



Edited by
Sagat Shaunik

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FAUJI FOUNDATION OF INDIA

UNTOLD BATTLEFIELD TALES

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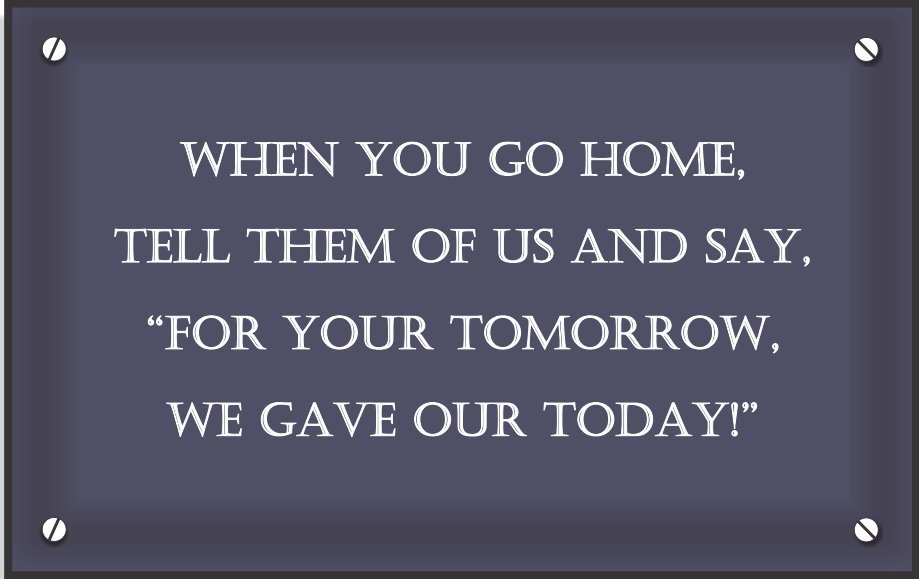
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WHEN YOU GO HOME,
TELL THEM OF US AND SAY,
“FOR YOUR TOMORROW,
WE GAVE OUR TODAY!”

This book is dedicated to all soldiers who fought in defence of India. For all who laid down their lives in the line of duty, and to those who lived to tell their tales. Thank you for your service and sacrifices.

FOREWORD

Having led the Indian Army during Kargil War, I can say with confidence, and great pride, that whenever Indian soldiers are called upon to fight, they give their best in true soldierly bravery, ethics and traditions.

When a soldier goes out to perform his duty, he sublimates his individuality into that of his organization. He works in unison with his fellow soldiers, trusting them completely. He strives to accomplish his mission whatever be the consequences – even if it means sacrificing his life. A single-minded focus on fulfilling his duty is all that matters for him. 'Pursuit of excellence' is, therefore, a goal for him not merely as an individual but as part of a team. Camaraderie and esprit de corps form a way of life and a collective trait for the whole of Indian Army.

While there is a very high sense of nationalism and patriotism, our Regimental system is at the core wherein camaraderie and military ethos are visibly embodied and practised. The strongest, most generous, and proudest of all virtues is the true courage. Our officers lead from the front and their bonding with their soldiers is stellar. This is what makes us a great army. Whatever is mentioned above, the same can also be said about our sister services; Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force.

Post Independence, our Armed Forces have fought many wars. Despite the expansion of police, military forces and raising of the disaster relief units, they continue to be engaged in counter insurgency and counter terrorist operations and providing aid during natural or man made calamities.

Many true stories of our gallant military heroes, particularly those who have been decorated and celebrated, are now in public domain. Some of them have become legends and become a part of our glorious military history. But we must remember that for every brave deed noticed and recognized, there are many that go unnoticed in the fog of war.

French author, philosopher and statesman, Michel Eyquem Montaigne (28 February 1533–13 September 1592) once said, "The only good histories are those that have been written by the persons themselves who commanded in the affairs whereof they write; rest is hearsay."

The book - 'Untold Battlefield Tales' attempts to talk of the untold saga of soldiers who survived wars and battles in their own words. Many of the heroes may have missed being decorated with gallantry awards for their untold heroic actions but their valiant actions in battlefield aggregated to overall victory for the Fauj.

These Battlefield Tales have been published in 'Fauji India' magazine from time to time. Some correspondents have travelled to meet these war veterans in different parts of the country to bring out first-hand account of what they encountered in these battles and how they turned the course of battle/war in our favour. Many of the battlefield tales in this book are gripping and riveting. These brave men demonstrated the valour and die-hard passion for their motherland. Their stories are not only relevant for the armed forces fraternity but also a valuable slice of military historical repertoire.

I am told that the sale proceeds from this book shall go for the welfare of Veer Naris, their dependents, and Disabled Soldiers. 'Fauji Foundation of India' which has taken this noble initiative and published the book needs to be commended by all of us.

I encourage all military units, formations, libraries and institutes of Armed Forces and universities in the country to add this book as part of their educational and motivational collection.

JAI HIND!

General Ved Prakash Malik PVSM, AVSM (Retd)
Chief of Army Staff (Sept 1997 to Sept 2000)



The Inception of Battlefield Tales

A fascination with the gallantry awards that adorned the officers mess of various regiments initiated my quest in 2004 to find out details about the men behind the medals. There was more to citations and photographs that needed to be unearthed.

On a personal front, my family never spoke about the battles and operations they participated in between 1915-2008. My maternal grandfather's personal diaries spoke for him, only after his final posting to Valhalla. It was a personal and national loss, as I perceived it a decade ago, when I began searching for the less-known history of his brothers-in-arms. Would the story of his battalion be forgotten? What happened to others during and after the war? These were some of the many questions that probed my imagination.

Subsequently, my search resulted in interactions with a number of Veterans who served with him – a quest that led me to Brig HH Sukhjit Singh, MVC of 14 HORSE (SCINDE) who deflected my questions on his role during the 1971 war and suggested I write Raju's (Col Rajendra Singh, SM) story instead. That was the inception of Battlefield Tales supported by Capt Prasoon Kumar, CEO Fauji India Magazine, when I approached him for publishing my interactions with War Veterans as a series of articles.

The series grew beyond its mandate of recreating the battlefield as the Veteran saw it. Erstwhile commanding officers, regimental officers, senior JCOs, and other ranks began associating with me as news spread about this pursuit. The results spoke for themselves when 2-5 accounts narrated by Veterans of the same unit at different times of interaction with me matched each other and substantiated their history. Certain regiments extended their hospitality by inviting me to visit them during battle honour days. Indeed, the Armed Forces' support in finding forgotten war heroes has been tremendous. The true achievement of efforts was when other Veterans began contributing their experiences and tributes to fallen soldiers for publication under the Battlefield Tales series.

On popular demand, a comprehensive compilation of published Battlefield Tales, with some new episodes, is being released as a book. As editor, I have retained the style and tone of the original author as far as possible. Experiences shared by soldiers who served on the front carry a personal expression of their feelings, bridging a sense of belonging to the past and present, and highlighting change and continuity within the military traditions of India. Besides, some tales bring to the fore the experiences of unsung heroes recognised and highly respected by their comrades while their contributions so far remained unwritten.

Yet, regrettably, there are many unsung soldiers whose gallant actions shall never be known as they took their stories to their graves. Some protected truth, the first casualty in war; while others maintained a stiff upper lip in acknowledgement to life skills imbibed through military training and ethos. Besides, many soldiers whom I visited in their villages remarked that it was the first time in 45-70 years that someone inquired about their service to India. The search for Battlefield Tales encouraged villagefolk to appreciate Veterans' experiences as well as value the stories of soldiers whose busts have been given a place of honour in their villages.

Our modern Indian history syllabus at the undergraduate level ends at 1950; perhaps, it is time to revise it to include the Indian Armed Forces' contribution towards nation-building. In doing so, we will acknowledge their upholding our Constitution and territorial integrity, a price paid in Blood, Sweat, and Tears.

JAI HIND!

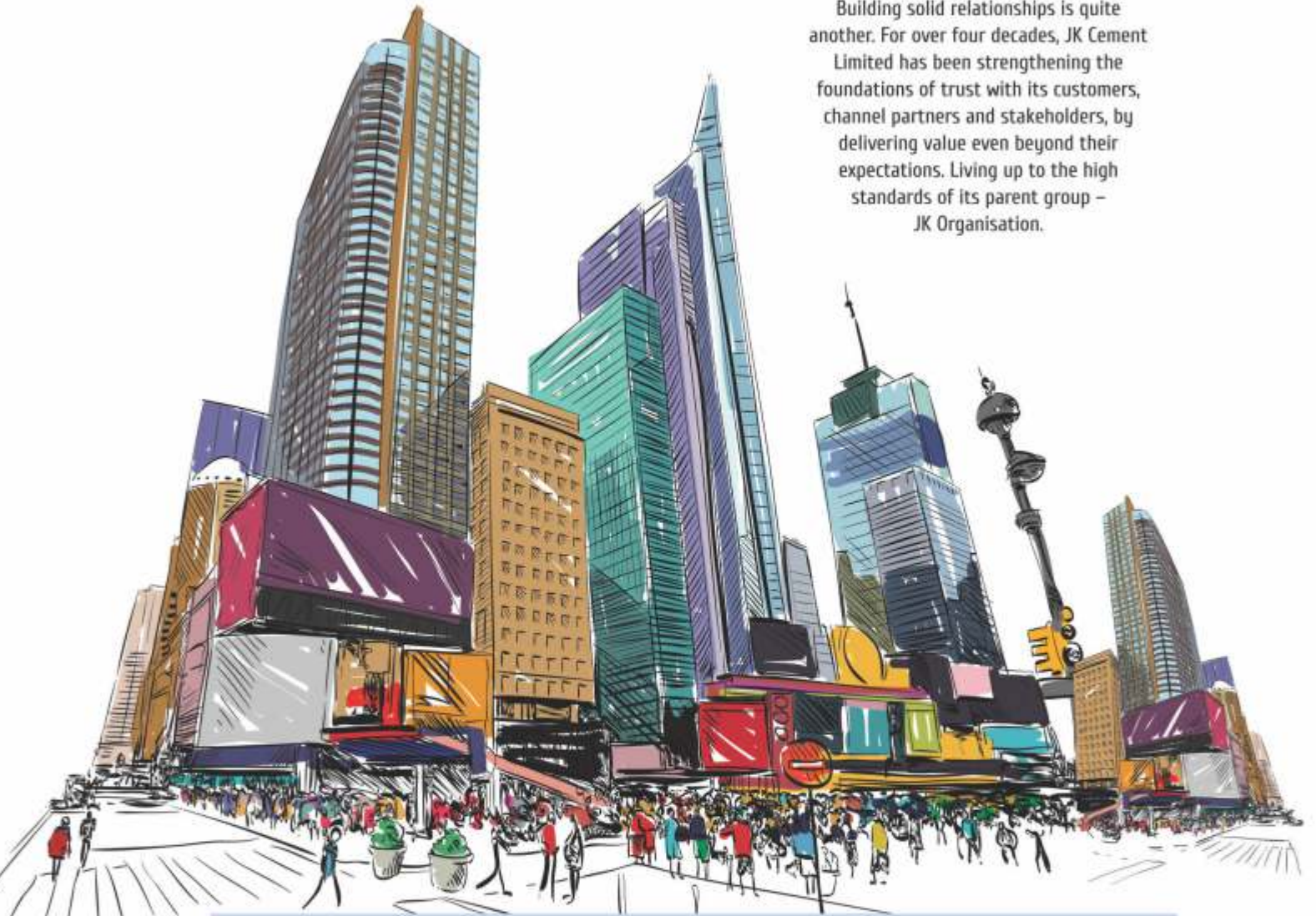
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Our Contributors



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Brig AN Suryanarayanan served three tenures in the same sector (Chhamb), the subject of his article, as BM, 2IC and Commander Arty and participated in 1965 and 1971 operations. His humorous articles appear in Deccan Herald and The Tribune and in Silver Talkies. He has published two books on his life and career, also chronicling the tragedies he faced in both. You can visit his blog <http://surya-musings.blogspot.in> or connect with him on Email: surivini@gmail.com



Brig Kanwaljit Singh was commissioned in 4 SIKH. In the 1965 war, his company captured Brahmabad and then Barki (Lahore). During recapture of Khemkaran, he was taken PoW for five months. In 1971, he was wounded during capture of Siramani (Khulna). An alumnus of DSSC and LDMC, he commanded 20 Sikh Regimental Centre, Uri Brigade and a TA Group. He has authored two books. He can be reached at Email: brigkanwaljitsingh@ymail.com



Col Narendra "Bull" Kumar, PVSM, KC, AVSM is a mountaineer. Known for the reconnaissance expedition he undertook in Teram Kangri, Siachen Glacier and Saltoro Range for the Indian Army in 1978 at the age of 45. Kumar crossed seven mountain ranges-Pir Panjal Range, Himalayas, Zaskar, Ladakh, Saltoro, Karakoram and Agil-to give India Siachen. To learn more on him visit - <http://bullkumar.com>. He can be reached at Email: md@mhe.co.in



Group Captain Patri Jayarao, a Transport veteran of the 1971 war was commissioned on 28 Oct 1963 as part of the 85 Pilot's Course. He was an experienced Pilot with four operational tenures on Dakota and AN 12 in Ladakh. He has undergone Staff Course at DSSC and Higher Air Command Course at CAW. He took voluntary retirement in 1987 when he was Chief Instructor at CAW. He can be reached at Email: jayavian@gmail.com



Col SK Suri, M-in-D is an alumnus of the Sardar Dastoor School Pune, NDA, IMA, DSSC and Punjab University. He was part of 1965 and 1971 wars and saw intense action. He was commissioned in the Regiment of Artillery and retired in 1993 after 34 years of service. He is also a lifetime member of Vanarai, an organization involved in the development of wastelands. He can be reached on Email: surisudarshan@rediffmail.com



Col Abdul Rasul Khan, VSM of 4th GRENADIERS fought the Indo-Pak war in 1965. In the Battle of Asal Uttar. Post retirement he lectures and speaks on military history at public forums. He can be reached at Email: rasulkhan@rediffmail.com



Col KS Rajamani served in the MADRAS SAPPERS for 33 years. As soon as he crossed the finishing line of a long career in the Army, he decided to write. He saw intense action during 1965 (Sialkot sector with 5 ENGINEER REGIMENT) and also served with 9 RAPID Engineer Regiment (Battle of Basantar). He is the author of four books. He can be reached at Email: rajamani40@gmail.com



Col NN Bhatia was commissioned into the 13 Kumaon in 1963 and commanded 2 KUMAON (BERAR). After retiring, he served in the Intelligence Bureau, specializing in industrial security and conducted security audits. He is a freelance Industrial Security Consultant and a prolific writer on military and industrial security matters. He is deeply involved in crusading for the release of 54 Indian POWs languishing in Pakistani jails since the 1971 War. He can be contacted at Email: narindrabhatia@hotmail.com



Lt Col AK Moorthy is a war veteran of the 1965 and 1971 operations and anti-insurgency operations in Nagaland. He was commissioned into First GARHWAL Rifles and Commanded the Sixth GARHWAL Rifles. At the age of 87, he is very fit and alert but hard of hearing. His grandson Major Akshay Girish has made him very proud by his valour and sacrifice in Nagrota on 29th November 2016. He can be reached at Email: megirish2001@gmail.com



Parth Satam is an Economics graduate by education, and a crime reporter by experience who has also covered defence and strategic affairs with popular tabloid Mid-Day and national daily, The Asian Age before joining 'Fauji India' magazine. He can be reached on Email: satamp@gmail.com

About the Editor



Sagat Shaunik is a UGC NET qualified professor in Social Work and Defence & Strategic Studies. Educated at The Lawrence School, Sanawar and multiple Army Public Schools that dot the country, he holds a BA Honours in History (University of Delhi); MSc in Disaster Management (TISS Mumbai) and MPhil with Specialisation in Planning & Development (IIT Bombay). He has held a Visiting Fellowship with a think tank and a Teaching Assistantship at IIT Bombay, prior current employment with a Big 4 consulting firm. He remains an honorary correspondent with 'Fauji India' Magazine and publishes Battlefield Tales series. He can be reached on Email: shaunik.irregulars@gmail.com



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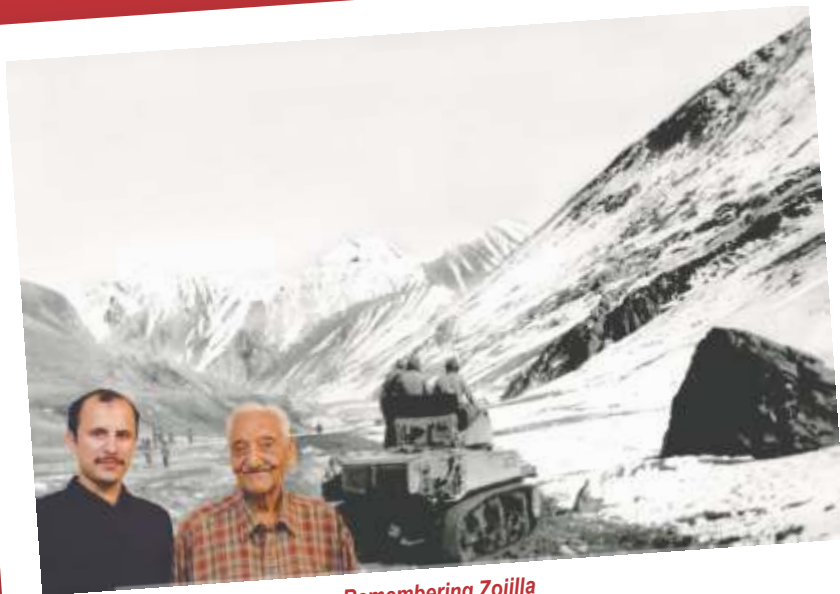
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JAMMU'S GREATEST SONS



Remembering Zojilla



Jammu's Greatest Sons

This is a narrative history of how Lt Col Sharak Dev Singh Jamwal fought in the 1962 War in a rearguard action that bravely covered the withdrawal of the 4th Infantry Division in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). A Veteran of many wars, in his mid-nineties, Col Jamwal is a library of information with treasure troves of history that he recalls with minute details. Read on to know the unsung saga of this brave Officer.

SAGAT SHAUNIK

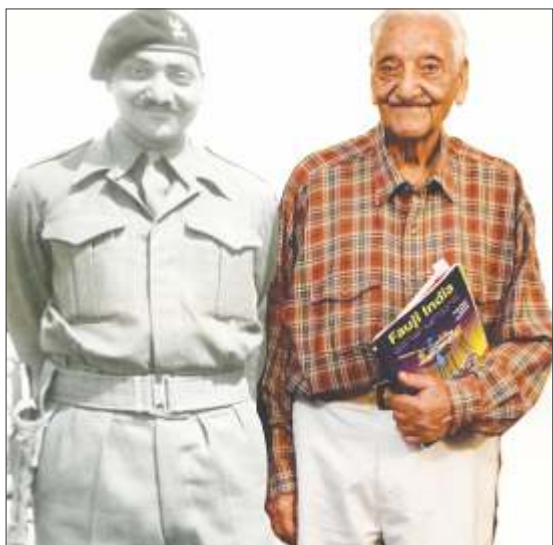
Jammu area historically fielded many great warriors owing to its geographic setting and social culture that promotes a rich military heritage. From the famous Dogras to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's armies to the J&K State Force, Jammu has an unbroken service record in different armies to the present day.

Two sons of Jammu stand out in modern history of Independent India. The similarities are strangely coincidental and the fact that both families are known to each other makes for an interesting read. The two sons are Lt Col Sharak Dev Singh Jamwal, 7 CAVALRY and Maj Som Nath Sharma, PVC (Posthumous) of 4 KUMAON.

Both officers were born in Jammu to fathers who had fought in the First World War and both been mentioned in dispatches. The sons were sent to public school for receiving higher education and decided to opt out by independently writing to their fathers that they intended to join the army. The boys were united at the Prince of Wales' own Royal Indian Military College (RIMC) Dehradun. While Som joined from Sherwood College, Nainital a year earlier; Sharak joined up from The Doon School. With similar backgrounds and leanings, it was natural that Sharak would look up to his senior.

They were commissioned during the Second World War and saw action in the eastern theatre. Som earned a Mention-in-Dispatches (M-in-D) in Arakan, Burma, while Sharak performed gallantly with his light tanks in Burma right up to Japan as part of the British Indian Division (BRINDIV) and served with the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) as part of the Allied Occupation Forces in Japan.

Their story developed further when they returned to fight for their homeland J&K their birthplace. Maj Som Nath Sharma posthumously earned the Nation's first PVC and his story is well



Serving Captain and Veteran Lt Col Sharak Dev Singh Jamwal, 7 Cavalry

known. On the other hand, Capt Sharak Dev Singh Jamwal on his way up in to J&K first supported an Infantry Company where his troop leader Jem Kartar Singh earned his first Vir Chakra. Then he reinforced Srinagar with his Stuart Tank Sqn, which was later pressed in to service for the recapture of Jhangar where his CO Lt Col Rajinder Singh 'Sparrow' earned his first MVC. Interestingly, during the battle 2/Lt Rana Raghoba Rane earned his PVC while defusing mines under cover of Capt Jamwal's tank's hull.

But the real test of Capt Jamwal was when he relieved a great war-hero Capt NG David, VrC to command 'C' Sqn 7 CAV around Aug/Sep 1948. Capt Jamwal had barely two years of military service and went on to create world history by taking his tanks up the eerie Zojilla heights where his Sqn pushed the enemy out through deliberate and accurate armoured firepower that unnerved the enemy at an altitude of 11,575 ft. Capt Jamwal recalls having the proud privilege of writing the citation for Jem Kartar Singh's second VrC. For commanding the Squadron from the front and in to victory, he was awarded a mere mention in dispatches!

Thereafter, Capt Jamwal went on to fight in the liberation of Goa (1961), NEFA (1962) and all other wars of India. In continuation of battlefield tales series, Col JDS Jind, SM of 7 CAVALRY offered to join the author in the quest to record the battlefield tales that follow. Incidentally, Col JDS Jind's father Brig DS Jind had fought alongside Col SDS Jamwal in 1947-48, 61, 62 and so on. In fact while interviewing Col JDS Jind and his gallant crews involved in mine breaching operations' in 1971, each veteran had suggested meeting their forgotten war hero Col Jamwal Saab who was 95 years old and a regimental hero. The story of Col Jamwal's gallant service in 1962 is now narrated for the first time.

Foremath

October 1962, preceding a number of intrusions at various points, Chinese launched a simultaneous attack in the Kameng & Lohit Divisions of NEFA and in Ladakh. The first assault was made against the 7th INFANTRY BRIGADE defending the line of Namka Chu River. Chinese were strongly supported by heavy artillery and mortars whilst Indians were bereft of any supporting fire whatsoever. Left to fight gallantly, they were overwhelmed by the sheer force of Chinese numbers. By 24 October, the main defensive position reverted to Bomdi La in the Dirang Valley. Two Infantry Brigades, 62 and 65 were inducted in the middle of November and having been ordered to move

“But the real test of Capt Jamwal was when he relieved a great war-hero Capt NG David, VrC to command 'C' Sqn 7 Cav around Aug/Sep 1948. Capt Jamwal had barely two years of military service and went on to create world history by taking his tanks up the eerie Zojilla heights where his Sqn pushed the enemy out through deliberate and accurate armoured firepower that unnerved the enemy at an altitude of 11,575 ft. Capt Jamwal recalls having the proud privilege of writing the citation for Jem Kartar Singh's second VrC. For commanding the Squadron from the front and in to victory, he was awarded a mere mention in dispatches!”

at short notice without any previous warning, arrived in NEFA clad in summer uniforms whilst bitter winter had already set in. The two brigades were deployed at Se La and Senge Dzong, 48 Brigade at Bomdi La and 4 Division Headquarters at Dirang Dzong.

Move to NEFA

On 22 October 1962, 'B' Squadron (Sqn) 7th CAVALRY, commanded by Maj Sharak Dev Singh Jamwal, was put on alert by HQ Eastern Command. Two days later, orders were changed and the whole Regiment less one Sqn was ordered to move to Misamari in the Brahmaputra Valley.

At that time, the Regiment's 20-year-old Stuart Tanks were in extremely poor state for want of spares and further deteriorated by their recent deployment in the 'Liberation of Goa' just a year ago. 'B' Sqn made up deficiencies by taking tanks from 'A' and 'C' Sqns. While 'C' Sqn Commander, Maj DS Jind was sent to Delhi Cantonment with an escort party on 25 October to take over rebuilt Stuarts and proceed directly to Misamari.

'B' Sqn reached Misamari on 27 October and concentrated with other troops at Lama Camp near Foothills, wherein RHQ and 'C' Squadron (less tanks) arrived on 30 October. 'B' Sqn received deployment orders from HQ 4 CORPS. Orders were to retain its HQ and one troop with HQ 4 INFANTRY DIVISION at Dirang Dzong (5500 ft); deploy one troop in support of 48 INFANTRY BRIGADE at Bomdila (10,000 ft) and another troop in support of 62 INFANTRY BRIGADE at Sela, a treacherous climb of 13,550 ft).

"Considering it was the worst possible terrain in terms of geography and tanks, perhaps senior commanders may have felt that they could repeat a Zojila again! They may have assumed that the presence of tanks would unnerve the enemy, little realizing that own infantry was already on the run, and this time around, we were facing a professional Chinese Army".

Whilst the ascent to Zojila in Kashmir had been dangerous and narrow, it was confined to a relatively short stretch. In the Kameng Sector of Arunachal Pradesh, the track from the Foothills (1800 ft) winds its way up to 10,000 feet, the highest point, before descending again to the Tenga Valley at 2000 ft, then climbs again to Bomdila at 9,000 ft. Ahead of Bomdila, the track descends to Dirang Dzong (5000 ft) before climbing up to 13,550 ft to reach Sela, from where it again descends to Tawang. And all this within a distance of 200 kms from Misamari to Tawang!

Throughout its length the track was narrow and rugged, cutting

"Considering it was the worst possible terrain in terms of geography and tanks, perhaps senior commanders may have felt that they could repeat a Zojila again! They may have assumed that the presence of tanks would unnerve the enemy, little realizing that own infantry was already on the run, and this time around, we were facing a professional Chinese Army".

through thick virgin jungles on both sides of the road, restricting visibility only to the 10-30 meters of track itself. There were constant dangers of roadblocks due to landslides and steep narrow bends that could send a tank crashing thousands of feet into the ravines below. So far the only vehicles using the track were high-powered 15 cwt (< 1 tonne) Dodge trucks.

Regardless, Maj Jamwal and his 'B' Squadron pressed on dauntlessly. Halfway to Chaku one of the tanks stalled as its engine failed against the steep climb, and had to be left behind. At the 64.5 milestone, Dfr Daya Nand's tank fell over the mountain slope as the road edge collapsed under its weight while negotiating a bend, and fell 3000 ft into the ravine. All the crew except the driver were thrown out and saved by trees and thick undergrowth. The driver Swr Raj Karan, however, fell right down and was killed. His body could only be recovered on 5 November, after two days of difficult trekking, and was cremated at Misamari with military honours. Dfr Daya Nand, Swr Nepal Singh and Swr Rattan Singh were seriously injured, had to be recovered from trees at different levels.

'B' Squadron reached Bomdila on 11 November, where one troop of tanks had to be left behind under Ris Siri Chand as they were unable to proceed further. The rest of the squadron pushed on to Dirang Dzong, reaching there on 13 November. However, the tanks were practically useless as the strain on the engines had been very great and they were unable to move any further. Crews dismounted to attempt whatever maintenance they could do to restore some mobility.

On 16 November 'C' Sqn had been put on alert to move to Walong 200 Km further east. While Maj D'Souza (2ic) was directed to proceed to Dirang Dzong alone as Ris Maj Karan Singh was indisposed.

Fall of Bomdila

The Chinese launched their next simultaneous attack on Sela on 17 November and the 'B' Sqn troop at Bomdila under Jem Siri Chand found themselves deserted as other units began to withdraw, and his tanks were deprived of infantry protection. Two tanks were captured and Jem Siri Chand made a heroic fighting withdrawal to Chaku. By the time he reached there with his remaining tank, the Chinese had overrun Chaku and the road was blocked by destroyed and abandoned vehicles. The Chinese approached the tank from a spur, which was too high to be engaged by the tank's main gun, but close enough for the Chinese to use short-range anti-tank weapons. Finding it impossible to use his main gun, Jem Siri Chand opened his hatch to use the anti-aircraft Browning machine gun. During the fight that ensued he was

Maj Jamwal and his 'B' Squadron pressed on dauntlessly. Halfway to Chaku one of the tanks stalled as its engine failed against the steep climb, and had to be left behind. At the 64.5 milestone, Dfr Daya Nand's tank fell over the mountain slope as the road edge collapsed under its weight while negotiating a bend, and fell 3000 ft into the ravine. All the crew except the driver were thrown out and saved by trees and thick undergrowth. The driver Swr Raj Karan, however, fell right down and was killed. His body could only be recovered on 5 November, after two days of difficult trekking, and was cremated at Misamari with military honours.

shot twice in the shoulder but continued fighting until the tank was hit and caught fire. LD Ramji Lal, Swrs Amarpal Singh and Sawan Mal were killed, but Jem Siri Chand and Dfr Sumer Singh jumped out and fell into a wooded re-entrant from where they were able to make their way around Chaku and were later picked up.

The news of the debacle at Bomdila had not yet reached Dirang Dzong where Maj D'Souza was visiting 'B' Sqn. The first intimation of disaster came through the Divisional Commander himself, Maj Gen AS Pathania, MVC, MC. The famous 4 INFANTRY DIVISION had suffered a disastrous rout and was in hasty retreat. With no formal orders or briefing from any commanders, Brigade or Division. The only orders consisted were of three sentences by Div Cdr – *“Try to break through to Bomdila. If you can't.....cover our withdrawal! I am leaving and if you can't get through to Bomdila follow us”*.

Maj Jamwal immediately got his junior commanders together and explained the situation to them. He ordered them to hold ground till last light, to provide rear guard action to the withdrawing troops. In the eventuality of their being separated they should try to make their own way down to Foothills. The five tanks at his disposal were in such poor mechanical condition that they could hardly move, but he ordered Jem Girdhari Lal's troop to advance to Dirang Dzong village, three miles down the road to Bomdila, to estimate the extent of enemy occupation and be in an 'offensive-defence' posture. The troop came up against a road block of abandoned vehicles and took up defensive positions to engage the Chinese who were firing at them from heights to the North of the road. Information was sent back to Sqn HQ and Maj Jamwal came up to evaluate the situation for himself. He found that the road to Bomdila was blocked and the Chinese were in strength in the surrounding hills. He therefore decided to fight on as long as daylight lasted and then pull out in the hours of darkness, using the route from Dirang Dzong to Foothills via Jhumla and Bhairabkunda.

Throughout the heavy engagement, Capt KB Mehta was running from troop to troop encouraging them to 'fight on'.....***“Koi 7th CAVALRY ka Jawan peeche nahee hatega”*** (No 7th CAV soldier will withdraw). The men stood their ground till dark.

Jem Girdhari Lal was ordered to hold his position from where the troop was bravely pushing the Chinese back. The rest of the Sqn was deployed to confine Chinese to the hills and jungles and stop them from descending into the narrow valleys on either side of the road. The squadron settled down to a dogged fight, and the more adventurous Chinese who tried to cross the road in attempts to surround the

“The news of the debacle at Bomdila had not yet reached Dirang Dzong where Maj D'Souza was visiting 'B' Sqn. The first intimation of disaster came through the Divisional Commander himself, Maj Gen AS Pathania, MVC. The famous 4 INFANTRY DIVISION had suffered a disastrous rout and was in hasty retreat. With no formal orders or briefing from any commanders, Brigade or Division. The only orders consisted were of three sentences by a very hastily 'getting away' Div Cdr – *“Try to break through to Bomdila. If you can't.....cover our withdrawal! I am leaving and if you can't get through to Bomdila follow us”*. He nor his troops were ever to be seen again.”

Indians were shot down. Jem Girdhari Lal's troop was fighting a magnificent rearguard action, holding their position right up to the last minute, when they were ordered back by the Sqn Cdr. Here special mention must be made of LD Hans Ram, who acted as a messenger between the Sqn Cdr and the dismounted troops in their fighting positions, moving about fearlessly under enemy fire, carrying orders. His gallantry was akin to the example set by the legendary LD Govind Singh, VC!

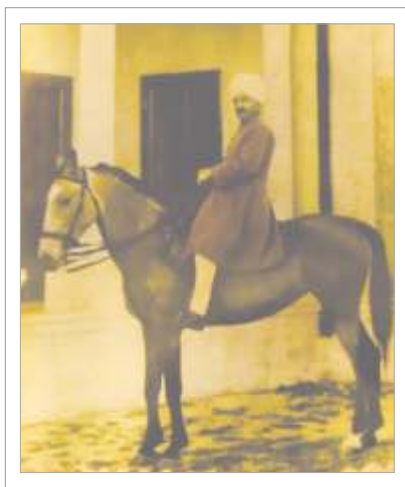
As darkness set in, the Sqn consisting of three officers, Maj D'Souza (sprained ankle), Maj Jamwal and Lt KB Mehta (seriously wounded in Goa just a year ago and still in pain), two JCOs and 53 other ranks, were brought together and after some discussion, it was decided to break up into two parties. An advance party under Maj Jamwal (the fittest of the three officers), with 9 able bodied other ranks decided to move down the shorter but more difficult route via Jhumla-Bhairabkunda, while the other, under Lt Mehta along with Maj D'Souza would take the longer route to the East. All along the way this group, along with an ENGINEER's officer Capt Rawat, collected a number of 'fleeing and lost' men from other units. After much difficulty and some encounters with Chinese advance elements along the way, both parties reached Missamari. Maj Jamwal's advance party on 22 November and Capt KB Mehta's main body by 25 November. It was a bitter experience but the fighting spirit of 'B' Sqn was the only redeeming factor in one of the most dismal chapters in the glorious history of the Indian Army.

Meanwhile, at Missamari 'C' Sqn was ordered on 17 November to move up in support of 4 INFANTRY DIVISION. They were initially required to go up to Dirang Dzong, but by the time they reached the Foothills, Dirang Dzong had been cut off and Bomdila threatened. Orders were changed and 'C' Sqn was ordered to proceed only up to Bomdila under 48 INFANTRY BRIGADE, and reached Sisni on the evening of 18 November, where they harboured for the night.

As there was no space for the tanks to park they were left standing on the road whilst the men huddled in the cold on small ledges for the night. Bomdila fell on 18 November and the Sqn was ordered to return to Missamari for the defence of the airfield. However, Maj Jind was suspicious of the signal, thinking it could be an enemy deception, so no action was taken. With the fall of Bomdila, traffic on the road became heavy with troops and vehicles moving back, and any idea of rest had to be abandoned. At 0300 hrs on 19 November, the GSO 1 (Intelligence) of HQ 4 CORPS, reached the Sqn with the second copy of the signal, so 'C' Squadron moved back to the foothills and was

“After much difficulty and some encounters with Chinese advance elements along the way, both parties reached Missamari. Maj Jamwal's advance party on 22 November and Capt KB Mehta's main body by 25 November. It was a bitter experience but the fighting spirit of 'B' Sqn was the only redeeming factor in one of the most dismal chapters in the glorious history of the Indian Army.”

“Col Jamwal inspired his nephew Lt Col Rajendra Singh, SM of 14 HORSE (SCINDE) to join the Armoured Corps. Interestingly, Rajendra became the second Jamwal to take tanks across mountain passes, in this case Changla Pass at 17,800 ft with T 72 M1, globally the highest height traversed by a medium tank!”



Col Parsidh Singh Jamwal, M-in-D; 2 J&K Rifles, Father of Col Sharak Dev Singh Jamwal, M-in-D; 7 LIGHT CAVALRY

placed under 181 INFANTRY BRIGADE.

'C' Squadron stayed at the foothills camp with 181 INFANTRY BRIGADE, hoping that the Chinese would come down and fight in an area more favourable to tanks, but it did not happen. Instead, the Chinese unexpectedly pulled out.

Aftermath

Unfortunately, the Government decided that no awards would be given for any actions in this sector, regardless of individual gallantry. The men continued to serve and now live as forgotten soldiers in their ripe old age between late eighties and mid nineties. Perhaps, it is time the Indian Government recognizes the gallant and distinguished service rendered by unsung heroes in their war efforts.

Conclusion

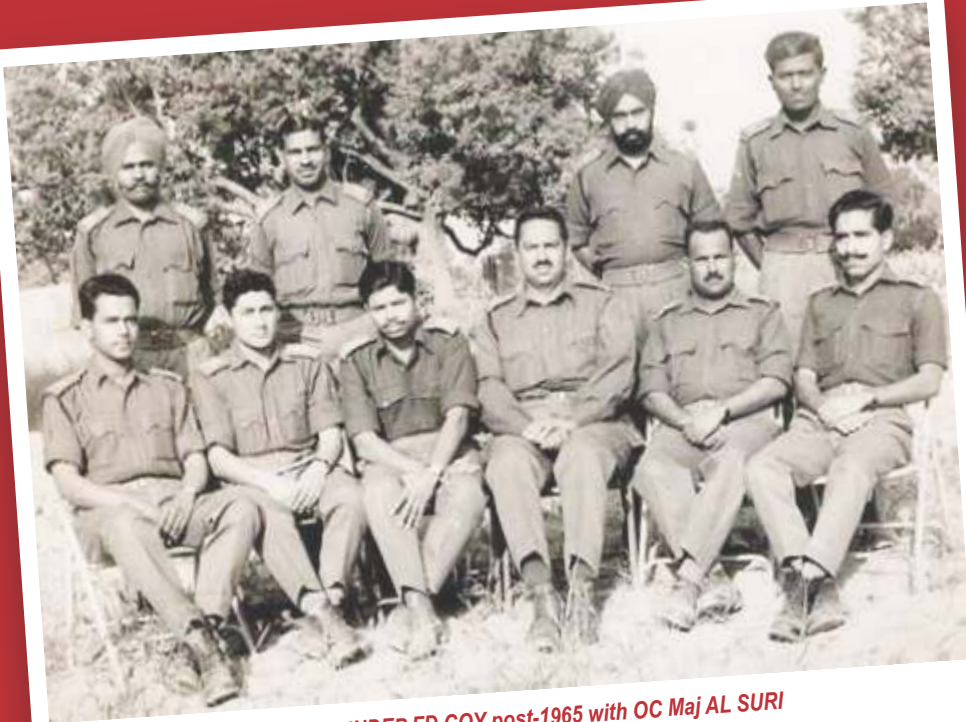
Col Jamwal lives with great pride in his beautiful Jammu home. Well in to his nineties, he received Col JDS Jind and the author while wearing camouflage shorts and an olive green t-shirt. The brave officer recalls every colleague's name, village address, nicknames, the orders that were passed, the map routes taken and every minute detail. He believes his life is a celebration as he showed us his photo albums that were preserved carefully right from his father's childhood to date. Seeing historic formation signs that he had once worn (in to war as well) brought a sense of nostalgia and great admiration for the Officer who sacrificed so much for India.

Col Jamwal inspired his nephew Lt Col Rajendra Singh, SM of 14 HORSE (SCINDE) to join the Armoured Corps. Interestingly, Rajendra became the second Jamwal to take tanks across mountain passes, in this case Changla Pass at 17,800 ft with T 72 M1, globally the highest height traversed by a medium tank!

Keeping in mind, the warrior legacy of Jammu and Col Jamwal's ubiquitous role, the author suggested that in the ultimate analysis of all his service, especially in 1962, no gallantry award was enough for him. Col Jamwal laughed it off by saying "My brother (Maj Som Nath Sharma) earned it, I am satisfied".

Perhaps it is time military historians review Lt Col Sharak Dev Singh Jamwal's contributions, particularly on securing what we have in Kashmir. Indeed, India is blessed by a valiant unflinching military; and the time is ripe to acknowledge several of our unrecognized heroes.

1965: 31 (INDEPENDENT) FIELD COMPANY IN LAHORE SECTOR



*Officers 31 INDEP FD COY post-1965 with OC Maj AL SURI
(Retd Maj Gen, AVSM) in the centre*



1965: 31 (Independent) Field Company in Lahore Sector

A narrative & war-diary based 1965 war history of 31 (INDEPENDENT) FIELD COMPANY (ENGINEERS) recollected by Col Surinder Kumar Bhatia over a yearlong exchange of emails and telephonic conversations. "With just about parity in force levels, to open up the Punjab Front in the Western Sector, to counter reverses suffered in Chamb-Jaurian (J&K) was decidedly a bold and imaginative move on part of the Indian Army. Yet, it almost boomeranged, as, there developed a direct threat to Amritsar! The incredible performance of 31 (INDEP) FIELD COMPANY in turning around a mauled and battered 38 INF BDE stands out as yet another example of sapper ingenuity, enterprise and valour that has a few parallels! As a young Lieutenant, I happened to be the Officiating Officer Commanding for the initial nine action-packed days"

SAGAT SHAUNIK

What was the backdrop of raising 31 (I) FD COY?

Col Bhatia: For me, 31 was special! It was brought up, groomed and trained very zealously. Raised in the immediate aftermath of 1962 debacle, it had our BEG's Adjutant, Maj (later Brig) SDS Bhalla at the helms, donning two hats. We could therefore pick and choose our men while the entire training resources of the Centre were at our beck and call. I had three Blues of sorts. Other subaltern was Lt (later Major Gen) Chander Narain a grand celebrity being a National Junior Squash Champion and a Gold Medalist throughout. In our 2ic Capt Patil, we found a maestro of trades training from the CIW staff. Our basketball team boasted of three command players. Even JCOs and ORs were hand-picked. We had a very intense and productive phase of training at the centre. Soon after, in Sep 1964 we moved to HQ DIV ENGRS that was being raised at BEG & Centre Roorkee. It was a mixed group with HQ and two field Companies from BENGAL SAPPERS, Field Park from Madras Sappers and 31 representing the Bombay Sappers.

Around April 1965, as war seemed imminent, our company was moved out and concentrated at Khalsa (Amritsar). Affiliated with 38 INF BDE, under 15 INF DIV commanded by Brigadier Pathak and Major (later Lt Gen) Misba Mayadas as the BM. 1/3 GR, 3 GARHWAL and 1 JAT were the infantry battalions. Next 2 months saw extensive mine laying and lifting activity astride GT road axis between Khalsa and Attari. No 1 platoon under 2 Lt KN Harsh was grouped with 1/3 GR, No 2 platoon under 2 Lt SK Bhatia (self) with 3 GARHWAL and No 3



The class 40 BPB across River Mula

platoon under 2 Lt S Gajamer with 1 JAT. The three platoons became fiercely competitive. Morale was sky high all were raring to go. However, there was stalemate for the next two months. Our OC moved out on promotion. Capt Patil, our officiating OC had to be hospitalized due to a nagging back injury. And then, almost abruptly, the full-fledged war started on 06 Sep 65.

Owing to said circumstances, as a young Lieutenant, I had the grand opportunity of Commanding 31 (I) FIELD COY in the first nine days of the war, before handing over to Maj (later Maj Gen, AVSM) AL Suri. I attended all the important meetings/briefings and developed a close rapport with the Commander and the BM. I noticed with pride that Maj (later Lt Gen) Gurbir Man Singh was commanding 411 (I) PARA FD COY in the same sector. It was an experience of a lifetime. Each day of war was action packed. I am much excited at the prospects of sharing with younger crop what I have treasured all along!

What were the initial experiences of 31 (I) FD COY during the '65 War?

Col Bhatia: In 1965 operations (Lahore Sector), the leading Infantry Bde of the 15 INF DIV surprised enemy on Amritsar–Lahore axis by capturing Dograi on Ichhogil canal on night 5/6 Sep. It exploited beyond up to Bata Factory, across the Ichhogil Canal just 6 km short of Lahore. A strong Pak counter attack, however, pushed the BDE back to the Eastern bank.

Meanwhile, 38 INF BDE of the Division followed-up at first light, 6 Sep from Kharsa (10 km short of Wagah Border), to keep up the momentum. This was a major disaster as the advancing column was strafed and blasted from treetop levels with impunity by Pak Sabres, from dawn till dusk. There was unacceptable attrition and loss of morale. There was no air cover, nor even a semblance of any anti-aircraft protection. The unprecedented mauling and near incapacitation of 38 INF BDE by PAF was a major setback as the advance was stalled well short of Wagah Border. There was utter confusion and loss of control. Infantry battalions were reduced to an effective strength of just 300 plus each!

Later in the evening, there was some regrouping and the brigade managed to sneak across the international border into Pakistan, sans its major support weapons. Hurried defences were taken in the sugarcane fields by first light. Intelligence reports then suggested that a major Pak offensive spearheaded by an ARMoured BDE through our brigade sector was imminent. It could take the Pulkanjri Axis (old

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Mughal route) and head straight for Amritsar. Situation was grim. But, luckily for us, the enemy lost invaluable time in decision making. This threat got delayed and later diverted.

Meanwhile, there was a rapid consolidation of defences for the next 3 to 4 days and a semblance of a bde-defended sector complete with protective mine fields could emerge. This lifted much 'doom and gloom'. Thereafter the offensive phase of inching forward and closing-in on Ichhogil canal started. By 22 Sep we had contacted Ichhogil and linked up on the left flank with 54 INF BDE at the re-captured Dograi.

This turn-around story of 38 INF BDE was largely scripted by 31 FD COY duly inspired, promoted and sanctioned by the bold and enterprising Brigade Major (BM) Misba Mayadas of Armoured Corps. He had an unflinching faith in sappers. I was the officiating OC for the first nine days and later the great Bombay Sapper Maj AL 'Bilu' Suri, took over on 14 Sep '65.

Initially 31 occupied and held forward defence lines (FDLs) along with Infantry. Their most outstanding contribution over the next three critical days was, however, to plan, co-ordinate and implement a credible protective minefield ring for the Bde to thwart enemy armour. This infused tremendous confidence all around. Then started yet another phase of sappers daring and enterprise which was forward leap frogging of the protective mine fields, in the face of enemy small arms and mortar fire to help infantry battalions inch forward and hold out. This was incredible as mines were being used in lieu of armour!

Earlier in the battle (09 Sep), Sappers helped the Bde to shake out of the initial mauling-shock; by destroying an enemy up-gunned Sherman Tank with explosives, dramatically ceasing initiative from the belligerent Pak Armour. Followed by an aggressively carried out minefield breaching at Waghrian, Ichhogil (19 Sep), right under an enemy MMG nest told the story of our ascendancy. Things had moved a full round circle. Sappers were truly the game changers.

What happened when your brigade was caught in the open on the first day?

Col Bhatia: The situation has somewhat stabilized by evening and during the night 06/07 Sep our Bde could sneak across the border. The Bde less a Bn fanned out and hurriedly occupied defenses in general area Sadhanwali. 1 JAT was in a relatively better shape and given responsibility to advance from the right flank on 'Ranian Axis' and capture a foot hold on Ichhogil canal in a first light attack. This, however, failed miserably and JATs had to fall back.

When the intelligence reports suggested an Armoured Bde head-

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ing towards us, all we had by way of Armour resources was a troop of Sherman tanks mounting the obsolete 76 mm guns and a woefully depleted complement of RCL guns. In a further setback to the DIVISION, the GOC, Maj Gen Niranjana Prasad almost walked into a Pakistani ambush along Ichhogil Canal, losing his diary and marked operational maps in his abandoned jeep.

The enemy held built-up area of Bhasin-Dogaich-Waghrian along the line of Ichhogil canal with strong Inf elements protected by minefields. Forward of these, he had placed a squadron plus of Armour (up-gunned Shermans) and elements of Recce and Support Battalion. In addition, a few tactically-sited strong points and sniper-post were covering the intervening ground. The ascendancy of enemy armour could best be illustrated from the fact that on more than one occasion we had the unusual experience of enemy tanks taking a full round circle of our bde defenses.

Initially the bde was tasked to hold fast and blunt any major initiative by the enemy through our sector. Fortunately, by 12/13 Sep, the threat of any major thrust had much receded and progress towards Ichhogil was well underway. Ichhogil was contacted by 38 INF BDE by last light 22nd Sep. Meanwhile Dograi on the main axis had been recaptured by 3 JAT under Lt Col (Later Brig, MVC) Desmond Hayde and Squadron of 14 HORSE (SCINDE). The ceasefire came at first light 23rd Sep.

Some time in Dec '65 we learnt from our HQ DIV ENGRS that Nb Sub Jai Singh Ghorpade and my self had been "Mentioned-in-Despatches" for our effort during 17 days war. This would appear all the more noteworthy as both my GOC Div and Inf Bde Cdr, had been removed from command during the war.

Would you like to share a daily-account of 31 FD COY in 1965 ops?

Col Bhatia: Yes, let me break it up for you as per day-to-day records noted by me:

06 Sep – Advance

Our Bde crossed the starting point at Kharsa at first light 0600 hours as we advanced on the GT road towards Lahore. Earlier in the night, 54 INF BDE from our Div had captured Dograi on Ichhogil canal and exploited right up to Bata factory just 6 km short of Lahore. Our three field platoons were grouped with affiliated battalions. Each platoon had a Jeep and one 1-Ton vehicle for carrying important FE stores and some explosives. My No. 2 platoon was with Garhwalis in the advance

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Lt SK Bhatia with the Coy JCOs

“Two subalterns from 3 GARHWAL and I were moving in the middle of GT Road as morale was sky-high, when we heard a distant hum of approaching aircraft. We learnt that those were possibly IAF planes returning after a successful mission of bombing Sargodha airfield of Pakistan. We felt like gladiators as we moved hand in hand in the middle of the GT road exchanging pleasantries and jokes with each other. Suddenly we found some planes swooping down at our advancing Bde column from the Amritsar end. They were actually Pak Sabres that had leveled up for strafing almost at treetop height, on either side of GT road with their machine guns blazing. We were taken completely by surprise.”

column. Three 3-ton vehicles loaded with mine laying stores and some live-mines were moving at the tail end of the column under a JCO. Coy HQ being brought up by Sub VT Kadam. Unit rear had been established south of Amritsar along with park platoon.

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Damage inflicted by PAF was enormous. The complete stretch between Khassa to Wagah was littered with burning vehicles and exploding ammunition. 73 casualties had been reported. We suffered 4 casualties in our FD COY; including Spr Shankar Rao Pawar who had been shot through his stomach by a Sabre MG burst just 50m away from my location. We had our trousers torn at the knees and elbows bruised & bleeding due to mad-diving across the folds of ground to escape MG bursts. There was practically no retaliation from our side, no anti-aircraft guns, no air cover, nothing! It was total chaos and panic and break down of command and control. We had advanced only 6 km, during this time period (approx 10 Hrs) – that too on our side of border, with no ground opposition.

Yet I must narrate the heroics of a Sikh peasant around 50-55 years of age. Completely oblivious to the Pak Sabres, he was moving in the middle of the road on his bicycle with a huge basket (tokra) of tandoori roti on his cycle carrier and two buckets full of Dal on handlebar distributing hot food to those who dared. He shrugged off the fear of any attacking aircraft with utter disdain. Such was the solid support received from the people of Punjab.

In the meantime Sub VT Kadam (Coy Subedar) moved up with some Coy HQ boys to inform me that as Capt Patil (Offg OC) had been hospitalized due to a back injury I was to assume command. I asked Coy Sub to remain with my platoon till further instructions. There was

no contact with the other two platoons at that stage. In the evening, around last light, just short of Attari, an effort was made to re-assemble and form-up to resume advance. However four 1000-pound bombs were dropped in the area by PAF and the troops dispersed in panic once again. Perhaps some local enemy informer was guiding the strikes all throughout.

At last, around 2130 hours, Garhwalis and Gurkhas crossed the border almost in a file formation weaving their way through the sugarcane fields. They reached the line of Sadhanwali village by midnight and hurriedly dug down to cover a frontage of approximately 2000 meter. Their major support weapons were left behind and could fetch up only on the next night. The two battalions were much under strength. Lot of troops had dispersed as utter confusion prevailed and rejoined only in the next 2-3 days.

Our Bde HQ column, approx 200 strong, lead by our BM advanced in a single file along the track Attari-Gopal Singh Wala-Sadhanwali and hit the kutchra (unmetalled) track Pulkanjari-Sadhanwali – Waghrian-Lahore (Old Mughal era route to Lahore) around 0100 hours on 07 Sep. It became the Bde HQ location, albeit temporarily. That column largely included guides, protective elements and LOs from the two flanking Bns, Bde HQ staff and some 60 to 70 all ranks from 31 FIELD COY. Open rifle trenches were dug speedily and readied with a degree of camouflage by first light. The Bde Cdr had also joined us in the meantime.

07 Sep – JAT assault across Ichhogil beaten back

First light attack by Jats on the right flank to secure a foothold across Ichhogil was repulsed by Pakistani stronghold and they fell back in disarray. As they ran back and crossed our Coy trenches, my men noticed the move and I promptly went up to the trench of the Bde Cdr, who was shaving and reported the scene to him. In a split second, the Bde Cdr was on his feet and asked me to pick up my Sten and follow him. About 100 m further away on the right flank we located Maj Pokher Singh, the Offg OC. Brig Pathak ordered him to stop his men or be ready to get shot. The words had a salutary effect and in about one hour nearly 150 JAT tps had taken up defences in depth of our FIELD COY.

The expected first light shelling on our open defences did not come. There was however sporadic automatic fire across our open trenches. In a rather bizarre incident, it became rather costly for Pahalwan Hawa Singh. In reply to NCE Jai Singh's query "*Goli kidder se aaee*" (where did the bullets come from) he pointed out with his

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Lt SK Bhatia

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In the morning, however we had a couple of visits by a Pak Air Op. This was followed by a very heavy doze of Air Burst shells particularly on our Bde HQ location between 1400 hours to 1600 hours. The trees lining the Pulkanjari – Sadhawali-Lahore route were left with practically no green foliage except for stumps and branches of diameter 2 inches and above.

The BM occupied a trench next to me, in a spot guarded by a thick Shisham trunk from the enemy's direction. We could clearly read each other's face. The fear and shock of the first few shells suddenly disappeared and we laughed almost hysterically after each round of shelling. This was a unique experience. My faith in folds of ground and even shallow trenches swelled.

08 Sep: Consolidating Defences

At this stage, the threat of a major enemy armour break-through was very real. The next 3-4 days were spent in consolidating defensive positions. Our Coy took up a 3 platoon-up position on an embankment to cover 300m frontages. Jats fanned out on a much longer frontage down south in our depth. We were given a section of MMGs from Jats, which was split to cover both flanks. We commenced building a 8x16 ft Bde HQ bunker. Soon, our strength was in the range of 150 all ranks and proper command and control had been established. 2/Lt KN Harsh was with Gurkhas and 2/Lt S Gajamer with Jats. The protective mine laying for Bde Sector was being planned at Field Company HQ level, including the moving forward of mines and marking stores. Execution at infantry Bn level was being organised and coordinated by respective Engineer platoons. Our Bde DQ, Maj Maslamani, gave us very effective logistics support. The BM was kept in the full picture throughout. That worked very well and we had a credible ring of protective minefields in the next 3-4 days. This changed the body language of the Bde.

09 Sep: Engagement

The new GOC, a gunner, Maj Gen Gurbaksh Singh met our Bde Cdr behind a ruined one-room house near village Gopal Singh Wala. I had accompanied the Cdr. As we returned to Bde HQ around 1300 hours, I was told to be part of a mixed patrol from Gurkhas. Lt Sanyal (my course mate from NDA) was the patrol commander. The mission was to destroy a stranded enemy up-gunned Sherman tank, which was being covered by automatic fire from enemy strong point at village Hussainabad just 200 meter away. The Inf element was 1 offr, 1 JCO and

8 ORs. They carried a 3.5" RL and two rockets. There was a 'bundh' (embankment) just 70 m away from the tank, which could be reached from our side. Nk Shripat Jadhav and Spr Angad Jadhav accompanied my recce party, with prodders, some PEK and accessories.

As we approached the site, stray firing engaged us. The infantry section took up position on the bundh. Lt Sanyal and Hav incharge of the RL and his no. 2 moved forward to a vantage point with the Sapper party. We had reached the bundh unnoticed and fired the first rocket. It missed the tank. The second rocket too ricocheted. We then planned to destroy the tank by throwing a prepared charge inside the cupola and inserting a second charge into the barrel. This had to be done under observed enemy fire as the two missed rockets had alerted the enemy. Accordingly we prepared two assault charges of approximately one kg of PEK each with 5 ft long safety fuzes, lighted the charges and raced towards the tank. Charges placed, we hurried back to the safety of the bundh taking cover provided by the tank. Soon there were two shattering bangs. We could see the splayed barrel. An Italian rifle with bayonet and some ammunition was also recovered from the tank. The mission was successful. Lt Sanyal earned a 'Mention-in-Dispatches' for the effort.

10 Sep

We coordinated with Inf for laying protective minefield in front of their three Bn areas and completed construction of Bde HQ command post as well.

11 Sep: Rear visit

As the situation was stabilizing fast, I decided to visit coy rear located on the GT road, south of Amritsar. Sub VT Kadam was moved in advance, on the previous day to organize that location. I was amazed to find nearly 100 personnel present there. They included new arrivals from the centre, PARK PLATOON elements and deserters who had run back during the advance. The Coy Subedar lined up 36 deserters in a single row. Curiously they were very keen to meet me and included some of my hand-picked boys. *"I cried in anguish as I lashed out at them. My knuckles were bleeding. At the end of the ceremony, all were visibly happy as they joined back their respective platoons. There were no more desertions thereafter"*. On my way back, I happened to pass through the famous 'Hall Bazar' in my open jeep. I felt like an instant hero as my jeep was flooded with eatables and gifts from passers by.

“As we approached the site, stray firing engaged us. The infantry section took up position on the bundh. Lt Sanyal and Hav incharge of the RL and his no. 2 moved forward to a vantage point with the Sapper party. We had reached the bundh unnoticed and fired the first rocket. It missed the tank. The second rocket too ricocheted. We then planned to destroy the tank by throwing a prepared charge inside the cupola and inserting a second charge into the barrel. This had to be done under observed enemy fire as the two missed rockets had alerted the enemy.”

12 Sep

Things were stabilizing further as we re-activated the old Mughal track Pulkanjri-Sadhanwali-Waghrian and our DQ, Maj Maslamani inspected the track.

Night 12-13 Sep: 31 beats back Pakistani assault

Nearly a Coy strength enemy presumably supported by recce & support elements suddenly appeared in front of our Coy FDLs and gave us a strong doze of automatic fire interspersed with tracer bullets. It was a unique experience for our troops manning the FDLs. Without waiting for any instructions, they let their .303 bolt actions go. Perhaps all the 13 LMGs opened up too. It was a lot of din and confusion. There was also some firing by 1 JAT elements located in our depth, which created further confusion. The JAT MGs from the flanks also opened up...

By the time we could get any degree of control, nearly 80% ammunition had been exhausted. Enemy was also perhaps taken aback by such a heavy volume of fire. 31 FD COY had successfully beaten back enemy attack in less than 30 minutes! It could have well been a costly lesson in fire discipline had the enemy persisted.

13 Sep: Commenced leap-frogging of troops and protective mine fields

As the threat of a major enemy thrust receded the main task of the Bde was then to capture all territory East of Ichhogil canal and hold the line of Ichhogil. We had marked superiority in inf numbers, yet, the ascendancy of enemy armour and recce & support elements was a major problem. We usually attacked and captured Pak strong points by attacking at last light. An instant protective mine field cover for the newly acquired positions was the only practical solution to beat back the inevitable first light enemy counter-attack supported by armour. Sapper ingenuity and enterprise once again came to the fore.

The Bde inched forward by night, three Bns up. One Engr Platoon remained grouped with each Bn. The Bns normally launched one/two Coy up, attack during first part of the night to clear enemy strong points including MMG nests. Close behind assaulting troops, Sappers moved forward bringing up mines and minimum marking stores in vehicles as forward as possible. Mines for the last 500m were carried manually and dumps were established 200-300m short of forward line held by own troops. The Pioneer Platoons from infantry augmented the carrying parties and acted as guides.

Sapper mine laying parties sprang into action in the second half of

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the night. The intervening gap between opposing forces seldom exceeded 800m and the minefield had to be laid literally in the face of the enemy. There was no chance of carrying out any recce and even setting out was done at night just prior to laying of minefields. Fortunately for us, the nights were dark and that saved us from aimed small arms fire. However, we bore the inevitable enemy shelling/mortar fire that came within minutes of vacating a strong point. We dived for cover in the open field anxious to find some protective folds. At times when the going became rather rough, we had to fall back to own newly acquired FDLs for a few minutes.

Part of the heavy casualties that our FD COY suffered was due to this unconventional mine laying activity. In my own no. 2 platoon, my buddy Spr Abdullah was so proud of his status as my buddy that he would not leave despite his badly wounded left arm. Spr Gurmukh Singh's left arm had to be amputated and Spr Lad had a deep gash in his leg and yet two more had to be removed as shell shock casualties. In other platoons also, perhaps the casualties were of the same order. These minefields were laid with 2/3 Anti Tank and 1/3 Anti-Personal density on a frontage of 600-800 m, depth varying 120 to 150 m. Proper accounting of mines was ensured to confirm 100% recovery. Mine laying activity usually started around 2300 hrs and completed by 0400 hrs.

On the next day just prior last light, the minefield that were earlier laid in depth and were now redundant due to forward advance of own infantry were ripped open, lifted and stacked centrally after inspection for mine laying during the second half of the night. This leap frogging of minefields was repeated two to three times in each Bn area. Finally the Bde contacted and dominated Ichhogil Canal linking up with the JAT bn of the sister Bde on the left flank at Dograi. The enemy's up-gunned Shermans were forced into the built up area of Bhasin-Dogaich-Waghrian. Sappers had done it as mines won a mobile battle against Pak armour!

14 Sep: Much Relief

Maj AL Suri arrived as the new OC of 31 FD COY. I was much relieved to find my ex-Bridging Instructor and such a famous Bombay Sapper taking over command. I received him at the unit rear in an open Jeep and we arrived at the Bde HQ in the afternoon. Much later, after the cease-fire, in a lighter vein, he confided that the only time he was genuinely scared was when I drove him down the GT road, weaving through the stranded vehicles at a break-neck speed. He straightaway

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became the right hand-man of the Bde Cdr, who fondly called him 'Amrut'.

16 Sep

Coy HQ bunker with an OHP was ready. It was rather spacious as it could take 5-6 persons. Lt (later Maj Gen) SD Sohani rejoined the coy as 2ic. 2/Lt PD Shah also reported for duty.

17-18 Sep

Leap-frogging forward towards Ichhogil continued. Nb Sub Jaisingh Ghorpade displayed absolute cool despite some casualties in his no. 1 platoon. Later, he earned a Mention in Despatches for his brave efforts.

19 Sep: Recce of enemy protective minefield at Waghrian

We were closing in on enemy strongholds at Bhasin, Dogaich and Waghrian. Enemy had laid 200-300m deep minefield. Under instructions from Bde HQ, I was tasked by my OC to find out the depth, frontage and design of the enemy minefields and bring back the type of mines being used by Pakistan. As stealth was the key to success, only two Inf soldiers accompanied me to provide a firm base. As usual I picked up my standard recce party of Nk Shripat Jadhav and Sapper Angad Jadhav. We were in dungarees and carried only one Sten gun between us as weapon. Around 2200 hrs when it was rather dark we entered enemy minefield and commenced prodding with short prodders as we moved forward. We encountered the first strip at approximately 50 m from the fence and the second strip another 50 m ahead. The third strip was encountered some 70 m further up and close to a known enemy MMG nest.

At that point of time, a very funny thing happened. A fairly loud sound was emitted by one of the two men behind me. The sound was quite discernable in the still hours of the night. We all froze for the next 2 min fearing an MMG burst at us. Luckily it passed safely and Nk Shripat Jadhav faintly whispered "*sahib aawaj hamne kiya hain*" (Sir, I fired a burst from the other end).

We returned with 9 Anti Personal 'dome' type mine, which was disarmed, and put in our dangree pockets. We tied Anti-Tank mines to a signal cable and pulled out three of them as we returned to the forward edge. The mission was completed at around 0230 hrs.

20 Sep

N/Sub Sham Rao Lokre (the paratrooper, later Group Sub Maj and Hony Capt) my Platoon JCO laid a nuisance minefield in area 'lone hut'.

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21-22 Sep

3 JATs (ex 54 INF BDE) and Squadron of 14 HORSE (SCINDE) recaptured Dograi. Our Bde captured area “lone hut” and linked up with 54 INF BDE at the line of Ichhogil. Enemy continued to hold Bhasin, Waghrian and Dogaich despite several attempts by our Bde.

22-23 Sep

Cease-fire was declared for first light 23rd Sep. That night saw the heaviest exchange of Arty and mortar fire so far. We shared some anxious moments as the sidewall of our Coy HQ bunker caved in due to shelling. Maj AL 'Bilu' Suri, Capt SD Sohoni and I were the three occupants at that time.

23-24 Sep

Cease-fire! We had a good look at Ichhogil and down the GT road up to Bata factory and beyond. After two days the Pakis put up a huge screen across the GT Rd to limit our view.

25 Sep

In the afternoon of 25 Sep, a meeting with PAK defenders was held at Ichhogil to decide on the line of actual control and other modalities. Maj AL Suri, OC 31 FD COY represented our bde and I accompanied him.

What did you learn from your battle experience as a young officer?

Col Bhatia: The Bde showed tremendous resilience in overcoming a major disaster. A rock-solid Engineer Support, to a great extent helped this comeback. While '17 day war' was 'historic', 31 made 'history' on each of those 17 days. The key take-aways from our engineer point of view would be:

- (i) Rigorous and realistic field engineering training done under operational conditions.
- (ii) Close liaison with infantry at PLATOON and COMPANY level. Constructive rapport with the Bde HQ.
- (iii) Centralized planning and decentralized execution for ENGR tasks (extensive mine laying and lifting during Op ABLAZE also paid handsome dividends).
- (iv) Proper logistics planning was the key to success.
- (v) Sapper ingenuity and enterprise must be encouraged.
- (vi) Major tactical lesson: a set-piece advance operation, in broad-day light, on a well-defined axis, without absolute air supremacy, would be

“Was posted to 31 INDEP FD COY in Dec 1963 after my YOs when the Quarter Guard was housed in an EPIP tent and the posted strength just 48 All Ranks (authorised strength being 312). The company attained dizzy heights in combat during 1965 Ops that left an indelible mark in the glorious history of the Bombay Sappers. I saw off 31 at Leh in Sep 1966 to be finally amalgamated in 267 Engineer Regiment on 01 Dec 1966, under Lt Col Cosmos Flores as the first Commanding Officer. I have the complete picture ingrained in my mind.”

a major disaster (Air Marshal Asghar Khan, former PAF Chief, had much highlighted their 6th Sep triumph, in his book “The First Round -1965 War”).

Thank you for a wonderful day-by-day recollection and your thoughts. Is there anything else that you would like to share about 31 FD COY?

“50 years down the line, at age 75, I was once again standing proudly with H A M E S H A A 1, to participate in the Golden Jubilee Celebrations on 01 Dec 2016. The GOC of their Division graced the occasion when I formally presented to the REGIMENT a periscope that I had pulled out of a Pakistani up-gunned Sherman tank that I had destroyed using explosives in the 1965 Ops. My days spent with 31 shall always remain cherished and I deeply desire to re-live those days with my brother's in arms.”

Col Bhatia: Yes, I was posted to 31 INDEP FD COY in Dec 1963 after my YOs when the Quarter Guard was housed in an EPIP tent and the posted strength just 48 All Ranks (authorised strength being 312). The company attained dizzy heights in combat during 1965 Ops that left an indelible mark in the glorious history of the Bombay Sappers. I saw off 31 at Leh in Sep 1966 to be finally amalgamated in 267 Engineer Regiment on 01 Dec 1966, under Lt Col Cosmos Flores as the first Commanding Officer. I have the complete picture ingrained in my mind.

I was fortunate to visit 31 and 267 (HAMESHA A1) once again after a gap of 45 years in March 2011. The response of the troops to my visit was simply overwhelming; they were thrilled with 1965 ops stories. They came from detachments far and near to shake hands with me. They wanted to latch on to every detail.

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Home coming after 46 years, Col SK Bhatia with 267 ER

LT BIKRAM SINGH RATHORE: THE FORGOTTEN HERO OF BATTLE OF WALONG, 1962



*Lt Bikram Singh Rathore
(30th Nov 1938 - 16th Nov 1962)*



Lt Bikram Singh Rathore: The Forgotten Hero of Battle of Walong, 1962

The frenzy of war often obscures many brave feats, unwitnessed by the people who record them, causing the heroes to fade into oblivion. Lt Bikram Singh Rathore and his D 'Coy' of 6 KUMAON is one such tale, whose deed at Namti Nallah on October 22, 1962 and then at West Ridge in Walong November 16, 1962 prevented the fall of the 11 Brigade garrison. His action came to be recognized only after relentless pursuit by his brother. We chronicle this saga based from inputs of his brother, Capt Narendra Singh, whose life-time mission has been to give his brave brother a closure by taking his story in annals of military history of India.

PARTH SATAM

Deeds of bravery forgotten in the fog of war are not as bad as being mis-recorded with historical inaccuracies. Lt Bikram Singh Rathore and 120 men of 6 KUMAON's D Coy, who fought two relatively, unknown battles in the 1962 war, is one such case.

For one, his family maintains he was Missing in Action (MIA). They found the resting place, where he died after the army erected a memorial stone. Interestingly, the resting place was discovered 24 years later in 1986 by another army unit, where skeletal bones that were found were deduced to be of Bikram and his men.

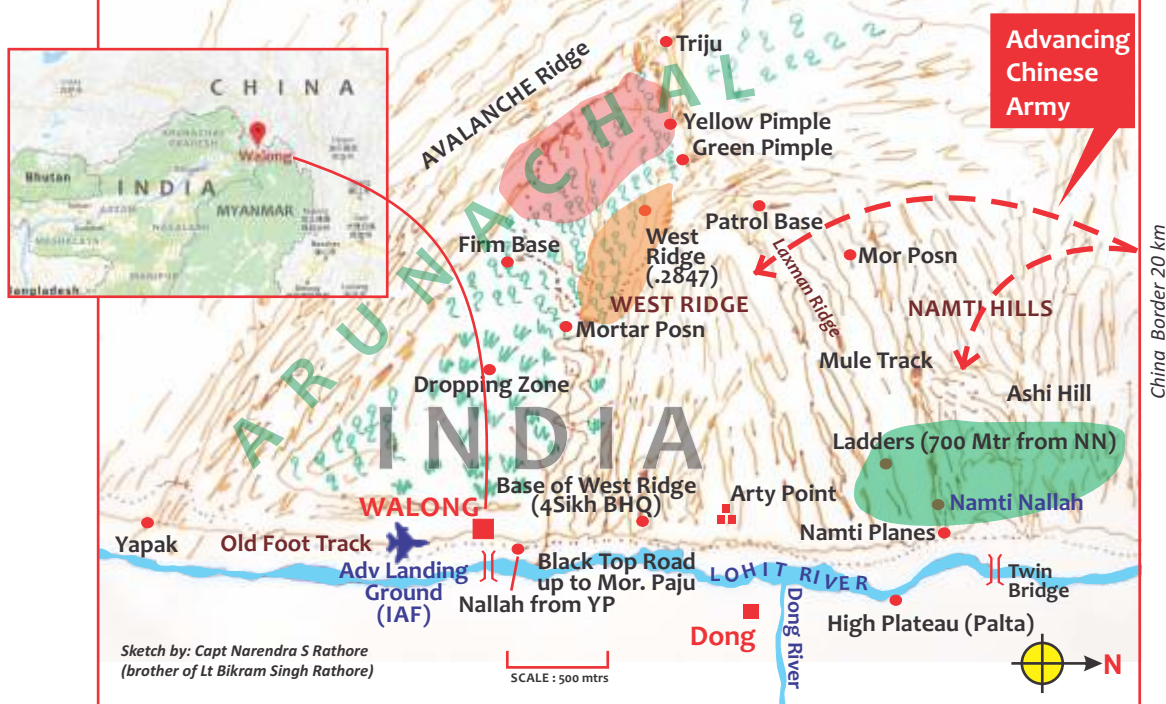
Second, both the engagements he fought as part of the larger Battle of Walong, were significant, as they rebuffed and severely delayed the Chinese assault, so much so that the Chinese had to angrily replace an entire Regiment for failing to meet their objectives because of the fierce resistance put up by Bikram and his men. The FIRST battle – also, one of the VERY FIRST contacts of the war when Chinese attacked – was at Namti Nallah in the intervening night of October 22/23 1962. The other was at West Ridge on November 16, where he died while successfully delaying a determined Chinese annexation of Walong.

'Fauji India' recreated the events between October 22 to November 16, 1962, when Lt Bikram Singh Rathore fought and died in a blaze of glory, but his actions forgotten with the passage of time.



Capt Narendra Singh paying obeisance to his brother Lt Bikram Singh's memorial

Battle of Namti Nallah & West Ridge on Oct/Nov 1962 where Lt Bikram Singh Rathore stunned the Chinese Juggernaut



Namti Nallah

The 1962 war began when the Chinese attacked on multiple fronts in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh or the then North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), on October 22 at 12:15 am, taking the Indian Army completely by surprise. Lt Bikram Singh, who commanded 6 KUMAON's 'D Company', had been deployed at Walong since April 1962 and by late April, was holding the Ladders Post on the North Eastern Spur. The Center Spur is a part of the Tri Junction, the point where a massive ridge breaks into three spurs – the North Eastern Spur, the Center Spur and the South Eastern Spur.

As on October 18, the Battalion's 'A' Company was deployed at Richu, while 'B', 'C' and 'D' were deployed at East Ridge, Kibithu and Ladders. The entire Battalion was ordered to withdraw to Walong – the small hamlet located on the tri-junction of Tibet, Burma and India – when the Chinese struck in the early hours of October 22 on the MacMahon Ridge. Two days prior on October 20, Bikram had handed over the Ladders post to a Platoon from the 4 SIKH and had himself advanced further to the Thapa Ridge, 3 kms south of Kibithu, from

where the Battalion then begun retreating while intermittently resisting the People's Liberation Army (PLA) advance. The PLA was led by their 153 REGIMENT. Bikram was asked to cover the Battalion's retreat. Before setting up the devastating ambush at Namti Nallah, Bikram was last reported to have engaged the PLA at Kraoti village during the day hours.

This is when, according to his brother *Capt Narendra Singh Rathore*, a Veteran of 6 KUMAON himself, the Chinese received their first rude shock as their “recklessly” advancing troops were beaten back by Bikram in a well-set ambush, set up across our own side of the small wooden plank bridge later in the night on October 22. It is this action, according to Capt Narendra Singh Rathore, that has nearly been forgotten, from the mainstream discourse. “The Chinese were moving in a 'cock-a-hoop' mode. Having being posted there since April, Bikram knew the topography well and instantly figured out an ambush,” Rathore said.

Narendra also dispels an account where Bikram is described to have taken up a “screen position” at Namti Nallah. “A screen position is merely an advance party for scouting the enemy movement to alert your primary defences behind you,” he explained. The 'screen position' notion prevails and has also found its way into official army history, which we will come to further along in this article.

The Chinese were advancing along the famous 'silk route', as was all human movement in the region, since crossing the extremely tall and steep mountains was nearly impossible. Bikram's 'D' Coy then comprised of around a 100 men, armed with 9 LMGs, 2MMGs and mortars, presumably facing a Brigade-sized PLA force of about 2-3000 men. Narendra, who visited the location and matched various accounts of the battle with open literature, Bikram's comrades and records available with his unit, said that it was one of finest ambushes ever executed. By 3 am, the Chinese reached the suspension-type, 70-80 feet long bridge over the Namti Nallah. The nallah is over a rivulet of the Lohit River, which flows to its south, while the Namti Plains are at the foothills of the huge Ashi Hill Mountain.

“He removed a few planks from his side of the bridge, leaving intact the planks over the side from which the Chinese were crossing over. And he waited, waited as long he could wait no further. His Subhedar, who I interacted with later, told me that he was getting jittery as they could hear the Chinese gathering at their side of the bridge and seconds away from crossing over. But Bikram had still not ordered to open fire. He was losing his nerve and then had finally begun to physically nudge Bikram, in order to not make a sound that will alert the

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Chinese,” Rathore said.

A record of the battle, found in the Unit and the Regiment's documents said, “Due to the restricted field of fire and visibility, the enemy was allowed to come close. The leading Chinese soldier, after walking halfway over the intact planks, reached the part of the bridge where the planks were missing and fell down into the nallah. The incident caused confusion and alarm in enemy ranks.” This was happening as the Chinese had begun flashing flashlights to look for their comrade who had fallen down the nallah. “Our 3-inch mortars and 4.2 inches MMGs played merry hell with the enemy troops. Under this well timed voluminous fire, the Chinese column groaned in despair. Only a miracle could have saved their massacre...The enemy was beaten back...with...about 200 killed/wounded. We had 3 Other Ranks killed and 6 wounded.” As the Chinese advance stalled, Bikram withdrew from the area to the Ladders Post, 600 meters behind him at 4 am.

The dead Chinese were later spotted by Rifleman (Sepoy) Bacchi Singh of 'A' Coy, who was escaping after being taken PoW on the McMahon Ridge. He escaped on the October 24th and after running into the Chinese again, he successfully evaded them the second time to finally reach the nallah. “There he described having seen around 200 to 300 dead Chinese soldiers in and around the nallah. He then reunited with his own Company and narrated them the sight,” Narendrasaid.

The rude shock at Namti and the fierce resistance offered by Indian troops over the next few days also forced the Chinese to reinforce the 153rd Regt and later replace it with a full Division. If a document that records the series of Chinese military decisions, found with the Battalion's war records is anything to go by, the General Headquarters (GHQ) first rushed the 390th REGT (PLA) for support, the Central Military Commission (CMC), later diverted the entire PLA's 130 DIVISION to finish off the Indian forces at Walong. “At 1430h on 23rd Oct GHQ sent a tele and instructed 390th REGIMENT to advance upto Chayu region (Lohit) and rapidly attack and wipe out enemy in the Walong area...(sic).” Estimating that the strength of the Indian troops at Walong to swell to 2000 to 2500 given the reinforcements we (Indians) “may be planning to add by air routes,” the CMC decided to transfer a complete Division, the 130th, to Chayu, to “carry out the task of wiping out Indian forces at Walong.” This, Narendra claims, was the angry Chinese response to the unexpected crippling losses that were caused by the action at Namti Nallah.

“Bikram had signaled his men to open fire after the release of a flare, which he shot immediately after the first Chinese soldier fell. The 2-inch and 3-inch mortars then fired the numerous para bombs, which illuminated the entire area while lazily parachuting down. Narendra quoted a JCO who was next to Bikram, who said, “*Sahab saara ilaka aise chamak gaya, jaise Chandigarh ki sadke chamak jaati hain.*”

Interlude

Until November 3, there was almost a lull, with the Chinese quietly building up and regrouping to about a Division strength for another offensive to capture Walong. On the same day, a patrol party from the ASSAM RIFLES clashed with the PLA. Bikram had then retreated Ladders post by 4 am, 600 meters behind the Namti Nallah after ambushing the Chinese there, who too had temporarily retreated. Over the next few days, Bikram was meanwhile was somewhere in the battle area. On November 5, Capt RK Mathur took 'A' Coy for an abortive attempt to evict the Chinese from the 'Green Pimple', when he was replaced by Bikram's 'D' Coy on November 6. Then on November 14, 8 am, 6 KUMAON mounted the famous attack on 'Yellow Pimple', making it the only unit to have attacked the Chinese in the entire Battle of Walong.

The PLA then launched their main attacks, with the first determined offensive on Tri-Junction on November 15, when 6 KUMAON fought back aggressively, causing the Chinese to fall back and leave a number of dead behind. The 11 BDE Cdr, Brig NC Rawlley, described the action: *"6th KUMAON at Tri Junction fought and fought and fought till there was nothing left. After this there was eerie silence."*

West Ridge (Point 2847)

Again on November 16 by 5 am, PLA simultaneously attacked all FDLs, including West Ridge, with nearly 4 Brigades, preceded by accurate 120 mm mortar and artillery shelling. Pouring in through the gaps in the Indian defences and infiltrating to Avalanche Ridge, they cut off our line of maintenance to 6 KUMAON. By 10 am, the Chinese, with two Battalions, again attacked the key position at West Ridge, that held by Bikram and his Company. West Ridge directly overlooked Walong and the Advanced Landing Ground and the DZ. Its fall would allow the Chinese to simply waltz down the huge mountain and take the 11 BDE HQ along with Brig Rawlley and Corps Cdr Lt Gen BM Kaul, who were at the location!

GS Bhargava, author of the book, *'The Battle of NEFA: The Undeclared War'* best described the last and glorious moments of Bikram's life. *"...Lt Bikram Singh who was at the head of a Company of Kumaonis guarding Green Pimple ...communicated to the Brigade Headquarters that the enemy was closing in on him from three sides – on the fourth side lay the Lohit River – and that the vanguard of the attackers was a Battalion strong...Accordingly, Lt Bikram was asked to stay put at all costs. He replied that they could hold it for half an hour but none of them would return. The ridge was prevented from falling*

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into enemy hands for one and a half hours. But thereafter when the Brigade headquarters called them for a situation report there was no response from the wireless set...The enemy had occupied the hill feature..."

Bikram was the typical Rajput, getting bolder by the difficulty. His devil-may-care bravado reflected in the last communication to his family, a letter to his father Kanwar Ranbir Singh on November 11 from Point 2847 (West ridge). It was payback for his brothers on the McMahon Ridge he says he "avenged" the death of his comrades. "Tradition of our race can never be forgotten...I will kill more till the b*****s finish up," he declared proudly.

Says Narendra: "The Chinese 390th Regt, led by their Gen Ding, planned to capture the ALG and the Bde HQ to lock the back door of Walong by 8:30 to 9 am. "However by 10:30 am, Brig Rawlley radioed Bikram and asked him to hold on for half an hour, when Bikram replied he had been surrounded by all three sides by around 300 Chinese. However, there must have at least 3 to 4 times the figure since that was how much Bikram could spot in the dense forest," said Narendra. An article by LN Subramanian on bharat-rakshak.com too confirmed the overwhelming Chinese numbers surrounding Bikram.

"By now communication with Bde HQ had been cut off. The supply route to Tri Junction was cut off. The only other pocket was at the West Ridge where 4 platoons under the valiant Lt Bikram Singh. At 8:30 am this ad hoc company was attacked by close to 4000 Chinese troops. From three sides, the Chinese poured in artillery and MG fire. But the Kumaonis held till 11 am till the situation became militarily futile and orders were given to withdraw," the article, 'Battle of Walong', posted on 12 October 2006 said. The article further said that Brig Rawlley, in his letter to Bikram's brother Raj Singh, on December 24, said he received accounts from some of the men who saw Bikram being hit and "falling forward".

"I was in contact with him through his control set until the very end. Approximately 300 Chinese broke through and surrounded him on three sides. The fourth side was a cliff. He was told to hold the position as long as possible. The loss of this position would mean the loss of the landing ground. He held on as long as humanely possible. Very few from his company managed to escape. Under his...leadership, the men fought until all of their ammunition was exhausted and they were completely overrun. Bikram's message to me over the wireless set was that he would hold on and not withdraw. He has fulfilled these words to the limit," Brig Rawlley wrote.

“ GS Bhargava, author of the book, 'The Battle of NEFA: The Undeclared War' best described the last and glorious moments of Bikram's life. *"...Lt Bikram Singh who was at the head of a Company of Kumaonis guarding Green Pimple ...communicated to the Brigade Headquarters that the enemy was closing in on him from three sides – on the fourth side lay the Lohit River – and that the vanguard of the attackers was a Battalion strong...Accordingly, Lt Bikram was asked to stay put at all costs. He replied that they could hold it for half an hour but none of them would return. The ridge was prevented from falling into enemy hands for one and a half hours. But thereafter when the Brigade headquarters called them for a situation report there was no response from the wireless set...The enemy had occupied the hill feature..."* **”**

Between late morning and midday, the Kumaonis, Sikhs, Gorkhas and Dogras were asked to withdraw by then Corps Cdr, Lt Gen BM Kaul who gave written orders to the Brigade – but many never got the orders as communication had been lost with the HQ. Kaul then took the last flight out of the Walong ALG at 11 am.

Narendra says, given time it took him to trek up and down the steep terrain to the posts around Helmet Top and West Ridge last year, the Chinese could not have reached Walong until 6 that evening. “Bikram's action delayed their advance by a full 10 hours, since they planned to take Walong by the morning,” Narendra added. In the same letter, Rawlley also fondly remembered developing “considerable affection” for Bikram when he had served in his staff.

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Habeas Corpus

The family still believes Lt Bikram Singh Rathore is missing in action, as the ashes the army handed over in a special ceremony in New Delhi in mid-1963 following months of hectic search operations, were after it had unilaterally cremated the remains it finally found the spot. It was deduced to be Bikram's based on the markings on the uniform. The unidentified “half-burnt” body, which was identified by a search party led by the legendary, late Maj PN Bhatia, concluded it to be Bikram's based on its location which matched with where a Sepoy had last seen him. Burnt portions of an officers parachute coat, officers' trousers and officers' equipment (belt, pouches) were also used to infer they were Bikram's since he was the only officer at West Ridge post.

“Maj Bhatia communicated us the above information (about how the body was identified) in a letter he wrote in a personal capacity, but we still don't have an official communication from the unit's Commanding Officer,” Narendra said.

Indians did not return to the spot until the cease-fire two months later, negating any chance of retrieving any of the bodies. The first official indication was the December 24 letter from Brig Rawlley. The second was on January 10, 1963 from the then Colonel of the KUMAON REGIMENT, Lt Gen K Bahadur Singh, who heard a “glowing account” of his gallantry, also quoted an eyewitness account from an NCO. “I happened to have talked to an NCO who related to me how the officer...stayed on fighting near Walong until he was hit by a burst of automatic fire,” he said. At least two unsuccessful search attempts were mounted in the intervening months, owing to extreme weather and terrain constraints. This was amidst persistent corre-

spondence with Brig Rawley, who was patiently updating the bereaved family on the army's action on the search effort.

Bikram's – and probably his men's – remains were rediscovered in 1986-87 when Narendra learnt about another Company Commander from Assam Regiment who had reoccupied West Ridge as a part of then Army Chief Gen Krishnaswamy Sundarji aggressive posturing on the eastern front. “He was on Helmet Top for just a little over three months in early 1987 and tasked with constructing a foot track from Walong. During his stay at Helmet Top, they found a number of skeletons, old arms, ammunition and other warlike stores of both Indian and Chinese origin,” Narendra said. In 1995, the 12th Battalion of the J&K RIFLES again found the remains and constructed a memorial dedicated to “unknown soldiers”.

The Plaque Guffaw

What is probably the most frustrating for Narendra is that even a new memorial plaque at the site of the Namti Plains, which was installed in 2013 to replace the one inaugurated in 2011 for acknowledging Bikram's action at Namti, too had incorrect information about the date, nature and location of his action. It said the 6 KUMAON's D Company had taken up a 'screen position' at Ashi Hill (North of Namti Nallah) on October 25. However, Bikram was at the Namti Plains (South of the Nallah), in the early hours of October 22 laying a classic devious military ambush. The previous plaque that was inaugurated by the then commander of the 2 DIVISION only mentioned 6 KUMAON alongside GORKHA and SIKH units to have been a part of the Namti defences.

It was replaced after Narendra had begun communicating with the army to correct its official history of the Namti action. “Screen position and an ambush are two completely different infantry practices. The replacement plaque was only a notional credit,” he said. Two leading military historians interestingly recognize Bikram's Namti action. *Shiv Kunal Verma's* '1962: The War that Wasn't' says: “Ever since 6 Kumaon's Delta Company under Lieutenant Bikram Singh had halted the Chinese advance guard on the Namti Nullah at the base of the Ashi Hill, the Indians had the upper hand in the Walong sub-sector.”

But the biggest impartial validation, according to Narendra, comes from Australian journalist *Neville Maxwell*, who broke a part of the still declassified Henderson-Brooks Report with his 'India's China War' book in 1970. “He, in a magazine article, reported about the Chinese having lost 200 men alone in a single action.”

“Bikram's – and probably his men's – remains were rediscovered in 1986-87 when Narendra learnt about another Company Commander from Assam Regiment who had reoccupied West Ridge as a part of then Army Chief Gen Krishnaswamy Sundarji aggressive posturing on the eastern front. “He was on Helmet Top for just a little over three months in early 1987 and tasked with constructing a foot track from Walong. During his stay at Helmet Top, they found a number of skeletons, old arms, ammunition and other warlike stores of both Indian and Chinese origin,” Narendra said. In 1995, the 12th Battalion of the J&K Rifles again found the remains and constructed a memorial dedicated to “unknown soldiers”.

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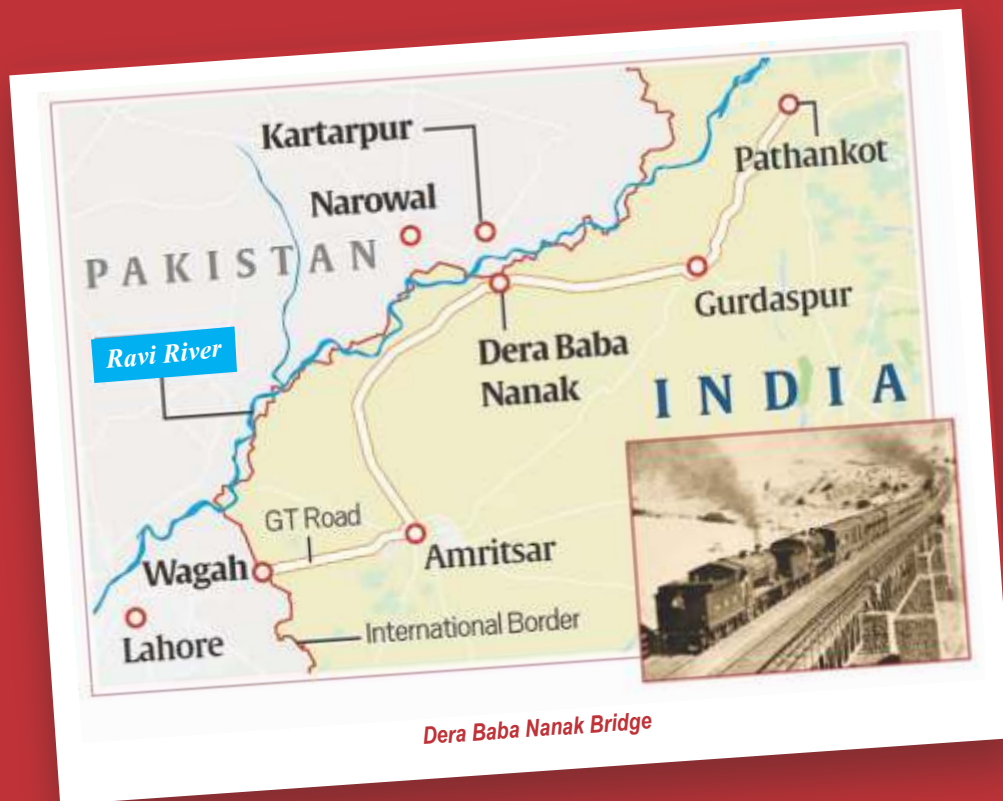


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THE CAPTURE OF DERA BABA NANAK (DBN) BRIDGE



The Capture of Dera Baba Nanak (DBN) Bridge in Lahore, Sep 1965

COL SK SURI, M-in-D (RETD)

After a surgery of my left arm at MH Kirkee, Pune, my POP of three months, was removed at MH Pathankot, on 01 September 1965 I was under medical 'Cat C' temporarily for 6 months and sent back to my unit at Tibri Camp, Gurdaspur. On September 2, I commanded Romeo Battery, as its Officiating BC, with a sling, in our 5 FD REGT Annual Adm Inspection. The same day, orders were received for our operational move to Gurdaspur-Batala-DBN for taking defensive positions.

I was given three options due to my low medical category; (1) to remain as OC Rear at Tibri Camp; (2) to become IO to C Arty, and; (3) to act as a Liaison Officer with HQ 15 DIV. I was in deep agony – it was a shattering blow to my Rajput spirit! My battle had already begun! Our Adjt, 2IC and CO finally sent me into action after I gave a written undertaking of proceeding to Field Area and Battle Zone “at my own risk.”



The author, Col SK Suri, seen at far right

Move to Battle Area

On September 5, we were all loaded up, including our first line Arty and small arms ammunition, equipment, dry and fresh rations, Bty Langars, not forgetting our Bty 'Mobile Mandir' etc. as per our well-rehearsed Operational Mobilization Scheme drills and War Loading Tables, for each vehicle, gun, trailer and man (Fd Service Marching Orders Pitthus! We were full of josh and enthusiasm and were eagerly looking forward to serve and defend our Motherland, its freedom, independence and sovereignty! Mandir Puja was performed.

I asked my men repeat the famous Rajput battle

oath with me: “Mein (name) shapath leta hun ke ladai ke maidan mein, dushman ko barbad karoonga; desh kee raksha karoonga. Agar mujhe shatru kee goli lagge gee, to chhati mein, peeth mein nahin. Karni mata kee jai, Jagdambe Bhavani kee jai, bharat mata kee jai! (I promise to annihilate the enemy on the battlefield and defend my country. If a bullet ever gets me, it will on the chest and not the back. Long live goddess Karni, long live goddess Jagdambe and long live India).”

These *joshiley* slogans continued throughout our journey to Batala till we reached our RVs, about 2 kms short of DBN Bridge. After marrying up with 2 RAJ RIF, we dug up our BC and OP party bunkers and trenches, along a bund (embankment), along our respective Bn HQ, and Inf Coy Forwards Defence Lines (FDLs). By September 6, no sooner had we completed our line laying (to guns) and our fortifications, the Pak enemy pounded our defenses, for hours, intermittently, with their heavy guns and mortars. The enemy had elevated defence towers and bunkers overlooking our FDLs and could fire at us, with impunity.

Around evening when I had gone to inspect and coordinate local defence to my OP locations, I found Capt Gary, my crack OPO, coming down from the Bundh, with his wireless set 62 on his head. He informed me that his affiliated Inf coy, had withdrawn.

Our tele lines to the guns were also interrupted, time and again due to vehicular movement nearby. I somehow managed to be informed by some withdrawing infantry Jawans, that the Bn had withdrawn to some Mango grove, about 7-8 kms behind on the left of DBN-Batala Road. There were no orders for us from Adjt or their CO or from our Arty channels. Therefore, I along with my two OP teams withdrew at night, groping in the dark, looking for the Bn HQ as no RV was given.

We were vaguely informed that a fresh attack would go in the morning. We refueled and retuned back to the Bundh position by early morning.

Trapped in a Mosque

As soon as we reached the 2 RAJ RIF HQ, their new CO, Lt Col Vohra, (who had taken over in the middle of war, had been posted from DGMO, AHQ), ordered me to proceed about 5-6 kms immediately to our left flank and to find out how many Pak troops were crossing the river, in the general area of Rasulpur mosque, a task more suited for a recce/protective patrol. Without a requested platoon/section of Inf troops, I immediately left with my BC party for our mission.

As we proceeded in my jeep and trailer, there was constant intermittent heavy guns and BMG fire, apparently brought on us from Pak

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towers and concrete bunkers, all along our 5-6 kms drive along the western side track to the Rasulpur Masjid. As we were dismounting from our jeep, to take our weapons and equipment to the mosque, a huge tree branch fell on our jeep due to enemy gun fire. Luckily, only the top canopy and trailer were broken/bent. We quickly, took positions in the mosque as under: I and TA (Tech Assistant) went right on the top of the Gumbad (dome) to engage enemy targets.

I was manning the wireless set 62 to take shoots, myself. My sentry stood guard with his rifle cocked, at the elevated door, my radio operator stood guard at the first floor window, and my driver stood guard at the window facing SW. There was a huge slit of 2' x 8' overlooking the entire River Ravi and beyond in the dome which was ideal to observe all enemy dispositions and movements! This mosque appeared to be tailor-made as a defense fortress!

Enemy Targets Destroyed & Engaged

For the next 8 hours, I engaged/destroyed enemy vehicles, tanks, 106 mm RCLs, BMGs, MMGs mounted jeeps and some of those trying to cross over, enemy bunkers, towers, forward POL, ammunition and supply dumps across the River Ravi. It was a treat to watch devastating fires and rising smoke across the entire panoramic horizon. Being a BC and an authorized OP, every time a target was destroyed I cried, with RAJPUT Josh and gusto, "Hello all stations 3, Karni Mata kee Jai, Target M 3421, 5 rounds gun fire." The fire and rising smoke in the skyline could be seen for miles, including from our gun-end! Our morale ("MURLA") had been raised sky high.

In the meantime, I reported the strength of the enemy across the River Ravi to be more than a Battalion, with supporting tanks and forward logistics. Also, I reported that approximately a Coy plus was trying to wade across the shallow waters, with vehicles etc, about one km NW of my location. I had destroyed more than half this force including crippling some tanks, whose barrels with POL caught fire. Only one Platoon+ had managed to cross over and was advancing towards my location. Despite my repeated requests no troops were sent.

I then requested my own (5 Fd) 2ic and Adjt to pull out one gunner each from my Romeo battery gun detachments and send them to protect me with at least one/two LMGs but it could not be done since all guns were engaged with the unending demand to bring fire upon the targets, specially, from my end. It was also disappointing to be denied fire at my targets because of low ammunition.

Finally, when we were about to be captured by the enemy platoon

“For the next 8 hours, I engaged/destroyed enemy vehicles, tanks, 106 mm RCLs, BMGs, MMGs mounted jeeps and some of those trying to cross over, enemy bunkers, towers, forward POL, ammunition and supply dumps across the River Ravi. It was a treat to watch devastating fires and rising smoke across the entire panoramic horizon. Being a BC and an authorized OP, every time a target was destroyed I cried, with RAJPUT Josh and gusto, “Hello all stations 3, Karni Mata kee Jai, Target M 3421, 5 rounds gun fire.”

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Then PM, Lal Bahadur Shastri, at forward area, 1965

which had surrounded us from SW and NW and we had exhausted almost our small arms ammunition, we quickly abandoned the mosque with all our equipment, headed back and joined 2 RAJ RIF by dusk. Lt Col Chajju Ram, our ex-CO, took over command as our DBN Sector Commander. I was thrilled to meet him as our Sector Commander.

I immediately got on with the task at hand – to capture DBN Bridge under direct one to one guidance and command of Col Chajju Ram, as his forward BC with the leading Coy of 2 RAJ RIF. To mislead the enemy, we fired on linear targets, smoke screens and area targets, well to the left of the DBN Bridge, where even a faint attack was carried out!

Detailed actual fire plans were made, including the final barrage, in front of the assaulting company of the Bn. Point Whisky (W) registered and passed on to the guns for working out the barrage and issue fire plan and task tables to each gun. The password to execute this fire plan was finally issued the next evening, before the final Bn attack/assault at 1600 hrs on 8th Sep 1965. The previous night, the northern end of the DBN Bridge and the adjoining Bundh had been secured to act as the Firm Base. (It is at this Bund, that I lost one of my very close and dear friends of NDA XXII Course, Capt SPS Sekhon, Coy Cdr Forward Coy. He was the victim of a direct RCL rocket, which went through and through the Bund and got him in the stomach; I only realized that he was killed, when my shoes and socks were drenched with his blood in the same trench)!

To the utter surprise of the enemy, ours was a frontal assault along

“For the next 8 hours, I took pot shots and engaged /destroyed the following enemy targets, with immunity: Enemy vehicles, tanks, 106 mm RCLs, BMGs, MMGs mounted jeeps and some of those trying to cross over; enemy bunkers, towers, forward POL, ammunition and supply dumps across the River Ravi. It was a treat to watch devastating fires and rising smoke across the entire panoramic horizon. Being a BC and an authorized OP, every time a target was destroyed I cried, with RAJPUT Josh and gusto, "Hello all stations 3, Karni Mata kee Jai, Target M 3421, 5 rounds gun fire." The fire and rising smoke in the skyline could be seen for miles, including from our gun-end! Our morale ("MURLA") had been raised sky high.”

the already damaged road/rail Bridge! In fact most of the enemy had already run away when the far bank, i.e. the SW bank of the bridge was heavily pounded by our guns and mortars fire during the pre-assault fire! We executed the assault with precision and accuracy with the fire plan and the moving barrage fired perfectly ahead of the assaulting Inf. I felt that we could have captured the DBN Bridge with a Marching Brass/Pipe band, as the enemy had already run away and totally abandoned their defenses. The objective including the NW end defenses was captured by 1800 hrs on 8th Sep, 1965. A heroic battle victory!!

For this restoration and regaining of a losing Sector, Lt Col Chajju Ram was awarded a well-deserved Vir Chakra (VrC). He retired as QMG at AHQ.

Our DBN War Booty

After capture and total occupation of our objective, the following was our 'war booty': 6 x jeep mounted 106 mm RCL guns, with the American Jeeps' key intact and full petrol tanks; 2 x Tanks semi burnt out with their POL barrels; Partially damaged enemy forward ammunition dump, (with almost 20 days' ammunition for a Bn Gp); POL dump; Supply dump; Hundreds of small arms; some LMGs, MMGs and 2 jeep mounted Browning Machine Guns (BMG); More than 2 dozen dead bodies, including 3 Officers' dead bodies. I opened the top pocket of a young Pak Capt and found a diary with names of some girls/ladies in Lahore.

We also captured more than 50 PoWs (Prisoners of War). There were a few enemy wounded who were given first aid and evacuated to our Field Hospitals. The dead were given respectable burials after taking their pictures and proper documentation; one disc was buried along with the respective body, and the other properly stored for disposal as per Geneva Conventions! I informed our CO, Lt Col Ambrose of the completed task of coordination and integration our local defenses to ward off any counterattack by the Pak Army.

I rang up my CO to join me, my forward OPOs and leading Inf Coy OC, in our DBN Victory celebrations, that night, across the captured DBN Bridge, as I was opening a bottle of Old Smuggler Scotch Whisky! He promptly congratulated me, but cautioned me to confine myself to only 2/3 small, as I was to lead our move to Taran Taran-Barki Axis, the same night! Another challenge! I readily said, "*Wilco Sir, Karni Mata ki Jai!*"

“Finally, when we were about to be captured by the enemy platoon which had surrounded us from SW and NW and we had exhausted almost our small arms ammunition, I ordered and we quickly abandoned the mosque with all our equipment, headed back and joined 2 Raj Rif by dusk. Lt Col Chajju Ram, our ex-CO, takes over command as our DBN Sector Commander. I was thrilled to meet him as our Sector Commander, due to sacking of the then incumbent Brig/Sector Cdr. He was very fond of me as a naughty boy, a trouble maker, but a genuine dashing go-getter, dare-devil reliable Officer, especially during crisis.”

1965: 'BRAVO' – DO



1965: 'Bravo' - do

This is a narrative history with battle-accounts from a leading tank commander and his Sqn Commander juxtaposed as living history of 'B' Squadron, 62 CAVALRY during the 1965 War. "Lessons learnt were that we had superior crew integration and training. Credit goes entirely to unsung heroes like each member of my Squadron, especially our tank-gunners who held their nerve and shot those Pattons with great skill and determination. Knowing we were thoroughly out-gunned, they sat in their battle positions and waited for the right moment to engage the Sherman's trigger. All my troop leaders were wounded in battle or otherwise..." recalled Maj Gen KMKS Barach who commanded the Sqn during the war. It has been 51 years since the battle was fought, but men like Hony Capt Om Prakash Kadian of Sixty Second Cavalry live on with individual, unsung, brave histories as the first Indian Armoured Regiment to be raised post-independence.

SAGAT SHAUNIK

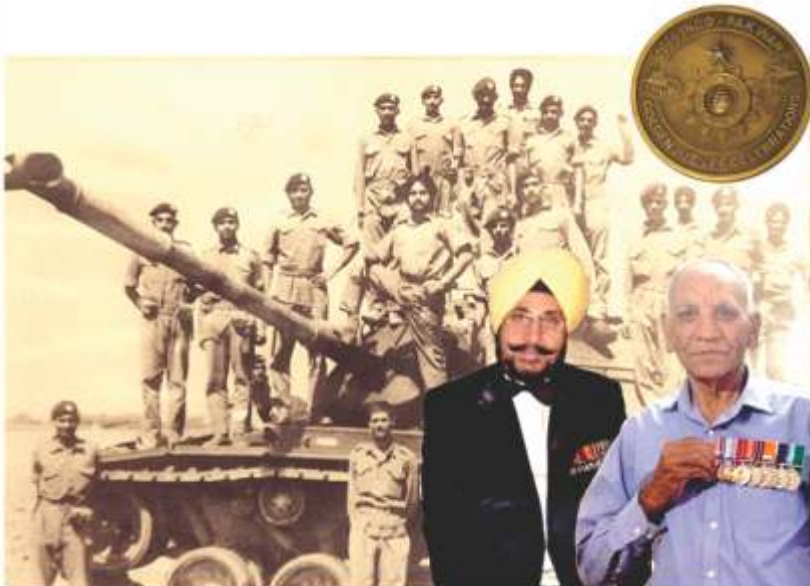
Then - ALD Om Prakash Kadian {Retired Risaldar (Hony Captain)} Leading Tank Commander's Experience:

I was born in Tehsil Beri, Zilla Rohtak (now Jhajjar). I was a sportsman in school and thought that I would receive more opportunities in the Army. In those days my Jat community didn't do business, we either farmed or joined the Army. My father Daryao Singh (rank unknown) served in Peshawar with 15 PUNJAB and was discharged after WW II, following his footsteps, I attended a recruitment rally at

Delhi Cantonment. In 1958, I was enrolled in the Armoured Corps and assigned 62 CAVALRY located at Ferozepur.

"Bharat ki pehli cav-lury unit thi jo without ghode raise hui, Ambala 1956 mein, Lt Col RS Butalia ki kamaan mein" (It was the first Indian Cavalry Regiment to be raised without horses, directly on tanks at Ambala in 1956; under the command of Lt Col RS Butalia). We had Churchill Tanks named after the British PM and we moved to Jalandhar in 1959. By June 1960, we deposited those Churchills and converted to Sherman Mark IV and V's, these were American equipment with 76 mm calibre guns. 'A' and 'B' Squadrons (Sqn) had Sherman Mk V while 'C' Sqn had Mk IV. In May/June 1964 we moved to Jammu.

Our tank crew lists were regularly updated



B Sqn 62 Cavalry on top of destroyed Pakistani Patton M 48 tank.
Top Right: 50 years commemorative coin, Below Maj Gen KMKS Barach (left)
and Hony Capt OP Kadian (right)

based on training and availability. In 1965, I was with B Sqn 3rd Troop with tank number ↑GX51. Our battle crew were gunner Sowar Ram Singh (retired Risaldar); Driver Sow Khushi Ram; Operator/Loader Sow Mange Ram and I was the tank commander with Acting Lance Daffadar (ALD) rank. Usually, an ALD is never allowed to command a tank in war, but being a sportsman playing Regimental teams I was noticed and with the shortage of crews, was privileged to be hand-picked and given command of that tank.

Bravo Sqn's leadership were: Sqn Cdr Maj Kanwar Maharaja Kumar Singh Barach (retired Maj Gen); Sqn 2iC Capt Kulwant Singh (retired Maj Gen, UYSM); Troop (Tp) Leaders, No 1 Tp Nb Ris Shyam Lal, No 2 Tp Nb Ris Sultan Singh, No 3 Tp Senior JCO Ris Fateh Singh, No 4 Tp Nb Ris Shodan Singh, SDM (Squadron Daffadar Major) Kali Ram; SQMD (Squadron Quarter Master Daffadar) Gudan Singh and Squadron Signal NCO Attar Singh.

Just like we had supported the Mukti Bahini in 1971, Pakistan had sent soldiers in civilian dress during 1965 to operate behind our lines in J&K. The Regiment was alerted and 'B' Sqn was sent to Jammu Tawi's railway station that was surrounded by jungle. We guarded the jungles against Pak infiltration for 20 days. The other two Sqns were deployed towards Ranbir Singh Pura (RS Pura) on the road towards Sialkot. It was around May 1965 when, *"ek dum aisa ho gaya tha ki bhagna padhta tha, jab bataya jata ki ghusbaithiye aa gaye hein"* (we had to suddenly rush to the locations, when we were informed that the infiltrators had crossed in). On 2 September, they finally attacked us with air strafing.

We were tasked to commence attack on Sialkot from Samba sector, while 20 Lancers was despatched to Chhamb-Jaurian and 18 CAV (Shermans) was allotted Sialkot-Jammu road in the general area of RS Pura. Later, 62 CAV (Shermans) was detailed to protect 1st Armoured Division's right flank and 2nd LANCERS (Shermans) would protect the Div's left flank. 18 CAV was tasked to hold the region of RS Pura. 16 CAV (Centurions) the advance guard of the Div's assault were to remain in contact with the enemy to ascertain their positions, equipment status, armour deployment and so on. 16 CAV was tasked to engage in small battles and mine-clearance at Regimental level wherever necessary.

It so happened that when the Div pressed on with the assault, Sqn of 2 LANCERS got bogged down in a nalah (ditch). So 'C' Sqn 62 CAV filled their strength to form the Div's left-defensive flank, both Regiments were reduced to '-1' status. Our 'A' Sqn commanded by Maj BIS Khurana would advance one day and on the next day our 'B' Sqn

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would replace his position. In a combing manner, we reached unopposed till the area outside Maharajke, a small town of sorts. Pakistani village Chawinda was just a km ahead of the international border and an advance party of Pak sappers/pioneers had arrived in a truck to lay mines. Our arty opened up on them at 11 pm on night 6/7 September. They halted their mine laying and fled leaving behind their dead and wounded. My Sqn recovered their wounded; there was no fighting for us, we remained in Maharajke for the night.

On 11 Sep, we were tasked to capture village Haral. Regiment was told that the advance guard had crossed the Div's limit-lines as they had been unopposed right up to Sialkot. Enemy armoured brigade dug in at Sialkot, engaged the advance guard with superior Patton tanks. So they commenced a tactical withdrawal. In the dust that lifted, we didn't know if the tanks manoeuvring ahead of us were Pattons or Centurions.

B Sqn had been deployed in up-front formation with 2-Tp on the right and my 3-Tp on the left. By 1100 hrs, we were halted as arrangements were made to replenish petrol and ammunition as we had been firing for two days. My tank was the first on the front left extreme of 3rd Tp. The advance guard was retreating and came over from my side with a Pak armoured Sqn chasing behind them.

Seeing my troop, the advance guard first went behind our rear troop, turned about and then faced Pakistan. Our troop received orders not to fire when we reported sighting tanks approaching our position. We were informed that they were our tanks. When they came closer, we recognised them and alerted our Sqn Cdr who repeated not to fire at them. I was ordered to show a white flag and ensure that my gunner doesn't pull the trigger. But I didn't have any white flag or cloth. So I took off my dungarees and removed my baniyan (vest) and raised it.

At about 500-600 gaz (yards), Pak Tanks came and halted just ahead of us. They were facing all directions. We were waving white flags. They saw us and got confused. Then the Advance Guard came up front from behind my position and fired at them. Enemy returned fire, so the Advance Guard withdrew promptly. But, we still didn't fire. For 20 minutes both of us went silent. I was left standing waving my baniyan-flag.

By then, they had recognised us and fired at my tank. The round fell 50-60 gaz ahead of my tank. When that fell, I ordered my crew in to fighting position. I informed my Sqn Cdr that they were not our tanks; they were the enemy's! Still he did not give any fire order. Regardless, we went in to battle position. *"Itne mein doosra gola aa gaya aur Kikar*

“It so happened that when the Div pressed on with the assault, Sqn of 2 LANCERS got bogged down in a nalah (ditch). So 'C' Sqn 62 CAV filled their strength to form the Div's left-defensive flank, both Regiments were reduced to '-1' status. Our 'A' Sqn commanded by Maj BIS Khurana would advance one day and on the next day our 'B' Sqn would replace his position.”

ped se lag gaya" (meanwhile a second round hit the Kikar {Acacia Karoo} tree next to us). The falling branch made me realise that the next round would be killing us. Luckily, the third round came and hit my left sprocket and bounced off. *"Wo ricochet karke nikal gaya"* (it ricocheted and didn't penetrate further).

"Phir hamne fire shuru kar deeya. Koi order-shorder nahi. Maine apna cupola band kar deeya tha. Pak ka tank broadside disha mein dikh gaya toh maine uspe hamla karne ka order deeya. Mera gunner Ram Singh ne theek uske petrol tank pe nishaan-cheeri lagaya aur unke tank mein aag lag gayi. Fir meine doosre tank k engine deck mein bhi hit keeya. Itne mein Pak ka wo 15 tanko ka battle group darr gaya aur about-turned hua. Pehle unka kamaan tank ghooma, phir sabhi ghoom gaye. Phir hamne trigger ko dabba deeya aur do tanke aur hit hue. Ek jal gaya aur ek thamb ho gaya. Tab tak Pak withdraw kar gaya. 11 bajje kee yeh kaarwai surya-ast hone tak chalti rahi. Hum act-sun khatam hee keeye k dono aur key art-lury shuru ho gayi. Phir toh bahut hee bura ho gaya".

(Then without any orders, we commenced firing. I shut my cupola and saw a Pak tank on its broadside. I ordered my gunner Ram Singh to fire at him. Promptly he placed the crosshairs and hit the petrol tank that set ablaze. Then we fired at another tank, hitting it in the engine deck. By then, the Pak tank battle group of 15 got scared and turned about. First their command tank turned around and then all of them did. So my gunner pressed the trigger and hit two more tanks, one burnt and another stalled there. Pak had withdrawn, the action that started around 11 am ended at sunset when both sides' artilleries opened up on each other, making it a terrible situation).

That night, we were ordered to outflank Haral from the rear. My tank track was broken; its battery was weak and it just didn't start. We had a small generator mounted on the tank, but even that couldn't give a combined battery start. I used what was taught during training that if we could hold one track's stick in neutral then we could turn about and withdraw our tank. But the engine just didn't crank up. I ordered my loader Mange Ram to remove the 'ack-ack' MG (Machine Gun) from his cupola {*"jo Browning-e tank-o mein hoti hein"*} and we dismounted to take shelter in a pit nearby. We deployed the MG in defensive position, *ab Pistol-o se kaun ladhe?* (Who would fight with pistols?)

When dust settled, we found ourselves isolated. Then I went back inside the tank, placed grenades and explosive charges in their designated positions near the radio, gun-breach and ammunition deck. Setting the primer, I ran away from the tank, dived in to the pit and detonated the charge. We were ready to lose our tank but didn't want it to be misused by the enemy either against us or as a war trophy in their

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“When dust settled, we found ourselves isolated. Then I went back inside the tank, placed grenades and explosive charges in their designated positions near the radio, gun-breach and ammunition deck. Setting the primer, I ran away from the tank, dived in to the pit and detonated the charge. We were ready to lose our tank but didn't want it to be misused by the enemy either against us or as a war trophy in their cantonments. As night fell, we began withdrawing from our position and reached a sort of embankment where we found a Jeep with Indian marking. We looked around and noticed a tree and approached it seeking possible assistance. There our arty FO O (Forward Observation Officer) was perched and alerted, *"yaha mat aao, mein dikh jaunga"* (don't come here, I will be spotted). So we went behind his jeep and oriented ourselves as per small maps taken from the tank.”

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Just a little ahead, we found B Sqn Sherman Mk IV “↑GX50”, the troop leader's tank that had fallen in to a well. Its main gun had prevented it from going in completely and was bent. That tank's commander Ris Fateh Singh had been wounded in the shelling as his cupola hit him on the head. Luckily our CO, Lt Col BM Singh arrived on his tank. I briefed him about the situation and requested if Fateh Saab's tank could be recovered. He told us that there was no way to recover the tank and it would be of no use since the barrel was bent. So I took permission to destroy it. He granted it, so we repeated the procedure that we had done with my tank. But it didn't destroy sufficiently. So I requested the Commandant to dismount his tank, then got in, turned the main gun and fired a single round in to the engine deck of our Saab's tank stuck in the well. That completed our drill for war-damaged tanks. I fulfilled my responsibilities as an NCO of 3rd troop.

We had lost our Troop Leaders tank and our own. The third tank of our troop, Sherman Mk IV “↑GX52” location was still unknown, our CO ordered us on a search mission. We proceeded on the main road and found some infantry just a little ahead. They told us that the tank had recently moved towards the Regiment's location. Now, we were without any transport and had to march back to our location. We saw a truck going down the road and tried to halt him. He slowed down, we tossed in our carbines, just then he accelerated. We got worried that we would be without transport and our personal weapons in enemy territory. Being an athlete, I sprinted behind him and caught hold of the tailboard. Then I moved the small window in the driver's cabin and prodded the driver. He got alarmed and pressed the accelerator. Perhaps he assumed I was Pakistani. Then somehow I conveyed to him that we were from the same army. Then he stopped his truck and my crew boarded. Later, at the Unit lines, he told us that he thought we were Pakis and slowed down only because of the rough road, speeding at the next opportunity. He apologized telling us that he was recruited just 3 months ago. We forgave him instantly.

Then my crew was assigned administrative duties and we recovered all Pak tanks that we had destroyed. The Pak tank that had stalled after

being hit by my tank was fully functional. Div took it for technical studies; in fact some American groups later came down to study how an inferior American Sherman Mk IV could take on the supposedly superior American M-48 Patton! I had driven that Patton back to India and the odometer read barely 100 kms. Pakis just didn't spend time to train their crews on brand new tanks and mistakenly thought that they would take on my brothers of 62 CAVALRY! The other three destroyed Patton tanks were retained as war-relics with the Divisions at Jammu, Ambala and Ahmednagar Centre. My life carried on and I retired as an Honorary Captain. To know more about the Sqn you must meet my wartime Sqn Cdr, Gen Barach sahib.

Then-Maj Kanwar Maharaja Kumar Singh Barach (Retired Maj Gen), B Sqn Cdr recalls: 65 War was started by the Pakistanis in J&K area. They had achieved superiority over Indian Army in terms of modernisation of their army. They had received M-47, M-48 Patton tanks for 8 regiments as also some M-36 Tank Destroyers that had the same gun but not mounted on the same chassis. Also, they got other sophisticated equipment and thought that it was the best chance for them to annexe parts of Kashmir, if not the whole of Kashmir and they started the problem there. Now when they started that, the Army Chief Gen Choudhary went up to the Prime Minister to say, “*look, in the hills we got no reinforcements, the only way we can reduce pressure, is to open a new frontier for which we will have to violate the international border*”. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri replied, “You are the expert on the thing. I have no objections, you can do what you like, but ensure the safety and security of the country”.

So he planned an attack into Lahore sector and drew the enemy there, he launched our only Armoured Division (Armd Div) that had four Centurion Regiments. The Centurion tank was not as modern or sophisticated as the Pattons. The British tank was an end of World War 2 design with very simple-effective gunnery techniques of engaging targets. On the other hand the Pakistani Army was unable to absorb modern hardware when the war started, because their rank & files were not trained and most of them were still uneducated or had a very primary level of education. Whereas our crews were very proficient in the Regiment. We had a simple drill of firing three shots after locating the target, it just made a guess if the target was 1000 or 1200 yards. Fired one shot- up 200, fire another shot-down 400 fired another shot. At firm 800 up to 2000, you would definitely hit a target, maybe two rounds would hit and it did happen that way. But they (Pak) had more

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powerful guns. We had 20 pdrs (83.4mm), they had 90 mm guns that were more sophisticated. At the time, the Army Chief ordered launching 1 ARMOURED DIV through Samba area, go as far in to Pagowal and further up. We did not know what his intended target was; all we knew was that the Armd Div would drive the main offense.

The Chief achieved tactical superiority by suddenly launching his entire Armd Div from Ambala to catch Pakistanis by surprise in Samba area of J&K. Much against the resistance of GOC Armd Div and his staff, when the Armd Div began moving, Chief decided that one Regiment would be left behind in Punjab for securing the border. 3rd Cavalry was asked to stay back. The Div was left with only three Armoured Regiments to hold J&K. The breakout was to start from Samba through a bridgehead made by 6 MTN DIV, then commanded by Maj Gen SK Korla, DSO, MC.

Before operations started, 62 CAVALRY less one Sqn was placed under 6 MTN DIV to support them in securing the bridgehead and enlarging it. The bridgehead was being made between Maharajke and Charwa. On night of D-Day, we were placed under command 1 CORPS. 'C' Squadron 62 CAV was placed under command 1st ARMD DIV to protect their left flank. The other two Squadrons were on the right flank where I was privileged to lead 'B' Squadron in to battle. Our initial attacks were successful as there were hardly any enemy in the area. They were in the process of marking and laying down mines, but before they could do anything, we were pressed in to service! We helped 6 MTN DIV to successfully secure the bridgehead and widen it. The ARMD DIV broke out from there. We went on the road from Samba (India) to Charwa (Pakistan) and then on to Kaloi and finally Pagowal.

'C' Sqn could not penetrate properly in the sense that communications were fragile and there was some infantry in supportive role with them who had dug-in by night and slowed them further. By night in Chawinda, they were given the targets but the infantry never joined up with them. The Sqn was ordered to fall back as calls to the infantry Colonel were not answered. There were elements of enemy artillery positioned there, and the Sqn destroyed half a battery before falling back. Once you start moving back, it becomes difficult to stop the troops, the Sqn was coming back to the same place where it had started, unfortunately it so happened that the Armd Div's Arty Brigade had occupied it. When the Gunners saw tanks approaching from the enemy side, they assumed it was the enemy, so they hit a couple of tanks (own), but no serious damage happened. The tanks returned fire

and destroyed one or two of their guns too!

The Brigade Commander, based on reports of that ARTY BDE and some report from 2nd LANCERS who were also placed under their command, said that two Patton tank regiments were moving in the area. *"Jadd tank-a move karde ne, ta dust hundee aiye"* (when tanks move, a lot of dust is lifted), so he thought that some Armd Div had come and ordered all Regiments to fall back and make a hollow square. They wasted two three days there, but there was no enemy in the area. Indian Army lost total surprise by wasting 2/3 days in area Philoura (Pakistan) where the main battle took place. On the third day when they began advancing ahead of Philoura, they found some troop there and suffered casualties. A few Pattons were also destroyed in the face to face fighting that ensued.

We, 62 CAV (A & B Sqn) were advancing on the right flank at the same time. On the next day, we were placed under 43 LORRIED BRIGADE of ARMD DIV. We reached Philoura that was almost on the flank of 'C' Sqn that had already gone there. We suggested to the Armd Div that they pull back from there and move towards our side where we would protect their right flank by first light. Next morning, Pakistanis were found in their same place thinking only C Sqn would hit them as it was. They were caught by surprise when they found our new formation and both sides suffered very heavy losses. 30-40 or more Patton Tanks were destroyed that day!

The next morning, we were asked to advance to Pagowal. We observed that from flank on right side, there was a road emerging close from Sialkot-Philoura that crossed behind Pagowal where we were standing nearby and saw Patton tanks coming from that side. Not more than 2/3000 yards ahead, we hit the markings of a minefield and stopped, we didn't know if it was mined or not. I reported the matter to my CO Lt Col BM Singh, that there were Patton tanks approaching and we hit the minefield. Somehow, he did not reply so I repeated the transmission after 5 minutes passed. Then another 5 minutes later, I got a call from GOC 1 ARMD DIV who was listening in to the Regimental Nets of everyone in the battle. He said, *"look I am Tiger so-&-so Division, we have already identified all Patton Regiments that the Pakistanis have. There can be no Patton Regiments here. What could be there is that we have lost contact with one Sqn of 16 CAVALRY, perhaps they may be roaming around in this area so please don't fire at them"*.

I responded, *"We are so close, we can't make a mistake"*. He replied, *"Alright then show them a white flag"* to which, I replied, *"No, I don't have any white flag"*. So he said, *"Put a bloody towel up or something!"*

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“The Pattons were getting closer and closer. So I ordered my men, "don't fire unless these tanks are within a 1000 yards". We had only Sherman Mk IV, the best tank amongst the Sherman tanks. It had a very powerful tracer that you could see from the time it left the barrel until it hit the ground or the target. Its 76 mm gun was more powerful than the previous 75 mm that had been used earlier, but nothing in front of Pattons, my squadron was made to hold steady. The enemy got within 1000-1200 yards of my tank-troop that had been up front at the farthest. The enemy faced them on the broadside and hit my leading tank troop.”

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On that evening, the enemy attempted to dislodge us by a failed counter-attack. The GOC ARMD DIV came down to see us. He remarked, “*Look I know your tanks (Shermans) are inferior (to Pattons), I will send you a troop (Centurions) from my HQs, and they will join you and fight along with you.*” I accepted his offer and they were promptly placed under my command. He further remarked, “*You will harbour here, but you will not pull back, even if you are decimated, we will not pull back from here.*” I replied, “*Alright, don't worry, we will hold this area.*” The counter attack had been half-hearted and naturally fizzled out.

{According to Regimental Records, Capt KPS Sidhu (Retd Brig) of 62 CAV was the GSO 3 (operations) of the Div at that time. He was the troop leader of GOC's Centurion tanks and earned a Mention-in-Despatches for his role in the subsequent action}

Strangely, that night when our rear-echelon fetched up with fuel, ammunition, food etc., the Senior JCO came and apprised me, “*Saab wo Risaldar Sahib aur RDM kehte hein ki AP ammunition of Sherman Mk IV ka available nahi hein. HE wo le aaye hein*” {Sir, our Risaladar Sahib and Regimental Daffadar Major inform us that we have no Armour Piercing (AP) Ammunition for our Sherman Mk IVs. They have only brought High Explosive (HE) rounds}. So I said, “*In that case, go to every tank and find out how many AP rounds have been fired and redistribute them equally amongst every tank.*” He informed that we had about 50% of AP ammunition! Then I informed GSO-1

ARMD DIV that, "A JCO had been to all the ammunition points in the rear area, none of them have AP ammunition of Sherman Mk IV, they have only HE with them". He confirmed that 'it was a very serious matter' and assured that he would get in touch with Army HQs. He was resourceful and immediately rang up AHQ. "By early next morning, a helicopter was flown to our area and AP rounds were delivered to us on the spot". We spent the day in replenishment of fuel, ammunition and maintenance.

By nightfall we had tanks approaching us, we thought another counter-attack was going to take place. The alerted Sqn took up battle positions. During our advance we had picked up a JCO who was recovering a disabled Patton tank that stopped moving midway and he was standing just there. He joined us with the Light Repair Vehicle after fixing the broken track of the Patton. He walked up to me, saluted and remarked, "Saab, yeh awaaz jo hein, yeh toh Centurion tank k hein" (Sir, sounds like Centurions are approaching us). So I asked him, "yeh aapko kaise pata?" (How would you know that?). To which he replied, "Saab, yeh awaaz jo hein, wo kissi bhi tank mein nahi, yeh kewal Centurion tank k hee hein" (Sir, this sound belongs to only Centurion tanks). I accepted his suggestion and asked him to move up with me in my rover. As we inched closer, he confirmed, "Saab, 100% yeh Centurion hein!" (Sir, 100% these are Centurions).

At about 50 yards or more they came, and halted in front of us. Commandant 16 CAV was an old friend from 9 (DECCAN) HORSE. He dismounted from the leading tank, came up to me and asked, "Who are you?" I said, "We are The 62nd CAVALRY!" He replied, "Phew, thank God! I thought we hit a Pakistani harbour". I replied, "We have taken their positions". It was just good luck that neither side got excited. Had somebody opened fire, we would have been annihilated. Then he informed me that for three days they had not seen any food, water or rest, and if we could provide anything, it would be most useful. I ordered the necessary arrangements and his men rested well.

Around midnight, I got a call from CO Light Regiment, who conveyed that 4 MADRAS had been given a task to capture Pagowal crossroad and we were to support them. He gave me their coordinates and asked me to link up with them and be briefed on the task ahead. I tasked my 2iC to assemble the Sqn and I got in to my rover and moved ahead to link up with CO 4 MADRAS. Initially, he was very happy to receive me, I asked him, "What are your plans?" He said, "I have been given this task, our plan is very simple, you see this road/track going to Pagowal, we will advance like that and capture this village in Phase I

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I inquired, “Have you done any patrolling in this area?” He said, “No we have just been given this task and come here”. “What is the information about enemy in this area?” He said, “None”! Then I remarked, “How can you go in this area? I will give you information. This place is held. There is also marking of a minefield, we had a tank engagement in this area, just the day before yesterday”. Then he asked, “Now what do I do?” I said “Instead of your planned route, we will go 2-3 kms to the right, advance and hit the road from Sialkot going to the crossroad behind the village, advance along that, capture the village in Phase I and post first light we capture the crossroad”. He said, “No, No, No; it can't be done, I have already issued my orders, I can't change them!”

Then he picked up his radio to speak with his Brigade Commander Brig Eric A Vas (Retd Lt Gen), who was an intellectual kind of person. He told him, “This Sqn Cdr arrived and as usual he is very uncooperative”. Brig Vas said, “What is the problem? Put him on the line”. I told him “Having spoken to the CO, their plan is entirely based on a map study, they have not been out on patrol as they were tasked just this evening, and they don't have any information about enemy whereabouts. I have been here for two days and we had engagements with enemy tanks in this area, we have also drawn enemy automatic fire from the village. This place is held by anything up to a Company of infantry. It has transpired that the CO has been told that the village was a humble patrol base or something at most a Platoon. I know this place; I can help him and lead him. But I can't get in to the village where the infantry will go. But I can support from behind. Once they lose their tail, we can cut them off and they will lose their balance”.

The Brig made me hold the line. After 5 mins, he told me that he understood what I had said and asked for CO infantry to speak to him. The Brigadier told him, “This Sqn Cdr engaged the enemy yesterday and destroyed Patton tanks. I think the plan he is giving off is a very solid plan”.

Then the problem of Command-chain happened. The CO agreed with me in principle but found it difficult to re-issue orders down to the section level where changed objectives and so on had to be shown... H-Hour had been fixed at 0400 hrs. It was getting late. The fire plan, fire support base everything had to be changed. Company commanders further refused to change anything. Finally with great difficulty, one Company was assigned to me. I told them that they could mount our tanks and ride piggyback up to the battlefield. They said that they were not trained to do that and didn't have any gloves to hold the rope

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line. They were ready to jog behind our tanks. I was in no mood to get in to arguments during war, so I offered the Company Cdr to sit inside my tank along with his wireless set, so that his troops kept pace with us.

Next morning, we commenced advance at 0600 hrs. Pakis were taken completely by surprise. There was a tank troop in the area, they just bolted off from there and one tank was left. Probably it didn't start. It had hardly 139 kms on the odometer; another brand new tank was presented to us!

As I looked around, I found we were in the only grove within 500 yards of that area. I thought we were asking for trouble, it must be their DF-Arty task (defensive fire) so ordered my SHQ to move in to the open fields and camouflage themselves. I made the infantry take cover behind us. Sure enough, within 5 mins very heavy shelling came on us along with automatic fire. 10 minutes later, I was informed that we had sadly lost our RMO (Regimental Medical Officer) during that shelling. Shrapnel had pierced his intestines while he was injecting morphine to a wounded crewmember.

At the end of the day, we captured that crossroad. Of the infantry elements that had gone the other way, the CO, Coy Cdr, Battery Cdr were killed in action along with a number of casualties amongst the other ranks. Had we gone along with them, we would never have succeeded, we manoeuvred around the village, Pakis got unnerved and pulled out, as they didn't know how much armour had come behind them. Pagowal was captured and all infantry with our Sqn, returned intact!

The most remarkable job done by the Chief was firstly launching the ARMD DIV from Samba area and secondly, leaving 3rd CAV near Amritsar where Pak launched his ARMD DIV in Punjab. 3rd CAV was well positioned as the ARMD DIV was expected there. They were told to have a free run and skilfully created Patton Nagar, *the largest graveyard of Patton Tanks in world history*. Wherever Pakistan probed 3rd CAV, they were retaliated by Centurion fire. About 40-50 Pattons were decimated right there, all told about 90 Pattons were shattered at the Battle fields of Khem Karan – Asal Utar. That was the Indian Armoured Corps!

Lessons learnt were that we had superior training, crew integration (*the man-machine mix*), and very demanding peacetime gunnery training. Credit goes entirely to unsung heroes like each member of my Squadron, especially our gunners who held their nerve and shot those Pattons with great skill and determination. Knowing we were

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Family of Hony Capt Om Prakash

thoroughly out-gunned, they sat in their battle positions and waited for the right moment to press the trigger. Dafadar Om Prakash (Retired Hony Capt) who was in the leading tank sought permission to abandon his tank when he was hit. I asked him if his main gun was operational. He answered in the affirmative so I kept him engaged with the enemy, which he did with great élan. I assured him that his ammunition would be replenished as soon as it arrived. These were very good examples of our teamwork and dedication. That man destroyed his tank only when the battle was over and when its recovery was rendered impossible. All my troop leaders were wounded in battle or otherwise; our RMO laid down his life dispensing first aid under intense shelling. That was the spirit of 'Sixty Second Cavalry'; we just didn't stop till the job was done! We just carried on.

Post-War Note:

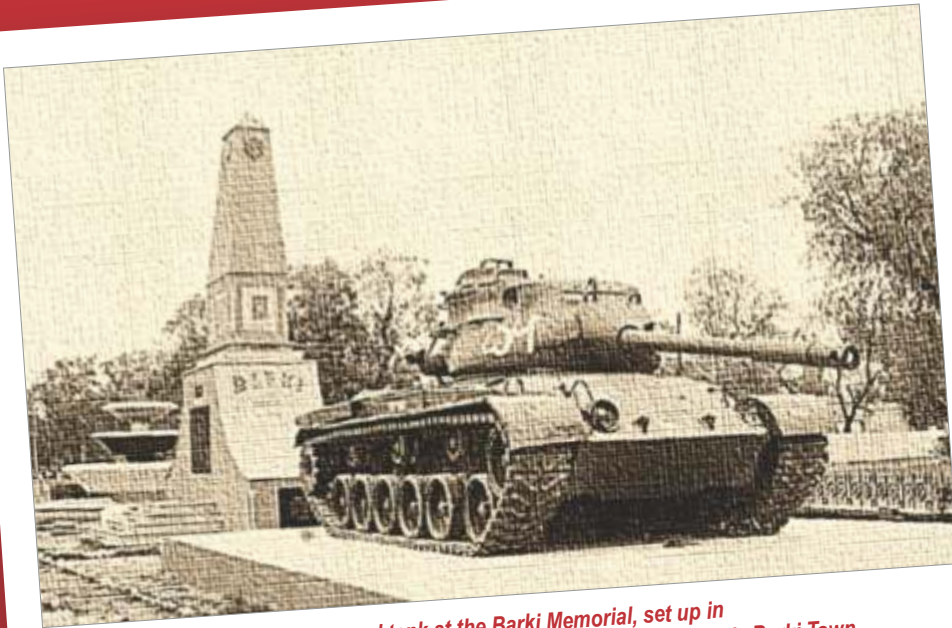
The Squadron returned to garrisons with two Mention-in-Despatches for Sqn Cdr Maj KMKS Barach and No 2 Tp Ldr Nb Ris Sultan Singh. The CO Lt Col BM Singh received a COAS Commendation and a wound medal. Considering 5-6 Pattons, 1 Chaffee and half a battery destroyed, along with the capture of 2 working Pattons, 2 Jeeps with mounted radio sets, 4 X.50 Browning MG, 6 X .30 Browning MG, one 3-inch mortar, one 3.5 inch Rocket Launcher and 12 assorted rifles, the Regiment received meagre recognition given the circumstances and pro-rata Patton destruction.

The names of killed in action are: Capt GN Yadur (RMO); Dfr Didar Singh; LDs: Santokh Singh, Surjit Singh and Sowars: Jawan Singh, Onkar Singh, Baldev Singh, Santokh Singh and Sher Singh. Amongst the wounded were Ris Fateh Singh; Nb Ris's: Shyam Lal, Sultan Singh and Shodan Singh; Dfrs: Shiv Charan Dass, Vijay Kumar; LD Dhian Singh; ALDs: Hawa Singh, Swaran Singh, Niranjana Singh; Sowars: Dayal Singh, Jagbir Singh; Craftsman Bharat Singh (LRW) and Sower/Waiter TN Pradhan.

Lt Col DPS Waraich, son of war time Sqn Cdr Maj Gen KMKS Barach, continued with the legacy of service to the Regiment. I am indeed grateful to Dfr Ant Ram, a recent veteran of the Regiment for having introduced me to Hony Capt Om Prakash Kadian. The spirit of camaraderie post retirement, speaks volumes of the Regiment.

The Regiment captured the tank of Commandant 10 GUIDES CAVALRY (Pakistan) and till this day use its muzzle brake as the base for 'The Pennant of Commandant Sixty Second Cavalry'.

THE BATTLE OF BARKI



A captured tank at the Barki Memorial, set up in Ferozepur 1969 to commemorate the 1965 capture of Pakistan's Barki Town



The Battle of Barki

The Battle of Barki was a battle fought by Indian infantry and Pakistani armour in the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965. Barki is a village that lies 6 miles (9.7 km) south-east of Lahore near the border with Punjab, India and is connected with Lahore by the Bridge of Ichhogil Canal. During the fighting, the relative strengths of the two sides were fairly even and Indian infantry clashed with Pakistani forces that were entrenched in pillboxes, dug-outs and slit trenches that had been carved into the canal banks. The Pakistanis were supported with a large number of tanks, supported by fighter jets. The battle resulted in an Indian victory after they were able to capture the town on 11 September 1965. Brig Kanwaljit Singh (Retd) of 4 SIKH was a leading company commander in four attacks in 1971 war, gives a first-hand account of what happened in the battle of Barki when he was a Lieutenant.

BRIG KANWALJIT SINGH (RETD)

Pakistan's much hallowed 'Operation Gibraltar' in 1947-48 to capture Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), had been thwarted by the Indian Forces successfully. Pakistan was seething within due to its miserable failure and was itching to have another try. The Indian forces' debacle of 1962 emboldened the Pak forces, already getting aid of all kind except the troops, from the West, USA, some countries of Middle East and China, to venture an expedition against India in 1965.

All talks for peaceful settlement of issues had failed. Armed forces, on both the sides, maneuvered to defensive positions, eyeball to eyeball. Aggressive reconnaissance by air and ground had set in. On the pretext of India having opened the innings first at Cooch-Bihar, a fictitious paradox, Pakistan's air arm pounded Indian airfields on 05 Sep. India responded.

7 INFANTRY DIVISION, with 48 and 65 INFANTRY BRIGADES, was tasked on Axis Harike Pattan - Khalra-Hudiara - Barki - Lahore, to capture area up to Barki. As per plan, International Border was to be crossed at 4am on 06 Sep; 4 SIKH of 65 INFANTRY BRIGADE and 6/8 GR of 48 INFANTRY BRIGADE was to secure firm base along the Road. Thereafter, 48 INFANTRY BRIGADE was to advance to capture Barki by the last light.

4 SIKH, of Battle of Saragarhi fame, gloating in the glory of fighting a magnificent 25-days continuous battle at Walong in 1962, was moved to Ferozepur in Aug 1965. (Late) Lt Col Anant Singh, a war veteran of WW II and 1962, tasked two companies, 'A' under Major Shamsher Singh Manhas (VrC, Brigadier) and 'B' under Major DS Sidhu (AVSM, VSM, Brigadier), who captured enemy's BOPs of Theh Sarja Marja and Rakh Hardit Singh. At the same time, 6/8 GR cleared Ghawandi Barrier.



*The author is on the right posing with fellow officers,
4 SIKH in front of Barki Police station
near Lahore in Pakistan*

48 INFANTRY BRIGADE launched 6/8 GR and 5 GUARDS, supported by a squadron of CENTRAL INDIA HORSE (CIH), to clear Hudiaara Drain, Nurpur and Hudiaara, which were about four kilometers from the IB. Pak artillery was having a field day with advancing troops during the day. Enemy's Company less a Platoon, augmented by elements of recce and support battalion gave a tough fight, however was pushed back by the evening. The Division's plan was now modified and hereafter 65 Infantry Brigade was tasked to resume the advance and capture Barki and secure Eastern bank of Icchogil canal, about nine and half kilometers from the IB.

Against enemy's heavy accurate artillery fire, the troops had learnt to dig a slit trench for protection at the slightest lull. On night 7-8 September, 4 SIKH concentrated South-West of Village Brahmabad, which was captured by 'D' Company under Lieutenant Kanwaljit Singh (now retired Brigadier), on the day of 8 Sep, suffering casualties because of immense enemy air burst shelling. 4 SIKH suffered four killed and 19 wounded so far.

On 08 Sep, 9 MADRAS and 16 PUNJAB, captured villages Barka Kalan and BarkaKhurd by gallant actions. The enemy brought in intense artillery and mortar fire on the attackers. On night 08/09 Sep, 4 SIKH was moved North of the road in area Mile 16, prepared itself by the morning for any counterattack by the enemy.

Meals, at times were not available due to enemy's shelling and air attacks. Water was scarce, thus troops had to consume standstill water from the paddy fields. Destroyed mud houses, trampled drying fields and dead bodies of animals were seen everywhere. Weeping dogs and howling jackals were silent only in fear of 'screech and thud' of artillery. No cremation was possible for the dead, except the burials with a stick outside, the soldier's identity disc tied with it, for later recognition and respectful disposal.

On night 9-10th, patrols were sent out to obtain information about enemy defenses. Enemy was sensitive to any movement and responded by lighting up the area and a heavy barrage of fire. Thus, much information about the area and enemy could not be obtained.

However, as revealed later, the formidable defense system at Barki and Icchogil behind it had 11 concrete pill boxes, so strong that even a direct hit of artillery shell or tank's rocket could not destroy it. Each pillbox was equipped with a medium machine gun, a light machine gun, one or two rifles or Sten guns and ample supply of ammunition and grenades. On the left of the road was a solid building of police station, strengthened to locate weapons firing heavy volume. A deep

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ditch, a tank obstacle, was expected before Barki. The Ichhogil, was constructed as a defense system in 1950, linking Rivers Ravi and Sutlej. Its rear bank was three feet higher than the front, with solid fortifications, to bring in effective fire upon the attacker. Tanks were hull-down behind the canal with only turrets up to fire across the canal. The canal was 150 feet wide and 17 feet deep, filled with water, which could be controlled.

According to the plan, 9 MADRAS was to provide firm base in line with Barka Kalan, on the right of the road. After last light, CIH squadron, equipped with Sherman tanks, were to assault Barki in an unorthodox role with lights on, firing all its armaments, followed by 4 SIKH to physically capture Barki in Phase I of the Brigade attack. Ichhogil canal which was expected to be 500 to 700 yards behind was to be captured by 16 PUNJAB in Phase II.

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CO 4 SIKH gave orders to his sub-unit Commanders on 10th, setting the mood for the fight with the following words in Punjabi:

"It is one of the luckiest days for XXXVI. We are moving back to our 'homes' from where we had been pushed out at the time of Partition. Today, Barki is like a bride and we the bridegroom. The elephants (tanks) will lead the marriage procession and crackers and lights (artillery) will put a Diwali celebration to shame. I am confident; XXXVI will live up to its traditions of bravery and sacrifices." (XXXVI being erstwhile designation of 4 SIKH).

As per 4 SIKH plan, 'A' and 'C' Companies formed up right side of the road, at the Start Line at 7.50 pm for assault. 'B' Company was in the rear as reserve. 'D' Company, was assigned a special task to move behind tanks in civilian trucks full of wooden planks to be lowered in Barki drain for crossing over of tanks. After doing this task, it was to clear the Police Station area. The Company formed up at Mile 16, the rendezvous, at 07.30pm. Somehow the tanks did not arrive till 8pm. Frantic calls to Brigade Headquarters provided no information.

The forming up area happened to be enemy's registered target, thus heavy accurate shelling ensued. CO 4 SIKH, being sure of tanks coming, though delayed, ordered the assault Companies to move at 8 pm, the Start Time. Indian artillery pounded enemy positions, though lesser in scale than planned, probably due to some other priorities. It was a sight worth watching with enemy's deadly web of hundreds of whistling bullets with orange tracers, criss crossing, and a heavy barrage of bombs landing all around with piercing shrieks and bursts. The enemy illuminated the entire area turning it into daylight. This spurred the jawans to reach the objective as fast as possible. The

battalion mortars started pounding enemy positions. Attacking troops closed on to pill boxes, from where the small arms fire was now effective.

After about 20 minutes of assault having begun, CO confident of armour fetching up, ordered 'D' Company to move along left of the road as planned and complete its task. The Company had moved at a fast pace hardly for 15 minutes when the tanks arrived rumbling along, firing towards the objective. Lt Kanwaljit Singh quickly got in touch with a tank commander, and tank fire was switched to left of the road. Contrary to the plan, they had not put on their lights, which at this stage proved to be fortunate for the infantry ahead.

The enemy's intense artillery fire was further augmented by direct firing weapons and armor from behind Ichhogil Canal, pill boxes and fortified positions from some housetops and police station. The Companies inched forward through fire and move tactics with grit and determination, till they were close to a 100 yards from pill boxes, where they shouted their war cry, "Bole so Nihal, Sat Sri Akal," and pounced upon the enemy, men crawling and lobbing hand grenades into the pillboxes and thus silencing them. Casualties were surmounting. Once the forward crust was pierced, there were hand to hand fights, bayonets crossing bayonets splitting bellies, with filthiest abuses hurled at each other by the foes. Enemy had been crushed, some paralyzed in their pill-boxes hearing the Sikh war cry. Survivors abandoned their positions running helter-skelter through the lanes of the village to the safety behind Ichhogil wading through it since the bridge had already been destroyed by them in the evening. 'A' Company neutralized the South-Western portion of the village up to the road and 'C' Company, under Sub Sadhu Singh cleared the North-Eastern area.

The success signal, firing of two para flares, was given by assault Companies, exactly 70 minutes after commencement of attack. After a stiff fight, 'D' Company captured the police station area; enemy's tanks brought in devastating fire on to the Company from across the Ichhogil which was just 150 yards away. Enemy had laid anti-tank mines hastily, on both sides of the road; track of an own tank was blown up about 200 yards short of the police station. OC 'D' Company conveyed to the armour not to leave the road or move forward as the objective had already been captured, there was no ditch as such to be crossed, and enemy had laid anti tank mines all over. While this message was being passed, a 4 SIKH recoilless gun jeep with CO CIH, Lieutenant Colonel S C Joshi, came rushing along and was blown off

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near the police station, just 20 yards from OC 'D' Company. The brave officer was wounded and succumbed to his injuries later.

The assaulting Companies found Ichhogil only 150 to 250 yards from Barki, scrambled up and secured the East bank. The defeated enemy had already fled to the rear of the canal. 'B' Company moved up and completed mopping up. Major Shamsheer Singh and Captain SSDuggal (later Colonel), the Adjutant, had been wounded and were evacuated.

Phase II of the Brigade attack thus was completed in Phase I, within two hours of the assault. 16 PUNJAB was then assigned the task capturing area along the Ichhogil further North, thus a large area was secured.

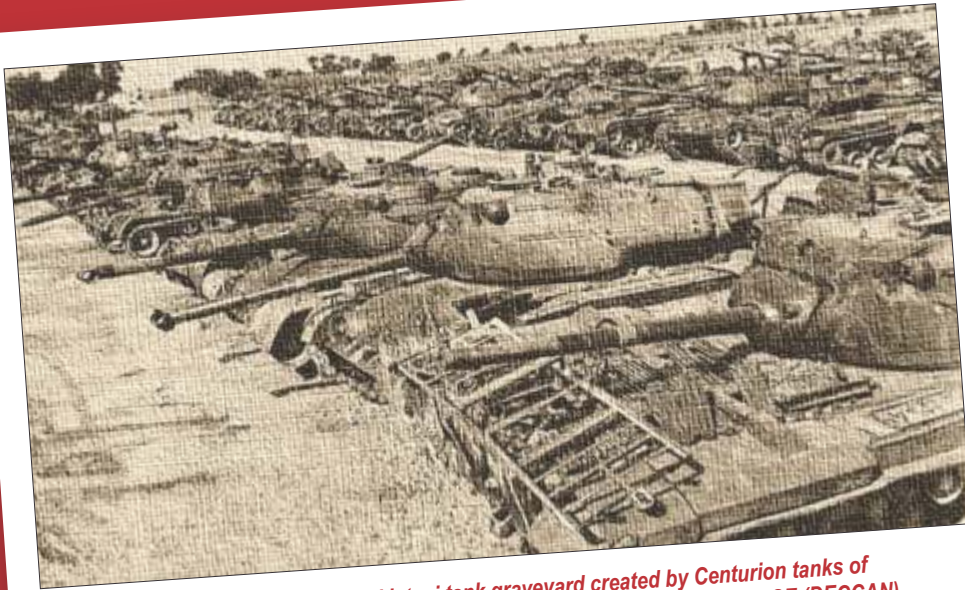
Later, it came to be known that Pakistanis had fired over 3,000 bombs within half an hour. Major Aziz Bhatti, who had been tasked to defend the formidable defences with two Companies plus, was awarded Pakistan's highest gallantry award, Nishan-I-Haidar, posthumously. Besides enemy's continuous fire night and day, his two F-86 Sabres bombed and strafed 4 SIKH in the morning.

Capture of Barki was hailed as one of the master set piece battalion attacks. 4 SIKH had 39 killed and 121 wounded. Battle Honour 'Barki' and Theatre Honour 'Punjab' were awarded to the Unit besides gallantry medals one MVC and three Vrcs. Dr S Radhakrishnan, President of India; visited Barki later, had tea with the troops and highly complimented the Battalion for its sacrifices and victory.

Note: On 11th itself, 4 SIKH was moved out without relief, unmindful of heavy casualties and being in battle for continuous six days, to a different sector under a new formation, to move 18 km on foot after midnight, in an un-reconnoitered area, to carry out an ill planned task against heavy odds. Some were killed or wounded, while about 120 were taken as PW, since the main forces could not succeed to link up with the unit which had established a road block in the rear of enemy at Khemkaran. This was a setback. The unit thus was bereft of many more awards which its gallant soldiers deserved, the irony being defender of Barki getting highest award of his country and the CO of battalion capturing those formidable defences getting nothing.

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BRIG DAVID VS. GOLIATH



*Patton Nagar: largest Pakistani tank graveyard created by Centurion tanks of
3 CAVALRY (B Sqn Cdr & Sqn 2ic wounded); Sherman tanks of 9 HORSE (DECCAN)
whose CO was wounded MVC-later COAS*



Brig David vs. Goliath

An intimate bondage or personal chemistry that developed between Hav Abdul Hamid, detachment commander of an RCL gun and 2Lt Behram Panthaki, a Forward Observation Officer (FOO) from 91 MTN REGT. They decided on a modus operandi of destroying enemy armour? Panthaki would climb a tall tree with his radio set and binoculars, observe the tanks from his high perch, bring down arty fire on them and tell Hamid about the location and direction of the advancing tanks. Hamid would wait for his kill to emerge from thick crops and then fire with unerring accuracy. He would then ask his driver (Nasim) to quickly change position, and get ready to take on another "Shikar". They worked in tandem beautifully for three days.

COL ABDUL RASUL KHAN (RETD)

The battle of Asal Uttar, for some strange and inexplicable reasons, has not received the attention that it deserved. What should have gone down in military annals of India as "Mother of All Defensive Battles", much better than the Battle of Thermopylae in the ultimate results that it achieved, is almost casually mentioned as one of the battles fought during 1965 war. Here, as in Thermopylae, the "300 brave Grinders" faced an enemy far superior in every aspect of military hardware and in numbers too. Plainly put, it was a contest between enemy's Armoured Division equipped with "state of art" tanks, fully supported by an aggressive Air force and 4 GRENADIERS, an infantry battalion, at half its' strength and fatigued by operational exertions from the morning of 06 Sep 1965. In this battle of David v/s Goliath, 4 GRENADIERS emerged the pre-eminent winner, and the enemy completely vanquished.

The Offensive Phase

India's response to Pakistan's "Op Gibraltar" in Aug 65, when infiltrators were sent to J&K was very firm. In Punjab, XI Corps, with three divisions, surged forward, to first capture home bank of the Ichhogil (BRB) canal and then await further developments.

Here, I will confine myself to the operations of 4 MOUNTAIN DIVISION, consisting of 7 and 62 MOUNTAIN BRIGADES, with 9 HORSE (DECCAN) as its integral armoured regiment. The division was still on modification 'Mountain', with infantry battalions having 57mm Recoilless (RCL) as the anti-tank weapon, which essentially was effective against soft vehicles only. The division started moving from Ambala on the morning of 05 Sep 1965; there was lot of confusion and traffic snarls, However, 4 GRENADIERS reached Dibbipur by about 0530 hrs on 06 Sep 1965.



Postage Stamp issued on
CQMH Abdul Hamid, PVC in 2000

4 MOUNTAIN DIVISION was tasked to capture home bank of Ichhogil Canal, South of 7 INFANTRY DIVISION area of operation – a stretch of canal between Theh Pannu and Kasur. four Infantry Battalions, including 4 GRENADIERS were to be launched in the offensive. The attack was to be launched in the early hours of 06 Sep 1965. The attack was delayed, because battalions could not fetch up in time. However, 4 GRENADIERS launched its attack at approx 0830 hrs, with support from artillery, but without armour, which could not negotiate Rohi Nullah. The battalion despite heavy enemy fire, succeeded in capturing its objective. It was continuously subjected to heavy fire from across the canal while it held the home bank.

By midday on 07 Sep 1965, it became clear that Pakistan intended launching a major offensive through this sector. Orders were issued to HQ 7 MOUNTAIN BRIGADE and 4 GRENADIERS to fall back to Dibbipura to get ready to face the enemy armoured division. 4 GRENADIERS had to face a lot of fire during withdrawal, but successfully reached Dibbipura before last light on 07 Sep 1965. So did the Brigade Head Quarters.

Occupation of Defence

Brig DS Sidhu (David), Commander 7 MOUNTAIN BRIGADE issued orders on map well after last light on 07 Sep 1965. Four 106mm RCL guns, which were collected enroute from ABOD Suranassi, arrived in the evening. 57mm RCL guns were left behind and their crew took over 106mm RCL guns. I happen to have incidentally met HavAbdul Hamid at Dibbipura. I remember Abdul Hamid's eyes lit up when he saw 106mm RCL guns coming in. He exclaimed, “*Yeh hui na koi baat–Ab dekhna Insha Allah*” – a prophetic voice! 4 GRENADIERS moved to their assigned defended area at village Chima – 11r (a mound 11 feet higher than the surrounding ground), on road Amritsar – Khem Karan – Kasur, and arrived at almost mid-night in pitch darkness. Commanding Officer, Lt Col Farhat Bhatti (later Major General) issued orders for occupation of defences. HQ 7 MOUNTAIN BRIGADE was located within battalion defences, on the left side of 11r. This area was full of dense crops. At first light, when “Stand to” took place, it was found that the defence was too compact, with hardly any gaps between trenches, and men could see each other, despite thick vegetation. This proved to be providential. Seeing each other during tense moments of heavy enemy attack, boosted morale, and enhanced each other's determination to fight it out to a successful conclusion under the most trying circumstances.

On the morning of 08 Sep 1965, 4 MOUNTAIN DIVISION was

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left with 1/9 GORKHA RIFLES (ex 7 MOUNTAIN BRIGADE) in defence at Bhura Kuhna on axis Amritsar – Khem Karan – Kasur and 18 RAJRIF at Asal Uttar (ex 62 MOUNTAIN BRIGADE) on parallel axis and 4 GRENADIERS, much fatigued due to operational exertions since morning of 06 Sep 1965 located at Chima

“

Enemy tanks boldly moved forward and overran 1/9 GR at Bhura Kuhna within a short time. By about 1130 hrs, they contacted 4 GRENADIERS. At this point of time, Sqn less two tps of 9 HORSE DECCAN located in the battalion area, moved out, saying they are jockeying for manoeuvre. Emboldened by their easy success a little while ago, the enemy tanks rushed at great speed with the intention of over-running and churning our trenches as they did a little while ago, only to be stunned by a barrage of RCL gun fire.

”

The Epic Battle of ASAL UTTAR

The enemy started invasion in right earnest by about 0730 hrs or so, on 08 Sep 1965 on a broad front. 9 HORSE (DECCAN), led by their gallant Lt Col Vaidya (later COAS and awarded MVC), faced the enemy bravely and with lots of skill. However, their Shermans could not face the much superior Pattons of Pakistan. They fell back, without being mauled.

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At this time, the administrative area was strafed by enemy air, destroying about 50 percent of B-Vehicles. A cook of 4 GRENADIERS took upon himself the task of air defence single handedly. He fired his rifle asking the man next to him to watch whether the damn thing has come down or not! Such was the spirit pervading the rank and file of 4 GRENADIERS. How could any enemy, howsoever superior in weaponry and numbers, do anything bashing its head against such imperturbable rock! Needless to say, the enemy retreated, suffering heavy casualties. This phase of the day's battle lasted for approx. two hours. But the enemy returned after some break of about one or two hours with more determination and vigour. However, the gallant Grinders delivered another bloody blow to the enemy.



Editor visited spot where
CQHM Abdul Hamid, PVC was killed in action

*Here, I would like to relate about an intimate bondage or personal chemistry that developed between Hav Abdul Hamid, detachment commander of an RCL gun and 2Lt **Behram Panthaki**, a Forward Observation Officer (FOO) from 91 MTN REGT. They decided on a modus operandi of destroying enemy armour. Panthaki would climb a tall tree with his radio set and binoculars, observe the tanks from his high perch, bring down arty fire on them and tell Hamid about the location and direction of the advancing tanks. Hamid would wait for his kill to emerge from thick crops and then fire with unerring accuracy. He would then ask his driver (Nasim) to quickly change position, and get ready to take on another "Shikar". They worked in tandem beautifully for three days till about 1100 hrs on 10 Sep 1965.*

08 Sep 1965 was the most crucial day of this war, enemy tanks had driven back our armour, made short of an infantry battalion and was very hopeful of running over another. But good luck for India, 4 GRENADIERS stood its ground most valiantly like an insurmountable mountain. On that day, there was no infantry holding any ground in the rear. There were only administrative echelons of 4 and 7 INF DIV. Just imagine what could have happened had 4 GRENADIERS not only stood its ground firmly, but delivered a crushing blow to the enemy! That set the pattern for the next two days.

Night 08/09 Sep 1965, was peaceful with enemy making no move whatsoever. On this night arrived a party from 51 ENGR REGT, along with mine. Some mines were laid, but not enough to deter the enemy tanks. Following the tradition of Mahabharat (that proved beneficial for us), the enemy stirred from its' harbours on 09 Sep 1965 only after sun became bright. This time they went for 18 RAJRIF located at village Asal Uttar on the parallel axis. They easily overran the two companies deployed in open fields, ahead of village. However, the enemy did not risk tackling of built up area, where two companies were deployed.

It was their compulsion to clear 4 GRENADIERS, if they wanted a breakthrough: so the enemy returned to Chima. The same scenario repeated. On this day, a sqn of 3 CAV along with its' brave Lt Col Salim Caleb (later Maj Gen and awarded MVC) driving an open jeep appeared on the scene. They went forward during the lull. Some firing was heard.

During night 09/10 Sep 1965, an attack by infantry was expected, But, luckily, no such thing happened.

Next day, we witnessed the most fierce battle yet. PAF chipped in with a lot of close air support, fired even a napalm bomb, which luckily



Brig Behram Panthak (Retd)

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fell in the unoccupied area. There were very tense moments. The men of 4 GRENADIERS were holding the defence literally with the skin of their teeth. At this juncture, Abdul Hamid rose to the occasion, ably assisted by Panthaki, shot two enemy tanks in quick succession. While shooting the third, he was spotted by an enemy tank on the flanks which fired, killing him instantly. His body was blown to pieces and was buried at the same spot. His Mazar is a hallowed place of pilgrimage for the locals and he is revered as "Zinda Peer". Simultaneously, Panthaki got shot in his head and fell down. The RMO treated him on the spot and he survived but temporarily lost his memory. But became fully normal later and now lives in USA. This "destructive duo" must be revered as "Saviours of India".

Abdul Hamid rose to the occasion, ably assisted by Panthaki, shot three enemy tanks in quick succession. While shooting the fourth, he was spotted by an enemy tank on the flanks which fired, killing him instantly. His body was blown to pieces and was buried at the same spot. His Mazar is a hallowed place of pilgrimage for the locals and he is revered as "Zinda Peer". Simultaneously, Panthaki got shot in his head and fell down. The RMO treated him on the spot. He survived but completely lost his memory. This "destructive duo" must be revered as "Saviours of India"

The enemy pressed on with renewed vigour; chased by an enraged GOC, who was extremely unhappy at the lack of success. He, along with his Commander Artillery, decided to move forward. 24 CAV of Pakistan managed to reach, area behind 11R. His tanks were firing ferociously from the rear; no one dared to raise his head. However, the thick crops and excellent camouflage discipline of the battalion, beguiled him into believing that the defence had been overrun. He accordingly informed the GOC, who moved up, only to be shot by the brave Grenadiers (Shafique and Naushad) when his jeep reached close to their trenches. The C Arty was killed on the spot, the GOC and his staff officer, though badly wounded, jumped out of jeep and crawled into sugarcane field. Comdt 24 CAV's tank was also destroyed. His tank caught fire and ammunition inside started bursting. It was a spectacular firework.

After the cease-fire, the body of the C Arty, Brig Shami, was handed over to his widow, with full military honours, a guard of honour and pipe band in splendid regimental regalia. PAK army officers were highly impressed.

After this fatal incident, in which enemy's command structure was shattered, a pregnant silence descended on the battlefield. However, when enemy recovered his wits from this stunning blow, started attacking again. A sort of ding-dong battle ensued. Wave after enemy tanks came, but did not press home the attack. At about 1730hrs, tanks with infantry riding on them came. Infantry got down, not to attack, but started searching for bodies. Ultimately, they retrieved the body of GOC and went back. A radio intercept of the enemy that day revealed that the "bada Imam shaheed ho gaya". This brought down the curtain on an epic battle, which tested the mettle of 4 GRENADIERS to the hilt. A failure here would have caused an embarrassment much larger

than the one that the nation suffered during 1962.

At the end of this epic battle, area around 4 GRENADIERS resembled a graveyard – that of Pattons, wherein lay 94 of those “Pride of Pakistan”, either destroyed or abandoned. The crews of four RCL gunners of the battalion, fired an incredible 137 shells over three days. Knowledgeable persons know how vulnerable an RCL becomes after firing one round because of the 'back blast' which can be seen from miles. Crops, undoubtedly helped, but it was the skill, the sheer bravery and obstinacy of the crews to face the enemy squarely, that determined the outcome. The diminutive 'David' triumphed over the huge 'Goliath'. Each one of the men of 4 GRENADIERS deserved a gallantry award.

The RCL, crew moved along a kucha track which had 'besharam booty' (a hardy variety of bush), on each side to provide some cover, despite heavy tank fire and arty shelling, not to speak of PAF, fearing nothing for his personal safety, relentlessly engaged enemy tanks for three consecutive days, More important is the fact that the crews, prevented enemy armour from over running the position, as it did in other two cases.

The battle was christened as battle of “Asal Uttar” by Lt Col Sukhwant Singh, a gunner, who was the GSO1 of 4 MTN DIV. Arguably, Asal Uttar is the only battle in the history of India, wherein an invader from North was thoroughly defeated and sent back reeling with staggering losses.

No narrative of this classical battle can be complete without paying tributes to the brave Brigade Cdr Brig David Sidhu and his staff and the CO of 4 GRENADIERS, Farhat Bhatti, his second-in-command and his team of “dirty dozen” (of young officers), mostly “Emergency Commissioned”. These young, brave officers led from front and set up an excellent example for their men to follow. And I must also pay my compliments to FOO and other men from 91 MTN REGT.

“At the end of this epic battle, area around 4 GRENADIERS resembled a graveyard – that of Pattons, wherein lay 94 of those "Pride of Pakistan", either destroyed or abandoned. The credit for this massacre must go to the rank and file of 4 GRENADIERS who held on tenaciously and of course, the crews of four RCL gunners of the battalion, who fired on incredible 137 shells over three days. Knowledgeable persons know how vulnerable an RCL becomes after firing one round because of the 'back blast' which can be seen from miles.”

PLACES MENTIONED IN THIS BOOK

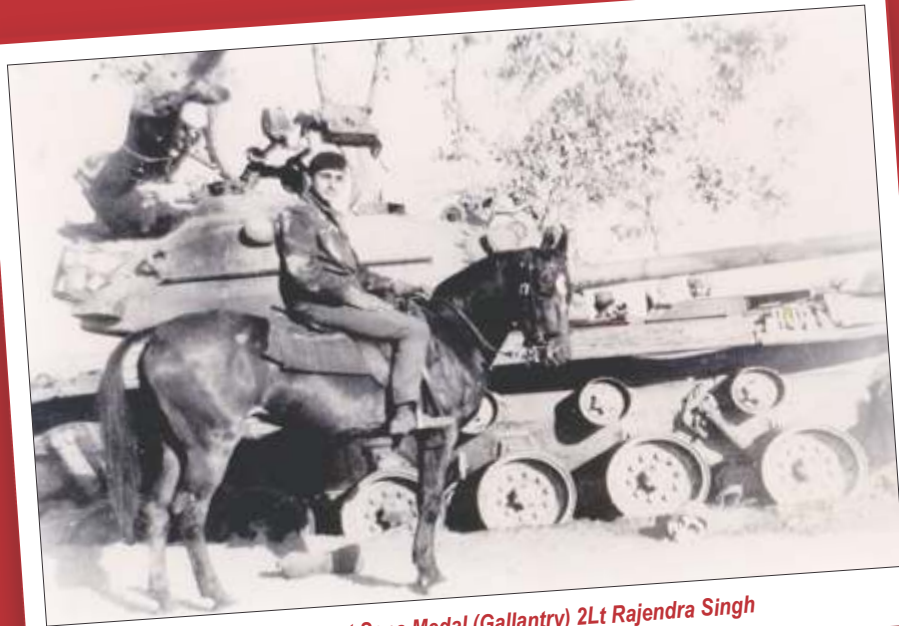


DISCLAIMER: Best efforts have been taken to depict location of places accurately and their spellings. If you find any discrepancy do bring to our notice by writing to us at - faujimagazine@gmail.com

NOTE: The external boundary of India corresponds with Survey of India map



ALL THE KING'S MEN



India's youngest Sena Medal (Gallantry) 2Lt Rajendra Singh



All the King's Men

This is the saga of 2/Lt Rajendra Singh and 14 HORSE (SCINDE), when he was recalled from YO-50 (Young Officers) course and immediately deployed in Shakargarh Sector during the 1971 War. "It was my proud privilege to have the finest set of Officers and men present in the Regiment as ever I have seen assembled, hence, all credit goes to them collectively. Colonel Rajendra Singh won his award of the Sena Medal (SM) as a Second Lieutenant attached to Headquarters 115 Infantry Brigade as the Regimental Liaison Officer, by performing exceptionally gallantly under fire and adversity during the conflict," said Brig Sukhjot Singh, MVC, Commandant 14 HORSE (SCINDE) during the 1971 War, while deflecting a question on his role in the war and advising: "write Raju's story instead".

SAGAT SHAUNIK

Barely three months of service in the 14th HORSE (SCINDE), 2/Lt Rajendra Singh was recalled from YO-50 (Young Officers) course and immediately deployed in Shakargarh Sector during the 1971 War. His commandant, Lt Col Sukhjot Singh, reassured him by telling him that he would learn more in the field than what he could have learnt in the course. With that, he was marched off and placed under command of a 1965 war hero, Maj JS Sanga, SM who ensured that he would quickly learn his skills in a tank troop of C Squadron.

The regiment was part of 115 INF BDE, 36 INF DIV, 1 CORPS. They were concentrated in Brahmni Village area near Dinanagar on the Pathankot-Shakargarh Road. The area was very close to the Ravi River and the Lassian Bulge. On 8th December, Rajendra was appointed LO to their brigade and on first light of 9th Dec, Scinde Horsemen, broke out, crossed the International Border through Boundary Pillar 16 and charged (on tanks) towards Nainakot and Shakargarh. They made first contact with B Squadron of Pakistan's 31st CAVALRY and their reconnaissance (recce) troop who contested their advance with RCLs.

On the night of 10 Dec, Rajendra was ordered by Brig Hriday Kaul to move quickly to Nainakot, report to Adjutant, 4 GRENADIERS and take their 12th platoon of D Company behind the tanks of 'A'

Squadron 14, HORSE (SCINDE). He had to move on foot, through uncleared enemy territory, under heavy enemy shelling at Nainakot. He met the Adjutant in a bunker and was told to proceed towards a big Banyan tree near a water tank, where he would find the designated platoon. Pak artillery made him dash down, drop and roll flat on his stomach. Crawling towards the position, he saw Capt Shyam Lal, the platoon commander rallying his men. They were shelled again and this time, lost their Havaldar who died on the spot. Capt Lal was also wounded



2/Lt (Later Lt Col) Rajendra Singh receiving his Sena Medal from Field Marshal Sam HFJ Manekshaw.

around the stomach and thighs. Rajendra then got up to rush towards them. With the help of another Jawan, he carried the Capt towards the RAP (Regiment aid Post) under the water tank. They had to stop and lie down twice during this period due to heavy shelling. Then, Rajendra took command of this platoon while handing over the Capt to the doctors. While evacuating the Capt, he had noticed a healthy person sitting on a jeep about 50 metres ahead. So, he ran towards the jeep to see Risaldar Padda, the recce troop leader of his own regiment sitting while Risaldar Mohinder and two other men lay on the ground. They informed him that they had recovered A/LD Harchand Singh and were going to evacuate Ris Padda whose leg below the knee was cut and hanging with just a little flesh and bleeding profusely. He recalls pulling Padda Sahib out with great difficulty and carrying him with whatever was left of his leg, so that the flesh did not get separated completely.

Then he safely brought the platoon behind A Squadron and completed his objective. Walking back alone to Nainakot in order to link up with his Brigade, he silently observed his most unforgettable birthday.

On first light of 11 Dec, A squadron and RHQ tanks headed North West of Nainkot, on the road towards Shakargarh, and engaged the enemy. While B and C Squadrons were ordered to take a left hook, get behind the enemy and fire... Rajendra recalls how this move was carried out with great speed, determination and élan resulting in the destruction of 8 enemy tanks and capture of an officer, 1 Bengali JCO and two tank crews of Pak's 31st CAVALRY.

Upon interrogation, it was revealed that the officer was 2/Lt Nayab Iftekar, the grandson of Sir Sikander Hyatt, erstwhile Governor of Undivided Punjab. Nayab was given a soft drink to calm him as he looked very nervous. Rajendra offered him Paranthas when he was brought to the RHQ and Nayab loved them! The regiment treated him with all due respect and this fact was complimented by the Pakistani representatives during the 1973 Indo-Pak talks. Their only complaint was that he did not appreciate being handcuffed to a 6 ft 4 inches tall burly regimental wrestler. This was done by the Risaldar Major, for a short while, since he didn't want this Afsar-Kaidi (officer prisoner) to nurture any thoughts of escaping from Scinde-ke-haath (Scinde hands).

On that day, Risaldar Dayal Singh earned a Vir Chakra for shooting Nayab Iftekar's tank and the one next to it. Maj Brijendra Singh, B Squadron Commander and a veteran of Dograi, 1965 (whose name

“On the last day of the war, on 17 Dec, the FOO (Forward Observation Officer), Capt Piara Singh of 221 Medium Regiment was killed in action. He had been with the regiment throughout and gave precise supporting fire in every encounter. 14, HORSE (SCINDE) had captured 230 Sq Km of Pak territory, destroyed 10 Patton M48-A2s and received the Battle Honour of Malakpur with Theatre Honour 'Punjab'.”

figured with honour in Brig Desmond Hayde, MVC's book) was mentioned in despatches. Maj TS Hassanwalia and Capt KK Chauhan destroyed two Patton Tanks each near Malakpur- Kanwal villages. Lt SS Chauhan destroyed one Patton near Saloch Brahman and 2/Lt KJ Singh destroyed two Pattons near Bisso Buzurg.

On 12th Dec, 2/Lt KJ Singh posthumously earned a Vir Chakra while leading his troop at Bisso Buzurg. A/LD Harchand who had been evacuated on night 10 Dec, passed away. The regiment's motto - "Man Dies But The Regiment Lives" helped keep their spirit and achieve their objectives.

On the last day of the war, on 17 Dec, the FOO (Forward Observation Officer), Capt Piara Singh of 221 MEDIUM REGIMENT was killed in action. He had been with the regiment throughout and gave precise supporting fire in every encounter. 14 HORSE (SCINDE) had captured 230 Sq Km of Pak territory, destroyed 10 Patton M48-A2s and received the Battle Honour of Malakpur with Theatre Honour 'Punjab'. Their commandant Lt Col Sukhjot Singh earned a Mahavir Chakra for his gallant actions throughout the War, leading the regiment, 'belly-up' (cupola-open) showing his face to both his men and the enemy.

After the war, Brig Hriday Kaul, Commander 115 INF BDE wrote the following Citation for 2/Lt Rajendra Singh:

10 Dec 1971:

After a tank battle on 10 Dec afternoon, the leading squadron of 14 Horse on Axis Nainakot- Nurkot was told to stay on ahead and not pull back for the night, so as not to give up the ground captured. For its close protection an infantry platoon from Nainakot was ordered to move to the Sqn. Night had fallen, and the infantry platoon did not get to the squadron. I then ordered 2/Lt Rajendra Singh who was the Liaison Officer from 14 HORSE (SCINDE) with me to go from our location (my Rover Group was then West of Nainakot on Axis Nainakot-Shakargarh) ahead of the infantry battalion and take the platoon to the squadron post-haste. He moved with speed under heavy shelling, contacted the infantry platoon and started them off. As they started moving, the infantry officer leading the platoon was wounded and one OR killed due to heavy shelling, and this affected the platoon adversely. 2/Lt Rajendra Singh knowing the urgency of his mission sent two jawans with the wounded back to the battalion rallied the platoon and through intense shelling led them to the squadron who were a mile ahead. He then went back alone, checked

In both these actions, 2/Lt Rajendra Singh displayed bravery of a very high order, a sense of dedication far beyond his years, leadership and complete disregard for his own safety under heavy enemy fire.

that the wounded officer and the dead OR had been recovered and reported to my Rover Group for further tasks - all this through heavy enemy shelling.

12 Dec, 1971:

14 HORSE (SCINDE) less Sqn with a Coy of infantry were ordered by me to swing South from Fatehpur Afghanan and capture Bisso Buzurg. During this action an officer from 14 HORSE (SCINDE) was killed in a tank vs. tank engagement and a few OR from the infantry wounded. The intervening area had not yet been flushed off the enemy. 2/Lt Rajendra Singh volunteered to take the ambulance car to the location of the wounded. Since I did not have any one else who would go from my Rover Group, I accepted his bid. This officer took the ambulance car through uncleared territory amidst very heavy fire, recovered the dead body of the officer killed and brought the wounded to safety.

In both these actions, 2/Lt Rajendra Singh displayed bravery of a very high order, a sense of dedication far beyond his years, leadership and complete disregard for his own safety under heavy enemy fire.

I recommend him very strongly, for the award of Sena Medal.

The Story After:

Lt Col Rajendra Singh SM, carries a very fine reputation in the army. His battle-time Commandant Brig Sukhjot Singh, MVC recalled his valour and said:

Colonel Rajendra Singh SM (Retd) my dear and valued friend and former colleague from the Regiment; "Raju" as he is affectionately known, is one of the most outstanding Officers that it has ever been my privilege to have served alongside. As a Young Officer, barely just commissioned, he displayed absolute sangfroid in the face of imminent danger, in action, during the Indo-Pakistan Conflict, 1971, whilst discharging his duties as the Regimental Liaison Officer, charged with the vital task of maintaining communication links with the Regiment from the controlling Headquarters, in this case, 115 INFANTRY BRIGADE Headquarters of then 36 INFANTRY DIVISION with whom the Regiment was then grouped for the offensive into Pakistan. Raju's exceptional gallantry earned him the coveted battlefield award of the Sena Medal, perhaps a "First" by any Second Lieutenant. His exceptional citation says it all.

Correspondence with the Colonel:

Sir, I would like to ask you questions about your part in the 1971 War.

Col: I will start from tomorrow our journey back in time - to a period

“

I met Major Jagtar Sangha my Squadron Commander who told me to collect 2/Lt KJ Singh from behind his troop location. I reached the location under enemy tank fire. His tank had been pulled back behind a tree. I was shocked to see my friend laid, on a blanket on the ground. He was wearing his favourite OG pagri cloth shirt, cotton Cavalry cord trousers, Coat Parkha, OG socks and brown shoes. The Cobra missile burned the left side of his head and face. I hugged him and cried. I wanted him to speak to me, but he was in heaven, a bit far for us to communicate.

- Col Rajendra Singh, SM

”

of agony when you lose your buddies in War and Ecstasy, when you are victorious.

(The next day): What were your thoughts while evacuating both the Wounded Officer and JCO? Did your training at IMA make it a natural reflex action or was it at the spur of the moment?

Col: Regarding your first question I will tackle it in two parts. Firstly, about my best friend from 'C' Squadron late 2/Lt KJ Singh, VrC. I was given a message on the Regimental net to quickly take the ambulance to C Squadron location and evacuate my friend. I moved post haste and reached C Squadron location. They were engaged in a tank vs. tank engagement, with shells flying all over. I met Major Jagtar Sangha my Squadron Commander who told me to collect 2/Lt KJ Singh from behind his troop location. I reached the location under enemy tank fire. His tank had been pulled back behind a tree. I was shocked to see my friend laid, on a blanket on the ground. He was wearing his favourite OG pagri cloth shirt, cotton Cavalry cord trousers, Coat Parkha, OG socks and brown shoes. The Cobra missile burned the left side of his head and face. I hugged him and cried. I wanted him to speak to me, but he was in heaven, a bit far for us to communicate. As I write to you I cannot hold back my tears and am crying, because I can visualize the scene and KJ lying in eternal sleep.

Regarding carrying Risaldar Padda, A Squadron on 10 Dec 71 night. He had been sent to the Regimental Aid Post of 4 GRENADIERS in a jeep. I had just carried the Platoon commander of No 12 platoon, D Coy of 4 GRENADIERS who was wounded in shelling to the RAP under intense shelling. I came out as I met a Regimental Jawan inside who had brought in the body of our martyr from A Squadron A/LD Harchand Singh, he told me that he was going to get Padda Sahib so I went with him. Again shelling started and we reached Ris Padda sitting in the jeep. His right leg below the knee was dangling by a bit of flesh. Four of us managed to carry him inside with me supporting what was left of his leg. He was brave and was not crying. He had been given Rum to calm down and field dressing applied to prevent loss of blood. My hands and trousers were full of blood due to profuse bleeding from his wound.

Later I delivered the platoon of 4 GRENADIERS for night protection of A Squadron located ahead and came back alone through shelling and enemy area.

Do you recall your thoughts at the time? How did you feel, given your background and young age? Did your philosophy on life change after

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My Dadaji was Thakur Kandhara Singh; he looked after the Maharaja's properties in our State as well as Lahore. Thereafter, my father the late Col Prithi Singh (Jamwal) was ADC to Maharaja Hari Singh of J&K. He was in his Bodyguard Cavalry where Polo, ceremonials, parties, looking after his Regal guests, treasury etc was the normal routine.
”

returning alone through shelling in enemy territory? Were you able to overcome many fears or was it that the situation demanded that you don't think about anything but survival?

Col: My Dadaji was Thakur Kandhara Singh; he looked after the Maharaja's properties in our State as well as Lahore. Thereafter, my father the late Col Prithi Singh (Jamwal) was ADC to Maharaja Hari Singh of J&K. He was in his BODYGUARD CAVALRY where Polo, ceremonials, parties, looking after his regal guests, treasury etc. was the normal routine. Shikar was the done-thing those days. Suddenly, everything changed, when Pakistan unleashed armed tribals under their Army's leadership to attack and annex Kashmir.

Under our brave Chief Brig Rajinder Singh we tried to stop them. My father was given a platoon and they dominated a road near Garhi to delay the enemy. They stayed in position and only after being wounded in his left leg; with little ammunition and no communication they decided to retreat over the mountain behind them.

Father's platoon was declared missing believed dead. They were out of communication for a week. Surrounded from three sides with a huge mountain behind them, they didn't have a hope in hell. It was their survival instincts and brave determination to somehow get back and report that they had achieved a vital delay. To cut the long story short, my father and a few survivors met our Gujjars. They hid my father and treated him with haldi and mustard oil. Later they put 24 stitches on his wound in the Hospital in Uri. He was evacuated to Srinagar where our Maharaja was kind enough to visit him. My mother at that point in time was expecting my late elder brother who much later joined the Indian Navy.

My father always told me never to be afraid in War because, if destined you can die in a road accident too. Nothing like a bullet in the chest for a Rajput, as this is what he prayed for, when he was surrounded.

Therefore, when I was carrying the Capt of 4 GRENADIERS to their RAP in Nainakot, or getting our Padda Sahib or after delivering the platoon of the wounded Capt of our A Squadron I felt no fear. Even evacuating KJ was a difficult task but I was only hoping to find him alive. Thanks to my father I felt absolutely no fear. I forgot to mention that as soon as my father got a little better he volunteered

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Yes, my Uncle Col Sharak Dev Singh Jamwal, 7th LIGHT CAVALRY the hero of Zojila Pass, had taken his Stuart tanks up to 14,500 feet, assisted the eviction of Pakistani positions and created world history as the highest tank battle. I took two of my T-72 M1 tanks across the Changla Pass, 17,800 feet, globally the highest height traversed by a medium tank. I became the second Jamwal in the Indian Army to take tanks to these heights!

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Col Rajendra Singh and Mrs Chitra Singh

to fight, as most of the State Forces had fought valiantly imposing enough delay and most had laid down their lives. Even our Chief Brig Rajinder Singh was killed in action and later to be the first recipient of the MVC (Posthumous).

May I ask, what happened to your '22' troop leader Risaldar Padda, after the war? Did he live to tell his tale? If yes, where is he now? Was life kind to him afterwards?

Col: Regarding 22 our Recce Troop Leader Risaldar Padda. His leg just below the knee was amputated. He attended Meeanee Celebrations 2 years later, where I met him. In the durbar he spoke a little about me and thanked me. Later he was allotted a Petrol Pump. He was running it well. Unfortunately his leg developed gangrene. They cut his leg above the kneecap, sad and painful. A few years later he passed away.

Would you like to share any personal anecdotes or incidents that you feel are special for you?

Col: Yes, my Uncle Col Sharak Dev Singh Jamwal, 7th LIGHT CAVALRY the hero of Zojila Pass, had taken his Stuart tanks up to 14,500 feet, assisted the eviction of Pakistani positions and created world history as the highest tank battle. I took two of my T-72 M1 tanks across the Changla Pass, 17,800 feet, globally the highest height traversed by a medium tank. I became the second Jamwal in the Indian Army to take tanks to these heights!

You know, many years after the war, I was pleased to meet Lt Col Shyam Lal, 4 GRENADIERS, near Jodhpur. Both of us hugged each other and remembered that terrible night when he lost his Havaladar and was wounded badly. He thanked me profusely, for carrying him to their RAP under the Nainakot water tank, under immense shelling. To cover just 100 yards from the place where he was wounded till the RAP, we had to lie down twice due to heavy artillery shelling. He recalled that too. I was glad to meet him all hale and hearty after so many years.



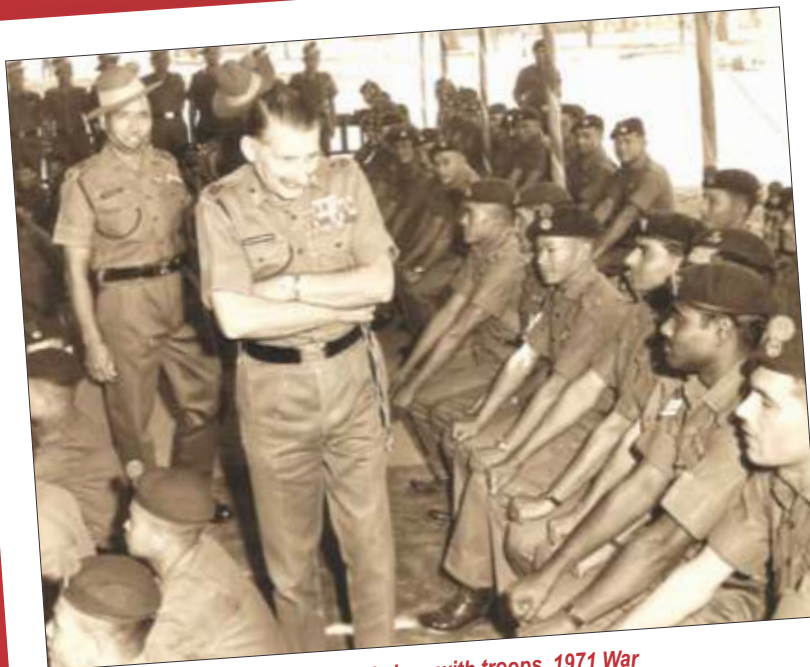
Scinde Horse postage stamp released in 2012

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THE BATTLE OF NAWANPIND, 1971 WAR



COAS, Gen Sam Manekshaw with troops, 1971 War



The Battle of Nawanpind, 1971 War

Of the JCOs captured, one was the famous Subedar Abdul Khaliq, the ace sprinter and the sole athlete from Pakistan who raised his country's flag high on the tracks during the Olympics in Melbourne in 1956 and in Rome in 1960. He won 26 gold medals and 23 silver medals in international games between 1954 and 1960, including the 100 meter and 200 meter sprint events in the 1954 and 100 meter in 1958 Asian Games. Milkha Singh, our very own 'Flying Sikh' dethroned Abdul Khaliq in the 200 meter sprint in 1958. Not only were both athletes Subedars in their respective armies, they shared mutual respect as sportsmen. Abdul Khaliq, on being taken PoW asked if he could meet Milkha Singh. When Milkha came to know this, he visited Khaliq in the prisoner of war camp. This episode was a highpoint of the Battle of Nawanpind, here is a brief account.

LT COL AK MOORTHY (RETD)

The recapture of Nawanpind post on 5th December 1971 by 6 GARH RIF by daring daylight attack on a superior enemy strength demonstrated well-coordinated action by highly motivated troops and Junior Commanders of the battalion. The leadership of young officers was exemplary and proved a decisive force in the success of the battle. The 6 GARH RIF located at Miran Sahib was placed on ORBAT 26 INFANTRY DIVISION defending Jammu-Samba region during 'Operation Cactus Lily'. This was a significant contribution by a battalion to 26 DIVISION in the 1971 war, particularly in terms of successful recapture of post, number of enemy taken prisoner, killed and number of weapons seized. Among the PoWs was the 'prize catch' of *Subedar Abdul Khaliq*, arguably Pakistan's greatest athlete ever, famously known as 'Parinda-e-Asia' (Flying Bird of Asia).

Action in Nawanpind

In the build-up to the 1971 war supporting the liberation of Bangladesh, orders in the Western Sector were to hold on to posts along the border with Pakistan and not to advance into Pakistani territory.

Nawanpind is a border out post (BOP) in the Sialkot Sector, south of Suchetgarh. Active operations with Pakistan commenced on the night of 3/4th December 1971. My battalion, the 6 GARHWAL RIFLES, was occupying a defensive area South of Nawanpind. On commencement of hostilities, border posts were vacated by BSF personnel, but army battalions deployed in the vicinity were not intimidated. The enemy occupied some of these



Subedar Abdul Khaliq of Pakistan who was taken PoW

posts like Nawanpind and Jogne Chak unchallenged. Particularly at Nawanpind, they built up the post to strength of at least two platoons with four MMGs, and Artillery OP from Medium Regiment.

This intrusion and occupation of Nawanpind and Jogne Chak was detected at first light on 5th December by our battalion's 'screen position'. For readers who may not be familiar with the term, 'screen position' is a sort of outpost where a small group of troops are positioned. A screen position is away from battalion deployment areas in order to keep an eye on 'gap areas'. They act like an 'early warning system' in case of expected/attempted enemy intrusion.

The enemy was sighted fortifying defences and reorganizing on the Nawanpind post. On information, I, as the battalion Commander, moved to the screen position and ordered continuous MMG and Mortar fire to prevent the enemy from settling down and strengthening their position, or from attempting further intrusion into our area.

I also decided we would dislodge the enemy as quickly as possible by launching a daylight attack. This decision was taken to catch the enemy by surprise and prevent further consolidation at our BOP.

I ordered one Platoon from C Coy commanded by 2/Lt Rathore and the Commando Platoon under Capt Sinha to form up behind the screen position.

The Brigade Commander had been informed about my plan. He arrived at about 9 AM to inform me that the GOC's orders were 'no day attack' but to 'carry out a night attack'. I did not agree with this line of thought because it entailed giving the enemy almost ten hours to consolidate their gains and fortify their position. We knew by then that the enemy had built up strength to a company at Nawanpind and if they settled down, they would need to be hit very hard to be dislodged. However, some of my troops were in the Headquarters and not immediately available to participate in the attack. Also, any withdrawal of troops from the international border would have created other gaps in our defences which the enemy could exploit to their advantage.

As the CO, I was firm that no further time could be given to the enemy and only a surprise attack at the earliest possible would be successful. Jogne Chak was swiftly recaptured by 1000 hours when I ordered Naib Subedar Gopal Dutt Joshi to attack with a platoon. In case of Nawanpind, our two platoons were set to launch the attack between 1000 and 1100 hours. However, we were made to change this timing to 1415 hours as the Brigade decided to move a troop of tanks to provide support to our attack. Since there was no early 'marrying up' of the tanks and the infantry, Major Tejinder Singh was sent from our

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battalion to contact the tank troop leader and guide them towards target to support our attack.

My infantry platoons launched the attack on the afternoon of 5th December. 2Lt Rathore's platoon attacked frontally from the screen position. It was swift and caught the enemy by surprise. The enemy was pushed back from the perimeter but continued to fight tenaciously from bunkers and trenches in the post. To overcome opposition, Capt. Sinha's platoon was sent to assault the enemy from the North-East. The enemy was almost encircled and our determined young officers and men decimated them. In little more than half an hour, the position was recaptured.

3 JCOs and 15 enemy soldiers were taken prisoner and moved to the screen position and handed over to the Military Police for shifting them to the PoW camp. In the search and mop up operation of Nawanpind post, 1 JCO, 3 NCOs and 12 other enemy soldiers were also discovered dead as a result of the attack. This meant a total of 4 JCOs and 32 men. We lost two brave men in this battle and Rfn Makar Singh Negi posthumously earned Vir Chakra. Six others including a JCO were injured.

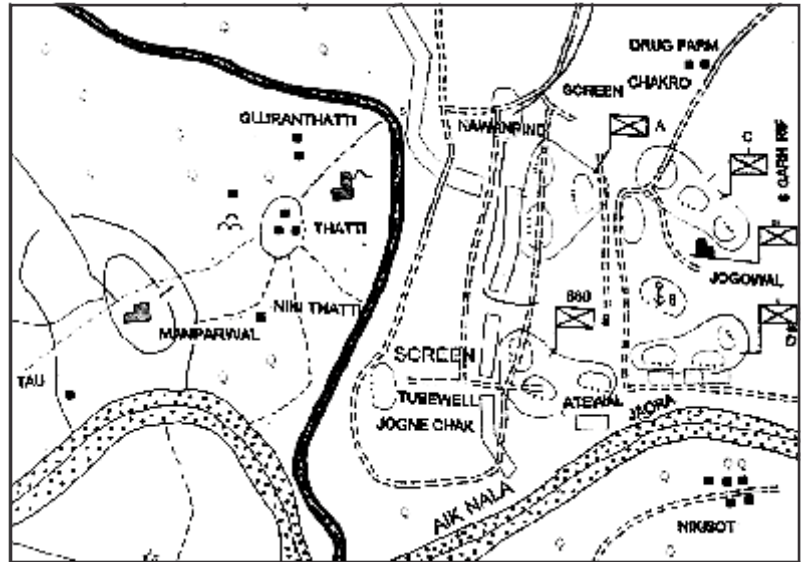
The majority of enemy troops belonged to Pakistan's 37 FRONTIER FORCE RIF REGIMENT and the 7th ENGINEER REGIMENT. The enemy also lost all their weapons and equipment. The 65 weapons captured included 4 MMGs, 1 Rocket launcher, 1 medium machine gun, 3 Sten guns, 30 automatic rifles, 17 rifles, hand grenades and plenty of ammunition.

Of the JCOs captured, one was the famous *Subedar Abdul Khaliq*, ace sprinter and the sole athlete from Pakistan who raised his country's flag high on the tracks during the Olympics in Melbourne 1956 and Rome 1960. He won 26 gold medals and 23 silver medals in international games between 1954 and 1960, including the 100 meter and 200 meter sprint events in 1954 and 100 meter in 1958 Asian Games. Milkha Singh, our very own 'Flying Sikh' dethroned Abdul Khaliq in the 200 meter sprint in 1958. Not only were both athletes Subedars in their respective armies, they shared mutual respect as sportsmen.

Abdul Khaliq, on being taken PoW asked if he could meet Milkha Singh. When Milkha came to know this, he visited Khaliq in the prisoner of war camp. Milkha recalls this meeting with: *'Tears appeared in the eyes of both.'* In lighter vein, I clearly recount two comments. One was by my young daughter who innocently asked, 'Daddy if he was such a good runner, how did you all catch him?' The other was unit banter among my men in relation to Abdul Khaliq

The majority of the enemy troops belonged to Pakistan's 37 Frontier Force Rif Regiment and the 7th Engineer Regiment. The enemy also lost all their weapons and equipment. The 65 weapons captured included 4 MMGs, 1 Rocket launcher, 1 Tripod medium machine gun, 3 Sten guns, 30 automatic rifles, 17 bayonet rifles, hand grenades and plenty of spare ammunition.

Battle of Nawapind - 6 GARH RIF 05 December 1971



Map Courtesy: Lt Col AK Moorthy (Retd)

wearing my pants after he had been stripped of his. He was big built and only my pants would fit him. On hearing about PoWs being returned home after the ceasefire, they laughed saying, 'CO Sahab ka patloon pehen kar Pakistan chala gaya!'

Here are some excerpts from the official report on the action in retaking Nawapind:

CO 6 GARH RIF could lift maximum of two platoons for carrying out the task without jeopardizing his defensive layout. (What it does not say is that about 120 of its soldiers were part of the security of the headquarters and hence, its fighting strength on the border was reduced.)

RCL guns of 6 GARH RIF engaged the enemy MMG in the bunker at Nawapind. The bunker was hit by accurate fire and three Pakistani soldiers inside were killed. RCLs also fired at the observation tower in the Nawapind post and destroyed it. This action greatly facilitated the subsequent assault.

The platoon under 2/Lt Rathore assaulted from the area 'Track Bend'. They overran the eastern portion of the post. The enemy retreated towards the Western edge and took up positions in the trenches in that area. 2/Lt Rathore put his LMG to cover the route of withdrawal of the enemy and closed in on the enemy which continued to fire at his platoon. Meanwhile, radio contact with the platoon had been lost. Lt Col AK Moorthy dispatched 2/Lt Tandon with a radio set to establish contact with 2/Lt Rathore's platoon. When 2/Lt Tandon

Nawanpind afforded excellent observation over the area west of the post. Abandoning this post without the infantry unit being informed enabled the enemy to occupy it. Not having enough men to plan a large scale attack was a concern. Troops from a fighting unit should not be attached to higher HQs (Brigade, Div, Corps) for duties. We have all learnt that parity between attackers and entrenched enemy should ideally be 3:1 or at least 2:1.

reported that the enemy opposition was high, the CO immediately dispatched Capt. Sinha's platoon which assaulted the post from the North-east. The enemy was encircled between the two platoons and the tanks engaged any enemy retreating towards Thatti Post.

Junior leadership was of a high order. This was further enhanced by the presence of the Battalion Commander.

Lessons Learnt

Nawanpind afforded excellent observation over the area west of the post. Abandoning this post without the infantry unit being informed enabled the enemy to occupy it. Not having enough men to plan a large scale attack was a concern.

We have all learnt that parity between attackers and entrenched enemy should ideally be 3:1 or at least 2:1. In this case, it was weighed against us; we had just two platoons and the enemy had a weak Coy. Credit goes entirely to my men for achieving this success.

The Armoured support was limited as the Infantry and Armoured commanders could not communicate directly with each other in the absence of efficient means of radio and line communication. The problem had to be overcome by sending an officer with radio set. Radio communication with Arty was also limited.

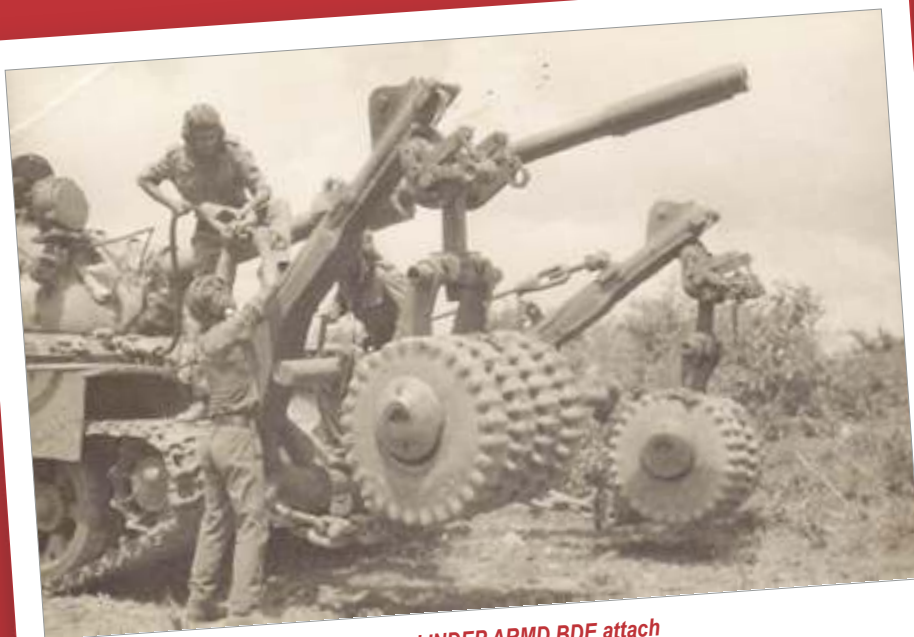
Conclusion

To quote excerpts from the official report: In the Nawanpind action, a Coy of the enemy was evicted from their lodgment and heavy casualty was inflicted on them due to resolute leadership and gallant action by the troops. The Screen Position effectively prevented the enemy from reorganizing on the objective or advancing any further. Commanders at all levels reacted quickly to the situation and displayed offensive spirit and gallantry of a high order. After this stunning defeat of the enemy and continued raids by our troops, the enemy was chary of occupying any of our BOP in this Sector.

After the morale boosting success at Nawanpind, we decided to carry forward the 'defensive' fight by taking it into Pakistani territory. To this end, officer led raids were mounted between 10th and 14th December with great success in Gujran Thatti and Wadi Thatti. Among the young officers who did us proud, Capt Sinha went on to retire as a Brigadier. Maj Tejinder Singh became a highly decorated officer commanded during his command of 9th GARHWAL where he, led them with great success in Operation Bluestar and earned highly coveted Kirti Chakra.

“After the morale boosting success at Nawanpind, we decided to carry forward the 'defensive' fight by taking it into Pakistani territory. To this end, officer led raids were mounted between 10th and 14th December with great success in Gujran Thatti and Wadi Thatti. Among the young officers who did us proud, Capt Sinha went on to shoulder greater responsibilities and retired as a Brigadier. Maj Tejinder Singh became a highly decorated officer after he not only commanded 9th Garhwal twice, but also led them with great success into Operation Bluestar at Amritsar, for which he was awarded the Kirti Chakra.”

THE ROAD TO VICTORY, RAN THROUGH A MINEFIELD



*Crew of 2nd INDEP ARMD BDE attach
their PT-54 Rollers for mine-breaching*



The Road to Victory, ran through a minefield

Here is a detailed operational history as narrated by Veterans of two special tank troops from 7th LIGHT CAVALRY, that were tasked with division level minefield lane clearance operations in Shakargarh Sector during the 1971 War. These men were the primary reason for 1 Corps' (Strike) armoured advance deep within enemy territory, changing the course of history. Today, they are forgotten heroes living in villages dotting our country.

SAGAT SHAUNIK

The 7th LIGHT CAVALRY (Seventh) was informed in late October 1971 that some new Russian equipment was on its way and was to be collected from Pathankot railway station. On 15 November, their Technical Officer, Captain Jai Devendra Singh Jind, was assigned to collect the classified equipment comprising of a few sets of 4-ton mine trawls (PT-54: heavy duty rollers, attached to T-55 tanks for mine field clearance). He was tasked to get the job done and the men trained to use them for the war that was imminent.

One tank from each squadron was taken and modified to harness the trawls. A few men were hand-picked for the task and a fortnight of gruelling training commenced. Meanwhile, from the war planning perspective, there was a lot of regrouping and redeployment with user formations to receive the assets of this specialised task force. As intelligence reports poured in, the strategy was continuously modified keeping in mind recent developments and changing patterns of the enemy's positions. However, the men were told to familiarise themselves with their new equipment and stand-by for deployment as the whistle blew.

By now, at the trawl troop level, it was clearly known that Pakistani forces had dug-in and in anticipation of an Indian advance, laid minefields at great depths, often exceeding 1000 meters. However, the nature of minefields i.e. density, depth, and alignment always remained a mystery for the attacking force. Traditional doctrine and training taught the trawl crews that they would receive covering fire support from ground elements; while air and artillery support would help keep the enemy's head pinned down; thus enabling the trawls to advance into the minefield and clear assault/vehicle safe lanes for the

“Traditional doctrine and training taught the trawl crews that they would receive covering fire support from ground elements; while air and artillery support would help keep the enemy's head pinned down; thus enabling the trawls to advance into the minefield and clear assault/vehicle safe lanes for the Corps to commence/continue their advance. All this whilst the infantry were to secure shallow bridgeheads on the Pakistani side of the minefield.”

Corps to commence/continue their advance. All this whilst the infantry were to secure shallow bridgeheads on the Pakistani side of the minefield.

Change in operational plans placed The Seventh on the Order of Battle (ORBAT) with 2 INDEPENDENT ARMOURED BRIGADE (2 [I] ARMD BDE with directions to leave the detachment of trawls with 16 INDEPENDENT ARMOURED BRIGADE (16 (I) ARMD BDE). The Seventh was further tasked to collect three additional trawl sets and create another trawl tank troop to support 2 (I) ARMD BDE operations. However, Pakistan's pre-emptive air strikes on 3rd December, marked judgement day for Capt Jind's training activities, as on the same day, the new set of equipment arrived and a motley crew of hand-picked men were put together to commence trawl-training. Despite a crash course, these crew were not satisfactorily integrated. Appreciating this, Capt Jind did not have the heart to send untrained crews into battle. His initiative to request command of this troop as an additional responsibility was accepted.

16 (I) ARMD BDE OPERATIONS

The first troop was attached at the last moment to 16 (I) ARMD BDE on 03 December 1971. They did the entire mine field breaching ahead of 54 INFANTRY DIVISION to facilitate its advance. As per theory, the infantry were to provide a bridgehead across the minefield, followed by deliberate trawling; thereafter, engineers would create and expand safe lanes. However, during the course of war, no such 'bridgeheads' were made and the crews were simply tasked to commence trawling in the brutal face of enemy tank, RCL, RPG and artillery fire.

1st Minefield: Barkhania

On 03 Dec, the trawl tanks were allotted to 4 HORSE (HODSONS). On 04 Dec, the first minefield in the area of Barkhania (Pakistan) was cleared for the safe passage of columns from 4 HORSE (HODSONS). The 1000 meters deep minefield was laid on a high ground area, no fire support was possible as 4 HORSE (HODSONS) was in low lying area. The enemy was actively covering the minefield with sporadic RCL, MMG, and artillery fire. Breaching was successfully accomplished in daylight hours starting at 1730 hours. The trawl troop, using two trawl tanks in tandem, had cleared 6 anti-tank mines and were subjected to strafing from the air during the process. Seeing the trawls continue their approach unnerved the enemy who retreated from his forward positions. The trawls held their ground positions for 45 minutes until they were relieved by 4 HORSE (HODSONS)

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Painting of destroyed M-47 Patton Tank



Trawl Crews open fire in the Battle of Shahbazpur

2nd Minefield: Chakra Delra

On the night of 7/8 Dec at 2200 hrs, Dfr Karnail Singh was ordered to link up with 17 HORSE (POONA), West of Chakra-Dehlra to clear the 1500 meters minefield in front of Chakra-Dehlra to facilitate 17 HORSE'S attack on Chakra. This minefield was a strongly held enemy pivotal position on high ground. In this area, eight tanks of 17 HORSE were bogged down in the Karir Nadi that was in the approach to the enemy positions. There was no bridgehead and Dfr Karnail Singh moved his trawl tanks successfully negotiating boggy ground and commenced operations.

Dfr Karnail Singh, regardless of his personal safety, lead the trawling operation and motivated LD Singh Ram to follow him, clearing their path into enemy positions. Seeing these trawls advance unsettled the enemy who fled from his position and later attempted a last minute counter attack using tanks, RCLs, and MMGs. The courage of Dfr Karnail Singh's troop made the day.

3rd Minefield: Bari

On the night of 13/14 December at 2000 hrs, Dfr Karnail Singh's troop under command 17 HORSE, was tasked to clear Bari minefield on a totally different axis. Yet again, there was no available bridgehead and so, Karnail's troops had to advance lone-wolf and cleared a 1500 meters minefield without any fire support. Clearing 1000 meters, the leading trawl of Dfr Karnail Singh was hit and the left track was disabled by a mine. The following trawl tank's hull and transmission train was damaged. As a result, the driver, Sowar Ajit Singh, was unable to engage any gear besides No.1. Karnail ordered him to continue driving regardless and together they cleared the minefield reaching

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the enemy side. They were relieved only after 2 hours; until then, Karnail and his troop had to fend for themselves. Ajit Singh later earned a Sena Medal for his cumulative gallant actions.

4th Minefield: Basantar

Repeating the actions in the three minefields, Karnail Singh's trawl troop cleared the 4th minefield, aligned South of Basantar river near Bara Pind and Jarpal area (two PVCs were awarded in these battles; 2/Lt Arun Khetarpal at Basantar and Maj Hoshiar Singh at Jarpal). On 18/19 December, under similar conditions, this minefield too was heavily defended and the trawls received no infantry, armour or artillery support. As per directions, a trawl tank needs to reverse its main gun to prevent any damage during breaching operations. However, the lack of any fire support made all trawl crews turn their guns around, face the enemy and fire at will while breaching mines. During their last operation, a safe passage was found and the follow on forces bypassed the minefield, leaving the trawls fending for themselves for over 4 hours without any support.

Due credit must be given to Karnail Singh's trawl troop who breached these minefields without bridgeheads, engaged the enemy with their guns, and with disregard to their own safety, withstood periods of isolation in the battlefield, allowing formations to exploit assault-lanes they created.

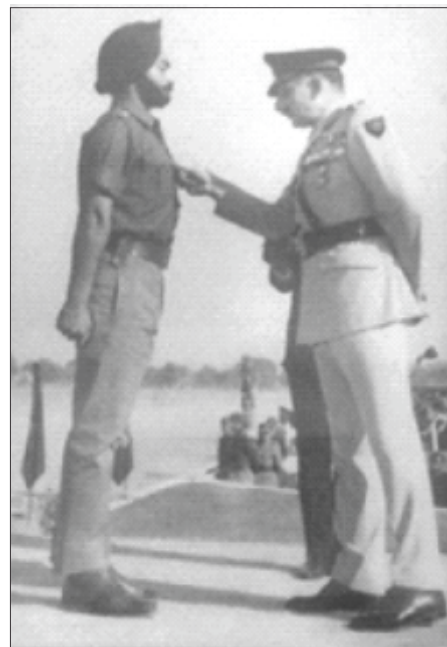
2 (I) ARMD BDE OPERATIONS

1st Minefield: Gidderpur-Harar Kalan

On 06 Dec, 'A' Squadron of the Seventh contacted a minefield in front of Harar Kalan, giving the second trawl troop its first task to breach without an infantry bridgehead. As the trawls and squadron moved into position, they were subjected to intense enemy fire making a headway impossible. All three trawl tanks sustained hits while trawling the minefield. Sowar Dalip Singh's tank received a direct hit killing and wounding 'piggy back' engineer element of 371 Field Company (We Lead, ed. by Lt Col Proudfoot, 1991). Incredibly, Sowar Dalip Singh's crew and ARVs of the Seventh did a commendable job to get his tank operational within 3 hours. All trawl tank crews declined to abandon their tanks and carried out repairs in-situ amidst artillery and mortar shelling.

2nd Minefield: Tugialpur-Amral

On December 7, orders were received to outflank Harar Kalan,



Capt JDS Jind receiving his Sena Medal from Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw

which was heavily defended. It was deemed necessary to create a safe lane towards the west in the area from Tugialpur to Amral towards Chakra Delra. However, only one trawl tank remained operational, while the other two were under repair. At this juncture, with a single trawl tank, Sowar Dalip Singh volunteered to carry out the task without a bridgehead with Capt JDS Jind who volunteered to command the tank. They commenced trawling at noon in broad daylight on an unknown minefield alignment, and cleared 5 anti-tank mines over 1200 meters and reached Amral under enemy fire.

On observing the boundary wire of the minefield, Capt Jind dismounted to see if it was safe to make a steep left turn disregarding the 'safe turning radii' of trawls. He uprooted one anti-tank mine and made Sowar Dalip turn a sharp left towards Amral. During this period, the enemy was seen abandoning their positions. On reaching the defended high ground of interlinked trenches, they radioed clearance to 'C' Squadron to commence induction through the minefield lane. In the meantime, Jind ordered Dalip to dismount from the tank and join him in clearing remnants from the trenches. Dalip flushed up an enemy soldier who ran behind cover, and shots from his revolver were of little use as the fleeing man darted away in the distance. Unfortunately, even after 45 years, Sowar Dalip Singh's actions are seldom recalled, let alone appreciated!

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3rd Minefield: East of Harar Kalan

After clearing the minefield at Tugialpur, the trawl troop was directed to be prepared to clear the minefield that was encountered in front of Chakra, and was heavily defended by Patton tanks of 33 Cavalry and recce & support elements. In a change of plans, a fresh attack just east of Harar Kalan was planned with 1 HORSE (SKINNERS) and 1 DOGRA. All three trawl tanks were now operational and placed under command 1 HORSE (SKINNERS).

On the same day (Dec 7), as the regiments were moving into the forming-up-place (FUP), all hell broke loose as intense enemy fire opened on them leading to utter confusion and disorientation. The trawls were lined up for commencing operations ahead of the FUP with their 'rollers-down', Dfr Sumer Singh and LD Vidhya Dhar's trawl tanks were the only two Indian fire-platforms that could return fire and silence them by first light. Regretfully, during this engagement, 1 Dogra lost many of its finest soldiers, some of them proud sportsmen who had played volleyball and football with the trawl crews in better times.

The trawl crew recalls Dfr Sumer Singh's calm and exemplary courage, whilst others were panic stricken. There is no record or way of ascertaining how many tanks and enemy soldiers he destroyed. Amongst 'the brothers in arms', he remains a God sent hero, but in history, his courage finds no mention.

4th Minefield: Shahbazpur

At 1300 hrs on 08 Dec, the force was regrouped and moved east in the area of Shahbazpur towards Khaira in order to outflank the enemy's position at Harar Kalan. Commandant 1 HORSE (SKINNERS), leading squadron commander, and Capt Jind, borrowed a RCL jeep from 15 Grenadiers who had dug in and held Khaira to reconnoitre the mine field. They found a gap east of Khaira, entered it, and came under tank and MMG fire from the area of Shahbazpur. They took cover in the nearby Hodla Nala; Capt Jind despite enemy fire, brought the RCL jeep back and delivered it to its rightful owners. In the process, he was wounded by a tank HE shrapnel but declined evacuation.

At 1500 hrs, Commandant 1 HORSE (SKINNERS) ordered one of his squadrons to rush through the gap, only to discover another minefield at Shahbazpur village and directed the trawl troop to move up and clear a safe lane for 1 Horse to break through. The trawl troop moved through the gap with the order of march: Dfr Sumer leading, followed by Dfr Nand Ram's tank, and Capt Jind atop of A/LD Dharamvir's tank as at that time sans night-vision, daylight was needed to ensure appropriate mine clearance in tandem by following tanks. Fifteen minutes into the minefield, Dfr Nand Ram's tank was hit by an armour piercing (AP) round shot from across the minefield. It created a gaping hole in the hull and set the tank alight; secondary explosions from stowed hand grenades wounded Dfr Nand Ram.

Capt Jind and Dfr Sumer Singh moved their trawls to defiladed position and ran to the burning tank. Dfr Sumer extinguished the fire, while Capt Jind removed the unexploded grenades. It was a desperate attempt to save specialised tanks as they were crucial for breaching. Capt Jind sent LD Dharamvir to Dfr Sumer Singh's tank and Dfr Sumer remained with the burning tank.

Dfr Sumer displayed exemplary courage of the highest order once again, as this tank was 'marked' and in the direct line of fire, but he wanted to save the tank from total destruction.

During the battle of Shahbazpur, the crews then shuffled in the following order: Capt Jind took charge of A/LD Dharam Vir's tank and A/LD Dharam Vir took charge of Dfr Sumer Singh's tank. Dfr Sumer

“The trawl crew recalls Dfr Sumer Singh's calm and exemplary courage, whilst others were panic stricken. There is no record or way of ascertaining how many tanks and enemy soldiers he destroyed. Amongst 'the brothers in arms', he remains a God sent hero, but in history, his courage finds no mention.”

Singh was now commander of LD Nand Ram's Tank. Now, Capt Jind was in the lead of A/LD Dharamvir's tank, with Sowars Dalip Singh as driver, Mehar Singh as operator/loader, and Mohinder Pal as gunner. In the second tank, A/LD Dharamvir became the commander, with Sowars Vidhya Dhar as gunner, Om Prakash (Kennedy) as driver, Bijinder Singh as operator/loader. They commenced trawling operations at 1630 hrs with one and a half hour of daylight remaining.

The breaching operation attracted intense enemy fire from tanks, RCLs, and MMGs. The leading tank received two direct hits, and another on the rollers, but kept on moving. Traditionally, during trawling, guns faced the rear as the mine blast could damage the gun. However, Capt Jind directed both tanks to traverse their guns forward and engage the enemy, an operational lesson recently learnt.

While trawling, they destroyed one M-47 Patton tank, one RCL gun and shot up the personnel of the recce & support company entrenched south of the minefield at Shahbazpur. After all that the trawls did, the attack was once again called off and they were advised to return. Capt Jind kept on impressing over the radio that troops must induct as the enemy was fleeing. There was a sudden lull in the volley of fire and a few RPGs whizzed past their trawls. The enemy counter attack came at 2100 hrs along with cries of '*Maaro Kafiron ko*' and '*Allah Ho Akbar*'. Capt Jind ordered the tanks to turn about and both received RPG hits. Sowar Dalip's tank received a hit on the hull right side and the engine stopped. Jind asked him, "Dalip Kya hua?", to which he replied, "Pata nahin sahib". Dalip tried all means, battery and compressed air starting, but the tank did not start. Dalip said, "*Sahib, Battery dead ho gayee hai aur air bhi.*" Pak soldiers were seen approaching the tank and the crew was ordered to abandon it. Dalip insisted trying to start the tank but to no avail. He was the last to come out of his tank. The crew then moved, jumped off the tank, firing pistols and small arms, taking signal instructions with them. Sowar Mehar Singh, Dalip, A/LD Mahavir and Capt Jind moved back through the minefield by feeling the track marks with their hands!

The tank of Sowar Om Prakash (Kennedy) moved back through the minefield in the dark. His tank had received three hits, two of them on the left front bogey wheels thus jamming them. While moving, the resistance caused by the jammed wheels, unknown to the crew, kept veering the tank slowly to the left. The tank then completely overturned inside a ravine in the mine field. Sowar Om Prakash, the driver, got stuck in the tank and was unable to extricate himself as his seat got unlocked and the heavy batteries came over his legs. The other crew

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members left him. On learning this, Sowar Mehar Singh decided to single handedly go back 600 meters into the mine field to get Om Prakash. He successfully brought Om Prakash back and saved his life.

The trawl troop held position close to the tank and RCL jeep that was destroyed for over 6 hours waiting for rear troops to come up and cross. In the meantime, the enemy counter attacked with RPG 7 rocket launchers.

In these actions, trawl tank crews discharged their duties with valour way beyond the call of duty. The troop had lost all three trawl tanks, fortunately Dfr Sumer had successfully saved A/LD Dharamvir's tank from exploding. He continued to be its tank commander for the rest of the war.

5th Minefield (Abandoned): Chichra Dusri Area

Then, A/LD Dharamvir's tank becoming the lone trawl tank, was ordered once again to clear a minefield lane for the Seventh's tanks to cross for the capture of Shakargarh. Dfr Sumer Singh took up this challenge with deep enthusiasm, but due to terrain conditions, the trawl tank and 7 of the following tanks got bogged down. The operation was thereafter abandoned.

Summary of Trawling Ops

The six trawl tanks bravely breached six minefields for the 54 INF DIV and 16 (I) ARMD BDE. They created history for 'The Seventh' by becoming the first unit in the Indian Army to use trawls successfully for mine breaching (Proudfoot, 1991). All breaching operations were executed in the face of enemy fire sans infantry bridgeheads. Operational account recollects, the trawls fended for themselves and provided cover to each other. Capt Jind who had trained these crews and personally led them, was awarded a Sena Medal along with four trawl crew members; Dfr Randhir Singh, LD Vidhya Dhar, and Sowars Harpal Singh and Ajit Singh; while A/LD Dharam Vir and Sow Bijender Singh were mentioned in despatches.

'The Seventh', including its No. 1 INDEPENDENT ARMOURED SQUADRON (1 IAS), emerged amongst the highest decorated regiments of the war, bagging a tally of 27 awards. These were: 3 VrC; 10 SM and 14 Mention-in-Despatches. Statistically, a fourth of these were bestowed to trawl tank crews who formed ten percent of The Seventh's tank compliment, which reflects the valour and stellar role played by the mine trawl teams.

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Col KS Brar from 9 ENGINEERS (3rd from left) met 7 CAVALRY trawl troops and shared experience

Fauji Foundation of India



www.faujifoundationindia.org

We are pleased to inform the Fauji Fraternity that we have now registered '**Fauji Foundation of India**' (as a non-profit welfare organisation) on 22nd June 2018 as a Section 8 Company and have obtained Certificate of Incorporation. 'Fauji Foundation of India' is an extension of non-profit initiatives by the founders of FAUJI INDIA Magazine for the welfare of Veterans, Veer Naris and Disabled Soldiers in non-governmental realm.

The OBJECTIVES of the FAUJI FOUNDATION OF INDIA are to promote the following:

1. Financial assistance for advanced medical treatment to needy critical patients, such as retired Jawans/equivalent, disabled soldiers and veer-naris in close cooperation with ECHS scheme.
2. Assist in fighting legal cases for pension related issues for veer-naris, disabled Jawans and needy Armed Forces personnel.
3. Skill-development and placement of operational/war disabled Jawans/ equivalent. Coordinate with corporates for suitable placements.
4. Financial assistance by way of scholarship to children of martyrs in higher education.
5. Raise funds by membership drive, corporate donations, CSR activities, charity dinners/musical event, conclaves and sponsored marathon runs across the country.
6. Organise 'boot-camps' in youth concentrated areas to motivate them to join Armed Forces.
7. Conduct revenue generation activities by way of publications, sponsored youth-personality contests, manufacturing and service related activities.
8. Organise seminars/conclaves to debate welfare related policy changes for Armed Forces personnel.
9. Coordinate actions with Ministry of Defence for Jawan's welfare and pension related anomalies.

TEAM

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MENTOR: Lt Gen Ata Syed Hasnain (Retd)

ADVISORS: Maroof Raza, Veteran; Cdr GJ Singh (Retd), Col S K Suri, Col Vinay Dalvi (Retd),

Col Dharmendra Singh (Retd), Maj DP Singh, Veteran; Maj Navdeep Singh (Retd)

CEO: Capt Prasoon Kumar, Veteran

The Foundation is still in stage of putting together a robust team in place. Meantime, volunteers who like to contribute their specialised services can get in touch with us at Email: faujimagazine@gmail.com

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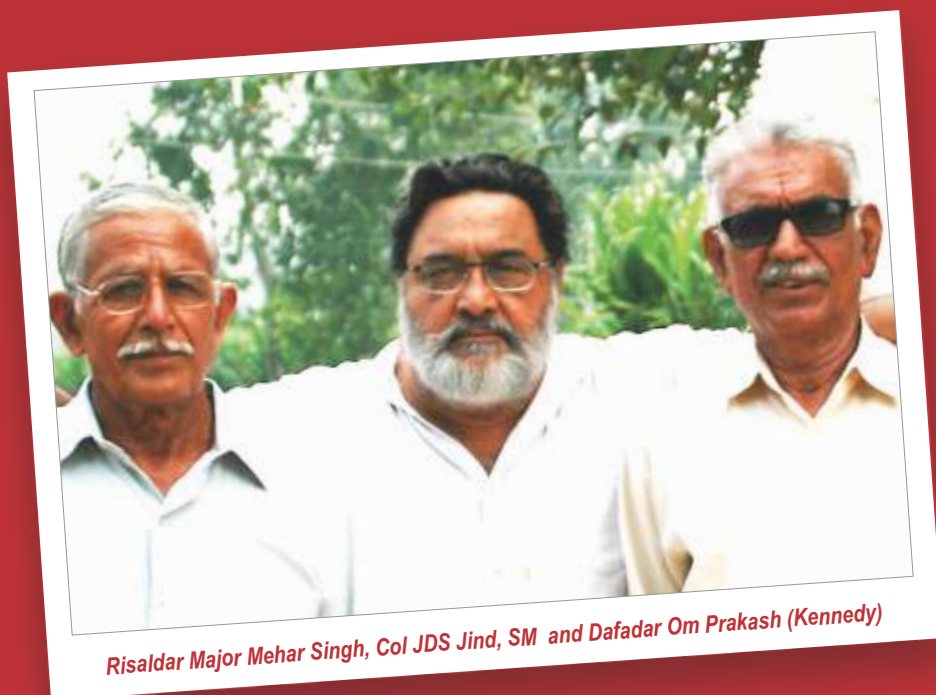
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CREW CUT: MAKING MINE LANES IN THICK OF ENEMY FIRING



CREW CUT:

Making Mine Lanes in Thick of Enemy Firing

Here is a detailed narrative-history from two special tank troops of The 7th LIGHT CAVALRY, that were tasked with division level minefield lane clearance operations in Shakargarh Sector during the 1971 War. Forty Five years later, it is discovered that these tank troops single handedly engaged the enemy resulting in significant casualties marked by the award of the Nishan-i-Haider (Pakistan's highest gallantry award) to the defenders who tried to stop their advancing T-55 trawl tanks. Lt Gen KK Singh, Padma Bhushan, MVC; their war-time Corps Commander, in his nineties, gave a one-line statement in honour of their gallantry under fire, "without my trawling boys, not a single member of my Corps would have got across those minefields".

SAGAT SHAUNIK

“

Risaldar Major (Hony Capt) Karnail Singh travelled all the way from Village Jandir, Dist Jalandhar, and gave his opening remark on meeting us: "If tomorrow there is a war, give me a uniform and I am ready to fight". He explained the need to keep two trawl tanks in front and one in the rear as reserve, as the equipment was 'very precious'. "Hodson's told me to lead the way so I thought, if that is going to be the way then my regiment pride and cap badge must lead."

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Reading about the precursors to the Battle of Basantar, the name of one Capt Jai Devendra Singh Jind appeared frequently. At 'Fauji India', we decided to track and trace him. We were delighted to get an invitation to interact with the combat seasoned crews. "My evidence is my men", he exclaimed on the phone, and we were sure we had the right Cavalier on the line.

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Risaldar (Hony Lt) Kuldip Singh who had travelled from Village Bhatiara, Dist Patiala, informed us that they fixed their trawls at Mawagaon and crossed the border on 5th Dec 1971 at 2230 hours saying, "During battle, Hodsons would be in front and at the minefields we were in front. We were fired upon by Pak RCLs and were delayed. We called for air support and were cleared to enter the first minefield only at 1630 hours. The airforces of both countries filled the entire sky and it seemed that the sun was covered. *Andhera chha gaya* see. We couldn't make out the difference between our aircraft and theirs. But within a few days, we knew whose aircraft it was, and reacted accordingly."

Then between the two of them they discussed how the enemy had

created a minefield 1000 meters in depth and laid mines strips/ clusters within 200-300m of each other. Anti-personnel mines had been placed on top of the anti-tank mines. So any human attempt to clear them would make 'keema' out of 'Sapper-wale'. This meant that their trawls would be the frontline tanks of 54 DIVISION and 16 (I) ARMD BDE who would advance behind them. They crossed Karim Nadi with great difficulty at night and found a tough defence laid by Pak at Chakra. One squadron had dug in and created a network of trenches around them. "We cleared them at night," they exclaimed, with a deep look in their eyes. Sowar (Sow) {at the time} Kuldip recalled how he could see enemy tanks at 400-500 m range (from his gunner-sight) while destroying them for breakfast.

'We, as a crew had to work as one man', exclaimed Karnail as he said '*hamare leeye ta koi goli ka dibba nee bana see*' {No bullet was ever made in our name}. Many years after the war and retirement, I visited my crewmate whose name I wouldn't take; *jab mein unhade gaon gaya see, ta voh ucchi ucchi roan pe gaya, te thodi veri baad, onhadee wattee ne onhanu keya, hunsade mehman nu kuch khilawa ke tussi roane hee paine?* {When I went to his village, he kept crying loudly, until his wife interrupted by asking him if he would look-after his guest or just keep crying.}

Kuldip calmly explained that war is a matter of the heart, a man must have courage and determination. He must exclaim that he will do his task at all costs. '*Daler vi hona chayida*' (he must be a happy go lucky man). We were living on Shakarpara and Pinniya from our villages. The government had given us dry rations in sealed packets but that induced nausea and I couldn't digest the *dal* and *chhole*. Even the tea was disgusting. For 15 days, we hadn't had a proper hot meal. Just our village made food saved our day. We spent 8-9 hours buttoned up inside our tanks and since our command formations kept changing, no one was willing to feed us their war-rations. Thank God (*Rabb di mehar see*) our officers had warned us earlier and told us to bring as many dry-foods that we could stack in our tanks.

Karnail is a seasoned campaign veteran of 1961 (Goa), 1962 (China), 1965 (Pakistan), and 1971 (Pakistan). He reminisced his time with Stuarts, PT-76 and T-55 tanks - "The first trawls came on 15th November 1971, they were specially imported from Russia and required three 3-tonnes to carry the parts. One had to join all three parts to make one set of trawls. It was bitterly cold and we found it difficult to attach the trawls to our tank until Jind Saab made some improvisations."

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Author with Col JDS Jind, SM; Ris Maj (Hony Capt) Karnail Singh and Ris (Hony Lt) Kuldip Singh.

“Karnail is a seasoned campaign veteran of 1961 (Goa), 1962 (China), 1965 (Pakistan), and 1971 (Pakistan). He reminisced his time with Stuarts, PT-76 and T-55 tanks - "The first trawls came on 15th November 1971, they were specially imported from Russia and required three 3-tonnes to carry the parts. One had to join all three parts to make one set of trawls. It was bitterly cold and we found it difficult to attach the trawls to our tank until Jind Saab made some improvisations.”

Karnail recalled being hit on the night of 13/14 December at 2000 hrs. “Ham akele pegaye see, ta 1500 meter minefield nu assi 1000 meters tak clear kitta, tad sanu dhoom dee awaaz aayi te zorr da jhatka lageya, tank da gola lageya see, te saade poore jism hilgaye see. Saanu aisa laga koi saade pairo vichh ugg la ditti see. Inna garam hoye sada tank. Te mera driver Ajit-a ne PT shoes paaye hoye see. Te oh kehnda ki Saab mere pair ta jall gaye. Mein keya koi gall na, mere bhi haali jall gaye. Te phir mein onhanu march karn da order ditta. Naal ek hee gear engage horeya see. Ta phir mein keya hun kuchvi ho, tu himmat na haari te tankaa nu march karde reyee. Mainu unhade vaaste bahut garv hoye jadd unhanu Sena Medal Bharat Sarkar to pradan kitta gaya. Je saade leeye ta jeena hee ParamVir Chucker hega. Oh tank ladai de vaad bhi teda hee chalda see. Ta phir LRW mein koi EME da afsar aaya te unhane keya ke tussi left chain hee badal ditti, hun right nu bhi kardo. Pata nai keda jugaad lata, par oh tank theek ho gaya. Naale, thoda hitch-kitch ta kardee rehndee see.”

{We were the lone tank trawl troop in the area, there was a 1500 meters minefield and we cleared 1000 meters when my tank was hit by an enemy tank round. We got a big shock as the tank shook. Our entire bodies were shaken and we felt as if someone had lit a fire beneath our feet. That is how hot the tank felt inside. My driver Ajit was wearing PT shoes, so he reported that his feet were burning. I told him not to worry since our feet were burning too. Then I told him to march the tank. He

realised that he could engage only one gear, so I told him not to stop under any circumstance and not to lose hope. I felt very proud of him when the Government of India awarded him the Sena Medal. For me, surviving the war is my Param Vir Chakra. That tank used to veer off its track even after the war until an EME officer in our LRW told us to change the right side track too. I don't know what magic he did, but the tank was alright after that. Although it did have some minor problems every now and then}.

Risaldar Major Mehar Singh travelled all the way from Village Lakhnoura, Dist Ambala, and expressed his concern on our interest in his valour. He considered it a matter of honour to have saved his regimental brother in arm Om Prakash whom they lovingly call Kennedy after JFK (apparently it is an internal joke within the trawl crews). *“Woh bhai ka tank un-tur-un ho gaya tha naale mein, uske chain pe hit hua tha aur uska commander Sumer usko disha bata raha tha lekin unko pata nahi tha ki tank tedee chaal kar raha tha. Toh phir jab tank nale me over-turned hua, toh unhone apne operator Bijender ko recce pe bheja. Usne aakar bataya ke aage Pak ka jawan hein, toh iss samay nikal jana chahiye. Kennedy kee toh seat unlock huee thee, aur uske upar toh bhaari batteryya bhi gir paddi thi. Koi chaara nahi tha, toh crew ne usse chodd diya. Kennedy bola ki ya toh mujhe bachalo ya goli maar do, paryeh Pak walo ke haath mat aane dena. Uske crew-walo ne usse keval chodd deeya. Jab mujhe yeh baat pata chali toh mein turant daud para aur kissi bhi tarah se trut ko halka sa ghumaya. Tab ek chota raasta khul gaya, meine Kennedy ke dono kamar ko apne haath mein pakadke kheeche, tab dekha ki uske ghutno par jhakam bhi tha. Par jaise-taise karke mein usko nikal ke regiment aid post pe recover kardeeya. Baki toh ab yeh yaha khada hein, yehi meri khushi hein.”*

(His tank had overturned into a ditch, as his tracks were hit. His commander Sumer was directing him and they didn't realise that their tank was veering off. After overturning, they sent their operator Bijender to recce the area. He informed them that Pak troops were nearby so they should move quickly. Kennedy's seat had unlocked and the heavy batteries fell on his lap, sandwiching him. There was no way out for him, so the crew left him behind. He told them that either you take me along with you or you shoot me; don't let me get in the hands of these Pakis. But they left him as he was. When I heard this, I quickly ran towards him and traversed the turret as much as I could. A small opening became available and I was able to grab Kennedy with both hands around his waist. I pulled him and found that he sustained a knee injury; somehow, I brought him to the Regimental Aid Post for

“I found that during war, sportsmen and the indisciplined lot made great leaders. These were men who could act at the spur of the moment, take decisions and get the job done. I learnt that indiscipline can be addressed when we treat the soldier as an individual and understand the cause of his problems rather than throwing the book at him. These were the types of crews I looked for while choosing my men.”
- Col JDS Jind, SM (Retd)

“

Dfr Om Prakash (Kennedy) travelled all the way from Village Kehar-Was, Dist Jhunjhunu, and was delighted to meet his crew. "They saved my life! I had a pistol near my foot-brake, but since I was sandwiched between the seat and batteries, I couldn't get to it. Otherwise, I would have pulled the trigger before the Pakis could get at me. I don't know how God sent Mehar to save me. I owe my life to him. We had sustained three tank hits, as I was the driver, I was the only one authorised to wear PT shoes (physical training rubber soled canvas shoes). The regular government boots slip on the tank pedals. So only drivers were authorised PT shoes inside the tank as it gave a better traction. But, after being hit, I wished I had my boots on. My feet burned and burned, one round after the other. We have grown as people after the war. I cannot thank Mehar enough for all that he did. All I know is that we went for a good cause and did what we had to do."

”


*Crew (clockwise):
Risaldar Dalip Singh Payal, Risaldar
Major Mehar Singh,
Hony Capt Karnail Singh and
Sowar Ajit Singh Sandhu, SM*

treatment. Now he is standing here in front of you, this is my happiness).

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On questioning Kennedy under what conditions did he overturn his tank in the ditch, he told us that the enemy had shelled his tank and then fired tank rounds at him, during which time a tracer round burnt his bedding that was mounted on the turret. A chindi rag cloth came out of nowhere and covered his driver's scope. He was blinded. So he asked his commander Sumer to direct him. Both never realised that

the tank was veering and not on its course and that is how they overturned. We asked him if there was any water in the ditch. He was considerably surprised by this question. “You know, we were very lucky, the first ditch we crossed had water, but the one I overturned into was dry; had it been wet, I would have drowned in my condition and wouldn't have been here to tell you this.” Incidentally, on a training exercise prior to the war, Kennedy's bedding had fallen off the tank and the vanguard had to pick it up for him. Unfortunately, the memories of war till date do not allow a good night's sleep to any of them.

Between Kennedy and Mehar, they discussed how the person who fires the first shot in armoured warfare wins. “*Pehle muthbhed mein jo maar le, wohi jeetega*,” they say. Then Mehar teased Kennedy by saying that he couldn't eat the rice-packs. “*Saab, main chawal nahi khata, hamare yaha toh gehu khaate hain*,” is what he said during the war. Today, eating habits have changed and Kennedy took a spoonful of rice while laughing at this memory. Kennedy then recalled anecdotes of how they met their hygiene needs by opening the escape hatch of the tank hull, while being buttoned up in the middle of battle. Sometimes they remained inside their tanks for 8, 10, 12 hours and could not get out. So, the escape hatches were used for the men to relieve themselves whilst the tanks moved forward once they were done shoveling the small pits.

Anecdotes of Artillery Fire

When the first round of enemy shelling started, the Seventh's RMO Capt Mishra was near the trawls. He did not know where to take cover, so he dived head first in to the T 55 cupola. It took them considerable 'technique' to pull him out after that. Once he received his baptism, he played a stellar role in providing medical assistance to the wounded. One of the officers received a shrapnel wound that tore across his abdomen causing his intestines to hang out. They pushed them back in and packed them by tearing pieces of turban cloth to serve as cotton-packs. This was war. Every man remembers the RMO who served right in the front and helped save lives.

Capt Ali, a Forward Observation Officer, climbed on top of a mosque and defined artillery-sector fire. The moment he came down, he was hit by enemy shelling. When he was evacuated, his ambulance was strafed by enemy aircraft. He never got a bar to his wound medal.

After the ceasefire, some journalists in plain white clothes came to 'inspect' the conditions of war. The enemy decided to give them a

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guard of honour and fired a salvo. They jumped helter skelter and browned themselves. Later, the crews joked with them that: “now you have received what we endured throughout, hope you write about this.” No mention was ever made!

Gallantry Awards

Maj Gen Gaganjit Singh, AVSM** who served as Intelligence Officer of the Seventh recalled how the Commandant, 2IC (second-in-command), Adjutant and he got down to writing the citations of their regiment. There were barely two-three lines each and they wrote it on field paper: “We were told to nominate each member of the trawl crew for gallantry awards and that we did. But then, some got and other's didn't. Yet, each one of them is a hero, The Seventh flows in their veins. Seven officers of Seventh sustained battle injuries, possibly the highest for a tank regiment in '71. Some of them refused evacuation, Jind was amongst them who returned on his own accord from the field hospital to serve with his trawls.”

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Col JDS Jind, Sena Medal

Col JDS Jind informed us that many officers of the ‘Seventh’ were second and third generation officers. There was an order that no epaulettes and insignia would be worn during the war. But all the officers refused this order point blank by saying, “If we die, we will die like an officer, wearing our full dress, scarf and the '7C' pips on our shoulders”. Then he added that he wore his father's battle jacket till the last day of the war and that is something he is proud of. His wife Mrs 'Neelu' Jind, heard about this for the first time 45 years after the war and was delighted. “I never knew that!” she exclaimed with wonder. Col Jind then added that Gags (Gaganjit) had even worn his Nagaland ribbon across his chest. Seeing this spirit, even the RMO and LRW officers were motivated and they too wore their cap-badges with great pride.

I found that during war, sportsmen and the indisciplined lot made great leaders. These were men who could act at the spur of the moment, take decisions and get the job done. I learnt that indiscipline can be addressed when we treat the soldier as an individual and understand the cause of his problems rather than throwing the book at him. These were the types of crews I looked for while choosing my men.

“When the first arty round came whistling by, we dived for cover. Thereafter, we learnt to follow the whistle and know where it would land, so we reacted accordingly. It was a funny sight to see the first-

timers jump, but then we remembered our first reaction and laughed at ourselves. One of our tanks was parked under a tree when shrapnel hit a branch and landed straight through the helmet, killing the man who was reading a letter from home. We can never forget this. The shelling brought us humour and tears every time.”

“Our trawl tanks were placed under different regiments. There was no harbour for us. We would line up with the tanks, a barrel or two of fuel would be kept in front of our tanks so that the crew could refill with the hand-cranking device. Then, a few rounds of ammo each were given and we would set off breaching minefields depending on the order of the day.”

“Do you realise what a beautiful sight it is, to see 45 tonnes of iron and steel galloping over 60 kmph through open fields? Then we would slow up, bring our rollers down and crawl at a snail's speed.”

“We must give credit to our enemy. When I interrogated the first prisoner we took, we asked him about their positions. *'Tussi agge jaake, aape hee dekh lava,'* was his prompt reply. Look, both sides speak Punjabi and imagine that man, a prisoner of war, yet refusing to give up. He told me to go ahead and see for myself all that I wanted to know.”

“Later, my tank was fired upon on the broadside. My bedding had duck-feather which flew after my tank was hit. Am sure the enemy would have wondered if he had shot a tank or a duck seeing the plume rise”, he guffaws. “I was wounded and walked back with my crew at night by tracing our tank track with our bare hands. Nobody had come to relieve us from the supporting army. We were all that we had, no replacements. The men are unsung heroes. You should write about them instead.”

A historical twist

Capt Jind's tank was recovered by 25 CAVALRY (Pakistan). Incidentally, his trawl tank had faced an entire squadron of 25 CAVALRY and decimated them single-handedly on the same day. When he returned from the war, he told his father what had happened. His father had lost a PT 76 in the 1965 war to the EAST BENGAL TIGERS. That regiment had shipped the PT 76 as a trophy from West Pakistan to East Pakistan. No. 1 INDEPENDENT ARMOURED SQUADRON (affiliated to the Seventh) captured the Bengal Tiger's in the 1971 war in Bangladesh. They could not bring the PT 76 back, so one of the officers unbolted the memorial plaque and brought it back. That plaque is now proudly displayed in the officer's mess. So after hearing Capt Jind, his father Brig DS Jind remarked - “that gives us an

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excuse to go back and recover it in the next war.”

History was being made in the strangest of circumstances. Both the Jinds, father and son, had lost their tanks in war and emerged heroes due to their actions while losing their tanks. They had given a tough fight, been left exposed and alone when their tanks were immobilised. Yet, their spirit to fight back is characterised by the father's response.

Col Jind quips, “There were many others like me. Capt Kamal Raj 'Patton' Sadana of the Seventh, was the Liaison Officer of our brigade. He saved many situations that could have turned devastating for our troops. He used to guide tanks with a swagger-stick in a unique style. Afterwards, when we saw the movie Patton, we saw how similar they were. That's how he earned the sobriquet. We owe our lives to him and so many others like him. You see, we all worked as a team, as one man. It was like a typist looks at you and continues typing in good speed. The man and machine get united. All the training makes you feel the instruments instinctively, so all you have to do is set your sights and pull the trigger. The first one to do so, wins. I think we out-gunned the enemy through superior training and of course luck. In tennis, one can win due to talent or due to the opponent's mistakes. War is a combination of both” Then he recalled how Capt DS Dhillon would read out his fiancé's letters and all the men would be mesmerised. This was another way of keeping their morale high.

Post-retirement, Col Jind regularly visits all the villages of veterans to tell the saga of how his brothers in arms fought the war. He calls them 'Sher-dills' (lion-hearts). Kennedy and Mehar brought their grandsons with them. These teenagers have seen 'Jind Uncle' coming to their village since their childhood and recall how he would roundup all the children, draw a map on their school's black board, and explain how and what their grandfathers (nana/dada) did in 1971. He made it known to them that they were unsung heroes and their actions must never be forgotten. Today, many of these boys have joined the armed forces and serve proudly. Some have become the fourth generation serving in the Seventh.

The Warrior-Brotherhood

After the war and introduction of the Internet, both sides engaged in historical writing on online platforms. One such discussion thread united these men on the topic of Indian mine trawls. The Pakistanis revealed that, 'on 08 Dec, the Indians while trawling, shot and destroyed another M-48 Patton tank besides their claimed M-47 Patton Tank, one RCL and personnel of the Recce & Support company entrenched South of the minefield at Shahbazpur'. It was inferred that

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a single trawl tank that fired an MMG burst at Sow Muhammad Hussain Janjua of 20 LANCERS (Pak), who was posthumously awarded their highest award the Nishan-e-Haider. It was LD Mohinder Pal, gunner of Capt Jind's tank, who tried to stop the approaching enemy from climbing on top of his Sahib's tank.

Today, Veterans of both sides treat each other with professional respect. They hold no grudges and each side reveals one new facet of history, which helps them realise the differences in their individual histories. Both pay homage to their fallen and convey their highest regards to each other.

Thus, war's first casualty 'truth' may find a resurrection between these fault-lines. Perhaps the veterans know their stories the best. Duty done, it is left for them to uncover the truth as they sit wounded, may be decorated, yet hurt by the war experience as they recall the heroes who never returned. In their Commandant's words just after the cease-fire men did what they were supposed to do'. But at Fauji India, we question, did we utter a word of thanks to those who gave so much for us?

To End with.....

Lt Gen KK Singh, Padma Bhushan, MVC; erstwhile corps commander of 1 CORPS (Strike) during the war, well into his nineties, crisply and clearly recalls the tank trawls operations and gives a one line statement, "Without my trawling boys, not a single member of my corps would have got across those minefields".

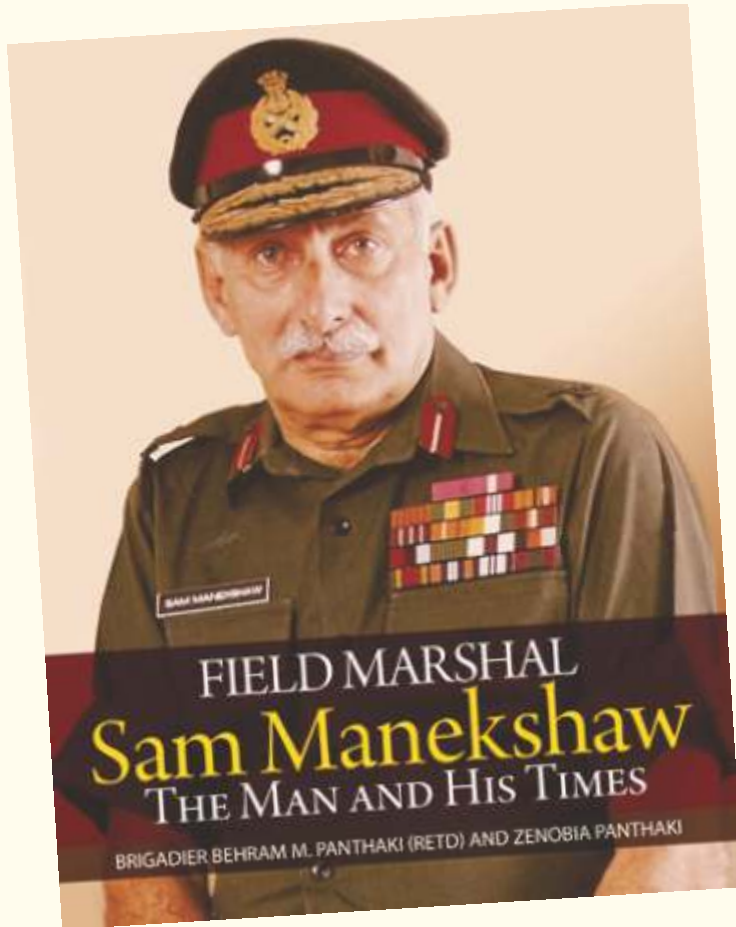
There ends the story of how the first ever Armoured Corps mine-trawling operations were conducted under intense enemy fire, with no close support and bridgeheads as per traditional training and practices. The men of the *Seventh* answered their call of duty.

During our interviews, a senior JCO suggested that such well trained and highly motivated men with such great regimental history could be assets to any organisation upon retirement. So, "*Saab tussi aa zaroor likhna, te sadda khyal rakhna, saadi 'Seventh' kaddi peeche nahi hutte gee, ta tussi bhi mukrana mat. Appa lead kardeaa, sadda motto vi 'We Lead' hega.*" (Sir, you must write this, take care of us, our 'Seventh' never takes a step back, so you should not hesitate. We lead the way and our regimental motto is also 'We Lead').

“There ends the story of how the first ever Armoured Corps mine trawling operations were conducted under intense enemy fire, with no close support and bridgeheads as per traditional training and practices. The men of the Seventh answered their call of duty.”

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who changed the history of India



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please contact Brig Behram M. Panthaki at behrampanthaki@hotmail.com**

MY COMPANY'S LAUNGE-ST NIGHT IN 1971



*Brigadier Kuldip Singh Chandpuri MVC, VSM
(22 November 1940 – 17 November 2018)*



My Company's Lounge-st Night in 1971

Here is a detailed interview with Brig Chandpuri, Company Commander of 'A' Company, 23rd Battalion of The PUNJAB REGIMENT, who held their ground against all odds versus a Brigade-plus Pakistani combined armoured and infantry assault attempting to over-run their position at Laungewala Post on the night of 4 December 1971. It was the dynamic leadership of then Maj Kuldip Singh Chandpuri who ensured that his Company, held their own against a numerically larger force and withstood multiple assault waves. Now leading a retired life, Brig Kuldip Singh Chandpuri, Maha Vir Chakra, Vishisht Seva Medal; recollected his battlefield tale and poured his heart out for the very first time. We bring a brief interview, though it is difficult to write all the intricate-details received from him. The interview in mid-2016 is probably the last full-length interview given by The Hero of Battle of Laungewala, prior his final posting to Valhalla on 17 Nov 2018. Incidentally, Subedar (Hony Capt) Rattan Singh, Vrc received his final posting, days before publication in Fauji India Magazine. The article carried his obituary and citation to honour the collective memory of 23 PUNJAB.

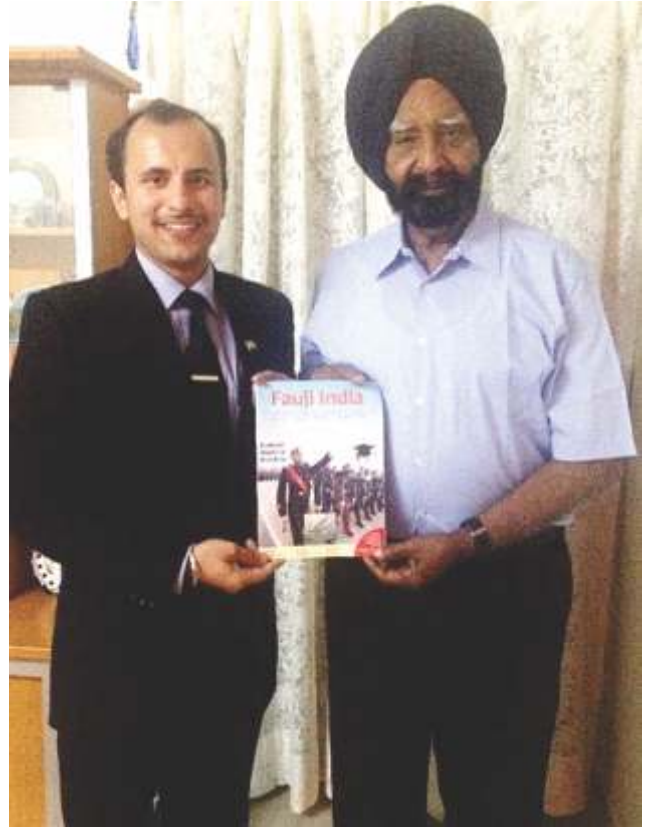
SAGAT SHAUNIK

Brig Chandpuri started the interview by asking if I had ever been to 'Laungewala'. Hearing an affirmative, he asked for a brief-narration of the area. When he learnt that I knew how Pakistan has poisoned the well (only source of fresh drinking water) he accepted I had been there.

Thereafter, he marked three pages on my note-pad, to personally draw a detailed map, with roads (metalled / unmetalled); tracks, water points, unit locations etc. With a red pen, he marked Pakistani entry points and named the routes taken by columns (armour, infantry and support echelons) from each Boundary Pillar (BP). *Dushmana nu hamesha red vich mark karne aa* (always mark the enemy in red) he exclaimed with delight when I handed over a red pen that I was carrying.

On the next page he wrote "Our Tps" followed by 'A' Coy {Company} (120 Men) with Maj Kuldip Singh Chandpuri as Coy Cdr and Lt Dharam Veer as Coy Offr. In a table, he wrote that he had 2 x 106 mm RCL (recoil-less rifles) mounted on Jeeps; 1 Section of 81mm Mortars; 2 x MMG (Medium Machine Guns); 1 section of Pioneers for laying mine fields; 18 BSF Camels attached for patrolling purposes under command *Naik Bhairon Singh* (not Captain as per Border movie) & 2 BSF Jawans of the 14th BATTALION for feeding & looking after Camels; 4 x 3.5" RL (anti-tank Rocket Launchers); and 2 LMG's (Light Machine Guns) per Section

I was assigned command of Alpha, 'A' Company 23 PUNJAB REGIMENT with Sikh class composition and deployed in Laungewala in the first week of October 1971. We replaced a BSF Platoon that had occupied the post for a number of years.



*Brig Kuldip Singh Chandpuri, MVC, VSM (Retd)
with the author when he met him in April 2016*

of Infantry totalling 18 LMG's. Towards the second half of our interview, he returned to this page and said *"hun pacchee (25) saal baad ta sab declassified ho jaanda hein, aa vi likh layee"* (after 25 years everything is declassified so write this too) he had 394 Anti-Tank mines and 215 Anti-Personal mines to be laid.

Then, he drew a sketch of BP 632, a cement pillar 3-4 ft high, made to show the alignment of the IB (International Boundary) between India & Pakistan. This was to roughly explain what a BP looks like.

Turning to the third page, *"chal hun mitra de force de vaare bhi likh den de"* (lets write details of our friend's force) he wrote in red "PAKISTAN" followed by Infantry Brigade with 4 Battalions; an Armoured Regiment with T-59 Tanks; a Squadron of Sherman tanks and Medium Artillery in-support from within their own territory having a range of 25 kms while we were deployed 18 kms away (*Onha deeya 25km range hondee aa, assi 18 km door see, well within onha da range*). A total of 3,000 infantry; 60 tanks; tractors with trolleys; mechanised vehicles for carrying infantry; two German Shepherd dogs for detecting mines, and drilling rigs for establishing water supply, post-occupation of Indian territory {*Yeh koi*

nai dasda. Onha da plan aa thodi na see k touch and salute one Maj Chandpuri & his Coy and then go back. Onha da plan see hore aage jaanda (Nobody writes about this. The Pakistanis did not plan to touch and salute one Maj Chandpuri and his Company, and then go back. They had planned to advance way beyond)).

The interview that followed:

How were you deployed at Laungewala?

I was assigned command of Alpha, 'A' Company 23 PUNJAB REGIMENT with Sikh class composition and deployed in Laungewala in the first week of October 1971. We replaced a BSF Platoon that had occupied the post for a number of years.

What were the tasks allotted to your Company?

The first task allotted to my Coy was to report and intercept any enemy movement towards Laungewala between BPs 632 and 638. The second task was in the event of an enemy attack, the post would be held to the 'last man & last round'. The third task was to coordinate patrolling of other assets between Laungewala and the border.

What was the importance of Laungewala to your formation?

It is a post located at a tri-junction connecting Sadhewala-Tanot, Laungewala-Asutar-Ramgarh and lastly, the shortest route from Laungewala to Ramgarh, which was a two-way metalled road.

The T-junction connecting roads Ramgarh-Laungewala & Sadhewala-Laungewala-Asutar was well covered by my supporting weapons and RCL guns. *Galti unhane (Pakistan) a kitti k Punjabiya naal ladh gaye, jo tutde nahi, j tutde aa, ta todke hee jaunde aa* (The Pakistanis made a mistake by attacking The PUNJAB REGIMENT who never break. If and when they break, they leave only after breaking the opponent). They could have well bypassed us and tried to do so, but then, they wanted to get on to the main road, for which they had to fight through a Company of 'THE PUNJAB REGIMENT'.

What happened during the night of 4 December 1971?

My Company was at the extreme edge of the 12th Infantry Division, beyond which, south of Laungewala, there were no Army defences, except a few BSF posts that were occupied by small detachments.

Major destruction was caused at Laungewala due to heavy medium artillery fire being used to guide their tanks and infantry without night-vision. Their artillery had been pre-callibrated and knew where to fire in the night. Their shots would act as markers for their forces to proceed. Lt

The first task allotted to my Coy was to report and intercept any enemy movement towards Laungewala between BPs 632 and 638. The second task was in the event of an enemy attack, the post would be held to the last man & last round. The third task was to coordinate patrolling of other assets between Laungewala and the border.

Dharam Veer was out on patrol from our post, when he reported tank movement from the BP at 2030 hours on 4 December. I reported this to the higher authorities who neither expected such a big thrust by Pak nor believed me. The Brigade Commander then came on the radio-set to say “*Maj Chandpuri, if I don't find any tanks in the morning, I will hang you*”.

Soon, my Company was surrounded by a much larger force which was superior in both numbers and armament. We spent the longest night of our life when Pakistani tanks were milling around our dug-in posts. *Jad do-tanka bhi aande aa, ta infantry waale ithe-uthe turr jaande aaa* (even if two enemy tanks come, infantry starts running helter-skelter). Pak infantry attempted repeated attacks on our posts and did not succeed. After all the odds and suffering few casualties, we held on to our positions as per tasks assigned to us. *Saanu jo allot kitta see, k pakkad k rehna c* (the task to defend our post at all costs). My men did not allow the enemy to capture any part of the post or allow them to move forward. We even halted the advance of their administration echelons coming from BP 635 towards Laungewala in order to hit the main road from where they would have got a straight route to Ramgarh via the two way metalled road.

We had laid mines around our Post to divert and concentrate the enemy in to a killing zone where our supporting weapons had been spread out and positioned to inflict heavy casualties. We defended the tri-junction of the road from a position where a sand dune formed a wall towards the front. On the side skirts my men were positioned and the only entry point was from the road where mines had been planted. This spelled disaster for the enemy who had surrounded us. Perhaps, they assumed we were a Battalion size due to the combination of mines and volume of fire of RL, RCL, LMG, MMG and mortars that brought great devastation within the killing zone, this truly unnerved them. The Paki's probed the area throughout the night to determine where they should move (*kittho move kareeye*). We had heavily mined the area while the rest was loose sand. I recall the Pakistani Battalions, as EBR, 38 BALOCH, 2 PUNJAB and another whose designation I forget. For armour, they brought Chinese-built T-59 tanks of 22 CAVALRY and one squadron of Sherman tanks. *Saade RCL-RL ne onha deeya 12 tanks maare te 23 tanka Air Force ne next day and subsequent days toh intercept and destroy key-tiya onha de returning tanka nu* (our RCL-RL's took out 12 enemy tanks while the Air Force destroyed 23 Tanks the next day and on subsequent days, while they were withdrawing).

“ My Company was surrounded by a much larger force which was superior in both numbers and armament. We spent the longest night of our life when Pakistani tanks were milling around our dug-in posts. *Jad do-tanka bhi aande aa, ta infantry waale ithe-uthe turr jaande aaa* (even if two enemy tanks come, infantry starts running helter-skelter). Pak infantry attempted repeated attacks on our posts and did not succeed. ”

They (Pakis) never breached our minefield. *Saade mine-aa ne saadi jaan save key-ti* (our mines saved us at night). They got scared as our RCL and RL had already got them. So they surrounded us. We had laid our minefield on the likely routes of all possible tank approaches towards us. Three sides were loose sand dunes which acted as natural obstacles which their tanks could not negotiate.

My CO was Lt Col MK Hussain and Brigade Commander was Brig RO Kharbanda. During the thick of battle, my Coy was completely isolated by Pak. Thereafter, it was placed under command of Brig EN Ramadoss, Commander 30 INFANTRY BRIGADE who was the nearest at 4-5 kms away. The enemy had cut off all our telephone lines. Thereby, our wireless radio sets, the ANPRC 25, became the communication lifeline with patrols, Battalion, Brigade and Divisional Head Quarters.

“

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Yet, it was a sheer battle of grit and motivation for my men, who denied the enemy a passage through Laungewala otherwise history would have been different. There would have been no Battle of Laungewala, no Laungewala day, no battle honour, nothing....

What happened in the morning of 5 December? Did you receive any reinforcements and what was your Company's status at the time?

All efforts during the night, to re-inforce Laungewala did not materialise because the post was isolated from all sides as the route from Laungewala-Sadhewala was cut-off by enemy tanks.

A troop of three AMX-13 tanks of 20 LANCERS were sent to re-inforce us in the early hours of 5 Dec. All of them were shot, only two crew members from a tank could bail out having sustained burn injuries. Dfr Harbir Singh was their Commander. *Oh bach gaya see, saade naal phir aa gaya. Tab pata laga k oh ARMoured DELIVERY SQUADRON da see. Jedde reserve see Sadhewala toh* (He survived and joined us. That's when I learnt that he was from the ARMoured DELIVERY SQUADRON which was a reserve stationed at Sadhewala). They were the nearest tanks after Maj Ravinder Datt Law, who had previously concentrated south of us at Asutar, was tasked to move his 6 (INDEPENDENT) ARMoured SQUADRON'S brand new T-55 tanks north to Kishangarh, a day earlier.

By the way, Pakistani radio on 5 Dec, during the news-bulletin at 0930 hours, had claimed that the post of Laungewala had been run-over by their army that the Company Commander Major Kuldip Singh Chandpuri had been killed and their tanks were advancing between

Ramgarh & Jaisalmer. This created a lot of confusion at New Delhi. Subsequently, this was clarified by my GOC Maj Gen RN Khambatta's remark, "my Major is alive and his post is very much in the hands of The PUNJAB REGIMENT". He added that we had suffered a few casualties.

I had been stocked with ammunition, water and rations to survive for seven days even if the administration backup didn't come through. However, most of the rations, vehicles, jeeps, water truck were destroyed by artillery fire. *Oontha leyee rakhi see, ugg lag gayi, peene leye paani hee see, ta rete naal ugg bujhane paiyee. Jo bacha paye, bacha leeye* (when the fire started, we used sand to extinguish it since water was meant only for drinking purposes. We tried saving whatever we could).

Around mid-day of 5 December, a Company of Col Garewal's Battalion, 17 RAJ RIF (SAWAIMANS) reached Laungewala to reinforce my position. We were glad to meet our Rajput brothers-in-arms. My compliments to their Company Commander and junior leaders who fought their way through the enemy ring that had surrounded Laungewala.

What was the Indian Air Force's role?

Airforce de vi hun tareef kar dende, oh hamesha credit leye ladhde aa, but jo hein oh ta likhna hee see (let's compliment the Air Force for its role, they always fight for credit, but one should write as it was). NO. 122 HUNTERS (OCU) SQUADRON had moved from Jamnagar Air Force Training Establishment; *do din pehle uth k aaye see* (they arrived two days prior to the battle) and made Jaisalmer their forward base. They were under command of *Wing Commander Donald Melvyn Conquest* who planned and flew combat missions during our battle of Laungewala. He was a brave man who had been mentioned in despatches during the 1965 war and was awarded an AVSM and a VrC for his role in 1971. He was the man who directed and supervised, a Squadron of Hunter aircrafts that were operating combat flights from Jaisalmer to support ground troops at Laungewala.

I cannot praise him enough for his excellent performance and able leadership. He received the AVSM for planning the operations and exemplary leadership while the Vir Chakra was for personally flying combat missions and destroying enemy tanks, vehicles and other assets. In fact, he was wounded in the war too, he was a humble gentleman who never claimed any credit for his valour and later retired as a Group Captain, with great honour and respect from all of us who saw him in action.

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Group Captain Donald Melvyn Conquest, VrC, AVSM

What is your opinion on joint operations between the tri-services, having personally witnessed the war?

It must not be forgotten that 'A' Company 23 PUNJAB REGIMENT fought against a much larger & superior force throughout the night. The Pakistanis did not have any Pakistan Air Force support during their operations at Laungewala, therefore, the IAF destroyed their tanks, like sitting ducks at will as there was no enemy air opposition. Pakistani military desire to have breakfast at Laungewala, lunch at Jaisalmer and dinner at Jodhpur was jointly crushed by 'A' Company 23 PUNJAB and IAF, rather similar in Pakistani military's ambitious thoughts of 1965 in thrusts through Punjab towards Delhi!

The Pakistani aim of bringing such a major thrust through Rajasthan was to capture maximum territory in terrain devoid of friction and obstacles as compared to the Northern Theatre; and have bargaining chips against Indian gains in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The crux of the whole operation was the bravery displayed by my jawans and the timely support by the IAF on the next day. *Je oh na aande, te saada kuch nai bachda* (had they not arrived, nothing would have been left of us).

Do you know, the Air Chief of the time, Air Marshal PC Lal wrote a book 'My Years in the Airforce' and gave full credit to 'A' Coy 23 PUNJAB REGIMENT. He complimented my Company for withstanding such a large force throughout the night. That means a lot to me and my men!

What happened in the aftermath of the War?

Field Marshal Carver of the British Army, during his visit to India chose to study 'The Battle of Laungewala'. He showered a lot of praise for my Company and the IAF who gave their timely support when it was most needed. While giving compliments he said, "Major, I have come all the way here to meet the junior Commanders who were in that battle as I have only two questions for them. You see in battle, both sides hurl all that they have at each other, that's what they are supposed to do, but my questions are: *What made you choose Laungewala as a post and Why did you choose to stay?* We have all the other answers to the battle and we teach it as a classic back home in our staff courses, but as part of the study we would be honoured to hear it from you, the man who stayed and fought the war".

You have been honoured with our Nation's second highest gallantry award, how do you feel about that?

Yes, I was given the nation's second highest gallantry award of MVC. Two of my men received the VrC too. What surprises me is that all the eight fighter pilots of IAF who flew combat mission during the Battle of

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Laungewala got a VrC each. My boys held their ground the entire night and got two VrCs only. Nothing or some very token awards were given to the 20 LANCERS reinforcements and the Brave SAWAIMANS, although I need to check what exactly they got. But even if they did, it wasn't as big as all getting a VrC. I must caution you here that the Air Force Commanding Officer Wg Cdr DM Conquest was very deservedly awarded with both AVSM and VrC. There can be no question on his leadership nor gallantry. But, you can clearly see my position when I speak about my men. They too deserved something. I got an MVC only thanks to them and Wahe Guru's blessings. I often think that the medal belongs to each one of them. *Oh sache hero aa, Mein ta keval onha da OC see* (they are the real heroes, I was just their Officer Commanding).

Do you have any recurring thoughts or memories from that battle?

Yes, Maj RD Law's 6 (INDEP) ARMOURED SQUADRON's T-55's had been rushed back, at once from Kishangarh to reinforce my position on 5th December, as 20 LANCERS' AMX-13 tanks were under-equipped to take on Pak's 22 CAVALRY. On 6th December, he drove the enemy out of our territory, with his squadron of tanks, later awarded a VrC. I have a lot of regard for his officer, Lt KR Bhadbhade, a troop leader, who was brought to my Laungewala post for medical aid, but had already died due to a bullet injury in his neck. I went to give him water, but he was no more. I clearly recall his youthful face. "The Lieutenant died in a tank vs. tank battle, while belly-up in his Commander's cupola", Brig Chandpuri sighed!

As I sit on my chair and think about that night, I realise that Pak Medium artillery fire was not just to basically guide their advancing tank and troops, but it was also used to drown the noise of their tanks. A smart move indeed, we must give credit to the enemy too, wherever its due.

Dhum-Dhum-Dhum jab fire-aa shuru hui, that moment the Pak tanks crossed the IB and entered our posts. Then on wireless when Brigade level asked me "*k 'a kitho aaya', ta Mein radio te aa ke jawab ditta 'mere sarr de utte'*" (when the guns boomed, the Pak tanks crossed in to Indian territory. Then the Brigade asked me where the fire came from, to which I replied 'over my head'). That's when they took my initial report given by Lt Dharam Veer, seriously.

Initially, during the battle nobody believed me that we were being contacted by tanks. Our higher Head Quarters had difficulty in

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appreciating the Pakistani thrust as they were concentrating on advancing towards Rahimyar Khan, a District HQ in Pakistan with a Division's worth of forces. *Maine jo afsar prisoner leeta see, ta oh boleya* (the officer prisoner I took told me) - "Had you advanced, we would have cut you off from behind".

“

The battle caught the eyes of the world as the enemy suffered very heavy casualties both in men and material on the very first day of the war between India and Pakistan. That had demoralised the Pak Army bringing their bold plans to an end. In a line I summarise "major territory of Rajasthan was saved from enemy hands, after his morale was ruined on the very first day".

”

You took prisoners? What did they reveal upon interrogation?

A prisoner told me "we had all possible weaponry and the latest tanks with us, *saari duniya saade naal see, kutteya vi German toh laye gaye see, par Allah saade naal nayi see*" (the entire world was with us, even the dogs were specially brought from Germany, but Allah was not on our side).

How would you summarise your Company's role in defending Laungewala?

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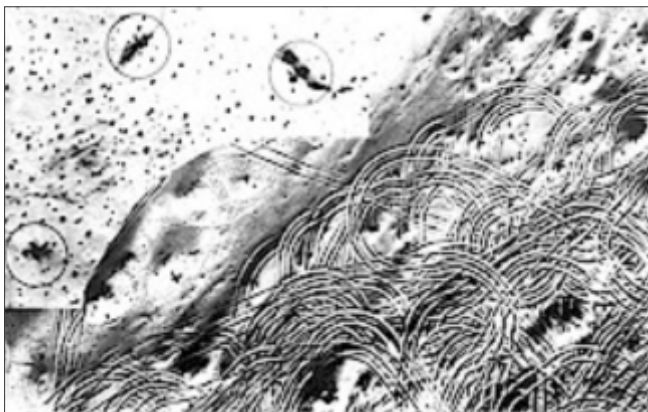
So what did you reply to Field Marshal Carver's two questions?

'Why you stayed' *da jawab Mein ditta k* "Marshal, I knew the consequence of my retreat or abandoning my post. I knew if Laungewala was captured, the enemy would have no opposition till Jodhpur, since there were no troops deployed behind Laungewala right up to Ramgarh and beyond to Jaisalmer-Jodhpur."

For the question 'What made you stay' *Mein kya*: "My own consciousness, my family, my Regiment Badge and then my Nation. *Mein kaise unha nu let down karda?* (how could I let any of them down?)"

A personal question, what was your family's reaction when they heard of the war, your MVC and the story after?

Let me tell you, I belong to one of the most highly decorated families from 1971. Both my paternal uncles got a VrC each, while serving as Squadron Leaders. My paternal aunt's son-in-law, was killed in action in East Pakistan and got a VrC Posthumously. We received our medals with pride, but did not celebrate due to the tragedy in our family. I also



Tank tracks at Laungewala. Photographic reconnaissance image taken at the time showing the desperate last minute manoeuvres by Pakistani tanks in the Laungewala sector. Circles show destroyed Pakistani tanks

remembered my 23 year old Sepoy Jagjit Singh who was manning an LMG in a bunker that was badly damaged by enemy fire. With utter disregard for his personal safety, he came out in the open and started firing his machine-gun till he was killed by enemy fire. He died under my command and later received a VrC!

My paternal uncle (*Chacha*) Group Captain Charanjit Singh, VrC, VSM; received his Vir Chakra, for flying deep within enemy territory, during day light to map (photograph) enemy targets and dispositions. That greatly helped in the planning and execution of operations, as per his citation. My younger paternal uncle (*Chote Chacha*) Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, Padma Bhushan, AVSM, VrC, VSM; was flying MiGs during the war. Later, when he learnt that I was in Laungewala, he came to me and said "*Chand, if you had told me then - that you were there in Laungewala, I would have come to you while flying to bomb Karachi Oil Fields*". He received his VrC for flying over heavily defended enemy areas. In spite of heavy ground opposition, he pressed home his attacks and destroyed a number of enemy tanks, gun positions and bunkers.

Would you like to share the story of your paternal aunt's son in law?

"Chadd parre, senti ho jaani Bua sadi. Chal, koi na, tu likhi Maj Harpal Singh Grewal, 8th Battalion, The BIHAR REGIMENT. Assi coursemate-a commissioned together on 30 June 1963. Bada hee handsome chap see. That's how Mein rishta karaya see. O mera co-brother-in-law see, BIHAR REGIMENT vicho killed in action hoya while attacking enemy position in East Pakistan. Vir Chakra mileya posthumously."

Let it be, my paternal aunt will become sentimental. Alright, never mind, he was Maj Harpal Singh Grewal, 8th Battalion, The BIHAR REGIMENT. He was my coursemate and we were commissioned together on 30 June 1963. He was a very handsome chap. That's how I got him engaged to my cousin sister. He was killed in action while attacking an enemy position in East Pakistan where he earned a Vir Chakra, Posthumously.

Would you like to tell me about his bravery?

Yes, he was tasked to liquidate a well-fortified enemy post, which was held in strength and supported by medium machine guns. During the assault, his Company came under heavy small arms and machine gun fire, but with his personal example, he inspired his men to press home the attack. He was wounded by a machine gun burst while

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”

leading the attack, however, he continued to lead the charge and succumbed to his injuries only after capturing his Company's objective. That's how he earned his Vir Chakra, Posthumously.

My last statement based question to you: “Many officers from both the Indian Army and Air Force have written against you after the movie Border. You have never given any reply to them. Would you like to say something now?”

Look, I went to court against a Mr So-&-So for ₹ 1/- and won the case. The details are available publicly, there is no need to take up the issue again. It was just a matter of my *Paltan's Izzat (Battalion's Honour)*. In our context, often historical writing is prone to errors and misgivings e.g. a journalist assumed that PUNJAB REGIMENT remains in Punjab and that the Battle of Laungewala was fought in Village Longowal, 20 kms ahead of Ludhiana! This is the degree of freedom of speech and misconceptions amongst media persons, I am glad you at *Fauji India*, at least know the difference between an LMG and MMG!

{Note: During the War of 1971, Laungewala was the correct spelling as per pronunciation. Today mixed spellings are used: Longewala, Laungewala and Laongewala. For this article, the original spelling 'Laungewala' is used in tribute to the bravery of A Coy, 23 Punjab whose citations spell it the same way}.



23 PUNJAB performs bhangra atop destroyed Pak T-59

1971: JANGI PALTAN'S STEN PROVED MIGHTIER THAN SULTAN'S PEN



1971: Jangi Paltan's Sten Proved Mightier than Sultan's Pen

Here is a brief battle history of how 1st Battalion, Maratha Light Infantry (1 Maratha LI aka Jangi-Paltan/Ganpats) captured Jamalpur Garrison. Lt Col Sultan Ahmed's (Pakistan) letter to Brig HS Kler, AVSM to hold a Sten instead of wielding a pen, in response to the surrender offer, a day prior to the actual battle is well known. The first-person account of what happened as a consequence to that exchange of letters was narrated by war-time 'C' Company Commander Lt Col Keshav S Puntambekar. With inputs from his then CO, Lt Gen Kuldip 'Bulbul' Singh Brar, PVSM, AVSM, VrC (Retd) giving intricate details about the Ganpats at War; making a compulsive read.

SAGAT SHAUNIK

To learn about 1971 Operations in the Eastern Sector, I interviewed Lt Gen Kuldip 'Bulbul' Singh Brar. When asked about his battalion's role, he suggested contacting 'Keshav' *as "he is a fine Officer, who served with honour in every battle while commanding 'C' Company. He has maintained the best records on Jangi-Paltan's 1971 war history..."*

Setting the tone for my interview, Lt Col Keshav S Puntambekar started by saying, "1 MARATHA LI were on ORBAT 95 MOUNTAIN BRIGADE along with 13 GUARDS and 13 RAJPUTANA RIFLES (RAJ RIF), Artillery in direct support were 56 MOUNTAIN REGIMENT (76mm; Jitra) and two Batteries of 85 LIGHT REGIMENT (120mm)."

Brigade's first battle plan

13 GUARDS and 13 RAJ RIF were to clear enemy opposition from Kamalpur and Bakshiganj areas respectively. *Jangi-Paltan* would move up on foot, infiltrate area West of Mahendraganj, cross river Brahmaputra and cut-off enemy communication lines between Jamalpur and Tangail from the South. After liquidating Kamalpur and Bakshiganj; GUARDS and RAJ RIF were to build up, for a Brigade offensive to capture Jamalpur Garrison.

Intelligence inputs estimated Kamalpur's strength as one Company (Coy) of 31 BALOCH along with a few Razakars and Al-badrs of unknown numbers. Another Coy, 31 BALOCH was deployed



Our proud Lt Col Keshav S. Puntambekar

at Bakshiganj, and remainder 31 BALOCH was garrisoned at Jamalpur along with elements of EAST PAKISTAN CIVIL ARMED FORCE (EPCAF), Razakars, Al-badrs and a battery of 120mm mortars.

Brigade's revised Battle Plan

The planned route for Ganpats could not support any vehicles, so bullock-carts were obtained from Meghalaya, for carrying first-line ammunition. GOC 101 COMMUNICATION ZONE ordered capture of Kamalpur Border Out-Post by 13 Guards. Ganpats and Raj Rif would capture Bakshiganj; and Ganpats would establish road blocks on road Bakshiganj-Shribodi towards Jamalpur.

This means War

With Bakshiganj secured early morning 5 Dec, Brigade Commander ordered an advance towards brigade objective 'South Jamalpur', implying an arduous march of 35 kms including crossing Brahmaputra.

At the river banks, Meghalayan bulls refused to enter water as they were accustomed to mountains. The CO ordered leaving first line ammunition, while all ranks were to carry as much ammunition on their backs. *"An early command-decision by him, made our Bn, the first to cross one of the most formidable river obstacles, we reached village Mollapara by first-light 8 December"*

Mollapara was located close to the main road linking Jamalpur-Tangail and Pak small-arms fire harassed leading Coys. A basic counter fire and tactical manoeuvre led to apprehension of a few Razakars.

"That was the time when Col Brar thought of sending his letter, but we had no type-writers as we were moving on foot, so he wrote a note in his own hand-writing addressing it to Garrison Commander, Jamalpur, dated 9 Dec. The legendary note asking Lt Col Sultan Ahmed, Commanding Officer (CO) 31 BALOCH to surrender, is famous now. He was informed that our brigade had surrounded him, Capt Ahsan Malik had surrendered and so should he, failing which, 40 MIG sorties were ordered to bomb his positions..and so on.

He was guaranteed fair treatment under Geneva Conventions. All this, written in Bn HQ where CO and Coy Cdrs were playing bridge (cards) and joking with Brig HS Kler, whose tactical Brigade HQs always moved with us. Suddenly, Col Brar had a brainwave to draft that letter. We younger officers watched in absolute amazement as Brig Kler dictated certain additions and signed the note"

The next problem was figuring out how to deliver the letter. It was

“ Intelligence inputs estimated Kamalpur's strength as one Company (Coy) of 31 BALOCH along with a few Razakars and Al-badrs of unknown numbers. Another Coy, 31 BALOCH was deployed at Bakshiganj, and remainder 31 BALOCH was garrisoned at Jamalpur along with elements of East Pakistan Civil Armed Force (EPCAF), Razakars, Al-badrs and a battery of 120mm mortars. ”

decided that Munshi Zainurul Haque, a freedom fighter from Bangladesh, would be courier, riding a cycle borrowed from a local villager. He left at 1230 hrs to travel a distance of approximately 4-5 kms. Having placed a white flag on his handlebars, he was stopped by Pak guards, questioned and badly beaten up. Later, taken to their Coy Cdr, who gave frisking orders, whereby our letter was found on his person. Thereafter, he was sent over to Garrison Commander who turned out to be CO 31 BALOCH.

Sultan read the letter carefully, sent for his RMO, ordered checking Munshi for treatment where necessary. A cup of tea and biscuits were served to Munshi while Sultan drafted his refusal to surrender with *"hoping to find you with a STEN GUN in your hand next time instead of the pen - you seem to have so much mastery over!"*

Around 1830 hrs, whilst inspecting frontline trench defences, I heard someone ringing a cycle bell. I cautioned my Ganpats to hold their fire and let the cyclist come in. Just as well, it was Munshi.

Munshi's most unforgettable statement while dismounting was *"Sahab, hum ko bahut peeta, par baad mein ek Officer ke pas le gaye, woh Sahab ne doctor ko bula ke hum ko maharram patti karaya aur yeh chitthi dia hai"*.

He handed over an envelope addressed to Brig Kler. It felt heavy when I took it from him. I contacted CO to inform him about Munshi's arrival and told him that the letter contained a 7.62mm bullet. He told me to have it delivered to him and get the Bn ready to move.

Redeployed

We moved towards Jamalpur at around 2000 hrs, Dec 9. Maj Nambiar took 'Y' Coy on the left flank of the road and I took 'C' Coy from the right. After 30 mins of marching, we checked our positions and radioed each other that we were under a large tree. Nambiar said 'Yes, I am under a large tree'. Much later, we realised that our reference trees were two very different ones, quite farther apart! By then, CO's group had proceeded along the main road, crossed us and had been fired upon by the enemy.

Col Brar thought we were way ahead, but he overshot and hit enemy forward defences. Luckily, his group dived for cover in the nallahs on both sides of the road. Nobody was hurt and they regrouped, laid defences, until we reinforced them.

10 Dec 1971: Eyes on target

0700 hrs, we had first glimpse of our objective, Jamalpur. We realised, we were barely 800 yards away from enemy positions. Col

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Brar ordered a patrol-platoon be sent from my Coy westwards, to establish contact with 13 GUARDS.

0730 hrs, Adjutant Maj SA Kulkarni, informed all Coys that an airstrike was eminent within an hour. He ordered forward entrenched Coys 'Y' and 'C' to pull back and take cover. Dot 0830 hrs, two Gnats came swooping low over target area marked by 'smoke'. IAF sorties created shock by napalming Jamalpur's defences throughout the day. We returned to our trenches when the first sortie ended, to witness a live firepower demonstration from 'a nice shady VIP stand' after confirming we were safe from friendly fire!

Engagement

My patrol returned 0930 hrs, to report zero contact with Guards who had not reached their assigned area. Col Brar appreciated, there would be considerable gaps between our defences and them, as and when they arrive. Therefore, to strengthen own positions, 2/Lt SD Patil was ordered to take his Platoon to a Bamboo Grove, west of my Coy's defences. Pakistanis engaged them with Heavy Machine Gun (HMG) and Chinese made 61 mm mortars when they reached. We ordered him to return after a while.

While discussing the day's plan with 2/Lt BK Ponwar, Sub Pandit Barge, N/Sub Baba Katkar and CHM Gulabrao Phadtare; enemy opened up HMG on us. We dashed down and crawled back to our trenches. One stray bullet hit Sep Shankar R Bharne of 'D' Coy who was well behind our positions. Strangely, it hit his chest and deflected from one of his ribs. He was evacuated to RAP, rested for a while and returned to trenches.

Devastating fire pierced tree trunks around us, as bullets flew over our heads. The trenches were wet due to soil conditions. Wherever we dug, water came out, making it difficult to entrench. Nights were bitterly cold, our socks wet and feet felt frozen. Regardless, we fought on!

I got an opportunity to hone artillery calling skills as FOO Capt PP Bhagat, occupied my trench. He was energetic and never missed an opportunity to register targets whenever air-sorties stopped. Soon, I saw Pak troops running for cover while I sat outside my trench to practice on them. Throughout the day, we observed Jamalpur holding its defence in strength.

1500 hrs, Adjutant summoned Bn 'O Group' for a briefing. Coy Cdrs ordered 'stand-two' before leaving. CO explained his plan whereby 'Y' Coy under Nambiar would attack Jamalpur from East and my 'C' Coy

“Col Brar thought we were way ahead, but he overshot and hit enemy forward defences. Luckily, his group dived for cover in the nallahs on both sides of the road. Nobody was hurt and they regrouped, laid defences, until we reinforced them.”

from West. I had reservations against this plan as I had observed the enemy and pointed out their pill-boxes and defences. I felt the plan had to be delayed, as we all wondered why a Brigade objective suddenly became a Battalion objective; and that too with two Coys from two different directions! This would have left us exposed, in the open and would certainly result in heavy casualties!

Unknown to us, Brig Kler was listening from inside the hut next to us. He may have wondered why Jangi-Paltan's Coy Cdrs were trying to avoid the attack. However, we assured CO that we were prepared to attack, but unsure of being able to capture the well-defended garrison. Due credit must be given to Col Brar who heard us and Maj Nambiar who convinced him to modify the plan. Then, he ordered attacking Jamalpur from the East with two Coys.

Just as he gave those orders, Bn HQs was subject to 120 mm Mortars for 20-25 mins. The bursting sound of erratically fired shells, created a chilling effect down the spine. There were no casualties. Only L/Nk Vithal Thange of 'Y' Coy was shell-shocked after a shell landed just outside his trench. Its impact was so great that he, along with his equipment and weapon, was thrown up about 12ft high. It was good luck that he got stuck on a tree. Sep Kisan Chale of 'A' Coy said in chaste Marathi "*Chaila attack ithe hota, kasa kai varti latakla aahe*" (I wonder how this individual in the trench, now hangs up on a tree).

We Coy Cdrs, asked Adjutant to convey CO's final decision, while returning to our trenches whilst shelling continued. Meanwhile, FOO's Captains Bhagat and Chopra engaged enemy with counter artillery fire whose effect was salutary, as enemy ceased fire. Brigade Cdr called off his plans for night 10/11 Dec.

Bangladesh's bloodiest night battle

Two Coys taking on a larger dug-in force of approximately 1200 troops and para-military elements, would have spelled disaster. We prepared defences after night fall by trampling fully grown paddy (that provided good cover during the day) to improve lines of sight and defensive firing-arcs up to a distance of 80-100 yards. After last light, everyone ate their packed-meals and rested by turns, while sentries watched.

A nice field-bed created by Mukti Bahini volunteers attached with my Coy, awaited me with a thick layer of hay to prevent moisture from ground and double up as a mattress. The second layer which was not so thick, had to be pulled over the only light bed sheet (*chaddar*) that we could carry. Believe it or not, my trench was cozy in that cold freezing night!

“Unknown to us, Brig Kler was listening from inside the hut next to us. He may have wondered why Jangi-Paltan's Coy Cdrs were trying to avoid the attack. However, we assured CO that we were prepared to attack, but unsure of being able to capture the well-defended garrison. Due credit must be given to Col Brar who heard us and Maj Nambiar who convinced him to modify the plan. Then, he ordered attacking Jamalpur from the East with two Coys.”

CO persuaded Brigade Cdr to pull back to 'D' Coy's position towards the rear, as our frontline was registered by enemy mortars and thereby unsafe. Meanwhile, Pak leadership ordered 31 BALOCH withdraw towards Tangail and then Dacca.

2300 hrs, sentry of 'Y' Coy observed movement along the main road. He was hardly 10 yards away, it was pitch dark, so he took some time to realise they were enemy. At least 50 men had infiltrated our defences by the time he alerted his Platoon Cdr Capt RSV Dafle. Observing their large numbers, Dafle initiated close-quarter fire from his Sten, without awaiting orders!

His firing alerted the entire Bn and marked commencement of what shall always be termed and remembered as one of the bloodiest night-long battles, fought on Bangladesh' soil. The tables turned, as we were in well-prepared defences while withdrawing enemy was fully exposed.

Capt Dafle remained calm, directed fire and kept encouraging his Platoon. His sudden firing created a wave of panic amongst the enemy. While the rest of the Bn had been alerted, they didn't open fire, so enemy thought it was just a Platoon and decided to over-run them.

Enemy's determined assault, was arrested by coordinated small arms fire and excellent fire discipline. Dafle fired upon a jeep accompanying leading enemy section while some enemies (mostly Balochis) lay dead as little as 10 yards from his trenches. The enflamed jeep lit up the area, exposing more enemies who were fired upon.

Two strange events happened that night. Maj Nambiar before resting, placed his boots on the edge of his trench; they were pierced by a few stray enemy bullets, the moment Capt Dafle opened fire. Nambiar fought the battle without his boots on! Secondly, the enemy hurled four grenades at them during the assault, none of them exploded!

Other Coys

Alongside, 50 odd enemies infiltrated Bn defences. They were challenged by 'D' Coy's Section led by L/Hav Laxman Rane. Unfortunately, Rane and seven others were killed while defending against that assault. Maj MC Sachdeva, 'D' Coy Cdr ensured no infiltrator could get away!

Unfortunately, Mohmad Khurram of village Kathiadanga, a Mukti Fauj guide who had been with us since the pre-war days, was also killed. He was young, energetic and reliable. Seeing heavy volumes of fire, he ran out to take shelter in rear trenches. That's when he got shot and succumbed to injuries.

“A nice field-bed created by Mukti Bahini volunteers attached with my Coy, awaited me with a thick layer of hay to prevent moisture from ground and double up as a mattress. The second layer which was not so thick, had to be pulled over the only light bed sheet (*chaddar*) that we could carry. Believe it or not, my trench was cozy in that cold freezing night!”

It became evident that entire Jamalpur Garrison was being abandoned. So we decided to engage them while they moved along the road. Captains Bhagat and Chopra did a fantastic job of controlling artillery fire to create utter confusion and panic amidst enemy vehicle columns. Due to their quick action, an enemy 'power-wagon' also went up in flames, providing adequate visibility, as the column burnt.

During the unprecedented battlefield illumination, my Coy observed some enemy troops occupying what was previously thought to be abandoned brick kiln area. I made full use of my voice by shouting orders to control firing in front of my defences, as my working-radio was with Capt Bhagat.

Ex-communication

Capt Bhagat's radio could only receive messages and didn't transmit, so I took it from him, to hear what was happening elsewhere. I gave him my radio in exchange so he could call for fire as per our requests. I took my actual radio from him, only to reply Bn calls. We kept switching frequencies while responding to changing situations on ground. I maximised using vocal cords for my Ganpats, so that good old Bhagat could concentrate on his bracketing.

Bombs away

At that stage, Capt Dafle kept asking for para-flare bombs to be fired in front of him. It was rather surprising for me that except for my Coy, no other Coy carried para-flare bombs, as they preferred carrying only High Explosive (HE) bombs, since we were to cover all distances by foot, carrying ammunition on a man-pack basis!

I acknowledged Capt Dafle's request and it so happened that, in those flares' light, we observed a fresh assault-line forming up in front of 'Y' and 'C' Coy defences. Pretty soon, Balochis assaulted our areas with their war cry "Allah Oh Akbar – Pakistan Paindabad". Limited duration battlefield illumination coupled with recently trampled paddy, helped Ganpats observe and inflict heavy casualties on enemy.

Lull in battle

There was a short lull in battle after the first assault was repulsed. Artillery from across Brahmaputra's northern banks continued peppering Jamalpur right up to 150-200 yards forward of 'Y' and 'C' positions. Their fire was close and efficiently controlled. Meanwhile, Ganpats replenished all weapon magazines while looking-out.

Without a radio, I thought of checking what was happening in front of my Platoon commanded by 2/Lt SD Patil, as he was to the west and

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slightly away from other Platoons. My second-in-command Sub Pandit Barge and CHM Gulabrao Phadtare advised me not to get out of the trench. Yet, I crawled out, up to a certain distance and linked up with him to obtain information. I told him to avoid indiscriminate firing and ensure judicious use of ammunition.

Red Over Red

The lull was just about enough to take stock of situation, as enemy mounted two successive waves on my Coy's position. My Ganpats could easily hear increasing sound of approaching assault echelons. A similar situation developed in front of 'Y' Coy as well. Crossing the brick kiln area and paddy fields, enemy inched towards us. I informed CO and signalled my Ganpats to open up extreme small-arms fire.

Capt Bhagat shared my trench and radio to request entire guns of 56 MOUNTAIN REGIMENT (JITRA) and Battery of 120 mm Mortars to fire at an intense rate for 10 minutes. The second-in-command of 56 MOUNTAIN REGIMENT (JITRA), informed him that all guns were "red-hot" and suggested reducing the rate of fire.

At that stage, Capt Dafle requested CO engage his Platoon's position with SOS fire aka Red Over Red (directing own artillery fire upon own positions to disrupt enemy who is too close for comfort and accept own risks of fratricide). Being fully aware of what was happening in front of 'Y' Coy's Platoon, CO already decided to order shelling their position and was going to tell them to take cover! An arty barrage followed and the rest became history.....

The enemy's assault was effectively beaten. Two sepoy from 2/Lt Ponwar's Platoon were hardly 15 yards away from me. Sep Maruti Ponwar sustained a bullet through his head, killing him instantly. His buddy suffered shock. I crawled over to their trench, pulled his body out, got inside, ordered his buddy to load his rifle and shoot at enemy in close vicinity, so that he could recover from shock. Initially he missed, but when ordered to fire again, he got his target!

Sep Powar was the only casualty suffered by my Coy; I miss him till date. At that time, in the prevailing darkness and thick fog, one could not guess what Jangi Paltan had achieved on ground...

11 Dec: Agony of war

0430 hrs, except for painful groans of wounded and perhaps dying enemy soldiers, there was absolute calm everywhere. I was still with Ponwar's Platoon, when we heard a Pak soldier, shouting for our CO from the dark paddy fields. Ponwar and I heard him, moved forward to another trench and called back by asking him to identify himself.

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Subedar Barge was rather worried that between his Coy Cdr and Platoon Cdr, they were bound to invite uncalled-for trouble from those wounded Pakistanis. His apprehensions, could have been right, but then we moved ahead.

The wounded soldier identified himself as a Havaladar and said that he was with more soldiers who wanted to surrender. We asked him to get up and move towards our position. Ponwar cautioned him to raise his hands well over his head while carrying his weapon. We ordered him to drop his weapon and belt when he was 15 yards away. Ponwar's Ganpats frisked and took him in to custody. Thereafter, we collected 43 uniformed BALOCH soldiers including an inspector of EPCAF.

By first light, fog lifted, firing ceased and area in front of 'Y', 'C' and 'D' Coys; wore a ghastly look as hundreds of dead and few wounded lay all over the kill zone. Believe it or not, this was the first time ever, in our life, that we had witnessed such a scene. I had participated in the Liberation of Daman (1961) and Defence of Rann of Kutch (1965), but never saw something like that day at Jamalpur!

Body count taken, the tally was 330. Each body wore a traumatic facial expression, perhaps in agony suffered during their dying moments. In one particular case, one of the dead, had a photograph of either his beloved wife or girlfriend, tightly clinched in between his teeth. One felt sad, but that was no time for sentiments, we were in combat!

Brig Kler, witnessed the battle at very close quarters and emerged from 'D' Coy defences. He came forward, met CO and radioed his Brigade Major (BM) to say *"Rajpal, I want you to send the press photographers with the first helicopter. You can come and see for yourself what this Battalion is capable of doing. For a moment, I thought that these troops may panic but the way this Battalion conducted itself in destroying the enemy is simply commendable, I am proud of their achievement and I have my doubts if any of the other Battalions of the Brigade could have ever performed half as well!"*

Jamalpur garrison falls

Maj GK Rajpal, the BM who just finished his conversation with Brig Kler, heard Jamalpur frantically calling up any Indian station for immediate medical assistance. A 31 BALOCH Officer appealed for help, while willing to surrender with what remained of his Battalion, EPCAF, Razakars and Al-Badr. BM, passed on that Officer's radio frequency, to our CO who switched to the given frequency. CO asked Maj Nambiar to proceed to Jamalpur with his Coy and accept their surrender. Nambiar's Coy accepted the surrender of 500 regular and

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para-military PoWs. CO's party followed them closely.

Clean-up

Soon Gen Nagra arrived with the press corps and some provisions. Our RMO Capt HK Malhotra and his assistant Hav Madanlal, continued to do an excellent service of tending the wounded. Under field conditions, they took 4 hrs to patch everyone up. Fighting Ganpats had donned the role of humanitarian agencies by evacuating all wounded to RAP.

GOC was taken to a huge compound outside 31 BALOCH's Officer's Mess, where Maj Nambiar rounded up all PoWs, formed them in a hollow square and handed over the parade to CO, who ordered them 'attention' and in true military custom, reported the parade to GOC.

Gen Nagra was so overwhelmed that he overlooked military traditions by embracing Col Brar instead of accepting the parade. He said *"Bulbul, your boys have done a wonderful job. Capture of Jamalpur was a prestigious task for my formation. You and the gallant team of your Officers and Men under your command have brought a great name to this ad-hoc force; I am really proud of you all. Get all your Officers and tell them that I have brought some breakfast for them"*.

The GOC brought two large baskets full of boiled eggs, toasts, puri and bhaji. Needless to say, we eliminated the breakfast too. Then we collected assorted vehicles to partially mobilise approximately a Coy. The dead were wrapped in blankets and evacuated to Bn HQ, where they were cremated as per prescribed service regulations. 2ic Maj Shahji Mohite; Sub Maj Ganpat Chavan, MM; and religious teacher Sub Mahadeo Bhare observed all rituals.

By afternoon, meals were prepared, weapons cleaned and arrangements made for replenishing ammunition. We had our first bath and my orderly was resourceful enough to get a bucket full of hot water. Under those circumstances, having a bath and change of uniform was more refreshing than anything else. Bathing in Coy defences, with dead enemy soldiers still lying around was quite an experience!

Summarily, on night 10/11 Dec, JANGI-PALTAN had 8 wounded and 10 killed in action. While enemy suffered 15 officers and 330 JCO/Other Ranks killed. We wished we had the enemy's 15 vehicles destroyed during battle to relocate the 500 Prisoners and mobilise us.

Honours

JANGI-PALTAN earned Battle Honour *Jamalpur* and eight gallantry awards, bringing prestige to our 203rd year (1971) since raising. Hav Laxman Rane, was posthumously awarded a Vir Chakra. While, Brig

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Incidentally, a British Officer suggested re-designating 'B' Coy as 'Y' Coy because each time they went to war, they suffered casualties to the extent of annihilation. The renamed Coy earned a Victoria Cross shortly afterwards. In a historical twist, 'Y' Coy's Officers earned two Vrcs while leading their Coy towards creating a new nation 'Bangladesh'. A proud history indeed!

“The biggest honour for us was, to be first to enter Dhaka along with 2 PARA (3 MARATHA LI) after our link-up at Poongli Bridge, Tangail”; stated Lt Gen KS Brar raising his right fist, re-enacting the manner wherein both Bns fiercely raised war cries - *“Bol Shri Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj ki Jai”* at the bridgehead, being 'Maratha-class' in composition. Jangi-Paltan's march in to Dhaka truly lived up to Shivaji's great warrior legacy.....



Author with Lt Gen KS 'Bulbul' Brar PVSM, AVSM, Vrc

1971: SALUTE
TO THE 'SILHOUETTE
OF A MAN'



INS KHUKRI (F-149)



1971: Salute to the 'Silhouette of a Man'

This is a narrative history of how Commander Anil Kumar Kakar survived the sinking of INS KHUKRI (F-149) during the 1971 War. As a young Sub Lieutenant posted barely 1 month and 9 days on board INS KHUKRI, he vividly recalls his experience and pays homage to his Commanding Officer, Captain Mahendra Nath Mulla, Maha Vir Chakra (Posthumous) whose silhouette, taught him well. This is the author's first exposure to a naval battle as he writes about the 'silent-arm' that continues to play a tremendous role in securing India's National Security & Maritime Interests.

SAGAT SHAUNIK

While attending High School, I visited my Chacha (younger paternal uncle) who was teaching at Punjab Public School, Nabha. There I observed Army officer's children and was enamoured by their sense of bearing, mannerism, communication and so on. I noticed their visiting fathers in sparkling uniforms and it seemed that the military was a very lucrative career. Without a second thought, I decided to join the army when I grow up.

Later, I had a choice between the Armed Forces and merchant marine. As a young man, one always deliberated between better choices. My father was in the railways and was transferred to Kanpur, where I enrolled for inter-science and joined the Officers Training

Unit (OTU) under the National Cadet Corps for joining the Army.

While at OTU, a naval officer visited us; his sparkling white uniform was very smart and exciting. It motivated me to change my choice to Indian Navy. The Navy offered a graduate-entry scheme, encouraging me to join DAV College, Kanpur and continue my education.

While in college, an opportunity came along to join Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) under Indian Explosive Limited (IEL) that had recently established a Urea manufacturing plant in Kanpur. I



*Cdr Anil Kumar Kakar, 1971 survivor displays his medals.
(Inset) Captain Mahendra Nath Mulla, MVC (Posthumous) and INS Khukri (F 149)*

appeared for an interview, at that time, ICI was one of the very few multinational companies in India, it was attractive and I was selected. The company was putting up a very large plant, perhaps the first of its kind in India. There were 96 of us who were selected. The industry training was for one year under Indian, British and Japanese trainers

Indeed, working with IEL (ICI) was exciting, but the lure of Armed Forces continued in the back of my mind. Somehow, I was enamoured by forces at sea than on land. This was a kind of trigger to look for a change. On the first opportunity, sometime in 1969 I applied to the Indian Navy; went through the Services Selection Board (SSB) and got selected in Graduate Entry Scheme.

I joined Indian Navy on 13 July 1970, as a Sub Lieutenant and was given rigorous training for 15 months at INS VENDURUTHY and then on-board INS DELHI and INS CAUVERI. Completing basic training on 1 November 1971, I was posted on board INS KHUKRI as my first deployment.

Captain Mahendra Nath Mulla was in command when I joined the ship at a time when war clouds were looming over East Pakistan (Bangladesh). We were at sea for about a week to ten days in the month of November and upon our return to Bombay Harbour, within no time as a precautionary measure went out to sea and deployed as part of the Western Fleet. Whilst at sea, war was declared on 4th December 1971.

Capt Mulla was the Flotilla Commander for INS KHUKRI (F-149), INS KUTHAR (F-146) and INS KIRPAN (F-144). All three were anti-submarine-warfare (ASW) frigates (Type 14 Blackwood class) with dedicated anti-submarine munitions. Unfortunately, one of the flotilla's ship developed a problem and on around 5 Dec, we escorted her back to harbour. By evening 5th or morning 6th we had her docked safely.

Short range of underwater target detection was a very serious shortcoming. The Navy was looking forward to overcome and augment detection range of Sonar systems fitted on Khukri-Class ships. Lt VK Jain, a scientist from DRDO, had developed a new system. Naval HQ decided that he would board INS Khukri with his new system to enhance our ship's Sonar detection-range. Capt Mulla was very concerned with it because this was a nascent system whose efficacy was not validated. We proceeded to sea on night 6/7 December. It was reported that there was a Pakistani submarine operating off Kathiawar coast; our mission was to seek and destroy it. We were accompanied by INS KIRPAN.

Lt Jain requested Capt Mulla if he could be given the assistance of an

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Officer to operate his system along with him. Amongst the available junior officers on the ship, Capt Mulla nominated me to be with Lt Jain and told me to give him full assistance in all he required. The Torpedo & Anti-Submarine Warfare Officer (TASO) Lt Manbar Singh; Lt VK Jain and I had a small meeting to determine which of the two Sonar systems namely Type 170 or Type 174 could be dovetailed with the new system created by Lt Jain. A choice had to be made, as it needed a transducer from either of the Sonars.

Then, Capt Mulla; Lt Cdr Joginder Krishan Suri (Executive Officer); Lt Kundanmal Suresh Hiranand (Navigation & Direction Officer) and Lt Manbar Singh (TASO) held a meeting, which I attended as being associated with Lt Jain. After much deliberation and giving full consideration to the requirement of the ship, with the possible benefits that may accrue with the new system; Capt Mulla decided that since we were at War, the better system Type 170 Sonar must be available to the ship and Type 174 could be dovetailed with Lt Jain's invention as he needed its transducer only. It was felt that this combination was better suited for our ship.

The efficacy of the new system with 100% assurance was amiss, even the most sophisticated Sonars today get false signals, which could be due to school of fish, sea bottom refraction, or even ambient noise. The new system was no exception, if at all, it was more pronounced towards getting marred by these concerns. As we commenced operating the new system married to the transducer of Type 174, many false signals raising undue alarms were being detected. Once again, Capt Mulla was very annoyed and wondered aloud "how could the quarters that matter, allow a new system, that has not been tried, be fitted on the ship at such a time, when War is in progress!"

As I said, there were a lot of false signals that were being picked up and any one of them could have been a lurking submarine, so, we had to go after those signals and verify them. Even Lt Jain was a worried man. The two of us discussed on the 7th evening that we would request TASO to give us Type 170 for a couple of hours, so that we could associate the new equipment with it. After seeking permission from the chain of command, we were allowed to do it for a couple of hours on morning 8 Dec 1971. With this, there was an appreciable improvement in the performance of equipment given by Lt Jain. Then, the system was reconnected to the Type-174 transducer.

As a matter of statement, the difference in range-detection capabilities of this system versus the system already fitted on the ship was 2.5 to 3 times. Capt Mulla with each passing moment was getting more and more disturbed and somehow controlled his anger. At one

Lt Jain requested Capt Mulla if he could be given the assistance of an Officer to operate his system along with him. Amongst the available junior officers on the ship, Capt Mulla nominated me to be with Lt Jain and told me to give him full assistance in all he required.

stage, he thought of disconnecting the new system and reverting back to the legacy fitted transducer.

I would like to clarify the subject as people don't understand how Sonar systems function. You can consider this akin to a visually disabled person looking for a small person in a big hall where the smaller person can always see him. So, ASW is a very challenging form of warfare as it is difficult to detect a submarine, which is the smaller person who can detect earlier and with ease the ship which is the visually disabled person operating in the large hall called ocean. I hope my analogy explains ASW challenges to the general public?

On 9th Dec, we picked contact 3 or 4 times and went to attempt prosecuting the submarine by launching anti-submarine projectile ammunition (Limbo Mark 10 Anti Submarine Mortars) that could be launched up to a range of 1000 yards (1 kms) away from the ship. In comparison to our projectiles, a torpedo has a range to the tune of 15-20,000 yards (13-18 kms) and many torpedoes are homer-type that use acoustic sensors to home on to the target. It is difficult to distinguish between false and true signals; command was left with no option but to attack. A paradoxical situation arose that if it were a false target, it would lead to quick attrition of limited on board ammunition. The Captain was a very concerned man as it could be that either the contact was false or the submarine was beyond the detection range of our Sonar systems. Simultaneously, we were also having a bit of a problem in one of our operating systems. That evening, we took some time for repair and brought it back to operational state.

During wartime, operations of our ships were in a two-watch system called defence-watch system. Implying that 50% of crew would be closed up in their fighting quarters at all times. As and when action-stations are sounded everybody closes up at respective battle stations. This is an established modus operandi and best way of working on a ship, so we followed it. I had completed my watch at about 2015 hrs and Lt Jain took over from me. Finishing dinner by 2035 hrs or so, I went to my cabin to take some rest because at midnight I had to again close up on my duty. At 2046 hrs, the first torpedo hit us, knocking out our propeller and emblazing the whole ship on the aft side. A lot of failure alarms started ringing; I reacted and ran towards the bridge, which was three companionways ahead, to find out what was happening. By the time I was climbing up the second companionway to the bridge, the ship had started listing very rapidly to starboard (right) side. In that inclined position, I climbed up one more companionway to reach the bridge with difficulty.

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I did not find anybody in the bridge except for Captain Mulla who was sitting in his chair in a very calm and poised manner. The ship was listing rapidly towards starboard; I jumped in to the Port (left) Wing to escape the ship. No soon did I jump in to the Port Wing the ship quickly sank; I began to drown with her. The ship just took a couple of minutes to be obliterated from the horizon. The aft of the ship had taken in a lot of water, became heavy and listed to starboard. I must have gone down 25-30 feet during the process of listing, aft sinking and the ship gyrating to become vertical with bows pointing skywards. I was disoriented and spinning underwater, in retrospect I did not know what was happening to me!

God Almighty has his own design. When a ship sinks as rapidly as Khukri did, lot of air gets trapped inside and under pressure seeks its way out. Perhaps, the bridge was one such escape route for air and maybe God timed my location. I was being propelled in a circular fashion; the trapped air seeking its way out facilitated my escape from the sinking situation. Somehow, the timing was right and the vortex moved me towards an opening and the escaping air ejected me clear of the ship. Had I been near that exit, a moment earlier or later I would have been sucked down and wouldn't have been here to narrate this experience!

During the time, I had taken in seawater and furnace oil, upon surfacing I recall the most unforgettable experience of racking regurgitation and gasping for air. My sleep is often disturbed even now. By Gods grace a floating wooden grating piece came in my way, I caught hold of it and remained afloat in the water for over an hour. Khukri was operating off Diu, an area notorious for Sea Snakes. I sensed a tingling sensation on my left leg and thought a snake was slithering. I involuntarily jerked my leg to discover that it was not a snake, it was the line of an inflatable life raft that got inflated by the jerk. Suddenly, I had this big life raft in front of me. I was tired and exhausted, my body coated with oil, and so it took an effort to get inside the life raft. Can you imagine I was the last man out of INS Khukri and the first man on that life raft? Then I picked up whoever came my way. The first person I pulled in was Sub Lt MS Ahluwalia, together we kept pulling in survivors. It was a 21-man life raft; we packed in 29, we didn't leave anyone behind.

On the morning of 10 Dec, Navy Search & Rescue (SAR) operations aircraft cited us. I was picked up by INS KATCHALL (P-81) an Arnala Class ASW Corvette commanded by Cdr KN Zadu. His ship, with all the survivors was directed for a hunter-killer mission to seek and

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destroy the submarine. We returned to Bombay harbour on 14th Dec. Until then I didn't really fathom what had happened, when I finally stood on terra firma, I had a great feeling of thanksgiving. We were given 30 days to go home, recuperate and come back to continue our service, most of us suffered mental trauma, not openly talked about in those humble days.

On returning from home, I was posted on board INS RANJEET and thereafter many more ships. I was part of commissioning two new ships; I went abroad for training and served the Indian Navy with honour up till 15 March 1993, the day I took pre-mature retirement. I joined the Merchant Navy whose Master's-exams I had cleared while filing my application for release from the Indian Navy. I worked in the merchant marine for about 14 years and for the past 10 years I am teaching Merchant Navy officers for their certificates of competency on FG ships.

What was Capt Mulla's last known position in the Bridge?

As I said earlier, I was coming up the companionway, I could only see his back, water was gushing in rapidly, and my thought was to get to the Port Wing as quickly as possible. I glimpsed the "silhouette of a man" sitting on his chair in a calm and poised manner, knowing fully well that he was staring in to his death. His posture indicated that he was fearless and the thought of death did not disturb him! He simply discharged his directions and occupied his position with a lot of élan, that's all!

What could have happened if Capt Mulla had evacuated himself?

I personally feel that a man of his intelligence and capabilities would have been an asset to the Indian Navy. In his death, the Indian Navy lost his great experiences of real time situations. I strongly feel that if he had survived, he would have motivated many young officers towards a higher dedication that he personally exemplified in his own life.

Administratively, what would have happened to him, I have no idea! I really cannot comment as there could be two situations, he could have either been highly rewarded or received punitive action. I felt that he was an asset to the Navy and the Nation.

Were you alone, or were they others while you were going up the companionway?

The ship was hit on its aft. The Bridge and living-quarters were

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located forward of the vessel and the violent torpedo impact was perhaps not perceived in these areas. The off-duty crews had assembled on the alleyway, thinking that the ship was under some kind of aerial attack, and they didn't want to come out lest they be strafed. We had power failure and all systems effected. Our public-address (PA) system was not available and there was no way to communicate with crews, except for personally going down and telling them.

My assigned duty was in the TAS control room, which was a deck below the bridge, I wanted to reach TAS as quickly as possible and crew had assembled in the alleyway. While climbing, I realised that the ship had sustained an attack and was sinking, I then moved to the Bridge and Port Way. The ship sank in a matter of about two and a half minutes. Nobody had any chance of escape, if they hadn't started coming out initially. Indeed, there was a bit of panic which is but natural and could not be addressed through PA system, it was the brave actions by our Captain and Officers in taking initiatives and control to save maximum Sailors, as also by the good training and survival instincts of our sailors.

Do you see still see the silhouette of the Captain? How do you relate yourself with him?

That silhouette always motivates me to perform to the best of my abilities. For example, today I am a teacher of Merchant Navy subjects and I enjoy doing it. As a result, I can give better to my students as against doing my job just for remuneration. The silhouette has placed me on a higher pedestal of thinking.

You served for 1 month and 9 days under Capt Mulla, what were the highlights spent under his command?

Captain Mulla was very fond of shayari (Urdu poetry) that had a lot of meaning in them. You could put him in any situation and he could respond with beautiful lafz (words) of shayari. On the Night 5/6 December, when he docked one of his problematic ships in Bombay Harbour, he looked towards the shore and said “unn toofano se ladh aaye, ab inn toofano se ladhna hein” {we braved those storms (seas) and now have to face these storms (shore-men)}. The shore guys thought no end of themselves! So those were his words in anticipation of them after escorting the ship to harbour.

The other tales, I will keep for another day. Under his leadership, I learnt a lot. When I became a Captain of my merchant ship, I realised the importance and loneliness of Command, which ultimately means

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responsibility. Capt Mulla, exemplified acceptance of responsibilities with a passion to serve.

Were you spiritual before joining the Indian Navy or became, after the War?

My late father was a very poor man. He was a very hardworking individual as he had witnessed and been a victim of partition when our family came to India from Multan. Since my childhood, I saw him perform Vedic Havan at home everyday.

While drowning with that ship, I saw in front of me, my whole life fleeting past me in a matter of a few seconds. So it is at that time, while experiencing those fleeting thoughts, I talked to God about it to say, "If You save me, I would send a lot of help to my father and would one day become a teacher". So that gave me an inclination towards God. It gave me assurance that there is some supernatural power that works for you. It was always there for me when I needed Him. Is this what you call God?

A very personal question Sir, as a survivor of the War, how did you feel about everything?

There were 67 survivors including 5 officers, 1 midshipman and 61 crewmembers. To the best of my knowledge, there were about 200 men on board who were killed in action. The officer's who survived in order of seniority were: Lt Cdr Manu Sharma, NM; Sub Lt MS Ahluwalia, NM; Sub Lt VB Khanzode; Sub Lt SK Basu, NM; Sub Lt AK Kakar and Midshipman SN Singh. For a list of crew killed in action, you may consult the Navy to get their correct ranks and names.

I kept a hand-written account of all the details, which I can't find now. The story remains ingrained in my mind. You are the second person after *Major General Ian Cardozo, AVSM, SM* to whom I have narrated the story in entirety. Presently, I am visualising the entire experience and the silhouette of that man once again. It's all as if I am there. Tonight, you will go home and write this story, but for me, I shall not sleep, as I shall relive that fateful night.

In the initial couple of years I remained disturbed. With time all that stopped, I guess it's a way of life. I generally refrain from talking about it as the particular day or night after narration is very intense for me.

Summarily, I believe that God has brought you in this world, so do your job well. He will only take you when either you are useless or he needs you more! I am sure he would have told Captain Mulla; "*bus karr yaara, saari duty kar lee, ab tu aithe aaja, aithe teri jaroorat bahut hegee*" (enough my friend, you have done your duty, now you come

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here, your presence is required more in heaven). Captain Mahendra Nath Mulla was posthumously awarded the Nation's second highest gallantry award the Maha Vir Chakra. He should have been given much more, he truly deserved a Padma Vibhushan or higher!



Postage Stamp released in 2000 on Capt NN Mulla, MVC, who went down with INS Khukri

1971: INS Khukri (F-149) Honours List				
Rank	Name	Gallantry Award	Appointment	Actions
Captain (X)	Mahendra Nath Mulla	Maha Vir Chakra (Posthumous)	Commanding Officer	Supervised arrangements for evacuating ship, continued directing rescue operations and refused evacuation giving own life-jacket to sailor. Having directed as many of his men as possible to leave ship, went back to bridge to ensure further rescue operations. Last seen going down with his ship.
Lieutenant Commander (X)	Joginder Krishan Suri	Vir Chakra (Posthumous)	Executive Officer (2iC equivalent)	Rushed to cut lifesaving floats and rafts, threw them in sea and directed men out. Continued evacuation after second torpedo.
Commander (E)	Ommen Mukadavil Ommen		Engineer Officer	Went below Ship to inform others to evacuate. Continued evacuation after second torpedo.
Lieutenant Commander (X)	Prabahat Kumar		Electrical Officer	
	Rajat Kumar Sen		Supply Officer	
Surgeon Lieutenant	Sudhansu Sekhar Panda		Surgeon (RMO equivalent)	Went down to Ship's sick bay, ensured sick and wounded were brought on deck for evacuation. Continued evacuation after second torpedo.
Lieutenant Commander	Manu Sharma	Nao Sena Medal	Communications Branch Officer	Post Combat Survival Operations.
Sub Lieutenant	Madanjit Singh Ahluwalia			
	Samir Kant Basu			

‘TIGER OF ASSAM SECTOR’ STILL FIGHTING IT...



Mi-4 Helicopter

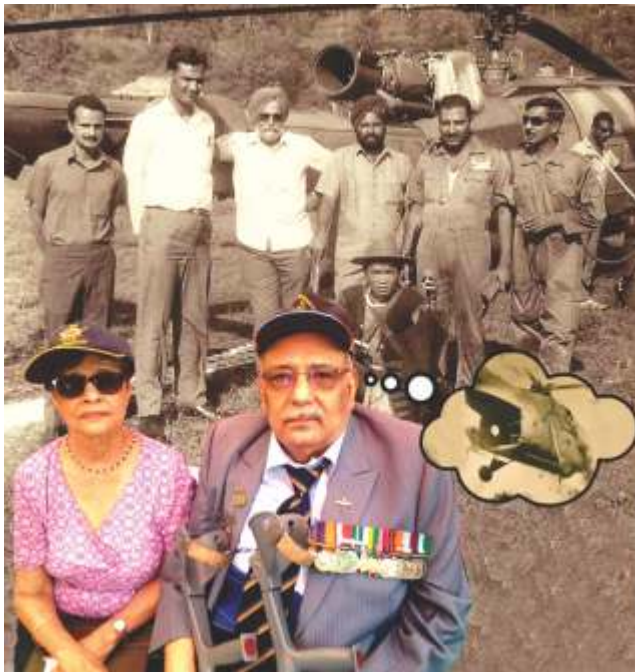


'Tiger of Assam Sector' still Fighting it...

This is a narrative history of how Squadron Leader Parvez Rustomji Jamasji, Vir Chakra, recalls his combat experience flying a MI 4 helicopter in the Eastern Sector, during the 1971 War: "There was no time to see others' gallantry. We were so busy from morning to evening that we couldn't find out what happened to whom...? Getting away safely, especially for the men who were on-board my MI 4 was a difficult task, as we didn't have anything to keep the crew in. Not even a rope line was attached. The men literally clung on to whatever they could grasp. Matters became worse when we had medical evacuations to be done. The body would simply roll out of the chopper, unless someone held on to it..."

SAGAT SHAUNIK

The Jamasjis have maintained a treasure trove of data, including photographs, diaries; log books, citations, certificates etc. with details of the veteran's heroism and service. Having spent considerable time with the wonderful family, a brief extract from the author's interview, tells a deeper tale.



**Mrs Zarin Jamasji and Sqn Ldr Parvez Rustomji Jamasji, VrC today and (background) ARC in ops with Gen Uban wearing goggles while Jamasji poses in his overall with top buttons open, standing second from right. Thought-cloud: SFF Pinja jumps out of Jamasji's hovering MI 4.*

Why did you choose the Air Force as a career?

My father Rustom Sorabji Jamasji (officer rank unknown) fought in Mesopotamia during the First World War, probably as part of the Parsi Pioneers who were raised in Bombay. Further, my elder brother fought the Second World War in the Royal Indian Air Force; and demobilised after the war. He had lots & lots of things that were kept from the war, along with material for recruitment. There was a considerable age gap of nearly 50 years between my father and me. I grew up seeing all those military things placed with affection in our home.

These things motivated me to join the NCC equivalent in my days spent at Wadia College. Actually it could be that my CO in NCC, Wg Cdr Whyte may have been a sort of colleague with my brother. So I enjoyed my days of NCC and consequently applied for the Indian Air Force.

I was commissioned in No. 111 HELICOPTER UNIT (HU) located at Jammu in 1965. I joined duties there via Chandigarh and remained at Jammu until the War got over. The HU flew back to its home base at Hashivada in Bengal. Thereafter, I was assigned to No. 110 HU until 1967.

How did you plan and prepare for the 1971 War?

In 1967, I was assigned to No. 115 HU in Tezpur. Around early 1971, Lt General Sagat Singh had called us. It was not a sudden escalation, it was an on-going thing. There were just 2-3 of us who had accumulated flying experience in the areas of Tezpur-Shillong-Meghalaya. I had the maximum experience amongst the lot and thereby locally known as the “Tiger of Assam Sector”. I had been flying MI 4s while Sagat's operational requirement was on Alouettes. A gentleman called Sahay was the most experienced pilot on Alouettes. At that time, as things started working, we made our base in Tura, Meghalaya. Then one fine day, the General called us in the evening and said, “dekho, baat aisi hein, (look the matter is) that we have to do something extraordinary...”

So, we went back to our CO, Mehtani who had just taken over from Ramarao. The General had informed us that there would be certain special requirements that we had to do. He said that we would be in any village, any open space, anywhere and we just had to fly there. So we told the CO that *yeh-yeh-yeh hein* (this is what the requirements are)! Gen Sagat told us that there could not be any restriction on passenger load or anything. So we informed him that we could not have an unlimited load just to suit his requirements. Our aircrafts wouldn't take off or would crash if heavily loaded.

Gen Sagat understood everything and when all this was cleared up, we all understood each other that we couldn't operate within the laws enforced at the time by the IAF. Then, I don't know what equation it was, '*usne mujhe bulaya*' (he called me aside), because I was the senior most and said, “Bhai, with what cards do you come to the table?” I said, “The cards are with the IAF! I have to go by the rules. If one Sagat Singh wants any change or modification, he has to liaise with the CO, HQ Eastern Air Command (EAC) and his own HQ”. Luckily, they were all located near each other. I wouldn't comment further about the discussion, but, his body language conveyed to me that - “*ki ha bhai, jaha tak ho sakta hein, utna kar do*” (do whatever you can, to the extent possible). That's exactly what he told the EAC later.

After this, it all started happening. We started flying him. He was always on one of our birds and would fly the Mukti Bahini around saying 'Yeh dekh, wo dekh' (see this, see that)... He had that sort of equation and relation with them. That is what we used to do! This is all my pre-Aviation Research Centre (ARC) work.

By that time, everyone in the formation and HQ, had come to know what we were capable of, what our aircrafts were capable of and what the IAF intended/wanted to do. Then, the Army had a sort of tête-à-

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tête with the IAF telling the Air Force what they were actually expected to do.

Please describe your combat experience of 1971?

Look, I was already operating combat sorties, fighting the extremists in my sector. By July 1971, my papers had been moved up and I was deputed to the ARC. I was told that I had the longest flying hours (>2000) in the Eastern Theatre and my services were required somewhere else. I was disappointed. I didn't want to leave my No. 115 HU, especially when War was just a kiss away.

"16 October 1971, we were watching a nice Hindi movie with the entire Dumduma Station where the ARC was headquartered. Suddenly, someone came and called them (Officers) aside. Then we were told to hurry home, pack everything as our husbands were being deployed", recalled Mrs Zarin Zamasji who saw her husband off, by the end of the day.

30 October was my first sortie in to East Pakistan, which was to recce Rangamato Dam, built just east of Chittagong. The recce op continued on the subsequent day as well....

Uske baad toh, it was a free for all. Our formation commander and the army started talking to each other and reached some conclusion. There were small-small things on how we were to go about business... We had two browning .50 Cal Machine Guns (MGs) or Russian small cannons attached as armament. They were adjusted as per experience because the MI 4's original Russian MGs were quite different from our Browning MGs. Besides; we had just one AK 47. The MGs of .50 Cal (12.7 mm) had been fitted in Moscow and proved too small to take on ground attack missions against bunkers and so on. To overcome fire power constraints, we halted at a location called 44 Field in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and upgraded to 20-23 mm calibre guns, based on what were available at the time. These created a lot of teething problems. Although it may look small, but the firepower is totally different. So anyway, trial and error was the theme and special order of the day!

I think it is of paramount importance to tell you and your to-be readers that it is best justice to say that our armourers and the fellows (airmen) who fit those guns on the MI 4s were the heroes of the day. I say heroes, because without them, nothing would have worked. They did everything as per what we wanted.

After this, we were informed about the areas that were to be reconnoitred and where we were expected to land. We were also told where to airlift our soldiers, evacuate the wounded, how the area would be marked by smoke-candles and different types of flags. Rangamati was

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**Squadron Leader
Parvez Rustom Jamasji, VRC**

designated as our operational base between mid-December to Jan/Feb.

We were shown on 'interdiction-missions'. But my real job was to take troops, about 10 of them and land them in a partially measured field in the midst of the enemy. After unloading the troops, I had to take out the casualties with my gunners lashing up bodies so that they didn't roll out. You will be surprised to know, that our MI 4s had been stripped to bare minimum. Every aircraft had only one pilot as we were supposedly certified by competent authorities, allowing us to fly solo from the right-side seat. In fact, the co-pilot's seat had been removed to reduce weight! For the men riding behind, there was nothing to hold on to. Not even a rope line. Somehow, everyone managed and while flying, I was careful so that they didn't tip over board.

It is sad to state that even in those trying times, everything was overwhelmingly affected by a strange character similar to bloody crabs trying to pull each other down! In those days, it was well known to all that anyone was a good force-commander if he did not use the 'force' of the IAF. By 'force' I mean the 'law'. Those laws actually prevented any fighting man from using his capabilities. This is what was called crab culture by most of us youngsters...

Of course, there were certain great leaders produced by the Air Force. You can have an insight of one Air Marshal Dattikara, whose sterling character I first saw early in 1967. Two aircrafts were taking off from an airbase when they had a collision. A court of inquiry was ordered. Dattikara was made the chair. So everyone rejoiced that they could have Dattikara Bhujia free. Jokes apart, Dattikara had one look at all the papers, called the officers to hear their version and then dismissed the inquiry. It was a Christian name, Coelho I think and another officer. Dattikara had simply asked them, "Now forget what you were told by other people. Tell me you both were lined up wingtip to wingtip. Tell me you both started rolling. Now, tell me how you managed to break the wings?

Both young officers narrated their stories separately. He couldn't find an iota of difference in their truthful answers. So he endorsed their story and wrote to the C-in-C, dismissing the case, as a real technical error for which there was no need to throw the books at them. So the Dattikara Court-martial became known as the famous Dattikara Bhujia because he was getting married and going to take over command in Chandigarh. While serving his famous bhujia he would joke, "Hey chaps, I am not out of gas, am run out of cash". So yeh hassi-khel mein (in a relaxed way), the court martial was thrown out and they were acquitted honourably.

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“But the biggest drawback is that, we who have got the memory of being hit by bullets, don't know how to process our disability. I don't know how to approach and who? I am wearing my wound medal and everyone says, “Bhai Wah!” But recognition? Recognition dene wala koi nahi hein (nobody recognises our war wounded). So today if I or my wife or my son want to claim any compensation, whom should we go to? Should we go from pillar to post? This is not the way to give recognition to people who fought nearly 50 years ago. This is very important in giving justice to people like us. I am not the type to ask for anything but my heart goes out for those soldiers, sailors and airmen who don't have any alternate avenues of employment post retirement. One must expose our collective trauma...”

Coming back to the point, on 11th December 1971 there was a particularly heavy ground fire while flying into Haji Chara. I got two enemy bullets in my fuel tank and one shrapnel, I don't know when it entered the aircraft, but came right below my feet and hit me in my left calf and went through. Nothing happened to me. When I returned from the mission, I was having tea in my room when suddenly I felt irritation and tried to see why my overalls were stuck to my leg. It had dried with blood. It was evening and that's when I learnt about my wound.

Our Medical Officer was a professor of medicine. *Petromax jalayi, dekha k kuch hole hein* (he lit the Petromax lamp and saw a hole in my leg). So he took a thermometer, dipped it in to alcohol and said, “Now it will pain you a little”. He jabbed it through until it came out from the exit wound. It went through and through, so he said, “*Bhai, tera huddi-wuddi toh theek hein* (your bones are alright), you are lucky!” That was all there was to it.

You were wounded in combat and didn't even realise it?

Baat yeh hein (the matter is), coming back to today, things have changed. There is a lot of recognition for warriors. Nowadays you all are talking about wound-medal pension, disability allowance and so on. *Uss time, jab unhe maar padi thi, tab kisi ne poocha nahi, chalo* (that time, when they were wounded, nobody bothered about them) at least now you are asking!

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Why were the Special Frontier Force flown in your helicopters?

The Indian Army had fallen short of a few battalions. The paramilitary forces had not proven themselves in combat and had failed to create a junior leadership capable of commanding them in to combat and delivering results. On the other hand, the SFF was a relatively

professional trained and potent force, led by Army Officers who had participated in operations. They were hardy men, called 'Pinjas' meaning 'brother' in their dialects. Those *Pinjas* could give a tough fight compared to the regular stock of reserved paramilitary forces. Unfortunately their gallantry is now forgotten and hardly spoken about. My job was to fly them in to combat theatres and extract casualties as per the ground situation. That's all...

As a helicopter pilot during the Vietnam era, were you able to draw lessons from the US heli-borne Ops?

A lot of American literature that came across were more like what we called acts of "Rambo". Admittedly, we looked at them with a certain jealousy because they had all the modern equipment and capability to deliver huge firepower. While our old machines didn't meet the technical requirements for fighting the sort of battles we were going in to. Due credit must go to the IAF that we overcame some of the problems by hook or crook. The commanders, pilots, airmen and technical staff all worked hard and it's their teamwork that gave grand success in most operations. Had we got better equipment, perhaps the outcomes would have been more favourable. In fact the world was surprised to see what Indians could do with antique equipment...

In my last question, you were deployed in the eastern sector; did you know how the IAF was positioned to take on the threat of US Navy's Seventh Fleet?

Am surprised that you are asking this question. It is a really good question because now is the right time to tell you that in those days we were informed about the lurking USS Enterprise. Still, there were young fighter pilots who were willing to volunteer to interdict and sink her. Many of us relatively seniors told them that they would be shot down like flies being swatted, if they dared to get even a 100m close to the ship. It goes to their credit and spirit that they were prepared to take on that risk. They were even willing to go on suicidal attacks against the Enterprise. You see, when the time comes, no Indian soldier backs out of his sense of duty. At that moment, while all this transpired, we became proud of our IAF's junior leadership, many of whom later went home as Air Marshals and higher.

{Our Sqn Ldr was keeping unwell during the time of the interview, so the author spent time with his family and their thoughts that follow, tell a larger story}

Mrs Zarin Jamasji (wife) said, 'during the war, some ladies gathered

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at our house to give me a message that was written on a typical palm sized brown paper. There were just two lines mentioning a wound, my husband's name and that he is fighting --followed by an 'F' that had dropped under the line due to typical sliding of typewriter keys. It was followed by few spaces and then by the word, 'it'. So it looked like:

"Jamasji wounded, fighting.....it F."

I read it, and asked the ladies to excuse me, then lit a diya and an aggarbatti while praying to God that the 'F' indeed be true. Would it be "Jamasji Fighting It or Jamasji Fighting fit? Later, 'Mr Rane, then DIG-Police of Bombay rang up our landline to say "*Mere bete ko Vir Chakra milla, aur tumhe pata nahi?*" (My son got a Vir Chakra and you don't know?) That's when we heard that my living husband was decorated with the coveted award for his cumulative gallant actions.

Your uncle was a brave pilot who fought both 1965 & 1971 wars and decorated multiple times even after the war. He used to volunteer for sorties even on weekends because he was so passionate about flying. He loved being airborne and chose to do every mission with the result that he had the highest number of flying hours (>4000) in helicopters by the time he hung his boots. Having retired from the IAF, he sought employment in Mumbai and looked after all of us.

We look up to our Armed Forces and know that they will defend India at all costs. You must work on what your uncle is saying about delivering justice to the war wounded. He went through a lot but never complained. Yet, his heart is pained by the thought of those who never got anything. We are PARSI, which is an acronym for "People Always Ready to Serve India". I always used to worry about him and his brothers in arms. But not one of them ever showed any signs of worry and flew all the missions with a lot of patriotism and sense of duty.

Citations copied from original documents maintained by the family:

1. Flt Lt Parvez Rustomji Jamasji of ARC showed outstanding courage and capacity to cheerfully accept risks endangering his life daily. Heptor flown by him was attacked twice by machine guns and twice by mortars while on ground.

Showing great presence of mind, this officer brought back his aircraft with several bullet holes every time. Once his heptor had engine failure over enemy position. He again showed courage and proficiency of a very high order in bringing Heptor safely to a post within out territory. This officer's cool courage was a source of inspiration to his colleagues. I strongly recommend him for the immediate award of Vir Chakra.

We look up to our Armed Forces and know that they will defend India at all costs. You must work on what your uncle is saying about delivering justice to the war wounded. He went through a lot but never complained. Yet, his heart is pained by the thought of those who never got anything. We are PARSI, which is an acronym for "People Always Ready to Serve India". I always used to worry about him and his brothers in arms. But not one of them ever showed any signs of worry and flew all the missions with a lot of patriotism and sense of duty.

Signed by Maj Gen SS Uban, PVSM, AVSM, Special Frontier Force in a letter to both Chiefs of Army and Air Staff with a copy to Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India.

2. An experienced helicopter pilot, with 2670 hours on rotary wing aircraft, he had flown 1357:40 hours since 1 January 1970 and over 1050 Operational missions as Captain. Recommended for commendation for an accident free flying record fulfilling requirement of AFO 18/76.

Signed by Wg Cdr CP Puri, OC No 252 Signals Unit, AF in a letter to AOC-in-C HQ Central Air Command, dated 9 April, 1977.

3. Since commissioning, the officer has operated mainly in the Eastern Sectors and out of a total service of 10½ years, he has served 9½ in the eastern theatre... An experienced helicopter pilot, with 2600 hours on rotary wing aircraft, he had flown 1262 hours since 1 January 1970 and over 1000 Operational missions as Captain. Recommended for commendation for an accident free flying record fulfilling requirement of AFO 18/76.

Signed by Wg Cdr AK Das, OC No. 110 HU; AF in a letter to AOC-in-C HQ Eastern Air Command, dated 9 March, 1976.

4. During the flood relief operation in Cachar District, from 15 June to 19 Jun 1975, this officer flew a total of 19:00 hrs and airlifted 7960 kgs and 15 passengers to various places in the flood affected area. Due to non-availability of any proper landing sites the loads had to be landed on small water logged patches of ground having extremely difficult approach. This officer skilfully manoeuvred the helicopter and successfully carried out the extremely difficult task of landing/dropping the critically required supplies at Ramakrishna Nagar, Sonakheri and Longai, under adverse weather conditions. At Patharkandi, the most affected area, the landing had to be done on a kacha road patch as there was no other dry place within 5 km area. Again this officer displayed his professional skill and carried out the task successfully.

Throughout the operation, Flt Lt PR Jamasji displayed high standard of professional competence and utmost devotion to the Air Force duties with complete disregard to personal comfort. For his selfless devotion to duty, professional skill of high order and hard work, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT PARVEZ RUSTOMJI JAMASJI, VrC is strongly recommended for Commendation by the Chief of the Air Staff.

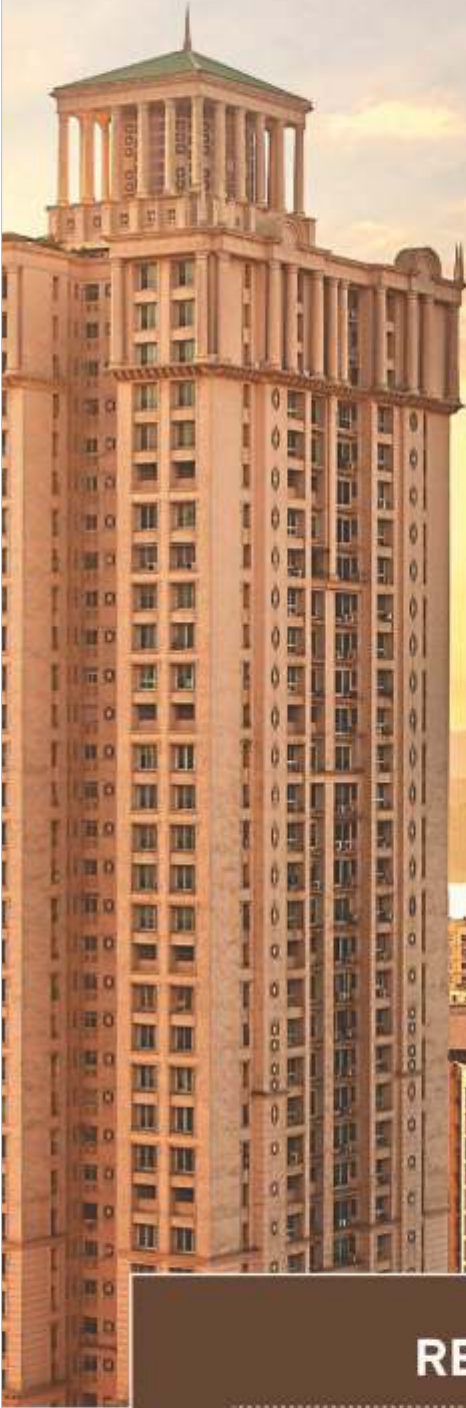
Signed by Sqn Ldr AK Das, OC No. 110 HU; AF in a letter to COAS, Air HQ, dated 22 June, 1975.

May the Tiger (Jamasji) keep fighting fit, whilst we draw inspiration from his heroic tales!

“Throughout the operation, Flt Lt PR Jamasji displayed high standard of professional competence and utmost devotion to the Air Force duties with complete disregard to personal comfort. For his selfless devotion to duty, professional skill of high order and hard work, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT PARVEZ RUSTOMJI JAMASJI, VrC is strongly recommended for Commendation by the Chief of the Air Staff.”



Squadron Leader Parvez Rustomji Jamasji, VrC



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reason of existence
and its happiness is
our motivation.*

Actual image shot at Hiranandani Gardens, Powai

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AN ICON FOR THE MADRAS SAPPERS



A Sapper Today



An ICON for the Madras Sappers

On the intervening night of 3/4 Dec 71, the Indian Army crossed the International border spearheaded by 47 BRIGADE; 74 and 91 BRIGADES followed suit covering a wide front. There was a momentary halt around Thakurdwara (3 December 71) after a Centurion was stuck in a minefield. This was the first indication that Pak minefields existed beyond that point. This was the very first time that trawls were used to breach enemy minefield. MAJ VR CHOWDHRY and his field company quickly got on with the task although there was not much interference. This is an operation that brings out the reality that the attacking elements have to depend upon the sappers to clear as a vehicle safe lane (VSL) through a mine field or other obstacles under very challenging situations.

COL KS RAJAMANI, (RETD)

During the year 1971, war clouds once again threatened peace in the subcontinent. As a result of a crackdown by the Army to suppress political unrest in erstwhile East Pakistan; refugees started pouring into India in their millions to escape the tyranny. India was therefore forced to act, as the massive influx of refugees was undermining her stability. International community could do nothing. Besides, Pak air force bombed Pathankot, Srinagar and Agra among others later in the year, to compel India to divert its forces to the west.

Our belligerent neighbor expected India to be cowed down by such pre-emptive airstrikes. It was a testing time for the entire Nation. He was mistaken. The country had to respond in a way that the people are relieved of the unwholesome burden thrust upon them. The result...a military conflict that ultimately led to the birth of Bangladesh. It was during these turbulent times, that India decided to take offensive action across the International border.

India was forced to declare war. The strategy as conceived by the Chief, then Gen Sam Manekshaw, MC was to defend cities like Pathankot, Madhopur and protect the National Highway between Jammu and Pathankot that at places was very close to the International Border. It was decided to attack Pakistan at a place of India's choosing. While 36, 39 DIVISIONS of 1 CORPS (Lt Gen KK Singh) ensured the protection task, 54 DIVISION under Maj Gen WAG Pinto was earmarked to attack via the Samba-Zafarwal sector. The timing of such an assault was chosen i.e., December 1971.

It is interesting to note that the International Border from Samba to Dinanagar, Gurdaspur was bulging into Indian Territory almost choking the highway to Pathankot. It was our intention to straighten this



Major VR Chowdhry, MVC (Posthumous)

Shakargarh bulge. Hence 54 DIVISION with 16(I) ARMOURED BRIGADE was tasked to attack Pakistan across River Basantar. This is the story of this battle that will be etched in GOLD in the history of 9 ENGINEER REGIMENT of THE MADRAS SAPPERS who undertook the onerous task of breaching very deep minefields under heavy shelling and accurate small arms fire.

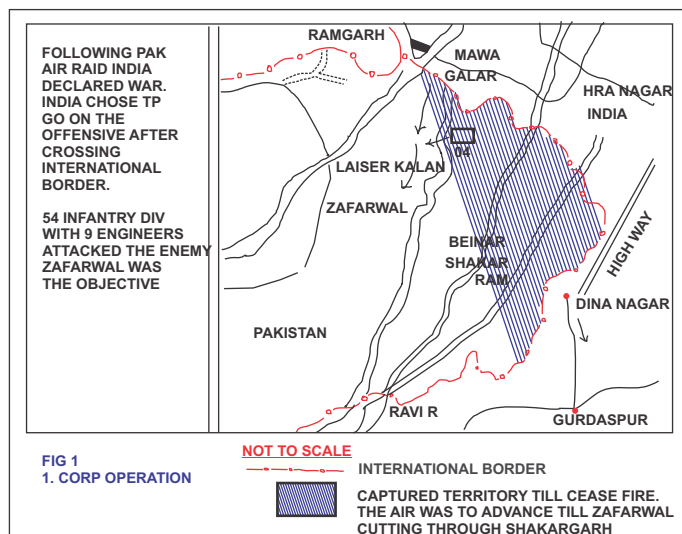
During the first week of November 1971, the COAS Gen SHFJ Manekshaw MC (later Field Marshal) addressed all officers of 54 INFANTRY DIVISION at a village close to the border near Samba. He stressed that the formation must be prepared to enter Pakistan as political climate looked grim. This was hint enough for the formation commander to use their reconnaissance teams to gather as much information as possible so that when ordered; his assault elements just move in to Pak territory with lightning speed and supreme confidence.

It must be remembered that time is the essence in assaulting across enemy obstacles. While the infantry and armored vehicles have to pierce through to gain a foothold, the engineers must breach obstacles immediately thereafter to enable more armored vehicles to rush to aid the bridgehead which otherwise would be easily overwhelmed by enemy to blunt momentum of our attack. Simultaneously, the sappers also have to do 'trail blazing' so that rear echelons could provide administrative support to assaulting elements. The sappers had to clear a pathway up to the International Border with dozers and earth-moving machines. This enabled the armor and infantry to proceed ahead with speed and efficiency.

On the intervening night of 3rd/4th Dec 1971, the Indian Army crossed the International border spearheaded by 47 BRIGADE; 74 and 91 BRIGADES followed suit covering a wide front. After moving unrestricted for a few kilometers into Pak territory, infantry columns brushed aside a few Pak outposts. There was a momentary halt around Thakurdwara (3 December 71) after a Centurion was stuck in a minefield. This was the first indication that Pak minefields existed beyond that point. But 3 GRENADIERS kept up the momentum and attacked enemy positions further ahead. 9 ENGINEER REGIMENT was immediately ordered by the CO Lt Col BT Pandit to commence breaching with 7 CAVALRY trawls in the lead. 405 FIELD COMPANY under Major VR Chowdhry was tasked to commence breaching with trawl troop from 16(I) ARMOURED BRIGADE.

This was the very first time that trawls were used to breach enemy minefield. Maj Chowdhry and his field company quickly got on with

“During the first week of November 1971, the COAS Gen SHFJ Manekshaw MC (later Field Marshal) addressed all officers of 54 Infantry Division at a village close to the border near Samba. He stressed that the formation must be prepared to enter Pakistan as political climate looked grim. This was hint enough for the formation commander to use their reconnaissance teams to gather as much information as possible so that when ordered; his assault elements just move in to Pak territory with lightning speed and supreme confidence.”



the task although there was not much interference. But the noise caused by the Centurion stumbling across a mine, invited immediate response from the Pakistanis. They opened up with their artillery. But Thakurdwara fell in to our hands. In the din of the battle, the sappers could hear the enemy tanks also revving up in the distance. They continued beyond Thakurdwara unmindful of the heavy shelling and intermittent small arms fire. The armored column was already deep inside Pakistan with the Infantry pushing ahead. A few Pattons tried to fire to at the Indian Centurions. But concerted action by our armor forced the enemy to retreat leaving behind some destroyed Pattons.

On 8th December, based on our patrol reports and intelligence, Chakra and Barkhanja were chosen as the next objectives. 2/Lt Mandanna and 2/Lt Brar did a reconnaissance that helped the CO to understand the state of minefield at these locations. Barkhanja minefield was tackled first. The Pakis had deployed some troops to delay beyond this point. But the sappers cleared this minefield quickly while the infantry brushed aside enemy resistance.

Beyond 9th December, the plan was to tackle Pakistani positions at Chakra with 74 BRIGADE and 405 FIELD COMPANY under Major Chowdhary. He commenced the breaching immediately. Due to uncertainty of such battles, a Centurion was stuck right in the middle of the path. But Nb Sub Doraiswamy took upon himself the dangerous task of making a detour through the minefield. The gallant JCO was awarded the VrC. Almost simultaneously, 47 BRIGADE turned towards Lagwal, Hamral and Suraj Chak. The ding-dong battle raged with the Indian troops keeping up the pressure while the Pakistanis tried everything to stop them.

Capt RN Gupta (404 FIELD COMPANY) was tasked with 3 GRENADIERS and 16 MADRAS with tanks of 17 HORSE (POONA) (15 Dec). While the infantry and tanks smashed across towards Lagwal (held in strength by Pakistanis), the sappers breached the deep minefield under heavy shelling. By the 16th of December, 16 MADRAS had entered Lallial forest area. Their CO Lt Col Ghai was awarded MVC (Posth) for this determined action. They held this position despite desperate attempts by enemy to dislodge them. Almost simultaneously, heavy tank 17 HORSE (POONA) battle raged across the Basantar. This is where the gallant officer 2/Lt Arun Khetrpal of 17 Poona Horse earned his PVC (Posth).

The battle across Basantar was so intense, that the sappers had to open up multiple passages through minefield over a kilometer wide

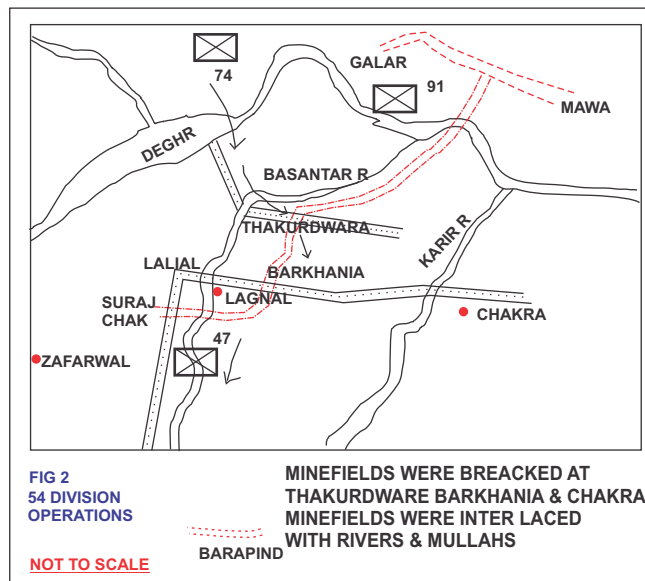
that existed in conjunction with nullahs of Basantar. At one stage, a composite team of 404 (Capt RN Gupta) and 405 (Maj Chowdhry) FIELD COMPANIES were formed for the huge task. In the nick of time, the task was completed and the Centurions dashed across through the path to meet the counter attack by Pattons. It must be mentioned that here the last few metres of the minefield was not fenced. The sappers fell short of pickets! But Capt Gupta himself joined the sappers to guide tanks through unmarked minefield. But the young captain perished when a shell crashed just near him. He was awarded the VrC.

Here are the own words of the, CO Lt Col BT Pandit, VrC (now Lt Gen Retired) about Maj VR Chowdhry: *"It was in 1971, I was commanding 9 ENGINEER REGIMENT of the famous Bangalore based MADRAS SAPPERS. My Regiment was deployed in the Western Theatre. I was lucky to have a highly motivated and well trained team with me. Late Maj VR Chowdhry was my leading company commander.*

During the war, most of our important and critical task was breaching of minefields laid by the enemy to inflict heavy casualties on our troops, vehicles and tanks, thereby hoping to bring our advance to a grinding halt. Clearance of minefields in wartime is a highly hazardous task since it is always carried out in pitch darkness under enemy fire and artillery shelling. Time factor is extremely critical to checkmate the enemy's counter offensive. Maj Chowdhry, with his field company carried out all assigned tasks in an exemplary manner and in record time. As a result, the enemy was shocked and suffered successive defeats with heavy losses in men and material.

Throughout this offensive from 3rd to 17th December 71, Maj VR Chowdhry personally supervised the operations thus inspiring and motivating his men with utter disregard to personal safety. His Field Company was stretched to its limits; but this gallant officer rushed from site to site unmindful of dangers at every turn. He displayed exemplary devotion to duty, extraordinary bravery and leadership of the highest order.

Unfortunately, on the last day of the war (17 December 71), that too just a few hours before cease-fire that came into effect at 2000 hrs, he was killed in action due to enemy shelling. He was, very deservedly, awarded the coveted MVC posthumously. He is now an icon of the Madras Sappers and of 9 ENGINEER REGIMENT. His name is etched



in golden letters in the proud post-Independence History of the Indian Army.”

Author's Footnote

While I write this, I am merely basking in the glory earned in battle by the men of 9 ENGINEER REGIMENT (now called the RAPID NINE ENGINEERS). I had never known late Maj Chowdhry. He was older than me and quite senior when I joined the unit as a captain. He was martyred before I joined as a replacement, as the unit had lost a number of officers in the battle zone. As I went around the unit and the surrounding areas, I stopped at the minefields that were breached by the Madras Sappers.

I conjured up the images of men, tanks and the sappers by gazing at the vast plains of Pakistan. I touched the barbed wire fence that was once held by these brave men. I even visited Lallial forest where troops of 16 MADRAS were entrenched. Some destroyed Pattons lay in the distance. I can't forget those who were awarded VrCs and Sena Medals and always remember many who were killed in action. Many were also mentioned in despatches.

The action by 9 ENGINEER REGIMENT in an offensive operation is a typical case study in higher level military institutions. It has all the elements i.e., sound planning, surprise, decisiveness, high class teamwork and leadership of the highest order. The credit for all this goes to the CO Lt Col BT Pandit, VrC (now Lt Gen, retired).

It should be noted that the MADRAS SAPPERS had to contend with very deep minefields contrary to teachings in manuals. They also breached such minefields and were never overawed by their size! In fact, the successful breaching of all these minefields demoralized the enemy who had assumed that the Indian Army could never cross them. It surprised them even more that the gallant men on ground could withstand heavy shelling and small arms fire. Even the Pak Air force failed to deter them.

This is an operation that brings out the reality that the attacking elements have to solely depend upon the sappers to vehicle safe lanes (VSL) through a mine field or other obstacles under very challenging situations. This is a necessity if victory has to be ensured. In this particular case, the MADRAS SAPPERS won the hearts of the infantry and the armor by ensuring that they never failed them at any stage. In the same way the heavy traffic that followed with ammunition, ration and so on followed the trail that the Madras Sappers had blazed continuously from beginning to end.

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THE TRUE POSITION OF ARTILLERY SUPPORT IN CHHAMB



Artillery Position 1971



The True Position of Artillery Support in Chhamb

The accidental but praiseworthy role of the unfortunate 216 MED REGT that suffered the maximum in preventing the enemy from establishing a Br H across M Tawi is summed up by Maj Gen Fazal Muqueem Khan (of Pak Army) in 'Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership': "...When two battalions crossed Manawar Tawi near Mandiala, they came across a well-fortified artillery regiment resulting in the attack being petered out and the battalions had to fall back with heavy casualties..." Had the enemy succeeded and more so with the Mandiala Br too being temporarily held by him, 191 INF BDE of 4 battalions and 10 ARTY BDE less 2 regiments would have been cut off and wiped out/captured. At least 61 decomposed bodies of enemy soldiers were found at the gun area of 216 MED REGT during 8-10 Dec. Similarly, 22 were found in lower heights of Kachreal and in 122 MED BTY Wagon Lines. Pertinent to note that there was neither own infantry nor armoured in those areas. Were our guns deployed too far forward?

BRIG AN SURYANARAYANAN (RETD)

For the past 46 years, I have been asked many questions such as: "Did we lose any guns in Chhamb-1971?" "Why was artillery, especially 216 MEDIUM REGIMENT, deployed so far forward?" "Was artillery support provided to 191 INFANTRY BRIGADE during the critical time of our/their withdrawal?" I was the Brigade Major of 10 ARTILLERY BRIGADE and I had maintained a pencil log of the events before, during and after the operations (based on my 1965 experience), which came in handy now. It had also helped me during Higher Command Course, to argue out these questions on 24 Sep 1983 during Chhamb Presentation in 10 INFANTRY DIVISION with Lt Gen RK Jasbir Singh (Commander 191 Infantry Brigade in 1971). Hope this article answers the above questions.



Taken within a few minutes of Pakistan Artillery opening up at 8.48 PM on 03 Dec 1971 it shows: Brig K (nicknamed 'Henry') Srinivasan (in a cam jacket), Commander at Fire Direction Centre in Sakrana Grove, close to Chhamb Village: (L to R) Maj AN Suryanarayanan (with a telephone), Brigade Major; Intelligence Officer, Capt CK Pasi (standing) and Survey Officer, Capt AK Kher

Some information on topography needs mention here:

A Cease Fire Line existed from just West of Laleali 4571 to just East of Uparla Batala 4468 (with Red Hill 4569 on our side), to just West of Pir Jamal 4863, then between Koil 4760 and Moel 4860, thereafter touching Bokan 4857, down to International Boundary (IB) at Melu 4952 (West of Burejal 5053)

There were no Ditch-cum-Bundhs on our side. The enemy had one long bundh, but no DCB in 1971. There were just two axes from East to West in Div Sect: N&S. Southern Axis ran from Akhnoor 8669 via Rakh Muthi 7563-Jaurian/Mandiala Village-Khaur 8559 (tarred till here and turning South to Sidhar 6753)-Palanwala 6061 and finally to Mandiala

Bridge 5565. A motorable fair weather road ran beyond Southern Axis via Mandiala Bridge (Br) over Gurha 5365-Kumauli Chappar 5266-Ghopar 5267-Dewa 4968-Dhoden Dhok 4869 to Keri 4972 and was in use for our field firing and for occupation by the Light Bty for Keri. Northern Axis was a fair weather road running from Bhagwan Chak 7264-South of Kalith 6865-Nariana 6562- Pahariwala 6362-Kachreal.

Having been ordered on 12 Oct 1971 to move and deploy in operational area, 10 Artillery Brigade spread over five locations in Pathankot and one in Jaurian J&K with 12, 18, 81 FIELD; 39 MED and 86 LIGHT REGIMENTS and 127 DIVISIONAL LOCATING BATTERY ready in 24 hours. 65/45 AD BATTERY (L-70) and E/151 AD TROOP (L-60) joined 24 hours later. 216 MEDIUM REGIMENT (130 mm guns) inducted on Night 12/13 Nov 1971, was secreted in a 'Hide' at Kachreal 5863, one kilometer to the west of 39 MEDIUM REGIMENT at 5763. As these locations and the Sunderbani (Hill) Sect are not material to our subject, their details are not covered. Only the Plains Sect specifically 191 INFANTRY BRIGADE is covered. After a visit by COAS on 01 Nov 1971, preparations for a probable limited offensive were done and accordingly FDC with 12 FIELD (less a Bty), 81 FIELD and a battery of 18 FIELD moved up to Area Sakrana 5363/5463. Gun areas ahead were recced, surveyed and ammunition pits dug and well camouflaged for the possible limited offensive.

But in the defensive posture towards the limited offensive, only gun-pits and fire trenches were dug and local defence of gun areas coordinated. Trials were carried out with 2 propaganda shells in Area Sukh Tau Nala 5068 in own area on 01 Dec, which would indicate 'limited offensive mania' still existing. Orders from HQ 10 Infantry Division on 02 Dec 1971 were to remain in defensive posture as hostilities were imminent on 04 Dec 1971, the likely D Day of the enemy but to re-adjust existing positions not being very suitable for any full-fledged attack by the enemy, some adjustments were made.

During night 02/03 Dec 1971, at least 11 out of the 23 Artillery Observation Post officers reported to me hearing tank noises along the CFL and IB from 2300 to 0230 hours. When reported to the Div HQ, it was serially dismissed as dummy tanks/dozers/pre-recorded tank noises. The very next night when the enemy attack commenced, Capt Ravinder Kaura, 39 MED REGT (missing believed killed but news reports even now claim he is a PW) from Moel got through to the GSO-2 Ops and invited him to hear the 'dummy' tank noises from close quarters! It was again arty OPs who had first reported on 16 Nov 1971 the presence of Patton tanks opposite the Div Sect, which too had

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been lightly dismissed! Limited offensive mania, I wonder?

On night 03/04 Dec 1971, the deployment of guns west of M Tawi were:

- No change in field regiments in Sakrana.
- FDC in Sakrana Grove, with preparations made to move out at 7 pm to Area Khunda 6360 but stopped by the GOC at 6:40 pm, after pre-emptive airstrikes on our airfields at 6 pm.

On night 03/04 Dec 1971, the deployment of guns east of M Tawi:

- Bty ex 12 Fd Regt: Akhnoor
- 18 FD REGT less Bty: Nikkiar 6458
- 39 MED REGT: Kachreal
- 216 MED REGT: Near Kachreal, but at 7.30 pm on 03 Dec, gun group was in the process of deploying in area Chapreal, (1 km west of Lundi Bharuti in later maps)
- Bty 86 LT REGT: Akhnur.

Deployment east vs west of M. Tawi: Were Guns too Far Forward with the Above Deployment?

(Note that normally, the farthest expected target should fall within 80% range of normal ammunition, which could not be done even when this far forward):

- Laleali, the farthest feature, could be covered by 5.5" guns with a play of just about 2000 yards.
- Guns west of M. Tawi could hit the BOPs with a max play of 2000 yards.
- If these guns were deployed east of M. Tawi, none of the BOPs, screen positions and covering troops, as per the then defence posture could be covered. For troops west of Tawi, there was an obstacle to their rear in own area, with just one bridge and 4 ford-crossings, with 2 being sandy in dry winters: a sure invitation for vehicles getting stuck! That is why defensive battle was planned in terms of screen positions and covering troops West of M. Tawi.

Operations:

- 24 OPs were provided to the Plains Sector of which 12 (including 9 FD and 3 MED) OPs were for 191 INF BDE of 4 battalions.
- Although many post commanders were JCOs, all our OPs were Officers. (We lost 3 within the first 36 hrs.)

All HQs and units were committed in pay parade that evening, as the Field Cashier could not get the cash on 01 or 02 Dec. And, most were on the movement that fateful evening/night:

“There is a mistaken belief that the enemy blew up some guns of F Med Regt; it is TOTALLY FALSE. NO GUN OF ANY ARTY UNIT WAS BLOWN UP BY ENEMY IN 1971 IN CHHAMB SECTOR. Five guns of F Med Regt were badly damaged (solid tyres were burnt out until wheel-discs touched the steel plates below) due to air strikes, sympathetic detonation of own ammunition during enemy shelling by DIRECT observation from Mandiala (which was lost) and KachrealHts (never occupied!) During the intense phase of ops and under repeated air attacks on 05-07 Dec

”

- Div HQ from Sohal to Anderwal
- 52 INF BDE from Troti 6871 to Khaur
- All 3 squadrons of 9 HORSE (DECCAN) moving forward to various locations
- 72 ARMOURED REGIMENT from Palwan to Baghwan Chak
- Bn ex 68 INF BDE, from Akhnur to Troti
- FDCs move from Sakrana Grove to Khunda was luckily stopped (as above) though we had to re-dig
- 216 MED REGT was deploying that very moment

Sequence of Events and Arty Support:

- Gun positions well dug in and camouflaged.
- All DF tasks re-surveyed and up-to-date Task Tables issued to infantry.
- On night 03/04 Dec, Arty units in Plains Sector had their First Line ammunition and 18, 81 and 39 and BATTERY 12 FD with 2 second lines in gun position; 216 MED REGT had 1 and 2nd was being dumped.

At 2048 hrs on 03 Dec 1971, a Friday, enemy artillery started heavy shelling all along the Div front, West of M Tawi from Pqt 707 (Pt 2087) 4773, right till Takho Chak. OPs started calling on line and without awaiting any clearance from Div, I ordered breaking of radio silence and our guns started engaging DFs at 2056 hours at Pir Jamal, Moel and 707.

By 2130 hrs, 35 HOSTILE BATTERY/HOSTILE MORTAR (HB/HM) locations had been obtained by DLB and we engaged them. Our gun areas were shelled from 2220 hrs. That same night 216 MED REGT reported that their gun area was being engaged by small arms (SA) by about 12 unidentified personnel in khaki from across Tawi. I personally spoke to Cdr 191 INF BDE who told us NOT to open fire, as they may be BSF personnel withdrawing and may be firing due to fog of war. The nuisance continued so I contacted him again, when he said it may be some infiltrating party of the enemy and NOT the BSF and so we could engage.

Regt fired their SA; the nuisance stopped. At 0410 hrs, 216 Med Regt was heavily shelled for the first time (240 rounds in 15 mins). Between 0748 am and 530 pm, 04 Dec, 7 missions had flown over gun areas both sides of M Tawi. In the meantime, CO 39 Med Regt personally led a 5.5" gun to Manawar Village to destroy 2 bunkers in 20r 5653 and the Mattewala Tower 5653 (enemy's only tall tower those days, while we had none). By 1000 hrs, 5 more Sabres attacked 39 MED REGT East of Tawi. By 1530 hrs, Mandiala North Hts had been overrun by the enemy and could not be retaken despite a counterattack. At 1540 hrs, both

“From about 0230 to 0400 hrs on next night (04/05 Dec), F Med Regt came under very heavy shelling, that wasn't like a CB fireplan. It was learnt later from the map captured by Capt Deepak Kaul, ETp/H AD Regt from Lt Col Basharat Ahmed of 13 POK Bn (on Night 05/06 Dec) lying wounded under Mandiala Bridge and pleading for evacuation, that the gun area/ Chapreal was to be enemy bridgehead (Br H) across M Tawi. (The highest ranking in Western sect who had a copy of Fire Plan codenamed "Broken Jaw", which was taken, copied and passed on to Div HQ along with him as PW).”

med gun areas were attacked by Sabres and at 1645 hours an enemy Air OP Cessna L-19 Bird Dog aircraft flew over med gun areas for the third time, followed at 1730 hrs, by a 7th mission of Sabres.

From about 0230 to 0400 hrs on next night (04/05 Dec), 216 Med Regt came under very heavy shelling which was unlike a CB fire plan. It was learnt later from the map captured by Capt Deepak Kaul, E/151 from Lt Col Basharat Ahmed of 13 AK Bn (on Night 05/06 Dec) lying wounded under Mandiala Bridge and pleading for evacuation, that the gun area/Chapreal was to be enemy bridgehead (Br H) across M Tawi. (The highest ranking in Western sect who had a copy of Fire plan code named "Broken Jaw", which was taken, copied and passed on to Div HQ along with him as PW). Soon the shelling shifted to 39 Med Regt gun area. At 0410 hrs, 216 MED REGT reported a physical assault by enemy infantry on their two forward batteries and sought armour assistance.

Enemy contacted both the forward batteries simultaneously from the West and a firefight took place for about half an hour. Failing in his attempt, the enemy skirted around and contacted the depth battery and Adjutant's Command Post area; but they fiercely resisted not only by SA fire but by open sights from their guns, on Arty Bde Cdr's advice.

By then 216 MED REGT had lost: 1 JCO and 50 gunners killed and 2 officers, 2 JCOs and 30 gunners wounded. Hardly any personnel were left to man the two forward batteries so the remainder were ordered to fall back and build on the depth battery. By 0500 hrs, enemy was in contact of Mandiala Bridge too! Information was received at 0600 hrs that 7 KUMAON was on its way to East bank of Tawi on the Northern Axis and 216 MED REGT was told to hold fast and contact them on arrival. But they arrived a good 5 hours later and were shelled at debussing point. As the enemy could not make headway on to the depth battery and RHQ, he outflanked the gun area from the North, climbed to Kachreal Hts and attacked the Wagon Lines of both Med Regts.

Meanwhile the other enemy column who had contacted the left forward battery of 216 MED REGT went towards 65 AD BATTERY and the northern battery of 39 MED REGT at Kachreal and attacked them twice at 0700 and 0930 hrs. But 39 MED REGT forewarned was prepared as the CO too was at the gun position, besides the 2ic which is normal. Sabres joined in at 0730 hrs. Now it was the turn of 39 MED REGT and 65 AD BATTERY to use guns in direct laying to devastating effect. At 0940 hrs, 216 MED REGT reported that with a total casualty of 102 personnel in the forward 2 batteries (Killed: 1 JCO and

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”

62 OR; wounded: 3 officers, 2 JCOs and 30 OR; Missing 4 OR), they were ineffective and that the depth (Q) battery and RHQ would continue to engage the enemy and provide fire support. That night, they were ordered to join 39 MED REGT as the fourth ('S') Bty.

There is a mistaken belief that the enemy blew up some guns of 216 Med Regt; it is TOTALLY FALSE. NO GUN OF ANY ARTY UNIT WAS BLOWN UP BY ENEMY IN 1971 IN CHHAMB SECTOR. Five guns of 216 MED REGT were badly damaged (solid tyres were burnt out until wheel-discs touched the steel plates below) due to air strikes, sympathetic detonation of own ammunition during enemy shelling by DIRECT observation from Mandiala (which was lost) and Kachreal Hts (never occupied!) During the intense phase of ops and under repeated air attacks on 05-07 Dec, Arty Bde Cdr Brig K. Srinivasan, with his Intelligence Officer, Capt CK Pasi (later Col.) assisted by 2ic 216 MED REGT, Maj (later Lt Col) RC Passi and advised on technical aspects in situ by Maj MN Kelkar of 240 FIELD WORKSHOP COMPANY Supervised retrieval of the 5 damaged guns from Chapreal and damaged Kraz vehicles from Kachreal. Of these, 4 guns were repaired at Base Workshop and only one was declared 'Beyond Economic Repair' and is now held at Arty Museum, at Arty Centre, Nashik Road. One each of 25 Pounder and L-60 guns was damaged badly due to airstrikes/ enemy shelling. NO gun of 39 MED REGT was damaged.

The accidental but praiseworthy role of the unfortunate 216 Med Regt that suffered the maximum in preventing the enemy from establishing a Br H across M Tawi is summed up by Maj Gen Fazal Muqueem Khan (of Pak Army) in 'Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership': "...When two battalions crossed Manawar Tawi near Mandiala, they came across a well-fortified artillery regiment resulting in the attack being petered out and the battalions had to fall back with heavy casualties..." Had the enemy succeeded and more so with the Mandiala Br too being temporarily held by him, 191 Inf Bde of 4 battalions and 10 Arty Bde less 2 regiments would have been cut off and wiped out/captured. At least 61 decomposed bodies of enemy soldiers were found at the gun area of 216 MED REGT during 8-10 Dec. Similarly, 22 were found in lower heights of Kachreal and in 122 MED BTY Wagon Lines. Pertinent to note that there was neither own infantry nor armoured in those areas.

Were Guns Deployed Too Far Forward?

Seriously, NONE was 216 MED REGT gun position at Chapreal was suitable for both offensive and defensive operations of the Div,

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However, after Cdr raising the same at least 4 times to the GOC (in my presence), the latter gave out his reasoning thus: "...Just imagine what will happen to Inf and armour if they see or hear about guns being pulled back across Mandiala Bridge. Wait for 24 hrs and I shall move not only F Med but all guns West of Tawi to the East, tomorrow night." There were other witnesses to this: Lt Col V Balachandran and Capt CK Pasi. Cdr Arty would not give in; he insisted that at least F Med Regt which was under direct observation from Mandiala Hts and thus under repeated threat be redeployed East of D Med at Kachreal. But GOC stuck to his decision which, in hindsight now, may appear incorrect. Watching the incessant clamour for 'medium fire' from all OPs at my FDC may have been another reason that influenced his mind and decision; and one cannot really fault him for it, as can be noted from the fact that F Med Regt fired 240 rounds within the first few minutes of their readiness.

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provided Mandiala and Kachreal Hts continued to be held by own troops. It could well have been deployed 3 km east of that position PURELY FOR A DEF BATTLE, PROVIDED THE 'LIMITED OFFENSIVE READINESS' HAD BEEN CALLED OFF. IT IS THEREFORE INCORRECT TO SAY MED GUNS (OR ANY ARTY GUNS) HAD BEEN DEPLOYED TOO FAR FORWARD. From 216 MED REGT Gun Area, the nearest distance to CFL/IB was 11 KM, while Reduced Charge of 50% of ammunition authorised covers only 19 km of which 80% is taken as effective, ie, 15.2 km. In such a case, moving 3 more km east would have served no purpose for limited offensive. 25 pounder guns west of Tawi were 7 km from the nearest point of CFL, while the max range for the (Standard) Charge 3 is 10.5 KM.

Such critics may note that right from the time when 216 MED REGT reported that around 12 personnel were engaging their gun area from across M Tawi, Cdr Arty had been impressing upon the GOC the wisdom of pulling back ALL GUNS from West to the East. GOC 10 Inf Div had spent bulk of the time during 03-07 Dec 1971 in my FDC, as our communications were excellent and a clear picture of the developing battle could be read by him. Prior to this a Cessna Bird Dog had flown low over our gun areas thrice at 0710, 1100 and 1645 hrs on 04 Dec, which was invariably followed by heavy shelling and air strikes. Ordinary prudence would never permit pulling guns back after just one night. However, after Cdr raising the same at least 4 times to the GOC (in my presence), the latter gave out his reasoning thus: "...Just imagine what will happen to Inf and armour if they see or hear about guns being pulled back across Mandiala Bridge. Wait for 24 hrs and I shall move not only 216 but all guns West of Tawi to the East, tomorrow night."

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“Was artillery support (arty sp) provided to 191 INFANTRY BRIGADE during the critical time of our/their withdrawal?”

Anyone asking this question is ignorant of the chronology of events, because while guns were pulled back in phases/batteries from West of Tawi on Night 05/06, units of 191 INF BDE pulled back the next night, ie, 06/07 Dec. During the day of 05 Dec 1971, GOC decided to redeploy arty that night from area Chhamb-Sakrana West of M Tawi to more secure positions in the East starting at 1800 hrs. The fire support that was available to 191 INF BDE during that period was:

More than the above MINIMUM DENSITY of fire WAS AVAILABLE TO 191 INF BDE ON THE NEXT NIGHT WHEN THEY PULLED BACK as our movement was over very short distances. Once it was decided to have the div defence layout to the East of M Tawi as per defence plan known to all, arty was re-deployed during Night 06/07 Dec. No time was needed for recce and only a little improvement of old defences and preparation was needed. Orders were issued at 2100 hrs and units commenced movement at 2300 hrs (the last time of withdrawal of all infantry and armoured formations West to East of M Tawi when Mandiala Br was partially demolished) and were ready between 0230 and 0300 hrs, 07 Dec 1971. The new locations were:

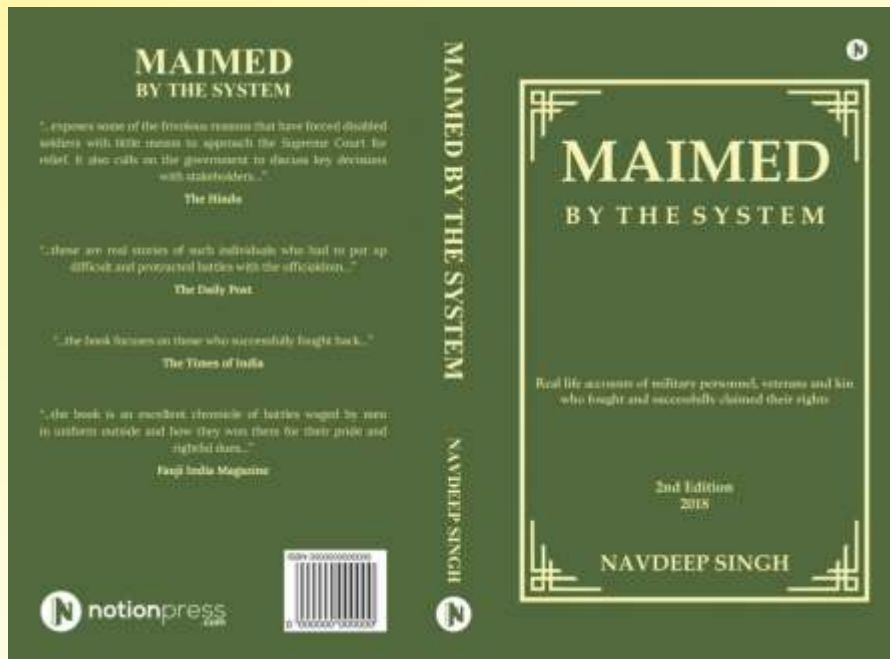
- 12 FD REGT (less one Bty at Akhnur): Pahariwala 6262/6263. *Bty to join up.
- 18 FD REGT: Continue, except that Bty with 12 Fd to build on the Regt
- 81 FD REGT: Khunda 6360
- 39 MED REGT: Pahariwala 6362
- 216 MED REGT: Danwal 6964
- 121 LT BTY: Dherian 6455
- FDC: KHAUR 6559; to move on Night 07/08 Dec

During 08 and 09-10 Dec, a few attempts by the enemy to establish Br H East of Tawi were repulsed by counter-attacks for which effective arty support was provided. Casualty figures of personnel, vehicles and eqpt are not covered being irrelevant to the topic.

“Once it was decided to have the div defence layout to the East of M Tawi as per defence plan known to all, arty was re-deployed during Night 06/07 Dec. No time was needed for recce and only a little improvement of old defences and preparation was needed. Orders were issued at 2100 hrs and units commenced movement at 2300 hrs (the last time of withdrawal of all infantry and armoured formations West to East of M Tawi when Mandiala Br was partially demolished) and were ready between 0230 and 0300 hrs, 07 Dec 1971.”

MAIMED BY THE SYSTEM (2018)

MAJOR NAVDEEP SINGH



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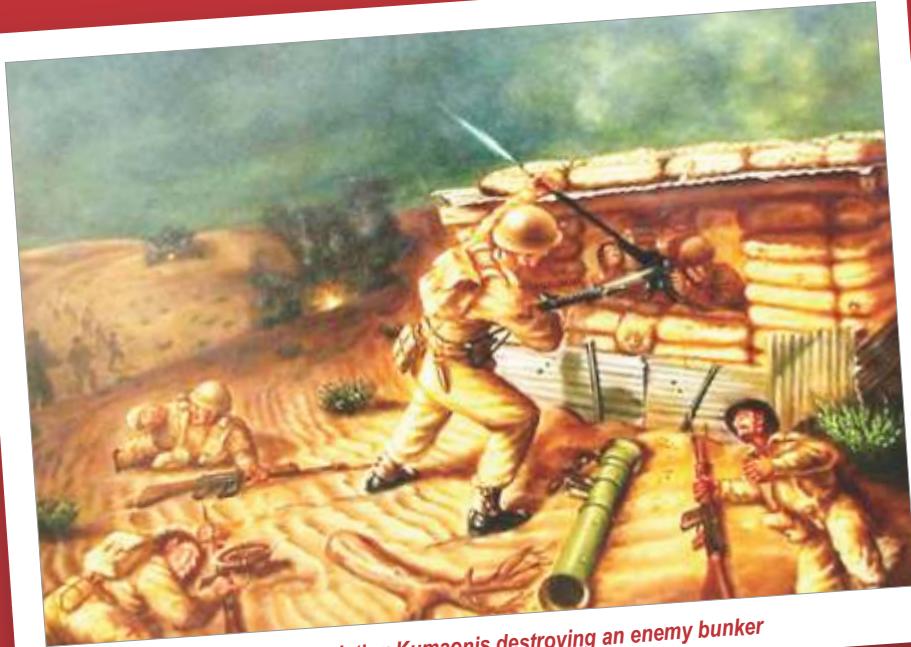
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MALHARIS' BATTLE OF GADRA CITY, 1971 WAR



A painting depicting Kumaonis destroying an enemy bunker



Malharis' Battle of Gadra City, 1971 War

COL NN BHATIA (RETD)

The Battle of Gadra City fought on the night of 4/5 December 1971 was one of the important battles in the Western Theatre. 15 KUMAON (INDORE) won a famous victory on the back of sound leadership, detailed planning and extensive rehearsals, great comradeship and flawless execution involving surprise and personal bravery. Before the description of the battle proper it would be useful to understand the geography of the area.

Gadra City lies on the edge of Cholistan desert. The name Cholistan comes from Cholna, a Saraiki word meaning 'moving or shifting sand', thereby meaning 'the desert of shifting sand'. Cholistan Desert locally called as Rohi is spread over in 26,300 square km area sprawling thirty kilometers from Bahawalpur in Pakistan's Punjab Province adjoining the the Great Indian Desert or the Thar Desert extending over to Sind in Pakistan and Rajasthan in India.

Geographical Setting

Gadra City lies on the edge of Cholistan desert. The name Cholistan comes from Cholna, a Saraiki word meaning 'moving or shifting sand', thereby meaning 'the desert of shifting sand'. Cholistan Desert locally called as Rohi is spread over in 26,300 square km area sprawling thirty kilometers from Bahawalpur in Pakistan's Punjab Province adjoining the the Great Indian Desert or the Thar Desert extending over to Sind in Pakistan and Rajasthan in India. The people of Cholistan lead a semi-nomadic life, moving from one place to another in search of water and fodder for their animals. Many settlements of the Indus Civilization existed in the Hakra River Valley in the ancient times.

Barmer is the largest city in the region on Indian side known for its folk music, dance, carved wooden furniture and hand block printing industry. Uttarlai, India's first underground airbase is situated in Barmer while the town has a small military cantonment. In Rajasthan, the India-Pakistan border runs around 1040 kilometer passing through border districts of Ganganagar, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Barmer. The border villages of the Thar Desert are inhabited by Hindu and Muslim cattle breeders and sheep farmers who during draught migrate to distant places in search of water and fodder. The Pakistan Rangers and Mujahids often looted the border villages and kept the area hot.

Barmer has a roughly 240 km border with Pakistan. An eight kilometer sand track linked Gadra Road Railway Station with the

Pakistani village Gadra City, which is situated 50 kilometer east of Munabao, the last Indian railway station while Khokhrapar is the first Pakistani station across the border and both are of strategic significance. Shifting sand is peculiar to this sector that creates peculiar logistical problems. The shifting sand dunes shaped in long ridges are covered by wave like curves formed by winds. The vegetation is sparse and climate extreme-very hot in summers but nights are pleasantly cool and equally cold in winters with scanty rain in between. Land marks exist only near water points and navigation is difficult. Communications are sparse and due to no obstacles terrain is excellent for tank movement but nightmare for the movement of 'B' vehicles and the logistic support is best maintained by camels. The fewer roads, Munabao and Khokrapar railway stations either side of the border, Gadra Road, Gadra City, Dali, Bagal, Naya Chor and Barmer are strategically significant, while all water points and desert tracks in this area are tactically important. The only way to conserve body water is to carry out operations in between the last light and the first light and not to move in the sun.

Gadra and its Famous Laddoos

Gadra village with the population of 10,000, on the Indo-Pak border is about 75 km from Barmer town. It's a well-settled village of Pakistani Hindu migrant engaged in organised handicrafts trade for which Gadra is very famous now. The lower castes stitch, weave and embroider handicrafts and the richer traders take them across Rajasthan and even export the finished goods. The village, famous for its 'Gadra ke Laddoo', borrows its name from Gadra town in Sind province of Pakistan, around 5 km from the border. Chaman Bhutra says his grandfather is the man who first made the laddoos in Pakistan. Around Partition, his grandfather shifted closer to Gadra railway station, hoping that if anything went amiss, he could at least board a train and reach India.

But after Partition, the railway station area became part of India and so did the famous Gadra ke laddoos. During my first visit to Gadra in 1984, I was amazed to see the huge quantities of laddoos being made daily that perhaps were impossible to consume locally. I was told that in the late evening these were loaded on well trained camels at Gadra Road with Assam beetle nuts, paan, Sojat's henna, limestone of Jaisalmer, stainless steel utensils of Jodhpur, bhujia, papad, rasgullas of Bikaner, handicrafts of Barmer etc and textiles, dry fruits, slippers, threads, leather items, opium etc were smuggled in from Gadra City

Gadra village with the population of 10,000, on the Indo-Pak border is about 75 km from Barmer town. It's a well-settled village of Pakistani Hindu migrant and like in most other villages, the divides are glaringly stark – cemented houses for the upper castes and mud houses for the lower castes – both bonded in the organised handicrafts trade for which Gadra is very famous now. The lower castes stitch, weave and embroider handicrafts and the richer traders take them across Rajasthan and even export the finished goods. The village, famous for its 'Gadra ke Laddoo', borrows its name from Gadra town in Sind province of Pakistan, around 5 km from the border.

through well-knit smugglers network in connivance of local officials, deployed on both the sides who get their due share in the smuggling. Marriages are often solemnized across the border and jeeps laden with marriage parties fitted with balloon tyres ferry them across.

Along with the smuggling and corruption, intelligence also gets compromised. Prior to Indo-Pak war in 1965, goods trains used to ply between Jodhpur and Karachi. There were strong business relations between Sind and Marwar. After the war, the rail tracks were uprooted between Munabao and Khokhrapar on both sides and rail route were closed. After signing of the agreement by both the countries, once a week, the Thar Express has started plying on this route again.

Once a week, every Friday, the train starts from Jodhpur around mid-night to Munabao and at zero point, passengers dismount to board train for Sind and vice versa. Bilateral talks are going on between the two countries to start goods train and establish road link via Munabao to improve trade, travel and tourism bilaterally. The Indian government has fenced the J&K-Punjab-Rajasthan border with Pakistan to check ingress of militants, arms, explosives and smugglers from that country.

A Word about 15 KUMAON (INDORE)

14 and 15 KUMAON are great old Infantry Battalions of the princely state forces of Gwalior and Indore with incredible record of service in both the World Wars that joined the Kumaon Regiment in 1953. They both had successfully eliminated the Pindaris in Central India. In 1730 the Maratha ruler of the Indore, Malhar Rao Holkar raised an INFANTRY BATTALION named after him as MALHAR PALTAN that was renamed in 1886 as the 1st Battalion the Maharaja Holkar's Army that changed to 1st BATTALION the Maharaja's Guard.

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Prelude to Operations in the Barmer Sector

15 KUMAON (INDORE) also called 'Malharis' had moved to Bhuj in August 1971 from Nagaland for its well-earned peace tenure, when war clouds with Pakistan started gathering momentum over liberation of the Bangladesh. The Battalion having spent 3 years in insurgency area in the Northeast had hardly any training to combat effectively in the desert terrain. Lt Col SR Bahuguna, the Commanding Officer (CO) started desert training in Bhuj and the Battalion moved

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to its firm base in Gadra where it trained hard in battle drills for the impending operations in the third week of October 1971.

15 KUMAON (INDORE)'s Offensive from Gadra to Chachro

As the Code word 'Padlock' for move to Assembly Area was received at about 2000 hrs on 03 December 1971, the Battalion was heavily strafed by the enemy for an hour. The move was on foot with complete secrecy and enemy unaware of it. Though enemy information was sketchy, plan to capture Gadra was as under:

- *Phase 1.* Capture areas Point 658 and Whale Back by D Company (Maj Sunhara Singh) 2100 hrs on 04 Dec 1971.
- *Phase 2.* Capture areas 157 R and Dune by B Company (Maj HS Yadav) and C Company (Maj IS Budhwar) respectively by 0200 hrs on 05 Dec 1971.
- *Phase 3.* Capture Areas High Ground and Ridge by A Company (Maj AS Khatri, VrC) and D Company (Maj Sunhara Singh) respectively by 0800 hrs on 05 Dec 1971.

Execution of the Operational Plan

The International Border (IB) was crossed at 1800 hrs in darkness as moon rose two hours later. By 2200 hours, Point 658 and Whale Back that were held by the enemy patrol were captured by D Company (Maj Sunhara Singh) and Phase 1 of the Operation completed and the enemy in its main defences was totally overwhelmed and shocked. To maintain complete surprise over the enemy, no success signal was fired knowing well that it would affect commencement of Phase II and fetching up of F echelon and mortar vehicles.

As planned two objectives 157r and Dune further west to be captured by B and C Companies simultaneously in Phase II. Their forming up place (FUP) had been secured by a platoon of D Company. In the FUP, B Company was fired upon by the enemy medium machine gun (MMG). Later it was learnt from Capt Attar Khan taken as Pakistani prisoner of war (PoW) that the enemy thought assaulting force for a patrol and did not open with more weapons so as not to disclose own defences and strength.

Artillery fire was called at this stage by Maj Yadav on the enemy dispositions and surprise was lost. The enemy opened up with small arms and eight medium machine guns (MMGs) fire but the resolute and relentless charge with war cries of '*Kalika Mata ki Jai*' thundered the desert and unnerved the enemy to withdraw to depth defensive positions on the high ground and Ridge in Gadara City, leaving behind their equipment and dead soldiers in the pill boxes. The attack from

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the rear offered gentle climb but totally surprised and outwitted the enemy who resorted to artillery and mortar fire on positions vacated by him but that did not impede Malharis offensive as reorganization was done ahead of the positions captured by them. However, it did affect move of the Phase III as the enemy fire had to be skirted to avoid own casualties.

In the final phase, the enemy's main defences consisting of pill boxes on top of the dunes south of Gadra city were to be tackled. A Company (Maj AS Khatri, VrC) and D Company (Maj Sunhara Singh) moved behind enemy positions on Gadra-Dali Road to launch their assault. Enemy resorted to heavy artillery and MMG fire that mercifully was plunging. While in the FUP, own troops were fired heavily yet they assaulted relentlessly in quick dash to minimize own casualties blunting almost ten MMGs and 40-50 LMGs fire. The reserve platoon of a Company was unfortunately caught in the maze of this murderous fire and suffered very heavy casualties and ceased to exist. Over the dunes, Kumaonis offensive progressed well destroying pill boxes in their path and hand to hand fighting ensued for well over two hours until their ammunition was exhausted.

During the assault of the battle, the CO had some anxious moments as there was a lull in the firing and no signal communication could be established with his assaulting companies. But then the sky was brightened with success signal of three green lights around first light that brought cheer on capture of Gadra City as the first rays of the sun hit the great Malhari Paltan, decisive victory was once again theirs forever. While the success signal brought cheers, the rising morning sun spread its canopy over the battlefield steadily and its warmth cut the sharp chill amongst the Malhari victors.

During the assault, Lance Naik Durga Datt crawled forward to tackle an enemy bunker that had MMG inflicting heavy casualties and impeding the offensive. He lobbed a hand grenade that destroyed the gun and its crew. He moved to another bunker and was hit in the head by the burst of enemy fire from another automatic weapon. He continued moving forward and silenced the second bunker and succumbed to his injuries. Maj Sunhara Singh showed highest quality of leadership and courage when under heavy enemy fire despite the fact that he had lost his reserve platoon and yet able to capture his objective. Both were awarded well deserved VrCs for their acts of gallantry.

Sepoy Chander Singh whose platoon suffered many casualties, took LMG from the gunner who was struck due to enemy fire and charged the enemy MMG and silenced it. He was awarded Sena Medal for his

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devotion to duty and bravery, though he very well deserved a much higher gallantry award but as said by me in my numerous articles, soldiers do not fight for medals. They only fight for their 'Naam', 'Namak' and 'Nishaan'.

The CO was very effective and his calculated risks, out flanking maneuvers and striking the enemy from the rear outwitted and surprised the enemy. The junior leadership was exemplary and officers and JCOs led their men from the front.

Malharis lost one JCO and one other rank (OR) while 22 ORs were injured. Enemy losses were around 40 killed. Besides 3 PoWs, the Battalion captured one jeep, four 3 inch mortars, one 2 inch mortar, two 6 pounder guns, one Vickers MMG, one LMG, 23 rifles, one radio set, 13 camels and large quantities of ammunition.

Dali, Bagal and Beyond

The Battalion was tasked to exploit towards Dali and moved early morning on 6 Dec 1971 after much needed night rest and replenishments. Attack on Dali, believed to be held with two companies duly supported by tanks and artillery, was launched at 0100 hrs on 7 Dec 1971. Since the enemy had no will to fight, it withdrew after losing 15 men, one PoW and some arms and ammunition. Enemy aircraft attacked the Kumaon is but there were mercifully no casualties. Bagal the next objective was vacated by the enemy and it seemed he was demotivated, disorganized and withdrawing to Naya Chor.

Large quantities of arms and ammunition were captured at Bagal by the Malharis. The Battalion was over stretched over a long distance and replenishment of water and rations were precarious. After replenishment, one company of the Battalion was sent on 8 December 1971 to occupy Chachro. By 16 December, 11 Infantry Division had reached within a mile of Naya Chor capturing nearly 3,000 square miles of Pakistani territory as against 50 square miles held by the enemy in Chhamb and Hussainiwala. Large credit for this outstanding feat goes to the Malhar Paltan. A few things have struck my psyche while reading and writing about our past wars whether at Rezang La, Walong, Kargil, J&K or the desert. Firstly, 13 KUMAON at BP 638 in Jaisalmer sector and 15 KUMAON (INDORE) at Gadra in the Barmer sector fought ferocious battles that created history of unknown sorts. My sincere effort has been to highlight this fact. Secondly, we have always been saddled with the defensive attitude and no patrolling or crossing the LoC/IB even when war was imminent allowed.

Since our adversaries only understand tough language and stand, we have to cultivate aggressive spirit but our commander are only

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“Since our adversaries only understand tough language and stand, we have to cultivate aggressive spirit but our commander are only taught offensive spirit in courses and exercises but when war is thrust upon our Armed Forces, our political leadership and bureaucratic controls kill this instinct so very essential in any war.”

Roll of Honour		
1.	Lance Naik Durga Datt	VrC (Posthumous)
2.	Maj (Later Lt Col) Sunhara Singh	VrC
3.	2/Lt (later Maj) NB Singh	SM
4.	L/ Hav (later Hony Capt) Diwan Singh	SM
5.	Sep (later Hav) Chander Singh	SM
6.	Lt Col (later Maj Gen) SR Bahuguna	M-in-D
7.	Maj (later Lt Col) AS Khatri, VrC	M-in-D
8.	Nb Sub Ranjit Singh	M-in-D

taught offensive spirit in courses and exercises but when war is thrust upon our Armed Forces, our leadership kill this instinct so very essential in any war.

If our field, commanders are encouraged to cultivate aggressive spirit, they will certainly be able to teach lessons to our adversaries in conventional and non-conventional war. Too much obsession with remaining with in our side of the LoC/IB is our biggest bane. No war can ever be by being obsessed with defensive mind set. The third aspect is that of honours and awards. In one action, a soldier silences enemy MMG gets killed and awarded nothing or at best given a Mentioned-in-Dispatches. Elsewhere, in a lesser action, the other individual gets away with very high award. Getting an award one does not deserve is worse than not getting the deserving award and our soldiers are first to know it.

Gadra Day

To commemorate and honour the saga of their bravery on 4 December every year it celebrates Gadra Day with great gusto and pride. In BP 638 in Jaisalmer Sector and Gadra in Barmer Sector, two Kumaoni Battalions (13 and 15) fought splendidly. Except for our Regimental history 'Valour Triumphs' the bravery of these two actions lie buried in obscurity. Hence an effort has been made in this article to revive the undying saga of these two Battalions to inspire for posterity.

THE SCHOOL THAT 'PROBABLY WON' THE BATTLE OF BASANTAR!



The School that 'Probably Won' The Battle of Basantar!

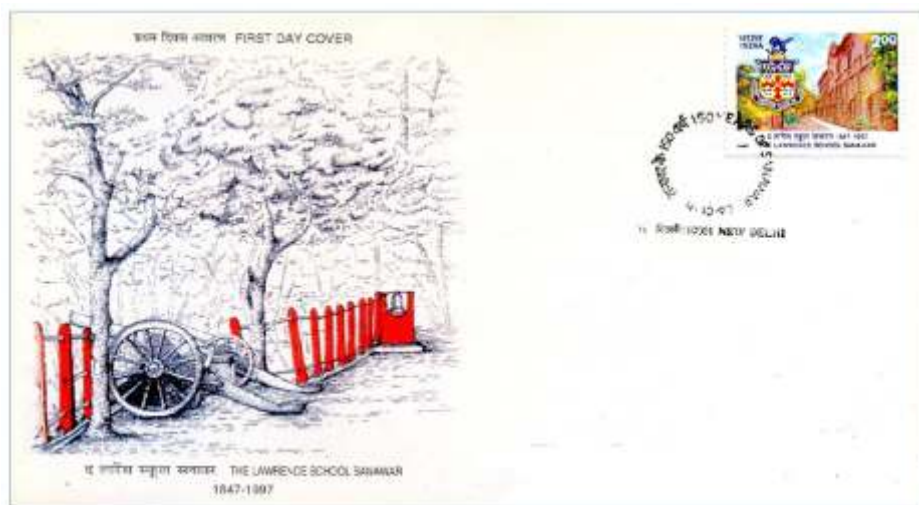
45 years after the Battle of Basantar, a startling fact was uncovered that ten alumni of The Lawrence School, Sanawar; fought this battle and earned the nation's highest gallantry awards including one PVC, two MVC, one Vrc and three mention-in-despatches. A brief history and a set of interviews reveal the stellar role played by the school in winning Basantar.

SAGAT SHAUNIK

If the proverbial Battle of Waterloo was won in the playfields of Eton, then the Battle of Basantar was 'probably-won' in the playfields of The Lawrence School, Sanawar in Himachal Pradesh. The school popularly called “Sanawar” with reference to its location, is one of the oldest co-ed residential schools, set up as The Lawrence Asylum in 1847 to train and educate orphaned wards of BOR's (British Other Ranks) residing in India. The asylum was conceptualised to train the boys as future soldiers in British Regiments. Thereafter, the school's role and size grew with its annual contribution of soldiers seeing action in many battlefields across the Empire.

In 1853, the School was presented with The King's Colour and became one of only six schools and colleges ever, to be so honoured in the British Empire. An honour shared with Eton, Shrewsbury, Cheltenham, the Duke of York's Royal Military School, and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. The military honour changed the school's

title to the 'Lawrence Royal Military Asylum' in 1858. The military orientation of the School saw several contingents of boys enlisting directly and marching into the battlefields of WW I. Towards the end of the war, in 1920, it was re-designated 'Lawrence Royal Military School' and in 1922, the Prince of Wales presented the school with new Colours. On 3 October 1941, a BBC Radio broad-



First Day Cover issued on the School's 150th Year

cast cited more than two hundred Sanawarians serving in the Second World War.

Post-Independence, the school passed into the hands of the Ministry of Education and Indians enrolled in the school for the first time; many of them later went on to serve as officers in the tri-services. 1962 saw two Sanawarians killed in action; Lt Yog Raj Palta, VrC (Posthumous), 4 SIKH and 2/Lt Chattra Pati Singh, 4 RAJPUT. Thereafter, the school's military contribution remained exemplary in 1965, 1971, and all CI ops where its alumni continue to serve to the present day.

Of all the battles fought in 1971, the study of Shakargarh sector, particularly Basantar, brings to fore my thesis that Basantar was 'probably-won' in the playfields of Sanawar. There is no attempt to downplay the contribution of any other school nor the sacrifices of every soldier who fought the war. However, it is interesting to note that all three of the nation's highest war-time gallantry awards were earned by Sanawarians in this sector, vis. 2/Lt Arun Khetarpal, PVC (Posthumous); Maj Vijay Rattan Chowdhry, MVC (Posthumous); Maj Amarjit Singh Bal, MVC and Maj Malvinder Singh Shergill, VrC; while Maj Kamaljit Singh and Capt (acting Maj) Brijinder Singh were mentioned in despatches. Six gallantry awards earned by Sanawarians fighting in one sector makes me use the term 'probably-won' Basantar!

At 21, Arun Khetarpal became a legend as the youngest recipient of the PVC. The school honoured him by renaming a playfield as Khetarpal Stadium, where graduating students march past each year during the trooping of the School's Flag. Recently, the school instituted a bravery award, named in honour of him and unveiled a full size statue that over-looks Khetarpal Stadium.

When 'Fauji India' Magazine announced that it would be covering stories on the Battle of Basantar, I grabbed the opportunity to write about Arun Khetarpal, an alumni I look up to. I searched through my albums to find a picture of the war memorial arch in Sanawar, where we marched past and saluted the names of all our fallen. The names of 2/Lt Arun Khetarpal, PVC, 17 HORSE (POONA); Maj Vijay Rattan Chowdhry, MVC, 9 ENGINEER REGIMENT and Maj Devinderjit Singh Pannu, VrC, 5 SIKH; glared at my screen, while I wondered at the odds of any of them serving near each other. A search of their citations unveiled a startling fact that both Arun and Vijay fought in the Battle of Basantar and died, a day apart from each other. An intuitive feeling about another Sanawarian, Maj (Later Lt Gen) Malvinder Singh Shergill, 7 CAVALRY; whom I had heard about, made me look up his VrC citation, to find that he won it in the Shakargarh sector too.

“At 21, Arun Khetarpal became a legend as the youngest recipient of the PVC. The school honoured him by renaming a play field as Khetarpal Stadium, where graduating students march past each year during the trooping of the School's Flag. Recently, the school instituted a bravery award, named in honour of him and unveiled a full size statue that over-looks Khetarpal Stadium.”

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With considerable effort, I contacted Lt Gen MS 'Binny' Shergill, VrC to inquire about his war-time location in Shakargarh and asked him how far he was from Arun, to which he replied 'we were in the same area, in the sense that Arun's tanks were a little distance away from ours'. Then in an absolutely excited tone, I revealed to him my discovery that three Sanawarians served in the same area and won all three gallantry awards PVC, MVC and VrC; and that their story must be told.

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'Oh, so you are drawing the Sanawarian connect, then let me tell you that there were seven of us there', he exclaimed. Maj Kamaljit Singh of Himalaya House was commanding 'A' Squadron with me in the 7th Light Cavalry, he was mentioned in despatches. Maj Amarjit Singh Bal, from Shiwalik House, was commanding a Squadron of the 17th (POONA) HORSE and got his MVC along with 2/Lt Arun Khetarpal, PVC (Posthumous) who was from Nilagiri House and a Squadron Troop Leader with him. Then there was Capt (acting Maj) Brijinder Singh of Himalaya House, who was commanding a Squadron from 14 HORSE (SCINDE), he was mentioned in despatches. We lost my good friend and classmate Maj Vijay Rattan Chowdhry who was killed in action, very close to where Arun's tanks were and he got his MVC for his role in mine-clearance throughout the war. It was his team's efforts that enabled Arun's tanks to get across.. And, Maj Vijay Kumar Nair of Vindhya House, was commanding a Squadron of 1st HORSE (SKINNERS).

While we are at it, let me tell you about another classmate of mine; Maj Devinderjit Singh Pannu, who was commanding a Company of the 5th Battalion, The SIKH REGIMENT, at a post in Pt 303, in the Chhamb sector. He was wounded, yet refused to evacuate and kept on defending against the enemy. He bled to his death and was later conferred the Vir Chakra. That is Sanawar for us. His post is still in Pakistan occupied territory, so I got a memorial constructed for him in Akhnoor, while I was commanding 10 Infantry Division where I laid a wreath in his honour. Since, you ask, let me tell you more facts, my class of 1957 had a unique history, whereby two of my batchmates had joined the Airforce and died in aircrashes. Our first battle casualty was 2/Lt CP Singh, killed in the 1962 operations, whose name is placed in the School's memorial. Another had joined the Navy. By the way, let me tell you, in the Autumn of 1961, the entire polo team of the IMA were Sanawarians and all four of us made it to the National team, representing the country for a very long time. We were the ones who



Maj VR Chowdhry MVC (posthumous) as cadet in IMA, image courtesy his son Mr Ranjit Chowdhry

started polo and equestrian sports in the army, even though none of us had ridden horses in Sanawar. Lastly, we had a unique honour of five Sanawarians commanding five different armoured brigades at the same time. We were Brigadiers: Kamaljit Singh, Vijay Kumar Nair, Amarjit Bal, Joginder Pal Singh (16 CAV) and myself, all Sanawar batch of 1957.

Gen Shergill then wished me good luck, adding that he looked forward to seeing what I would eventually write about Basantar. I was surprised to hear this less-known fact that either destiny or happenstance brought seven Sanawarians together in the same sector during the 1971 war, yet nobody ever mentioned this fact. All of them were recognised for their contribution towards the war effort, and their individual citations mention traits such as conspicuous gallantry, indomitable fighting spirit, tenacity of purpose, exceptional devotion to duty, extraordinary bravery, inspiring leadership, supreme sacrifice, professional skill and leadership of a high order. These characteristics, are often mentioned in many citations for awards, yet, when a reader contextualises the background of these officers, it reiterates the school motto “Never Give In” in a way that Sir Henry Newbolt's famous poem ‘Vitai Lampada’ comes to life: the river of death has brimmed its banks.... But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks-“Play up! Play up! And play the game!”

II

Thereafter, I wanted to draw in some civilian perspective and contacted Mukesh Khetarpal, brother of 2/Lt Arun Khetarpal, PVC (Posthumous) to know what he had to say about his heroic brother. Mukesh was a year younger than Arun and both of them attended Sanawar. They belonged to a 3rd generation army family wherein their great-grandfather had fought in the Sikh Wars; grandfather fought WW I (Mediterranean); father fought WW II in Indonesia and other regions. In fact, their father Brig ML Khetarpal had served in the same sector ‘Shakargarh’ during the 1965 war. Mukesh introduced his thoughts on Arun by saying that, “What happened in the battle is well recorded, but the question I ask is what if there was a replay of events, would he have done the same thing- in the same way? And, I think he wouldn't have been any different, after all we are 3-4 generations in the army. In Sanawar, we learnt to stand up for our team in every sport we played. We learnt to give an arm and a leg for them and live up to the school motto - *Never Give In!*”

Gen Shergill then wished me good luck, adding that he looked forward to seeing what I would eventually write about Basantar. I was surprised to hear this less-known fact that either destiny or happenstance brought seven Sanawarians together in the same sector during the 1971 war, yet nobody ever mentioned this fact. All of them were recognised for their contribution towards the war effort, and their individual citations mention traits such as conspicuous gallantry, indomitable fighting spirit, tenacity of purpose, exceptional devotion to duty, extraordinary bravery, inspiring leadership, supreme sacrifice, professional skill and leadership of a high order.

The telephonic interview that followed with Mukesh Khetarpal, brother of 2/Lt Arun Khetarpal, PVC (Posthumous):

Why didn't your brother bail out of his burning tank when he was ordered to do so?

Mukesh: What is recorded and told was that Arun realised that his infantry brigade couldn't stand up to the enemy armour unless his tanks were operational. So, he couldn't have walked out of the situation, cause then a lot of lives would have been sacrificed, and, he knew his vulnerable position with his burning tank and the fire spreading. But, by then, looking back at our family and school, he would never have let them down. That's something any Sanawarian would have done, they don't walk away- it's the done thing!

Did he have such tendencies as a child?

Mukesh: If you see the recent movie Neerja, the lady's bravery is somewhat similar to my brother. The idea that they displayed extraordinary courage since childhood may be overplaying it, but his background from where he came, he just had to do it. That's how I see it, you know.

So how did your family deal with the aftermath?

Mukesh: We were a small family, just the four of us: my mother, father, Arun and self. You see, when someone dies at an early age, before his time, then it is painful for you. Life was never the same for my parents who lived to their ripe old age up to their eighties. It was painful and difficult to get over that!

What has been his impact, on your life, even after forty five years?

Mukesh: Even today, almost on an everyday basis, youngsters who were born after 71, call up. Many of them have no connection with the military, yet they want to know about him. Those who are in the Armed Forces hold him in high regard, even in the NDA and IMA they have some sort of memorial for him. Yet, civilians are also connected, especially through the Internet. I always wonder why would somebody want to create a website in his honour and why 20-30 year olds visit it so often? It only means that a lot of you people agree with Arun and draw inspiration from him. The NCERT has introduced his battle story in their school curriculum and I think that's the right thing to do. 'Cause if you can inspire youngsters by building the right moral fibre, before they give in to other things, then they can go a long way. "Listen, I am 64 years old, but Arun is 21 years young!"

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How do people sympathise with your family?

Mukesh: My father Brig ML Khetarpal's interaction with the Pakistani Brigadier who had shot Arun's tank is very well documented by Maj Gen Ian Cardozo in his book *Param Vir*. Although, for our family, the loss is irreparable, but, as a family we can only say that it was destined. We can't do much about it! The fact that you are choosing to write about this battle, 45 years later means enough. For your information, Arun's tank is placed in Ahmednagar as a case study for all to see. JP Dutta, just a few months ago said that its too old a story to make a movie; so another Sanawarian, Apoorva Lakhia has expressed interest in making a full line feature film.

A personal and final question, why didn't you join the Army after Arun and all your forebears?

Mukesh: We came from a time when the father decided what careers the children would choose. The reality is that my father was an engineer in the army's Bombay Engineer Group. So, he decided that one son would join the army and the other would become an engineer. Actually, Arun was more intelligent, he was supposed to be the engineer, while I was not as good as him, so I would join the army. Unfortunately, he appeared in the IIT and NDA exam and qualified for the NDA only. So my father told him 'you had a chance, now go join the NDA'. Then he came to me and said "now you go join IIT". That's how I graduated from IIT Delhi a few years later.

III

After speaking to Mr Khetarpal, I spoke to Mr Aminder Singh Bal, son of Brigadier Amarjit Singh Bal, MVC and an extract of his telephonic conversation is:

My father spoke about his friends and time at Sanawar very often and proudly. I think the school had quite an impact on him. He did talk about the war while we were growing up, to sort of influence me, but not towards the end of his life, he didn't talk much about it. We heard so much about it from the Regiment, from the army, from what has been written about it, that now it tends to clutter the mind, becoming difficult to ascertain what I know from him and what I had picked up from others. He was a private person who never really spoke much, he carried his gallantry award very lightly, never showed off, although extremely proud of it, but he didn't speak about it unless spoken to. He was extremely humble, in fact far too humble for his own good.

Now, Arun was a hero in the Regiment and in the army. I had an opportunity to meet his family in the past, but since I was born after '71,

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Maj Kamaljit Singh OC 'A' SQN, Maj MS Shergill OC 'B' SQN, Capt DS Dhillon 2ic 'C' SQN on a destroyed EN Patton at Shakargarh, Dec 1971

“

Now, Arun was a hero in the Regiment and in the army. I had an opportunity to meet his family in the past, but since I was born after '71, I grew up seeing him in the Mess, in the offices and all over the place. Indeed, he was quite a hero! Whenever I asked my father about their role in the war or about Arun, I had to really probe him to answer my queries about the battle that they had fought. People used to call my father the 'modern Gandhi' since he was not really made out for the modern world. Just that, I think that was one of his best traits and everyone remembers him as a gentleman and as a soldier, rather than anything else.

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Father was a very God fearing person, although a Sikh, he wasn't really religious or spiritual. I guess he was more a good human being. He never took to spiritualism, in the sense that he was a very secular person who believed in the teachings of all religions. He picked up all that was best in them and tried to imbibe them in his life. In the Fauj, most of the Paltans have a Sarva-Dharma-Sthal (place of worship for all religions) and he made it a point that when I came back from boarding school, for those 2-3 months, we would go to every Temple, Gurudwara, Mosque..., so he was a believer in that.

He was extremely proud of being Indian and I recall at that time, if we spoke about anything in the world, he would tell us that there is so much in India, why should I go anywhere else? India is so diverse, it is beautiful, it has got everything, its got its opportunities and so much more.....yet you youngsters are always thinking about the West and trying to get too westernised. He was extremely Indian and very proud of being one. That's all I can say for now, why don't you come down to Delhi and spend some time with us? We can see what else you want to explore about his time.

IV

In the final analysis of how Basantar was 'probably-won' in the playfields of Sanawar, one has to reflect on the school's system. The battlefield action by Old Sanawarians in Basantar, highlight the role Sanawar played and how its values motivated them to do the 'done thing'. Public schools in the British era were designed to imbibe loyalty with the thought that: "if a boy could be made loyal to his house, then he would become loyal to his school and thereafter he would be loyal to the King". Strict discipline, orientation towards sports, and the judicious use of religion to create followers of ethical living rather than blind faith, marked the character of any graduate from such schools. Sanawar was no different. It has further evolved from its military ethos, to make its mark in other fields such as the civil services, business, films, journalism, amongst others. Yet, every graduate carries forward the original legacy and traits that live on through the culture and



Maj MS Shergill, OC 'B' SQN, Capt Gaganjit Singh, IO,
Capt MS Bains, FOO 101 FD (SP) REGIMENT
attached with 'B' SQN, Capt Ris Verdi, 2ic
'B' SQN in Shakargarh, Dec 1971

practice of traditions that are followed in the school. Thereby, there lives a Khetarpal, a Chowdhry, a Pannu in each one of them. Just for trivia, all four houses of the school were represented in the Battle of Basantar, truly representing the entire school.

Post Script

Lt Gen Kamaljit Singh contacted me after the article was published to inform that his 'A' Squadron 2ic Capt (later Col) Vijay Rosha was a Sanawarian and both of them were mentioned in despatches. "Vijay got a very clean wound because the splinter went in without touching the bone of his right arm although a lot of blood was oozing. He was wincing in pain so I gave him a morphine injection and evacuated him to the RAP. Then the second Sanawarian was Capt (later Col) RIS 'Bobby' Verdi who was 2ic to Maj (later Lt Gen) MS 'Binny' Shergill".

I researched this input to find, three Sanawarians consecutively commanded 7th LIGHT CAVALRY in order: Kamaljit Singh; MS Shergill and VS Rosha. In addition, it was found that Capt (Later Lt Gen) BS Takhar, was the adjutant and third Sanawarian in 17 HORSE (POONA) during the 1971 war, along with Brigadier Amarjit Singh Bal, MVC and 2/Lt Arun Khetarpal, PVC whose story was told in the first publication. The current known figures for Sanawarians in Basantar stand revised to ten and author looks forward to finding more such alumni who served that time.

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Khetarpal brothers: Arun (left) and Mukesh as students attending the Lawrence School, Sanawar



Mukesh Khetarpal brother of 2Lt Arun Khetarpal PVC

GALLANTRY AWARDS IN INDIA

Post-independence, first three gallantry awards namely the Param Vir Chakra, the Maha Vir Chakra and the Vir Chakra were instituted by the Government of India on 26th January, 1950 which were deemed to have effect from the 15th August, 1947. Thereafter, other three gallantry awards i.e. the Ashoka Chakra Class-I, the Ashoka Chakra Class-II and the Ashoka Chakra Class-III were instituted by the Government of India on 4th January, 1952, which were deemed to have effect from the 15th August, 1947. These awards were renamed as the Ashoka Chakra, the Kirti Chakra and the Shaurya Chakra respectively in January, 1967. These gallantry awards are announced twice in a year - first on the occasion of the Republic Day and then on the occasion of the Independence Day. Order of precedence of these awards is the Param Vir Chakra, the Ashoka Chakra, the Mahavir Chakra, the Kirti Chakra, the Vir Chakra and the Shaurya Chakra.

DESIGN OF THE MEDAL AND RIBBON

PARAM VIR CHAKRA (21*)



Medal: Circular in shape, made of bronze, one and three eighth inches in diameter and shall have embossed on the obverse four replicas of "Indra's Vajra" with the State Emblem embossed in the centre. On its reverse, it shall have embossed "PARAM VIR CHAKRA" both in Hindi and in English with two lotus flowers between the Hindi and the English inscriptions.

Ribbon: Plain purple coloured ribbon.

MAHAVIR CHAKRA (218*)



Medal: Circular in shape and of standard silver, one and three eighth inches in diameter, and shall have embossed on the obverse a five-pointed heraldic star with the points of the star just touching the rim. The star shall have in the centre a domed gilded State Emblem. On the reverse, it shall have embossed "MAHA VIR CHAKRA" both in Hindi and in English with two lotus flowers between the Hindi and the English

inscriptions. **Ribbon:** The ribbon is of a half-white and half-orange colour.

VIR CHAKRA (1322*)



Medal: Circular in shape and of standard silver, one and three eighth inches in diameter, and shall have embossed on the obverse a five-pointed heraldic star with the points of the star just touching the rim. The star shall have in the centre a Chakra and within the Chakra shall be a domed centre piece bearing the gilded State Emblem. On the reverse, it shall have embossed

"VIR CHAKRA" both in Hindi and in English with two lotus flowers between the Hindi and the English inscriptions.

Ribbon: The ribbon is of half blue and half orange in colour.

ASHOKA CHAKRA (83*)



Medal: : Circular in shape, one and three eighth inches in diameter, with rims on both sides. The medal shall be of gold gild. On the obverse of the medal shall be embossed a replica of Ashoka's Chakra in the centre, surrounded by a lotus wreath. Along the rim, on the inner side, shall be a pattern of lotus leaves, flowers and buds. On its reverse shall be embossed the words "ASHOKA CHAKRA" both in Hindi and English the two versions being separated by two lotus flowers.

Ribbon: Green colour ribbon divided into two equal segments by an orange vertical line.

KIRTI CHAKRA (458*)



Medal: Circular in shape and of standard silver, one and three-eighth inches in diameter, with rims on both sides. On the obverse of the medal shall be embossed a replica of Ashoka's Chakra in the centre, surrounded by a lotus wreath. Along the rim, on the inner side, shall be a pattern of lotus leaves, flowers and buds. On its reverse shall be embossed the words "KIRTI CHAKRA" both in Hindi and English, the two versions being

separated by two lotus flowers.

Ribbon: Green colour ribbon divided into three equal parts by two orange vertical lines.

SHAURYA CHAKRA (1997*)



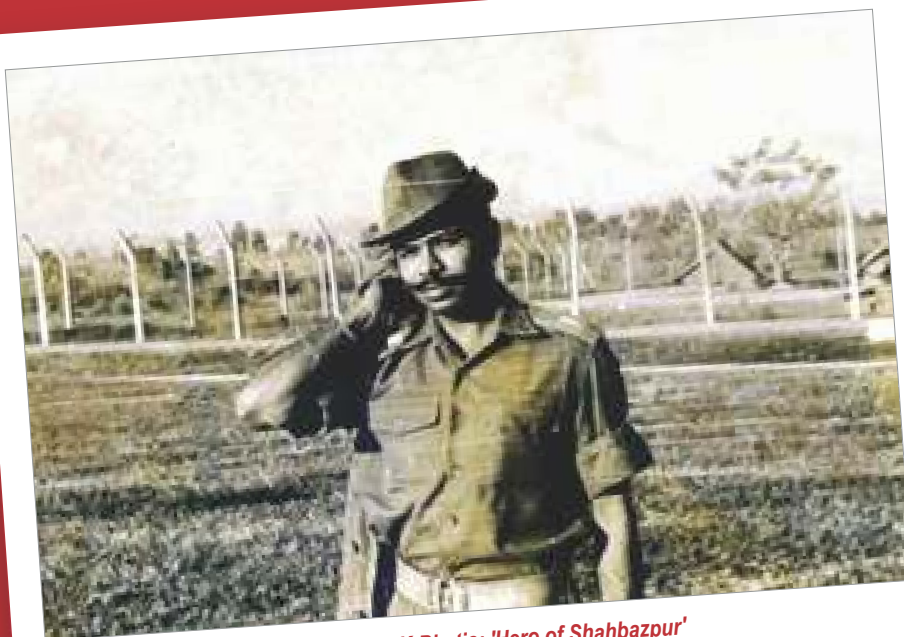
Medal: Circular in shape and made of bronze, one and three-eighth inches in diameter, with rims on both sides. On the obverse of the medal shall be embossed a replica of Ashoka's Chakra in the centre, surrounded by a lotus wreath. Along the rim, on the inner side, shall be a pattern of lotus leaves, flowers and buds. On its reverse shall be embossed the words "SHAURYA CHAKRA" both in Hindi and English, the two versions being separated by two lotus flowers.

Ribbon: Green colour ribbon divided into four equal parts by three vertical lines.

INVESTITURE CEREMONY

Gallantry awards along with some other Defence Distinguished Service awards are conferred to the awardees/Next-of-Kins (NoKs) by the President at the Defence Investiture Ceremony held every year at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. However, the Param Vir Chakra and the Ashoka Chakra are conferred by the President to the awardees/NoKs on the occasion of the Republic Day Parade at the Rajpath.

1971's FORGOTTEN COMBAT SAPPERS OF SHAHBAZPUR



Maj (Later Col) SK Bhatia; 'Hero of Shahbazpur'



1971's Forgotten Combat Sappers of Shahbazpur

Colonel Surinder Kumar Bhatia, 'Hero of Shahbazpur' commanded 358 FIELD COMPANY, 113 ENGINEER REGIMENT during the 1971 War and shared his Regiment's mine-breaching operations in the Shakargarh Sector.

SAGAT SHAUNIK

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The resulting break-out on first light 13 Dec, saw 7 CAV advance and exploit up to Dusri (15 km away on Shakargarh-Zafarwal road) and link up with the advancing 54 INF DIV in the West. 22 PUNJAB, meanwhile, raced forward and captured Mariyal railway station, 10 km away. Some 500 sq km of prime enemy territory had been captured in no time! This road to victory had been carved out of Shahbazpur VSL". Colonel Surinder Bhatia (Retd), nicknamed "Hero of Shahbazpur" recalls the unique breaching feat with a strategic overview of the whole Shakargarh Battle.

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The Shahbazpur mine-field breaching by Sappers of 113 ENGINEER REGIMENT was one of the most important singular event in the Battle of Shakargarh Bulge as it miraculously transformed the whole battle scene. First, the mighty 39 INFANTRY DIVISION (INF DIV) - 2 (Independent) ARMoured BRIGADE (Armd Bde) Combine, and later, 72 INFANTRY BRIGADE-7 LIGHT CAVALRY Combat Group had been stalled for nearly 108 hours (4.5 days) on the formidable Harar Kalan-Shahbazpur mine belt. It was frustrating, as time was fleeting away! At this stage, an audacious, unconventional and stealthy breaching operation on night 12/13 Dec 1971 took the enemy by total surprise. It gave a 6 metre wide, fully marked and proven vehicle safe lane (VSL) through the dreaded 600m deep Shahbazpur mine field in just 4 hours!

The resulting break-out on first light 13 Dec, saw 7 CAV advance and exploit up to Dusri (15 km away on Shakargarh-Zafarwal road) and link up with the advancing 54 INF DIV in the West. 22 PUNJAB, meanwhile, raced forward and captured Mariyal railway station, 10 km away. Some 500 sq km of prime enemy territory had been captured in no time! This road to victory had been carved out of Shahbazpur VSL". Colonel Surinder Bhatia (Retd), nicknamed "Hero of Shahbazpur" recalls the unique breaching feat with a strategic overview of the whole Shakargarh Battle.

Why was minebreaching important in Shakargarh?

Minefield Breaching is typically a sapper pre-occupation. It is ingrained in their blood to innovate and conquer the most formidable of obstacles when the mighty armour and resolute infantry get stranded. The battle of Shakargarh Bulge was no different.

Pakistani defences were organized based on three tiers of deep

(600-900m depth) defensive mine fields laid in conjunction with strongly fortified anti-tank ditches and concrete fortifications. One Infantry Division equivalent was holding these strong points supported by four armoured regiments (Pattons) of 8 (Indep) ARMD BDE and one Recce-&Support Battalion. These were formidable defences. Pakistan followed an 'Aggressive Mobile Defence Doctrine' based on the American pattern. The first tier of mine belts were laid just 2-3 km from the IB and ran on the line Tugialpur-Giddarpur. The second tier at 6-8 km from the IB was in line Shahbazpur-Hararkalan-Dehlra and the third tier in line Mariyal-Dusri-Zafarwal, some 20-22 km from the IB. This pattern of minefield, as existing in 39 INF DIV Sector was extended westwards in the 54 INF DIV sector as well.

1st CORPS was assigned the task of breaking into the bulge to capture area Zafarwal-Dhamtal-Narowal in Phase I of the operations. 54 INF DIV supported by 16 (Indep) ARMD BDE and 39 INF DIV supported by 2 (Indep) ARMD BDE were unleashed from the North while 36 INF DIV was launched from the southern Axis (Nainakot Axis).

What happened during your operations?

39 INF DIV - 2 (I) ARMD BDE combination met with initial success in the first 24 to 36 hours with the first tier mine field was successfully breached. Maj V Bhaskar of 7 ENGR REGT was awarded an immediate VrC for this breaching effort at Tugialpur. While, 7 ENGR REGT was the DIV ENGR REGT, my 113 ENGR REGT was the CORPS ENGR REGT in support of 39 INF DIV advance. Despite some pitched tank battles, heroics with trawl tanks and determined infantry assaults against enemy strong points, Pak defences held out. Our advance stalled on the line of second tier minefield Shahbazpur-Harar Kalan. There was little progress for the next 72 hours. Even the troop of trawl tanks had been incapacitated with one trawl-tank stuck up in the minefield 1000m west of Shahbazpur. This was rather alarming! A decision was then taken by the Corps Commander to pull out bulk of 39 INF DIV - 2 (I) ARMD BDE along with 7 ENGR REGT and re-launch them along Nainakot Axis from South in support of 36 INF DIV. 72 INF BDE and 7 CAV were left behind on this approach. 113 ENGR REGT, less a field Coy, was to provide engineer support.

72 INF BDE Group and Engineer Support Ops

The enemy reacted very sharply to our re-doubled push towards Shakargarh on Southern Axis. They pulled out some troops from the North to reinforce Shakargarh's defence. This made the defences in the

“1st Corps was assigned the task of breaking into the bulge to capture area Zafarwal-Dhamtal-Narowal in Phase I of the operations. 54 INF DIV supported by 16 (Indep) ARMD BDE and 39 INF DIV supported by 2 (Indep) ARMD BDE were unleashed from the North while 36 INF DIV was launched from the southern Axis (Nainakot Axis).”

North (areas of Shahbazpur-Harar Kalan etc) somewhat weak and vulnerable. Enemy vacated Harar Kalan strong point and moved South of Harar Kalan-Shahbazpur mine belt, leaving some sniper posts and small nests in the North. Strong Recce and Support elements backed by armour were to protect the line Shahbazpur-Harar Kalan from the South. Our 15 GRENADIERS occupied Harar Kalan unopposed on 10 Dec. Similarly, a rifle company from 22 PUNJAB occupied Shahbazpur village on 11 Dec. The enemy had withdrawn south, sealing Shahbazpur track with mines, behind them. Same evening, pioneer platoon Havildar of 22 PUNJAB was killed on Shahbazpur track in a mine blast while trying to clear an infantry safe lane. Pakistanis dominated the mine belt from the South and there was no progress for the next 36 hours! Then the Sappers moved in.

A historic breakthrough was achieved at that stage by 72 INF BDE Gp, when 113 ENGR REGT (358 FIELD COY) gave a 6m wide vehicle safe lane by stealth using an audacious and totally un-conventional breaching technique. The enemy was taken completely by surprise. The resulting break-out on the first light 13 Dec saw 7 CAV advance-exploit up to Dusri on Shakaragarh-Zafarwal road to link up with 54 INF DIV in the west. 22 Punjab moved up some 10 km to capture Mariyal Railway Station (The Chak Amru Railway Junction was already with us). By afternoon 13 Dec, more than 500 Sq Km of prime enemy territory had been captured! Both 7 CAV and 22 PUNJAB were highly rewarded, while 113 ENGR REGT earned the coveted 'Theatre Honour' for their breaching effort.

Meanwhile, the operational track being developed by 358 FIELD COY of 113 ENGR REGT (05 Dec onwards), close on the heels of the advancing troops, also linked up at Dusri by last light 14 Dec. It had crossed Tugialpur mine field by breaching a fresh detour on 07 Dec as the original VSL alignment was passing through a nala. The second mine field belt was crossed at the Shahbazpur VSL. This 45 km length Op-track starting from Forward Assembly Area (Madun) up to Dusri was an important land mark and the life line of the formation throughout the operations.

Post Shahbazpur breaching and the spectacular breakout, while 72 INF BDE consolidated its territorial gains, 113 ENGR REGT's commanding officer, Lt Col BC Khanduri (later a senior MP and Chairman of Parliamentary Committee for Defence in the Lok Sabha), lead from the front and pressed in with his second Field Coy, the 418 FD COY for a day-night conventional breaching of the third minefield encountered at Mariyal. This breaching continued for the next 60 hours in the

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face of enemy, without any infantry protection. The breaching party commander, Lt Balkar Singh was severely injured and had to be evacuated. Nk Sarjirao Chavan was hit on the breaching prodder by enemy small arms fire! This breaching effort put sustained pressure on the beleaguered Pakistani Shakargarh Garrison, that was already facing simultaneous attacks from the South (36 INF DIV, reinforced by 39 INF DIV) and North (54 INF DIV). However, eventually, breaching had to be called off and breached mines re-laid to seal the breach as cease-fire was imminent. Lt Balkar Singh was awarded a Sena Medal and Naik Sarjirao Chavan was mentioned-in-despatches.

While the war was still raging, 358 FD COY of Shahbazpur fame was then pressed in to breach and retrieve our tanks and trawls, stuck up in the dreaded Shahbazpur-Harar Kalan minefield since 8th Dec. Two T-55 tanks and one trawl-tank were retrieved from 600m West of Shahbazpur VSL before cease-fire. Sapper Sher Mohammad, of 358 FD COY lost his foot in this action. His gallant actions are forgotten in history.

Please elaborate your plans for breaching Shahbazpur.

Shahbazpur VSL breaching was a combat engineering feat done to perfection. It would hardly be prudent to discuss the complete nitty-gritty of various drills and techniques adopted. Yet, a few salient aspects must be briefly highlighted to bring home the enormity and audacity of effort.

We used unacceptable short cuts at grave risk to life and limb to meet forbidding time-frame and stealth requirements. Yet it was professional with a very high success-rate, borne out of our training-instilled confidence and active experience of 1965 ops.

Lt Col Khanduri briefed us at 2115 hrs on 12 Dec in a crisp speech to say “the VSL has to be breached by first light 13 Dec. Time is the key. Existing track could be the best bet for breaching. God bless.” This left us Coy Commanders with total freedom to plan and execute ops.

A sensible JCO guide from 22 PUNJAB lead our breaching party up to Shahbazpur and was of great help. While conventional breaching takes a minimum 18 hours and two Engineer Field Platoons (approx 80 personnel), at Shahbazpur, it took us one coy commander, his runner, a radio-operator and three hand-picked, dare-devil breaching parties of six each. Just 22 all ranks, no reserves!

There was no ground recce possible and breaching force reached Shahbazpur by a circuitous route (21km) via Chak Amru after midnight. Last 7 km were covered on foot, virtually on trot, lugging minimum breaching stores to avoid detection. Two 1-ton vehicles with

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minimum marking stores were to fetch up later.

22 PUNJAB's Coy Cdr at Shahbazpur confirmed that there were no infantry protection or any patrols across the mine field. Enemy was very sensitive to any movement or noise. I then requested him to shift the available MMG to a roof top to give a semblance of cover to my breaching force. The sole radio-set with the operator was then left by me at his Coy office, to be on a listening watch on RHQ 113 ENGR net. We assumed that the laying pattern at Tugialpur on the first tier minefield could be repeated. This meant three mine strips with inter-strip distance 200 to 250m, with full mixed clusters on the first-strip, double mixed clusters on the second and only A/TK clusters on the last strip.

The enemy had been using Shahbazpur's track till night 9/10 Dec whence he withdrew south of the mine field. Technically, therefore, our best bet was to look for disturbed soil, camouflaged at the last minute at the anticipated strip locations across the track. This assumption proved very valuable. Our prodders with hooded lights also proved very effective. Once a mine-strip was located, deliberate breaching was done to locate all the clusters as per known enemy pattern. Nothing was left to chance. Rakers were used only as a last resort, lest we disturb the soil afresh.

What happened on first contact?

The Pioneer JCO, 22 PUNJAB, lead us to the exact spot where his pioneer Havildar had been killed on Shahbazpur track. This virtually gave us the location of the first strip of mine field. It was around 0130 hours, 13 Dec. This strip was considered the most important as it was approx 70m from the home side fence. I assigned L/Hav Malkiat Singh with six Sappers for the task. They ensured safe passage through the first strip for the other two parties who moved up the track for locating and breaching both the second and third strips.

It was already past 0200hrs, 13 Dec. We were advancing 4 abreast covering the complete track. Though we were prodding only for our feet, I realized, the progress was too slow for the task in hand. There was no time to waste. Then I asked my men to prod only if the ground appeared badly disturbed, for the next 150m. We cautiously advanced in the light of our hooded prodder-fitted mini-torches. In the next half an hour, we located the second strip. CHM Krishna Shinde with 6 OR was made I/C here and our party passed through to locate the last strip. Some 250m away, by 0300 hours, we hit the last strip. Here we found only A/Tk clusters, as anticipated. We could also locate the rear fence

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some distance away. In less than an hour, all three breaching parties were at work. This was a splendid sight. As a Coy Cdr with a runner, I was the only person left to supervise, move up & down to control and trouble-shoot. I spent maximum time between the first and second strips.

By 0400h, mine breaching on all three strips was over, except for the first strip, where, we had decided to clear an additional 20m on either side, to provide a funnel-shaped opening at the entrance. The funnel was to be marked very prominently, using Long Angle Iron Pickets and liberal use of mine-tape, which proved very handy for smooth and orderly induction of armour into the VSL. Even the second and third strips had been cleared with an additional 5m on either side, marked more prominently. I conveyed the excellent progress of breaching so far to the Coy Cdr 22 PUNJAB and confirmed the likely completion time as 0600h. He was in touch with our brigade HQ.

The requirement at this stage was a strong marking party for the 'minimum marking' of a 600m deep minefield. Luckily for us, the two 1-ton vehicles carrying 16 LAIPs, sledge hammers with muffled ends and a large quantity of mine-tape had fetched up by 0330 hours. I instructed CHM Shinde to prominently mark the breached portion of the second strip and take on the task of entire marking. Lt Gupta was co-ordinating the task of marking between second and third strips besides the vigil with two sappers positioned at the far-side fence. By 0500h, breaching on all three strips was over and by 0530h, marking was done as well. Here I went for a quick inspection of the 2nd and 3rd strip. On the 1st strip I had personally ensured the funnel-formation and its prominent marking. There was no confusion.

By 0530 hrs, the first squadron of 7 CAV had lined up some 100m away, waiting for the green signal. At 0600 hrs the first tank entered the funnel and by 0630 hrs, the whole regt was through. In fact, two sappers from Malkiat's party, guided the tanks by running through the lane just ahead of the leading tank. We contacted our RHQ on the radio set and gave the success signal. Maj UC Thakur conveyed our CO's blessings and message "Well done! This is like 113". HQ 72 INFANTRY BDE was then contacted by our RHQ.

Conclusion

A party of just 2 Officers, 3 NCOs and 17 ORs had created a 6m wide, fully marked and proven highway, through the dreaded Shahbazpur mine field in just 4 hours! 113 ENGR REGT (358 FIELD COY) was hailed throughout 1 CORPS for their magnificent achievement. One false move during breaching or one tank causality in the

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VSL during the break-out stage could have been a major set-back to the Corps offensive.

It is a pity that not a single 'instant or individual award' was conferred on the Shahbazpur breaching force who remain unsung heroes. Even 7 CAV's 5 Sena Medals and 2 mention-in-despatches were not enough for their mine breaching operations. All my men richly deserved to be honoured. Yet, it remains an unresolved mystery that hurts even today. Eventually, 'Theatre Honour Shahbazpur' was earned by 113 for my men's breaching effort.

In the words of Lt Gen PS Bhagat, VC (GOC-in-C Central Comd, Colonel Comdt Bombay Sappers), *"The Sahabazpur VSL was a masterpiece of unconventional breaching that achieved a total surprise on the enemy and proved a game changer in Shakargarh sector. With this VSL the five days of frustration of a mighty strike force getting stalled just vanished. The resulting spectacular break-out captured maximum enemy territory, in shortest possible time with minimum resources. It was a very proud hour for the Bombay Sappers"*.

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DUSH'MAN PROPOSES, 202 DISPOSES



*Sub Sewa Singh neutralising 1000 pounder
bomb in Fazilka Sector*



Dush'man Proposes, 202 Disposes

This is a unique story of Veterans from 202 BOMB DISPOSAL (BD) PLATOON deployed in the western sector during the 1971 war commanded by Major (later Col) Sachendra Kumar Sharma, Kirti Chakra. Interacting with sappers of 202 BD PLATOON provides us an insight of circumstances through their detailed recollection of the 1971 Unexploded Bombs experience.

SAGAT SHAUNIK

202 BOMB DISPOSAL PLATOON (BOMBAY SAPPERS)

During WW-II, German air raids in cities left unexploded bombs (UXBs) with delayed-action fuses to cause panic and divert limited Engineer resources for handling UXBs that were a hazardous task requiring specialised training. Hence, London Bomb Disposal Companies were raised for sanitizing cities in the wake of such air raids and to free up the Corps of Engineers for combat tasks.

At the time of independence, The Bombay Sappers held three BOMB DISPOSAL (BD) Platoons that were modelled on similar lines and reported to HQ BOMB DISPOSAL GROUP. By the early 1950s, raiding cities was an obsolete tactic, subject to international law whilst air raids had been restricted to military assets. Consequently, the Corps of Engineers handled mines and explosives as part of regular training but their specialised BD platoons did not have any defined combat role.

Although BD platoons saw limited action in 1961, 1962 and 1965, it is believed that they were usually staffed by personnel seeking postings



(L-R) Hav Ram Singh, SM; Col Sachendra Kumar Sharma, KC; Hony Capt Karnail Singh, M-in-D, Hav Bua Ditta, SM; and Nk Gurcharan Singh M-in-D. 1971 Veterans of 202 BD PLATOON

on compassionate grounds, thereby affecting their regimentation. In this backdrop, Col AM Joglekar, Commandant BOMBAY SAPPERS, hand-picked Captain Sachendra Kumar Sharma of 68 ENGINEER REGIMENT, to take over the platoon at Chandimandir in July 1970. Capt Sharma was sent to attend a three-week BD course and returned in August to find his platoon being a Western Command resource, allotted to 15 CORPS and attached for training and administration purposes to 269 ENGINEER REGIMENT under the command of Col Raj Kapoor.

He met Col Kapoor who ordered him to grow a moustache! Then, Capt Sharma introduced a rigorous training module on a war footing and recalls: *"In Aug 1971, the Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram visited us along with the Army Commander and saw a 30-minute demonstration of BD techniques. By September, the Corps began deployment and the rumour mills had it that war would be eminent only when the 'Bomb Squad' was deployed. That came true, since we were the last to move out while war clouds gathered and as luck would have it, I was away on temporary duty when Pakistan declared war..."*

"We practiced BD drill, small arms firing and used all available equipment in the unit for training and paired men as teams. Later, the Platoon attended all Corps-level exercises and annual training. We were placed on ORBAT 474 ENGINEER BRIGADE commanded by Brig Jagdev Singh, who would pull my leg and call us 'Glaxo-babies' as all Platoon members came on cross-attachment and were yet to be baptized in battle as a cohesive fighting unit"

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Col SK Sharma, Kirti Chakra

From Chandimandir, the Platoon moved to HQ BOMB DISPOSAL GROUP, Jalandhar under the command of Col BB Gupta. Within three weeks of deployment somewhere around October, a neighbouring artillery unit's ammunition caught fire. There was no fire officer nearby so we were pressed into service and received our "baptism of fire" in the literal sense.

On December 3, I was on temporary duty (TD) attending a court of inquiry at Ferozepur Fort when around 1830 hrs artillery shells landed

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near the room I was sharing with a Major. Both of us were in pyjamas and had the Pakistanis crossed Ferozepur bridge, we would have been taken prisoners without our boots on! The BM called up and told us to occupy trenches. My driver Charan Singh gathered all the items while my buddy Baldev went frantically searching for something in the trenches.

While the pounding lasted for three hours, we found an ammunition bay where we took up position. The troops occupied trenches and some began moving vehicles away from the shelling. From the bay area, I observed total chaos in Ferozepur city where civilian houses were shelled and locals ran out of their homes. On the other side, I noticed our tanks and infantry crossing over at a distance and responding to the threat. As radio networks became operational, status messages were exchanged and I was recalled to Jalandhar HQ. However, the local CO ordered us to leave only after 2130 hrs, lest civilians believe that soldiers were running away. War cries of Bharat Mata Ki Jai, Shivaji Ki Jai and Bole So Nihal-Sat Sri Akal identified the troop composition. Again, I noticed that my *sewadar*, Baldev Singh from SIKH LI, was bravely walking through the firing in search of something. At about 2130 hrs, he joined up with my perfectly ironed uniform that had gone to the dhobi (washerman) who fled when the shelling began. Baldev told me in chaste Punjabi that he was searching for the uniform since he did not want the Indian Army to be led in pyjamas. It reflects the high morale of the troops...

By first light, I had a Jeep take me to Jalandhar where I was to receive orders. Reaching HQ, I was allotted BD tasks for all the forward airfields located in the *Area of Responsibility* (AOR) of 15 CORPS. While Amritsar-Attari-Ajnala would be the general area of BD operations, we were to concentrate at Amritsar. I was informed that about a fortnight ago, 110 of my men had already been split in three sections and deployed across locations near Jalandhar, Pathankot and Amritsar. Col Gupta added that the Jammu-Pathankot-Gurdaspur area was already under the command of my zic, 2/Lt Ravindranathan Maledath and that I would have to manage operations in Amritsar and Jalandhar by travelling between the two.

Area of Responsibility -1, Amritsar

As the deployment for Raja Sansi Airfield began, I realised a golden opportunity knocked at my door to prove ourselves since other units had already been allotted to Bangladesh and we were responsible for both the Army and Air Force.

At Amritsar, Nb Subedar Kabal Singh was sent by Lt Maledath who

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was indisposed with tasks at Pathankot airfield that day. Meanwhile, Nb Sub Lashkar Singh fetched up from Jalandhar with primitive prodding equipment and an LMG to cover us. Raja Sansi airfield was the first area to be swept as the Pakistanis had simultaneously launched pre-emptive airstrikes on all our forward airfields to start the war on 3 Dec. Luckily, most bombs fell 50m away from the runway and were spread across a radius of 2-3 km.

Every day, heavy bombardment accompanied breakfast and dinner while dogfights and air raids dotted the skyline during lunch. Besides, the threat of frontal attack was ever-present. Three bomb reports came on the morning of 5 Dec; I was tasked to carry out advanced reconnaissance of Amritsar area at night along with a local guide who never turned up at the appointed hour. By day-break, Col Raj Kapoor, (*who later made the famous TV Serial, FAUJI for Doordarshan*) occupying bunkers near Attari, ordered us to move towards his OC's position on bearing Manawala-Ajnala-Attari for taking further orders.

My section ran cross-country with all its gear, in open fields without any cover and linked up with the OC within 45 minutes. We were served a hot meal and detailed to diffuse bombs dropped by the Pak Air Force. Apparently, the road on the Manawala-Ajnala-Attari axis had been strafed early morning and unexploded bombs (UXBs) lay exposed in the general area, delaying our convoy passage. His guide took us to the spots where UXBs lay strewn around sugarcane fields and open areas on a bearing towards the airfield. Three reports came in stating Ajnala, Manawala and Attari had been bombed and we had to prioritise our areas based on our map-reading and proximity.

Nb Sub Lashkar ordered sentries to take up positions while I considered a reconnaissance for digging bomb-diffusion and detonation trenches in the area. Lashkar Sahib and I walked through the area, when I saw a UXB. At that time, we were unaware about the types of fuse being used by Pakistan, so our initial task was to determine the type of bomb (500, 750 or 1000 pound), extract the fuse, declare safety and dispatch the same for study at the Div level. Time was at a premium and Lashkar Sahib realised the unfamiliar American bombs could be tinkered with. Upon closer inspection, I removed the first delayed-action fuse by hand and decided to send it to Amritsar for a detailed examination to determine its operating mechanism. The neighbouring infantry had seen me remove it from the bomb and refused to carry it back to HQ, as it could have

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exploded on the way. So I sent it back with my own sapper, L/Nk Bua Ditta. We repeated this action at eminent risk in terms of large casualties if we removed the fuses wrongly. However, God was on our side and we were able to gather a large number of delayed-action fuses.

There was no place to store the collected UXBs pending disposal. Neither the Ordnance nor the Air Force were willing to store them fearing explosion. Consequently, my Platoon slept next to them in the same area where they were stacked. We drew strength from each other, as no man shirked duty and we kept smiling through the shared experience. When I asked for volunteers for disposing the first bomb, the entire section came up. I selected Bua Ditta, a good runner and tasked him to light the fuse and run back for cover. When that exploded, we became confident yet careful. Morale was high and we took turns in volunteering for BD. Besides, we had to guide civilians out of bomb sites. The locals were pouring water on the UXBs while some children tried imitating the aircrafts above by sitting on the finned-bombs that looked like aircrafts to them.

Pak dropped 27 bombs in Batala canal, where 13 exploded and did not damage the canal. The 14 UXBs were spread across 100 m of the canal. Around 8 Dec, 261 FIELD COMPANY (MADRAS) returned from Bangladesh, reinforced us, and took on the task. We were in a supporting role when two Pakistani aircraft dropped another sortie of bombs on us. Those landed a little away from us and we were all safe. Indeed, there was an element of luck that we suffered no casualties. We drew a lot of operational lessons from the efficiency that was achieved due to such conditions.

Amritsar: Hav Bua Ditta, SM

Three BD Platoons were located in Pune and moved up to Delhi, Chandimandir and Pathankot when the likelihood of war increased. Our platoon was further split in three: Amritsar, Pathankot and Jalandhar. I was deployed at Raja Sansi airport (Amritsar) and my first task was to secure an exploded bomb. The Air Force did not know what to do with that bomb and did not allow aircrafts to take off. We cleared the bomb and made the runway operational.

Then, we moved to Jalandhar and were made to return to Amritsar. We quartered ourselves in a langar hall and responded to all BD calls. Nb Sub Lashkar Sahib was our JCO and we had trained together in Jalandhar. We had to classify the bombs as per their type 500, 750, 1000 pounder and then destroy them, while ensuring that no local villager came nearby. We had to clear villages with local police support. If the

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bomb could be lifted, we took it away. There was a 1000 pounder bomb that was diffused and we hid it under a Gurudwara, until it could be disposed safely. The Sub-Area Commander and many civilians came to see it. We refused to show the bomb until Sharma Sahib permitted us. Then many more came to see it, so we camouflaged it and took it away the next day. That night we had to double sentry duty lest someone adventurous tried to come near the bomb.

The next day, Pakistan bombed some of our waterworks near Batala and dropped about 25-30 bombs, which landed in quicksand about 8-10 ft deep. We worked hard to secure them but remained unsuccessful. Thereafter, we put additional charge and detonated them within the quicksand. It was an engineering feat in itself. Since the villages were cleared, our task was made easy.

Next, I was deployed in Gurdaspur where a godown had been bombed. One had exploded and I brought the other UXB to Amritsar. The number of UXBs kept piling up. We were ordered to destroy them in situ and not carry back any further as there was no place to stack them and nobody wanted to deal with the hazardous risk of piled up bombs that were beyond safety measures.

Post war, we returned to Chandimandir with a fair amount of UXBs. We dug a huge pit near Ghaggar river and destroyed them all below a foothill. The Chinese bombs were cluster-munition variety and simultaneously exploded in three spots. We had to be careful of the type of fuse being used and how to extract it. All our bomb-disposal equipment was of Russian origin and we could handle Russian bombs due to prior training, but the Chinese and American bombs were new to us.

I was from 107 ENGINEER REGIMENT and attached to 202 BD PLATOON. I was the first to receive the Sena Medal followed by Sharma Sahib. The Army handed me a slip that Sharma Sahib read out to me. He remarked, “*tere ko award mila hein*” (you have been awarded).

Once the bombs were destroyed, there was a huge fireball left and we moved out to the next UXB. We used to stack up three bombs for disposing in a single explosion. Towards the end, the MADRAS SAPPERS reinforced us and assisted in clearance.

Area of Responsibility - 2, Pathankot

Hony Capt Karnail Singh, M-in-D

None of us were familiar with BD since we did not attend any course or lecture on the matter during basic training. I came from 111

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ENGINEER REGIMENT and joined in Chandimandir. I attended pre-regimental training with 106 ENGINEER REGIMENT, where 15 men each from 202 and 702 PLATOONS attended 3-month basic training. Captains Kohli and Batra were our instructors and all men performed well on the course. Joining 202 BD PLATOON, my first task was rifle training and I was to familiarise myself with the new SLRs. Although we were called BD PLATOON, it felt like a regular Infantry Platoon as no BD drills were taught. Just before the war, we had a few months of classes where we learnt about the types of fuses etc., followed by our move to Jalandhar.

On 3 Dec, war commenced with artillery shelling; the next day, Capt Sharma joined back after 18 days and assigned tasks to us. I was located along a canal near Pathankot and would take cover during meals when our positions were shelled. The section integration amongst the 2/Lt, JCOs and OR was very strong and there were no apprehensions between any of us. Everyone spoke with a lot of affection and took each other's opinion regarding BD techniques and positions. Initially, we did not have much experience and were careful with the bombs by following drills. Gradually, we touched them with one finger and later overrode all drills by manually extracting every fuse. Freshly recruited sappers improvised techniques and morale boosted as soon as the first fuse was in our hands.

One of the bombs fell on a Pathankot cement store and got lodged between stacks of cement bags. Lt Maledath assessed the situation and prioritised the UXBs surrounding the store and then the one between the bags. In his correct opinion, more damage would be caused by open bombs. We followed his orders and split in groups of three to diffuse every bomb. Lt Maledath told me to fall back since I was married. He said he could take more risk since he was a bachelor. We agreed, but realised that he was accepting moral responsibility for any untoward action that could have happened if we wrongly handled the bombs. We insisted on going ahead of him as he was an officer required for directing us, and I volunteered to remove the first fuse. He was right behind me and gave a tight hug when I handed over the first fuse removed with my bare hands. His pleasant demeanor and constant directions helped us diffuse more UXBs while he worked on them himself.

We removed 3-4 bombs on the first day while another exploded, destroying a vehicle with 15 labourers, whose driver insisted on crossing the road while we were diffusing the bombs. Our sentry had repeatedly warned the driver not to cross the line, but he pumped his

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accelerator and claimed the lives of all those innocents. We felt bad, but there was nothing we could do about it. The next day, we recovered 4-5 UXBs from the fields surrounding Pathankot airstrip.

While leaving Pathankot, a lot of civilians gathered to bid us adieu. They praised my section in front of other officers and told them that we had done excellent work in the war. Today, if I am remembered by anyone, or called for interactions, it is because of all the teamwork by the men of 202 BD Platoon. It gives me great pleasure to recollect the days of achievement by all of us and I am grateful to God that he made all of us return intact. Col Sharma's name is carried with all our actions and we feel proud to be associated with him and to have served under his able leadership. In summary, it is God's grace that He assembled such a team. Without His *kirpa* (blessings), such a daunting task would never be successful. I am humbled by all these events in my life.

Nk Gurcharan Singh, M-in-D

My section was deployed in Pathankot. My task was to remove the fuses and hand them over to the rear for examination. I worked closely with my officer, JCO and others to collect the bombs, diffuse and destroy them. I saw one civilian pick up a small bomb, place it on his cycle and ride towards Pakistan. Our sentry stopped him and called me to diffuse it. The local informed us that he thought it would explode only in their territory due to the concept of bad karma. That gave me an idea that we could collect all the smaller bombs on a cycle and stack them up. The heavier bombs were destroyed in situ. "*Bahut sona kaam kita*" (we did a marvellous task). My officer Maledath Sahib and JCO Lashkar Sahib directed all operations in clockwork synchronisation and I cannot praise their leadership enough; they even carried some of the bombs with their own hands. I have fond memories of working in the Platoon under trying times.

Area of Responsibility -3, Ferozepur

Hav Ram Singh, SM

I was posted to 474 ENGINEER (ASSAULT) BRIGADE, under the command of Brig Jagdev Singh, where my Platoon was attached. We did not know that war was imminent, and preparations were on in full swing as the Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram was visiting for an inspection. I was in-charge of plant stores that hosted the steam generator, water trailer, compressor and all BD equipment. We gave a demo on BD drill and he inquired from Maj Sharma if we had any deficiencies. He guaranteed that all deficiencies would be made up as

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we were meant to remain operational at all times. “*Unko pata see ki involvement honi see*” (he knew we would be deployed).

Barely four days after his visit, we were asked to send our families home. By evening, we boarded trains and by early morning our families were home. We were told to assemble at Katoch Ground, Jalandhar, where our HQ would be established. There, our platoon was split in sections for Pathankot, Amritsar and so on. Subedar Sewa Singh assumed command of my section. At 0200 hrs, we heard that the metalled road near Food Corporation of India grounds had been bombed by Pakistan, the army was stalled nearby, and that Shaheed Bhagat Singh's samadhi at Ferozepur had been occupied by Pakistan. We were tasked to dispose the bombs at once and clear the way for the convoy to cross.

The unmetalled Zeera village road on bearing towards Ferozepur was used to divert traffic. We saw bodies lying all over and large craters with damaged vehicles. Some sentries met us and informed, “*itthe fateya, te uthe hore hege, tussi vekho*” (some bombs exploded here, there are more UXBs ahead). Sub Sewa Singh tasked me to recce the area and find a safe location for disposing the bombs. He examined the bombs to find that the fuses were behind a cover with hexagonal screws. We asked the local police to arrange for hexagonal screwdrivers and within half an hour, I extracted the first fuse to realise it was a delayed-action type.

Unknown to me, General Candeth's vehicle was stranded on the road behind me and when he saw that barely 2 seconds were left for the fuse to trigger, he called me “*bada-lucky-banda*” (very lucky man). It would have cost our army a great tragedy had my section not completed its first task on time. He directed me to give a short demo to some section units nearby and took a sample of fuses for studying them at the Div level. A team took away 4 defused bombs as well. Col Aditya Chopra from 474 ENGINEER BRIGADE, accompanying the general, ordered us to take the UXBs to Chandimandir for processing under the steam generator. Sub Sewa Singh chose a serene scene near the foothills where on one side we had the river and the hill on the other.

202 Platoon was blessed as we did not suffer a single casualty or accident. We earned honour with the tasks we accomplished and etched the Platoon's history in the Corps of Engineers. It is another blessing that Col Sharma lives to narrate the backdrop of our Platoon, which was hitherto unknown to us. I feel honoured that we meet again as brothers who served the unit, the Corps and our Nation. Fond

“Barely four days after his visit, we were asked to send our families home. By evening, we boarded trains and by early morning our families were home. We were told to assemble at Katoch Ground, Jalandhar, where our HQ would be established. There, our platoon was split in sections for Pathankot, Amritsar and so on. Subedar Sewa Singh assumed command of my section.”

memories of our service bring a smile to my face, when I sit back and think about those days. *“Kaam khatarnak tha, lekin Sharma saab ne sikhaya k ek hi galti karne ka chance tha, aur hamne Parmatma nu yaad kitta, te sab kaam sahi hoaya”* (the work was dangerous, and Maj Sharma told us that it would be a zero-error operation, we remembered God and performed our duty).

Summary

In conclusion, Col Sharma recalled, *“I didn't know about my award until Christmas day 24 Dec”*. On 14 Dec, the IAF took over airfield tasks when their own personnel returned from Bangladesh. On 15/16 December, I visited the Airforce Station where an anti-aircraft gunner told me to fall back. He informed that the Air Force BD unit had destroyed only few bombs but left some unexploded bombs without identification marks. An IAF jeep had gone over one of the UXBs and reported 2 casualties. The IAF had a well-set criteria for BD activity that classified UXBs in priority 1,2,3. The number 1 priority had to be removed while the others could be done as per need. For 202 BD Platoon, all bombs were priority 1 by default and had to be removed. Thereby, our role has to be seen from a larger view or perspective not limited to the airstrips where we were deployed. Indeed, our IAF brothers were proud of us. It was reflected in all their DO letters received for the Platoon. Even the Air Chief sent a DO letter of appreciation addressing all ranks 202.

You would not believe that the quality of work done by my Platoon was better than many Engineer Companys of the time. Admittedly, at that time, there remained a perception that all low-rated personnel were sent to BD Platoons, which did not have much of a role. The Platoons lacked regimentation and could not be compared with a regular Corps of Engineers' Company or Regiment. The Bomb Disposal Platoon had earned a name in this battle. A few years later, there was a large function for gallantry awardees at Pune. I was told that the number of bombs we diffused in those 15 days were equal to six months of actual BD on an average. That day, I realised our Corps' pride in team 202 BD Platoon's war-time achievement.

Till date, I acknowledge the fact that we were scared while moving and negotiating around the bombs. One knew the outcome of a minor mistake could take our lives. We were truly blessed; our training, innovative team work and junior leadership lived up to the example set by our first OC, Capt RR Rane, Param Vir Chakra. It may be a record in the Corps of Engineers that out of 110 men, 11 earned gallantry awards.

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Amongst 10% of the Platoon, we earned 1 Kirti Chakra, 2 Shaurya Chakra, 4 Sena Medals and 4 Mentioned in Despatches. Most of the men were cited for some gallantry award, but the sector's gallantry awards quota was over. Amongst the honours list, 202 BD PLATOON earned an honour title “Sher-e-Punjab Disposers” for their role in the 1971 war.

To my knowledge, there is no Company like ours and I feel privileged to have led them in war. In short brief, we destroyed 135 UXBs. Our steam generator stopped working and the EME was unable to fix it. But they located a local engineer who had been to the UK and suggested taking the generator to Manimajra where he could fix it. That gentleman fixed it by evening and we continued operations.

202 BOMB DISPOSAL PLATOON
1971 War Honours List

Sr	No	Rank	Name	Awards Independence Day 1972
1	IC 17191	Maj	Sachendra Kumar Sharma	Kirti Chakra (5 Dec)- Destroyed 3 UXB Manawala Vil, Amritsar. Extracted first fuse himself, studied delayed-action fuze type and gave vital information on its disposal technique. Thereafter, supervised the neutralisation and disposal of other UX bombs
2	SS 23795	2/ Lt	Ravindranathan Maledath	Shaurya Chakra (13 Dec)– Pathankot airfield - mop up, personally disposed and kept airfield operational
3	JC 33586	Sub	Sewa Singh	Shaurya Chakra (13 Dec) – Food Corp of India, Vil Zeera, Ferozepur – 5 UXB 750 pds- manual extraction and disposal
4	JC 34489	Nb Sub	Lashkar Singh	Sena Medal (5 & 8 Dec) – found 3 UXB Manawala Vil, Amritsar- removed 2 fuses Disposed 8 (3 delayed-type) 1000 pds UXB in Kumayu and Heir (Attari Block) village near Raja Sansi Airfield of Amritsar – destroyed personally
5	JC 45837	Nb Sub	Kabal Singh	Sena Medal- (7-8 Dec) –kept Pathankot Airfield operational by personally disposing 3 UXBs
6	1519455	Spr	Ram Singh	Sena Medal- Food Corp of India, Vil Zeera, Ferozepur – 5 UXB 750 pds - took out first bomb
7	1563563	L/Nk	Bua Ditta	Sena Medal (8 Dec)- 8 (3 delayed type) 1000 pds UXB in Kumayu and Heera vill near Raja Sansi Airfield of Amritsar, dug and helped remove fuses
8	JC 84793 W Sub Hony Capt	Hav	Karnail Singh	Mentioned in Despatches
9	1509598	Hav	Hari Ram	Mentioned in Despatches
10	1518519	Spr	Gurcharan Singh	Mentioned in Despatches
11	1517799	Nk	Daljit Singh	Mentioned in Despatches

Indeed, the civilian population's support must be acknowledged in our wareffort.

Post Script

According to the *History of The Corps of Engineers Indian Army (1947-72)*, during Maj (later Maj Gen) AM Joglekar's command of 202 BD PLATOON, four UXBs had been destroyed in situ in the vicinity of Dabolim airfield during the Goa Operations (1961). A decade later, Capt (later Col) SK Sharma, KC had been handpicked by Col Joglekar to command his platoon, and the history created after that decision has been narrated above.

As part of regimentation, rolling trophies named after 1971 war veterans – Maj SK Sharma for Best Platoon; Sub Sewa Singh for Best NCO; Hav Ram Singh for Best Sapper and Nk Saminder Singh for Best Innovation – were introduced in 2018 on the occasion of the 61st Raising Day. At the award ceremony, Harinder Singh Balala, the proud grandson of Hav Ram Singh, SM, said: “While searching on YouTube, I found a video hosted by the History Channel that covered all aspects of Bomb Disposal that were similar to actions undertaken by my grandfather's platoon. That is when I learnt about the trying circumstances he had been in”.

“Till date, I acknowledge the fact that we were scared while moving and negotiating around the bombs. One knew the outcome of a minor mistake could take our lives. We were truly blessed; our training, innovative team work and junior leadership lived up to the example set by our first OC, Capt RR Rane, Param Vir Chakra. It may be a record in the Corps of Engineers that out of 110 men, 11 earned gallantry awards. Amongst 10% of the Platoon, we earned 1 Kirti Chakra, 2 Shaurya Chakra, 4 Sena Medals and 4 Mentioned in Despatches.”



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WITH A DAMAGED TAIL PLANE OVER TANGAIL DZ



With a Damaged Tail Plane over Tangail DZ

This is a brief account of an incident on 11 December, 1971 during the Airborne Assault over the Dropping Zone (DZ), near Tangail in East Pakistan during Operation 'CACTUS-LILLY', the military operation conducted by the Indian Armed Forces for the liberation of erstwhile East Pakistan. In this operation, 2 PARA of 50 INDEPENDENT PARACHUTE BRIGADE were parachuted onto a DZ close to Tangail, about 70 miles North West of Dacca. The aim was to capture the Poongli Bridge over the River Jamuna and prevent Pakistani 93 Brigade from retreating into Dacca to reinforce its defenses. The Air Transport Force comprised of Two Fairchild Packets as Pathfinders, Six AN-12s for Heavy Drops, followed by 20 Packets and 22 Dakotas. Two Caribou aircraft were deployed in a decoy operation far away from the main objective. The author wrote about this incident after 48 years, mainly to place IAF history on record.

GROUP CAPT PATRI JAYARAO, (RETD)

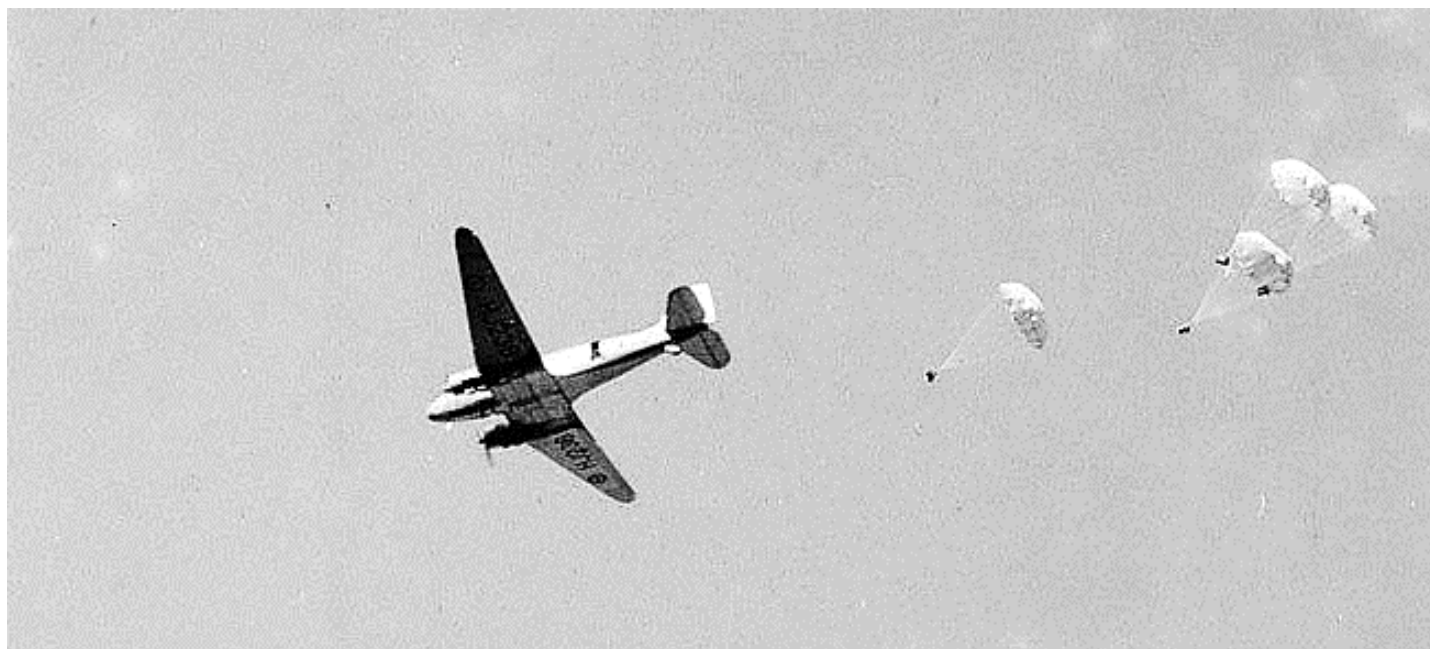
Background

This is a brief account of an incident on 11 December, 1971 during the Airborne Assault over the Drop Zone (DZ), near Tangail in East Pakistan during Operation 'CACTUS-LILLY', the military operation conducted by the Indian Armed Forces for the liberation of erstwhile East Pakistan. In this operation, 2 PARA of 50 INDEPENDENT PARACHUTE BRIGADE were parachuted onto a DZ close to Tangail, about 70 miles North West of Dacca. The aim was to capture the Poongli Bridge over the River Jamuna and prevent Pakistani 93 BRIGADE from retreating into Dacca to reinforce its defenses. The Air Transport Force comprised of Two Fairchild Packets as Pathfinders, Six AN-12s for Heavy Drops, followed by 20 Packets and 22 Dakotas. Two Caribou aircraft were deployed in a decoy operation far away from the main objective.

Gathering of the Force

The AN-12 Detachment operated from Dum Dum. The Packets operated from Agra and Allahabad staging through Kolkata. The Dakota force was based at Bhita an airfield near Patna. The 22 aircraft Dakota Task Force was made up of aircraft from 11 Sqn led by Wg Cdr Roy who was also the Dakota Force Commander, 43 Sqn led by Wg Cdr KC Sharma, 49 Sqn led by Wg Cdr M K Rudra and Transport Training Wing from Yelahanka led by Wg Cdr R C Sondhi. On 11 December 71, all 22 Dakotas were flown to Kalaikunda for briefing and launching the operation. Briefing was conducted by Gp Capt JK Seth. It was

In this operation, 2nd Para Battalion of 50 Independent Parachute Brigade were parachuted onto a DZ close to Tangail, about 70 miles North West of Dacca. The aim was to capture the Poongli Bridge over the River Jamuna and prevent Pakistani 93 Brigade from retreating into Dacca to reinforce its defenses. The Air Transport Force comprised of Two Fairchild Packets as Pathfinders, Six AN-12s for Heavy Drops, followed by 20 Packets and 22 Dakotas. Two Caribou aircraft were deployed in a decoy operation far away from the main objective.



Dakota HJ238 dropping supplies. The open door through which the supplies and the paratroopers would jump out is clearly visible

followed by a short motivational address by Lt Col KS Pannu CO 2 PARA.

The operation was complex with three types of aircraft flying over the DZ at different speeds and different heights. Besides, the unarmed Packets / Dakotas / AN-12s would be inside East Pakistan for considerable time. That by itself was not a problem since the Indian Air Force had achieved complete air supremacy over East Pakistan by 08 Dec 71. The Air Plan as briefed was, initially the Pathfinders would mark the DZ enabling the six AN-12s to drop artillery guns and heavy vehicles followed by 20 Packets with lighter vehicles and RCL guns on jeeps as well as paratroopers, and in the end 22 Dakotas would drop the main body of the Attack Force. In the Dakota Stream of 22 aircraft, 11 Sqn was in the lead followed by 43 Sqn 49 Sqn and TTW.

The ETA over the DZ was given at 1635 hrs which was sunset time for Tangail. This meant that all the aircraft, except the Dakotas, would have dropped their cargo in good light conditions. Our emergency diversion was Rampurhat which was being controlled by the Tactical Air Centre (TAC) from XXXIII CORPS at Siliguri. Rampurhat was a World War II airfield abandoned since, and none of us had ever seen it let alone landed there during our flying careers.

At the Tail end

As a Flt Lt, I was one of the six Instructors from Yelahanka making up the TTW Section of 22 aircraft Dakota Formation. Initially, my slot

“As a Flight Lieutenant, I was one of the six Instructors from Yelahanka making up the TTW Section of 22 aircraft Dakota Formation. Initially, my slot was to be No2 to our Chief Instructor Wg Cdr Sondhi, who was my Instructor during my training on Dakotas back in 1963. After arriving at Kalaikunda he changed my position to become the very last Dakota at the end of 22 aircraft Stream. His words were, “there will be a lot of waltzing in the air as the tail-end Charlie”.

”

was to be No2 to our Chief Instructor Wg Cdr Sondhi, who was my Instructor during my training on Dakotas back in 1963. After arriving at Kalaikunda he changed my position to become the very last Dakota at the end of 22 aircraft Stream. His words were, “there will be a lot of waltzing in the air as the tail-end Charlie”. True, the aircraft wake of the receding 21 Dakotas and all the oscillations of 21 aircraft ahead, would make my aircraft unsteady. I thought it was his way of showing confidence in me. My aircraft was BJ-972, with Flying Officer AMS Tanwar (my pupil) as co-pilot, Flight Lieutenant VP Davray as Navigator and Flight Sgt SR Singh as our Flight Signaller. We also had two *Parachute Jumping Instructors* (PJI) from Paratrooper Training School and 18 soldiers from 2 PARA. There were 24 of us in Dakota BJ-972 that afternoon. The briefing over, we started our respective aircraft waiting to taxi out in the order that we would be dropping our troops over Tangail. The air was tense as we knew a massive drop of about 700 paratroopers with artillery and engineers would be a historic operation.

Violent 'Hangup' During the Drop

All the aircraft got airborne safely. We maintained total RT Silence. As we crossed the border we could hear two Fighters engaged in continuous RT chatter. Our flight up to the DZ was uneventful. The weather was good and smooth. Visibility was hazy especially as we closed into sunset. One by one the aircraft ahead of us started dropping. We were in a Line-Astern formation, so we could see at least three aircraft ahead dropping their troops, and we were flying at 1000 feet above ground level. We aligned with the DZ and prepared BJ-972 for the drop, keeping a steady speed. At the designated point before the DZ, the Navigator started the countdown with 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and I gave the 'Green On' signal. The PJI, as per the drill, started giving the count for the troops that were jumping out of the Dakota; 1, 2, 3, till he came to 17 and then he used.....Immediately it struck me that there was some problem, so asked F/O Tanwar to peep behind through the cockpit door to see what was happening. At that very instant, there was a severe 'Thud' and both of us experienced 'Red-Out' for a few seconds.

The aircraft plunged nose down and there was no response even with hard pull back on the control column. Instantly, all the training on 'Paratrooper Hang Up' came into my mind. I tried all stunts like Severe Yawing to the Left and Right, followed by rolling the aircraft to the Left and Right. Opened full power, and closed power, lowered and raised flaps. Somehow, by about 300 ft above ground we were able to regain pitch control and maintain height after that. Our Dakota had

lost about 700 feet by then but there was severe vibration and juddering on the control column. The Navigator came into the cockpit and informed me that one Paratrooper had hit our Tail Plane and was hanging on it for a while. We knew that some damage had occurred to the tail plane, but could not ascertain how much, besides it was now getting dark and the Dakotas did not have inspection lights to see the tail plane.

Partial Response from Controls

On enquiry, the PJI confirmed that the Trooper was free of the tail plane. Our primary job at that time was to control the aircraft and set course for the diversion. The Nav gave a Course to Rampurhat onto a heading of about 280 degrees (as I recall). Once on course, we gradually gained height to about 1500 ft above ground, for added safety. The aircraft was maintaining level with great effort but the elevator required lot of effort with excessive trimming, presumably due to the damage on the tail plane. Even with increased power on both engines, the speed was settled to around 120 mph. The Navigator and the PJI gave a brief report. It seemed that the 18th paratrooper hesitated to jump, and in that confusion pulled his Rip Cord while still inside the aircraft partially deploying his parachute.

Then surprisingly, and against all Standard Operating Procedures, the PJIs pushed him out of the aircraft. With that partially deployed chute he did not jump clear of the aircraft, and due to propeller slipstream, went and got entangled with the tailplane. We were very lucky that he somehow got free of the aircraft with all that wild maneuvering, and regained control. All this must have taken about two or three minutes but seemed an eternity. On course to Rampurhat the co-pilot gave a PAN call, a cautionary emergency broadcast. There was no response from any one, not even from the aircraft of my own Dakota Section. We would take at least one hour to reach Rampurhat at this reduced speed which was not a problem as we had enough fuel and the engines were operating quite normal. The main problem for me was the severe juddering and noisy vibrations. But they were coming intermittently, I thought it must be because of the damaged Tail Plane. One can imagine the uncertainty and apprehension as to whether the damage to aircraft controls would further increase as we flew to Rampurhat. Throughout the crippled flight, in my mind, I was acutely aware that any time the tail plane may say good bye leaving us with no options.

“As soon as we set Course, the two PJIs came into Cockpit and asked me if they could jump out. Perhaps they wanted to get out of the aircraft when the going was good. They were told to stay put as there was no need to panic at that stage. After a while the two PJIs again repeated their request and once more assured them that we were not going to crash - as yet. Every time they walked forward into the cockpit my Elevator Trim which was already strained badly because of the Tail Plane damage, got further compounded and it was a struggle to keep BJ-972 flying level.”

Parachute Jumping Instructors' (PJI) Itching to Jump

As soon as we set Course, the two PJIs came into Cockpit and asked me if they could jump out. Perhaps they wanted to get out of the aircraft when the going was good. They were told to stay put as there was no need to panic at that stage. After a while the two PJIs again repeated their request and once more assured them that we were not going to crash - as yet. Every time they walked forward into the cockpit my Elevator Trim which was already strained badly because of the Tail Plane damage, got further compounded and it was a struggle to keep BJ-972 flying level. Finally, when they came to the cockpit a third time, I had to threaten them with gross insubordination and disobedience of orders if they came into the cockpit once again. That made them to strap up and sit tight. We should understand and appreciate their keenness to jump out, which showed their training and confidence.

But my option to keep flying was also the same reasons: Training and confidence in the Dakota. After about 10 minutes of flying, suddenly out of the blue the controller from 'Eastern Control' called us and asked for my intention. The Eastern Control was informed that we were diverting to Rampurhat. The Control gave us the Course to Rampurhat which was about the same as were flying. This meant that the radar of Eastern Control had identified us on his console which gave us some confidence, as someone on ground was following us. By then we estimated that we were about 50 minutes flying time from Rampurhat. But surprisingly, within ten minutes Eastern Control again comes up and asked us our position. In reply we asked him to give us our position as he was monitoring us on his Radar. He then startled us by saying that he had 'no joy' on our aircraft, it was unexpected, especially after he had given us the direction to fly to Rampurhat earlier. Immediately, I asked the Navigator for our position.

There was "no joy" there too as he had closed his Charts thinking that we were under Radar Control. Thus, in addition to our structural problems, we were now unsure of our position, during a dark night with complete "Blackout" all over and all Ground Beacons switched off. Not a happy situation.

Got our Ground Fix

After a brief discussion with the Navigator, we decided to alter course to the left by about 10 degrees. My idea was that, if we had continued the original course there was a possibility of missing Rampurhat and getting too close to the Himalayan foothills as there were not many prominent features on the ground to map read during night. By turning left, we would hit the river Ganges and by flying West

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along the river we would find enough features to identify and get a ground fix. This decision turned out to be effective. After flying for about 15 or 20 minutes we reached a very wide river and following the river due West, we looked for distinct features to ascertain our position on ground. There was little moonlight, full moon was nine days earlier on the night of 02 / 03 Dec 1971. We got our position by ground fix by identifying a distinct river feature and thanking our stars we set course for Rampurhat on a Northerly heading.

All is Well that Ends Well

Finally, we came over the general airfield area and town, but could not locate the runway nor see any lighting and our repeated calls to the Control Tower went unanswered. We started circling overhead and ordered the Flt Sig to Fire the Vary Pistol that is located on top of the aircraft. This was the recommended practice of alerting the Air Traffic Control that there is an aircraft overhead intending to land and it worked. Soon we heard some crackling noise in our earphones and after a couple of attempts we got a welcome message from the ground. He introduced himself as Gp Capt Sam Venkat Rao, a very senior navigator who was the Tactical Air Centre Commander. We enquired about the airstrip lighting. He apologized that they had only six Goose-necks (oil cans with long spouts and wick filled with kerosene) which were working. Requested him to mark the beginning and the end of the runway with three Goose-necks each and light up the Thresh-Hold with their vehicle's head lights.

Luckily, they had a Jeep and a One-Tonner. With those rudimentary lighting arrangements, we started descending to the circuit height and before turning towards the runway for a landing made a final check of flying controls. There was no Rudder control. We had partial Elevator control and of course the Ailerons were normal. Before landing I briefed Tanwar, to follow me on the controls and cautioned him that we may need a lot of force, by both of us, to keep the aircraft straight and flying as the speed drops off before the landing. Fortunately, we managed a safe landing at about 1845 hrs on 11 Dec 1971. We were received by Groupie Rao himself, he was very cordial and very helpful. After parking we requested him to light up the tail of the aircraft with headlights to visually inspect and assess the damage. On the Port side of the tail plane was badly damaged and most of the stabiliser was missing, The Fin had some visual damage, and the Rudder surface completely missing. For the first time we grasped the gravity of the situation that we had flown all the way from the DZ with such damage.

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Crew Debrief

On ground, during the Debrief, the PJs admitted that they made a mistake and it was a blunder to push the paratrooper out when he had pulled his Rip Cord inside the aircraft. They added that they pushed him out as he had a 2 Inch Mortar and a Carbine strapped to his body and hence assumed that he was a critical member of his group. That very clearly explained the damage sustained during the time he was banging on the Elevator and Rudder of the aircraft. It was the hard metal of the Mortar and Carbine strapped to his body that had caused so much damage to BJ-972. We had the familiar Air Force type (rolled in old newspapers) packed dinner brought to us by Groupie Rao. He wanted us to go with him to TAC HQs in Siliguri, but we declined and decided to stay with the aircraft. Our CI Wg Cdr Sondhi flew in the relief aircraft himself at 1600 hrs on 12 Dec 71. He had a good look at the aircraft, hugged me and said “Did you really land this aircraft last night?” I could sense the pride of a 'Guru' in his voice.

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Post Mortem

On return to Yelahanka, there was an Inquiry into the incident. The Inquiry papers with Findings and Recommendations were sent to the Dakota Force Commander for his Final Remarks. The Inquiry was returned after a while with a covering letter stating, “*I have already sent a report to Air HQs stating that the Operation was a great success, and there were no incidents or accidents*”. And for a good measure he added, “It would be embarrassing for me to forward this report now”. As promised, Gp Capt Rao, called me and confirmed that Para Trooper Mahadeo Gurao, who was involved in that 'Hang Up', was safe. Recently I came to know that he actually joined up with Marathas to fight the battle and later reported to his unit bringing his Parachute which saved his life as a Souvenir.

As we say in Air Force: **DCO...**(Duty Carried Out!)

TRACK-TWO DIALOGUE



17 March 2016 interview with No. 6 IAS crewmembers. Extreme Left Ris Amar Singh, Nb Ris Dharam Pal, Nb Ris Harish Chandra (folded hands) and author on extreme right while other veterans look on



Track-Two Dialogue

This is a narrative history of how a T-55 tank crew of No. 6 INDEPENDENT ARMOURED SQUADRON (now C SQUADRON, 75 ARMOURED REGIMENT) then commanded by Maj Ravinder Datt Law, Vir Chakra; recalls their combat experience of 1971 in the Western Sector. The main interviewee Naib Risaldar Harish Chandra, was the tank loader/radio operator and Naib Risaldar Dharam Pal was the tank driver and the other speaker during the interview.

SAGAT SHAUNIK

7⁵ ARMOURED REGIMENT has the historical distinction of being the only Armoured Regiment of independent India to be raised on captured Pakistani soil in 1972; all this and more post the amalgamation of No. 3, 4 & 6 INDEPENDENT ARMOURED SQUADRONS (IAS) that were in active combat in different sectors during Operation Cactus Lily – the 1971 War.

44 years later in March 2016 at 75th's Standard Presentation, Ris Amar Singh, Retired, introduced the author to retired war veterans Nb Ris Harish Chandra, 7 CAVALRY (abbreviated HC) and Nb Ris Dharam Pal, CENTRAL INDIA HORSE (CIH) (abbreviated DP) who were crews of B-Bravo tank 2 Troop (Tp) of No. 6 IAS and fought in the Battle of Laungewala and later in Sindh. They fondly remembered crew members who were not present, Gunner, Risaldar Kavar Lal, 7 CAVALRY and Tank Commander, Risaldar Samant Ram, 62 CAVALRY.

Please share experiences with 6 IAS, I want to write its history, prior raising of 75th.

HC (smiling): That is indeed a good thought. Come sit with us and hear our story. Our Sqn Commander was Maj RD Law, VrC, 7 CAVALRY; Sqn 2ic was Capt AK Bhatia, 62 CAVALRY; 1st Tp Ldr Lt TS Dahiya; 2nd Sqn Tp Ldr 2/Lt KR Bhadbhade, 71 ARMOURED REGIMENT and our Senior JCO was Risaldar Chand Singh, 7 CAVALRY. Fifteen men each were drawn from 7 CAVALRY, 16 CAVALRY, CIH, 62 CAVALRY and another regiment I can't recall.

DP: On 25 November 1971, CIH paid our salaries, granted two days leave to drop our belongings home and report at the Armoured Corps Centre and School (ACC&S) Ahmednagar ('Nagar).

HC: You were at least given some leave, we were sent from Samba to ACC&S and onto Bombay docks to collect brand new T-55 tanks. We zeroed them at KK Ranges and loaded onto flatbed train waiting at 'Nagar.

“That is indeed a good thought. Come sit with us and hear our story. Our Sqn Commander was Maj RD Law, VrC, 7 Cavalry; Sqn 2IC was Capt AK Bhatia, 62 Cavalry; 1st Tp Ldr Lt TS Dahiya; 2nd Sqn Tp Ldr 2/Lt KR Bhadbhade, 71 Armoured Regiment and our Senior JCO was Risaldar Chand Singh, 7 Cavalry. Fifteen men each were drawn from 7 Cavalry, 16 Cavalry, CIH, 62 Cavalry and another regiment I can't recall.”

When we arrived at 'Nagar, we were wearing our parent regimental insignia. Just before we boarded the train ACC&S, Commandant Sahib came and gave each one of us an Armoured Corps badge and ordered, "*Ab sabhi jann yeh pehnenge*" (now, all men will wear this). On the evening of 3 Dec, Pakistan Air Force simultaneously attacked several Air bases at '*theek paanch bajje*' (1700 hrs). Indira Gandhi had gone to meet the Mukti Bahini at Calcutta. At sharp 2200 hrs, she declared 'emergency'. We were listening to the radio while doing initial oil-change on our new tanks.

On morning 4th Dec, we moved on track from Asutar towards Laungewala. Before reaching, we were told to cross Tanot and proceed towards Kishangarh instead of Laungewala. So, we altered our way points marked on the map. On the way to Kishangarh, "*hame bataya gaya*" (we were told) that we were not supposed to be there, should have remained at Laungewala and that the enemy had reached Laungewala with some Patton Tanks.

"*Fir, ham sab ko fall-in karwa deeya tha aur poocha gaya k Patton Tank kee kaun g***d-maarega? Toh ham sab bole k ham maareng*" (Then we were all ordered to fall-in and asked who would take on the enemy? So we all said we will take them on). "*Saab, aapne kabhi socha hein ke Fauj mein log gaali kyu dete hein? Meine aajtak na kabhi gaali di na drinks lee. Saab, yeh toh galat baat hein na, galat kaam karna?*" (Have you ever wondered why Armed Forces use profanity? I have never abused or taken alcohol. Isn't it a bad thing to do wrong?)

Then, the Squadron Commander Maj Law Sahib said, "*mere order par hee sab hilleenge*" (everyone will proceed on my orders). Around the same time we learnt that Pakistan had infiltrated our 'Net' and ordered us to proceed towards Kishangarh with '*badhne ka hukam*' (marching orders).

DP: We reached Kishangarh at 0700 hrs. Then we were given 'hukam' (orders) to march 'without control', and reach Laungewala under all circumstances. "*Tanko se march hoga, koi rukna nahi aur poore speed mein*" (Tanks will move on track, without any stop and in full speed).

HC: On the way out, Chand Sahib distributed packed meals when our tanks crossed him, reiterating 'rush to Laungewala'.

DP: On the approach to Laungewala, about 15-20 km away, we saw "*kaala-gehra dhooa*" (thick black smoke) and then four burning tanks. At that time a Pak tank troop had four tanks. So we knew an enemy tank troop had been destroyed.

HC: When we reached Laungewala, we were ordered to take up positions at a post atop a dune. Pak forces were deployed and our Air

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When we reached Laungewala, we were ordered to take up positions at a post atop a dune. Pak forces were deployed and our Air Force was strafing them. Night fell and our tanks were told to take up defensive positions with 100-200 metres gaps. Our tank, Bravo-2 was in lead and I was given first sentry duty, so I took up position with my carbine "*Phir thoda apne sarr ke peeche laga kar jhoolne bhi laga*" (Later I placed it behind my neck and started stretching). Soon enough an infantry platoon arrived and started digging a '*morcha*' (trench) followed by their Captain who ordered, "*chodo yeh morcha, aur jao jakar patrolling mein lag jao*" (stop digging and move out on patrol), they left immediately. A constant moaning sound of '*Haye Allah*' filled the air, I saw Pakistanis dying below the dune while their tanks were burning. They were abusing us till 0330 hrs, by when all of them died.

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Our sector was allotted a few air-details that strafed and destroyed a few Pakistani vehicles and tanks, '*sabko jala deeya*'. Our tanks had moved 36 hours nonstop and crews were ordered to rest as I was on sentry duty. Then I heard some tank movement and told my commander Lance Daffadar Sant Ram. He came up and confirmed, "Yes, I can hear it too, go and tell everyone behind us to stand-two". I was a tank radio operator and my troop leader was some 100m behind my position. His operator was Mahendra whom I called via radio and got no '*jawab*' (reply) from. I rushed to his position and asked him why he wasn't on the radio and told him to go and inform everyone...

While I was walking back, an infantry Captain appeared out of nowhere and asked '*kaun hein*' (who is there). "*Mein bola k tankwala hun*" (I said am the Tank Man). The he asked me "Do you know what has happened?" I said yes Sahib, there is some enemy tank movement, I have informed everyone to stand-two and now am returning to my tank, please order your men to stand-two, as well.

When I reached my tank, the approaching enemy's tank noise kept on increasing. First it was loud from the right side, then centre and moved to the left. It was coming from behind the dunes in front of me, where Pakistanis were crossing us and taking positions about 1.5-2 km ahead. We knew their presence and approximate positions and that's how we passed the night of 5 Dec.

On first light 6 Dec, we marked our maps and were ordered on a search & destroy mission while driving tanks at high speed. By 1000 hrs we made contact, our troop was ordered on a right flank out manoeuvre. We engaged uncertain enemy positions with '*shakiya*' (prophylactic) fire. Meanwhile, Lt Bhadbade Sahib's radio fell silent. He did not respond to our calls, he had been speaking over the radio but fell silent when enemy burst pierced his head. Even his radio operator Vidya Dhar was killed because both of them were standing on

their seats with open cupolas. The enemy had taken up defensive positions and we could not easily spot them. Nb Ris Hoshiyar Singh assumed command and Maj Law ordered him on a left flank manoeuvre, as the previous move yielded no results.

{An onlooker veteran, during the interview commented: you were very 'bhagyashali' (lucky) that your crew survived!}

We arrived on the left flank to be engaged by heavy artillery shelling; those with open-cupolas would be killed. If Lt Bhadbhade Sahib had any chances of survival, that shelling would not have spared him! We closed our cupolas; our new tanks withstood the shelling and gave us confidence in T-55. During this shelling, Nb Risaldar Chain Singh's tank was hit by RL (rocket launcher) and caught fire. Of the four-man crew, only Sudan, the driver survived. Nb Risaldar Chain Singh, his operator Kanwarlal and gunner whose name I cannot recall at the moment had died.

After much shelling, we noticed a 'Kair' tree (*Capparis decidua*) behind our tanks. A Pakistani artillery Observation Officer and his operator had hidden there and directed accurate shelling. The moment shelling stopped, they came out and ran from behind our tanks. We tried firing at the fleeing men, but they were lucky to jump over the rete (dune) and got away. Shelling stopped but our positions were compromised.

By the time this 'kaarwai' (action) ended, it was 1600 hrs. Our Air-Op informed us that we were surrounded from both our left and right flanks, so we should extricate immediately. He told us not to turn an inch, just reverse straight, and in quick time. We wanted to verify his khabar (info), but there was no time, we withdrew 1 km back to our defensive line and reached the road where we found our Division Commander, Brigade Commander, a Wing Commander and an Armoured Delivery Squadron of old AMX-13 tanks that would get bogged down in the sand. These belonged to 20 LANCERS who had remained behind on the road and could not fight due to under calibre guns and limited armoured protection against Pak's Chinese T-59 tanks.

Div Cdr ordered us to return to our morning location and we marched back to Laungewala that was 1-1.5 km ahead. After a while, a correspondent like you came to me and inquired about the 'yudh' (battle). I told him that I didn't know anything. At that time I was the only sentry guarding the tanks. So I took him to the troop leader's operator. I told him, "*chalo mein bhi pata karta hun k kya ho raha hein*" (okay, let me also find out what is happening). We didn't know who was alive, who was dead, who came back and who didn't. That was

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when we learnt that Vidyadhar, Bhadbhade, Chain Singh, Kanwarlal, the gunner and Daffadar Atar Singh were killed in action. Dead bodies were being piled on a jeep and taken to the rear for last rites. Lance Daffadar Mohan of 7 CAVALRY had been grievously wounded, he could neither speak nor walk. Years later, he came to the Regiment once but we never heard of him again, he was in such a bad condition and got no pension either.

6 Days, 6 December and 6 Deaths! We were raised just 8 days ago, we didn't even know each other's names. After disembarking at Jaisalmer we were told, you are crew, you are crew and divided into crew lists as per our skills, i.e. driver/ gunner/ loader-operators/ crew commanders and allotted tanks and then ordered into battle. Along the way we learnt each other's names!

We remained in Laungewala for night 6 Dec. On 7 Dec, we washed our socks and then, *Chand Saab came and announced, "tum kya marr gaye? Tumhare saath Gorkha ladh rahe hein aur tum idhar baithe ho?"* (Have you all died? The Gorkhas with you are fighting and you are sitting here?) We went back in to assault positions, without our socks and awaited orders that didn't arrive.

On 8th Dec we were redeployed and marched in line-ahead formation and were to cross over into Pak. Once again our 2B-Bravo tank of 2 Troop was in the lead. We approached the Border Pillar (BP) where Pak had laid defences. Being in the leading tank, we saw a man running approximately 500-600 m ahead and indicated to our tank commander who stopped the tank and fired the machine gun. Simultaneously, the other two tanks of our troop came along side and opened up their main guns. That's when we felt that our brothers were with us. My tank commander and I were standing in the cupola giving contact report and call for artillery fire. 'Wang' a ranging bullet hit us, our driver DP, had engaged the reverse gear and at that instant let out the clutch and our tank commander fell inside the turret due to the jerk! We were saved from the following shot to the precursor ranging round; the enemy was located and fixed for destruction. Law Sahib came on the radio and said, "Well done, super job. Now don't leave the dune until I tell you, keep the enemy pinned and fixed in contact".

DP: Armoured Corps mein yahi rule hein, *RCL ko pehle udao, tank baad mein. Isliye hamara tank bach gaya* (It is the rule in the Armoured Corps, first destroy the RCL and then tanks. That's why our tank was saved).

HC: Then, the entire Squadron was brought up-front in assault position.

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{Mentions-in-side remark: Train mein aate samay, timepass karne ke liye ham sabne PKT ka ammunition load kiya tha, steno ke magazine load kiye aur bas yehi sab (while travelling in the train, we passed time by maintaining our weapons – cleaning checking and re-checking, belting machine gun ammo, filling carbine and pistol magazines and priming our grenades)}

We waited under that dune for an hour; I spoke on the radio, “*Sabh ladh rahe hein, hamme kya karna chahiye?*” (Everyone is fighting, what should we be doing?). Law Sahib came on the line to say, “*agar tumhe Vir Chakra chahiye toh hee attack karna nahi toh mere order tak wait karo*” (Attack only if you want a Vir Chakra, otherwise wait for my orders). We were anxious, DP tried to move a bit. The moment DP started the tank, Law Sahib came on the radio to say “you bloody fool, I had stopped you from doing anything! So we killed our tank engine. After a few minutes I asked Law Sahib, “*Sahib, why haven't you married till now?*” He responded immediately by saying ‘why keep a cow when you can get free milk?’ The entire Sqn had a hearty laugh on the radio! Soon enough, orders were received for an assault prior last-light. This would be a combined arms attack by 6 IAS and infantry from GORKHA, KUMAON, RAJ RIF and MAHAR Battalions; with Air-Op and supporting artillery directed by FOO (Forward Observation Officer) Bajwa Sahib, we can't recollect if he was a Captain or Major.

In the battle that ensued, our artillery saved our day; we assaulted at last light and opened all guns. It was to be a heavy assault; our thoughts were that if we don't do it, the Pakistanis would seize initiative. Our plans were heavy fire, kill shots seeking maximum destruction as it would be our last attempt being very low on ammo, fuel, water and food reserves, we just had to destroy the enemy. During the assault, some Pakistanis being desperate raised their hands but were instantly cut down by our heavy firing and shelling, perhaps if they surrendered after the assault they may have been prisoners. We could not take prisoners while firing on the move, it can only be done post attack re-organisation. *During the assault FOO Bajwa Sahib who was riding on top of our tank was very brave, directing artillery fire and merciless in using his carbine.*

We pushed the enemy 3 kms back in to his own territory. We stopped only when we felt that it would be inappropriate to proceed further, we were low on reserves and supporting infantry couldn't keep up – in those days we didn't have MECHANISED INFANTRY. Two tanks of Mahavir Sahib's troop did not stop, Daffadar CK Tomar a giant in appearance, could eat a kilo of meat in one go. He and another whose name I cannot recall didn't stop. Some Pak B-Vehicle of an Officer's Mess was withdraw-

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ing. Tomar thought that it was our own, so he started following it. He went further 2 km in to Pakistan lost his bearing and stopped to ask 'where am I?' He was advised to see the stars, orient and return, he didn't know which star to see. Then, Bhatia Sahib told Tomar that he was firing a red-flare and he should follow that and return. We withdrew a little and placed all tanks in harbour surrounding and protecting some infantry. Sentries and watch positions were assigned, we were to rest but spent time in tank gun cleaning and maintenance. All this happened beyond the Laungewala border pillar in Pakistan. There were no arrangements for food or water, infantry kept asking for water. “*Woh hamse bole ya toh paani do, ya goli maar do*” (They requested us, either give us water or shoot us). So we started dispensing water. Then our troop leader *Hoshiyar Saab* came and stopped us from giving water.

DP: I pleaded with him that tonight they will die, tomorrow we will all die.

HC: But our Saab did not listen.

DP: Then I told our infantry not to worry, just come quietly from behind, I will give you water...

HC: The next morning, I was sitting in my cupola, when the Air-Op was hovering just above us. I believe they communicated that for 10 km there was nothing and we could advance unopposed. We had neither water, diesel nor supplies so we stayed put.

The railway line connecting Munnabao-Khokrapar was destroyed in the Indo-Pak War of 1965. ARMY ENGINEERS repaired the line during the 1971 War. On 10 December we left Laungewala and returned to Jaisalmer and were immediately loaded on train to reach Khokrapar at 0400 hrs, 11 December. We spent the night on the train, in the morning; we saw Urdu and English markings of the station. None of us knew Urdu but English script told us we were again in Pakistan. There was information that Pak Air Force was going to engage us; we had to detrain as soon as possible. There was no natural cover and we were dispersed in the open, so we improvised with tank tarpaulins, as we had no camouflaging nets.

An air raid attacked us for a while, burning our entire convoy and artillery ammunition on board the train caught fire. Three train bogeys burnt down to ashes, fortunately we were able to de-link them in the nick of time and save our tanks. I recall Samant Ram our troop leader yelling, '*agar tanke marenge toh tumhe mein bhi marwa dunga*' (if the tanks get destroyed, I will sort you out!).

Even our Sqn Cdr Sahib was slightly worried. He told us that if we all

die and some survivors manage to find their way out, tell them that these train-walas got us killed! Army Engineer and TA drivers de-linked the trains; they were the only ones driving those trains. Tell me which civilian would drive a train in yudh (war zone)? Yet, local Pak civilians who were there provided mazdoori (labour) to help us get the tanks off! They came to us and asked for employment as labourers, saying that they had no source of livelihood. *“Woh hamse bhi gaye-guzare the, toh isliye unhone hamari madad kee”* (they were worse off than us, so they helped us). The civilians helped us a lot in this huge effort. The moment the tank dismounted, we would delink the bogey, then the next tank was dismounted and bogey delinked. In this manner all tanks were saved. Two fighter jets engaged us at Khokrapar and two fighters attacked our convoy when those 3 bogeys were destroyed. The rest were saved thanks to everyone's efforts.

Between 12-13 Dec we would move at night and camouflage by day. On 15 December we reached Parbat Ali, beyond which just a little ahead was a place called Nayachor where No. 3 IAS of 1 HORSE (SKINNERS) and Bhawani Singh 'key tukdee' (contingent) 10 PARA, were doing 'hulchul' (ops behind enemy lines). We linked up with No. 3 IAS and set up a perimeter. Ceasefire was declared the next day, but artillery exchanges continued.

We were to remain in Pak territory for many days, returning after the Shimla Summit of July 1972. We played wet-Holi in Pak area as we had our own railway station supplying water. Later we would sing and dance with the civilians too, times were relaxed. On 12 March 1972, while in Pakistan, North of Gadra Road, at the junction of a village called Ranasar, three INDEPENDENT SQUADRONS Nos. 3 IAS (SKINNERS HORSE), 4 IAS (DECCAN HORSE) and our 6 IAS were amalgamated and the First Regimental Flag of 75th ARMOURED REGIMENT was raised. It was an emotional and proud moment.

DP: Our tank was damaged, so I had taken it to the rear to get it repaired. That took two months and I remained with our tank. *“Maine sara itihas miss kar deeya”* (I missed all that history taking place).

HC: Those were administratively crazy days. We experienced heavy rain in June. There was a huge pit on the side of the Unit's location, we had 2 feet of standing water. Ammunition boxes had been converted in to office and mess tables, jeep seats were being used for sitting. We had neither clothing nor bedding, as the entire convoy carrying our possessions had been burnt. All tanks' canvas had also shred during the air raids, we wondered how our tanks would move on

“ An air raid attacked us for a while, burning our entire convoy and artillery ammunition on board the train caught fire. Three train bogeys burnt down to ashes, fortunately we were able to de-link them in the nick of time and save our tanks. I recall Samant Ram our troop leader yelling, *'agar tanke marenge toh tumhe mein bhi marwa dunga'* (if the tanks get destroyed, I will sort you out!). **”**

loss of our diesel barrels. Later we learnt that a T-55 has a lot of internal diesel storage and that's how our tanks kept moving even after the air raid.

DP: Earlier, Harish was thirty kilos lighter. He couldn't even traverse the main gun, so he would ask the tank commander Saab to traverse it for him. Now he is 'takda' (strong). Generally a man gets dublah-patla (thinner-weaker) with umar (age), but Harish after becoming the patwari (important man) of his gaon (village) has become 'ek-dum tandrust' (totally fit)!!

HC: Dismissing it with a laugh and hand gesture remarked, “ham sabhi ko phir bataya gaya ki apne gun Pakistan k aur face kardo. Yeh wastavik kahani hein, yeh mere hote hue taraf kee hein” (then we were all told to make our guns face Pakistan. This is a true story that I saw with my own eyes!).

DP: {Entering a reminiscing mood}: “Yeh patwari mota ho gaya hein, pehle toh kamzor tha. Mein inko doodh-voodh deta tha. Agar yeh fail ho jaaye toh mera kya hoga? Maine inki poori seva ki. Chhe pehle marr gaye the, ek kandam ho gaya tha. Agar yeh aur Sawant gaya toh mera kya hota?” (This Patwari has become healthy, earlier he was very weak. I used to give them milk and rations. If they failed, then what would have happened to me? So I served them as much as I could. 6 men had already died, one was grievously wounded, so if Sawant and he died, what would become of me?).

HC: Hamme pata nahi tha k hamare yeh driver k pass ration tha. Par isne hamari bahut maddad kee. (We didn't know that our driver carried rations, but he helped us a lot).

DP: I served for 27 years and it's been 28 years since I took pension. I retired in 1989.

HC: And I retired in 1991.

DP: Main bus yahi socha k ya toh tank chalega ya kuch nahi. Bahut seva kee, bus yeh hee. Aaj mein 40 saal baad in sabse mill raha hun (I just felt that either the tank would move or nothing would. I served, that's all. Today, I am meeting him and others after 40 years).

{HC got up and got photos clicked with all of us, then went for lunch with the others}

DP (asked me to step aside to say): “That night I had 20 litres of water with me. I gave the Infantry water in the lid of my boot polish tin. I kept thinking they would die today, I would die tomorrow. So what is the problem in distributing water? We Armoured Corps carry a lot of tel-pani (water & oil). What does Infantry have? One rifle and two grenades, that's all! I felt very sad to see their pitiable condition. There was

“Those were administratively crazy days. We experienced heavy rain in June. There was a huge pit on the side of the Unit's location, we had 2 feet of standing water. munition boxes had been converted in to office and mess tables, jeep seats were being used for sitting. We had neither clothing nor bedding, as the entire convoy carrying our possessions had been burnt. All tanks' canvas had also shred during the air raids, we wondered how our tanks would move on loss of our diesel barrels. Later we learnt that a T-55 has a lot of internal diesel storage and that's how our tanks kept moving even after the air raid.”

demand of 'paani-paani' (water) from all directions.

Then I opened my dry-ration packets, heated the food on my tank's silencer and fed my crewmates. Sahib, the only hope was to live for one more day! We had to keep everyone together in order to survive and win the war. But till date, I fail to understand how man can have wrong thinking. You would not believe that when Hoshiyar Saab our troop leader, heard that I had opened our dry-ration packets and distributed water to the infantry, he shouted at me angrily "*tumne ration k packs kyun khol deeye? Aage agar pani nahi milega, toh kya tum laaoge?*" (Why have you opened the dry ration? Will you fetch water if we run out of it?). I told him that the rations were given for the war effort, if we didn't use it at that time, then when should we have used it? He always held this against me. Till the time he took his pension and retired, he always looked at me with 'tedhi nazar' (suspicion). "*Yahi yudh hein, Saab, jo aap jaanna chahte the!*" (This is the real war that you wanted to know about!).

Placing his hand on my head with blessings, he said, "*Ab jao sabhi ko hamari kahani batao, acche karam karo aur desh k seva mein kaam aao. Aapki likhi huee kahani ko padhne ka mein intezaar karunga. Ab sabhi ko 40 saal baad pata chalega ke yudh mein kya hota hein. Yeh aapka mass-communication mujhe bahut acha laga. Bahut sahi tareeka hein meri kahani batane ka. Aaj pehli baar koi mujhse aake poocha ke mere saath kya ghatnaye hue thee. Bhagwan aapka bhala kare*" (now go and tell everyone our story, do good deeds in life and be of use to our Nation. I will wait to see what you have written about us. Now after 40 years, everyone will know what happens in war. I like your style of reaching out through the media. Today is the first time someone has come and asked me what all happened to me. May God bless you!)

Then he placed his hand on my head for the second time while we parted company. I could not sleep that night, as I was so sad and shaken at the plight of these amazing men who fought a battle against all odds uncomplainingly. Moreover, the fact that nobody asked them their story was a bitter pill for me too!

Historical Note

75th ARMOURED REGIMENT was formally established on captured Pakistani soil with the amalgamation of No. 3, 4 & 6 IAS. No. 3 & 4 IAS have historical linkages with SKINNERS and DECCAN HORSE and carry individual histories of 1965 war. With the destruction of Pak tanks during 1971 and in true cavalry spirit 75th drew upon SKINNERS and DECCAN tradition to select canary yellow and bottle green for emblazening their Regimental Colours.

“Then I opened my dry-ration packets, heated the food on my tank's silencer and fed my crewmates. Sahib, the only hope was to live for one more day! We had to keep everyone together in order to survive and win the war. But till date, I fail to understand how man can have wrong thinking. You would not believe that when Hoshiyar Saab our troop leader, heard that I had opened our dry-ration packets and distributed water to the infantry, he shouted at me angrily "*tumne ration k packs kyun khol deeye? Aage agar pani nahi milega, toh kya tum laaoge?*" (Why have you opened the dry ration? Will you fetch water if we run out of it?). I told him that the rations were given for the war effort, if we didn't use it at that time, then when should we have used it?”

“

75th a new blooded Regiment returned to India in 1972 with 2 Vir Chakras, 2 Sena Medals, 3 Mentioned in Dispatches and Theatre Honour 'Sind'. The Regiment has a number of firsts: from being raised on captured soil, conducting annual training firing on captured soil, the only Regiment where a safaiwala (sweeper) earned gallantry Sena Medal in 1971, its first Commandant rose to be Vice Chief, and the first T-55 regiment to be up-gunned to 105 mm.

”

No 6 IAS was truly born by the blood of brave man baptized by fire, drawing new tanks and assorted crews in November and pitched into combat within days without practical crew integration and cohesive training. The Squadron Commander, Major Ravinder Datt Law was conferred with a Vir Chakra as under his leadership remarkable destruction was caused to the enemy. His tanks traversed over 600 kms in the desert, crossing the International Border while pushing back Pakistani forces to support Battle of Laungewala to be followed by another move to reinforce battles at Parbat Ali, till the announcement of cease fire... The squadron was bestowed Theatre Honour 'Sind'.

75th a new blooded Regiment returned to India in 1972 with 2 Vir Chakras, 2 Sena Medals, 3 Mentioned in Dispatches and Theatre Honour 'Sind'. The Regiment has a number of firsts: from being raised on captured soil, conducting annual training firing on captured soil, the only Regiment where a safaiwala (sweeper) earned gallantry Sena Medal in 1971, its first Commandant rose to be Vice Chief, and the first T-55 regiment to be up-gunned to 105 mm.



On the 46th year since the war, author met Col Gurjeet Singh Bajwa, Vrc, SC, and Mrs Pushpinder Bajwa on 10 December 2017. The officer was attached as FOO to 13 KUMAON, while serving with 168 FIELD REGIMENT (LAUNGEWALA). On 8/9 Dec 1971, during the combined-arms assault on BP-638, he rode in to battle on top of the same 6 IAS T-55 tank (100mm) that was operated by Nb Risaldar Harish Chandra and Nb Risaldar Dharam Pal. Although they didn't remember his rank, they fondly remembered him as "Bajwa Saab who was very brave in directing artillery fire and merciless in using his carbine". A year after publication of 6 IAS history (in 2016), it was learned that 2/Lt GS Bajwa earned his Vir Chakra with the Squadron & 13 KUMAON. After the war, he earned a Shaurya Chakra with Artillery (Aviation) during a daring high altitude heli-borne rescue mission.

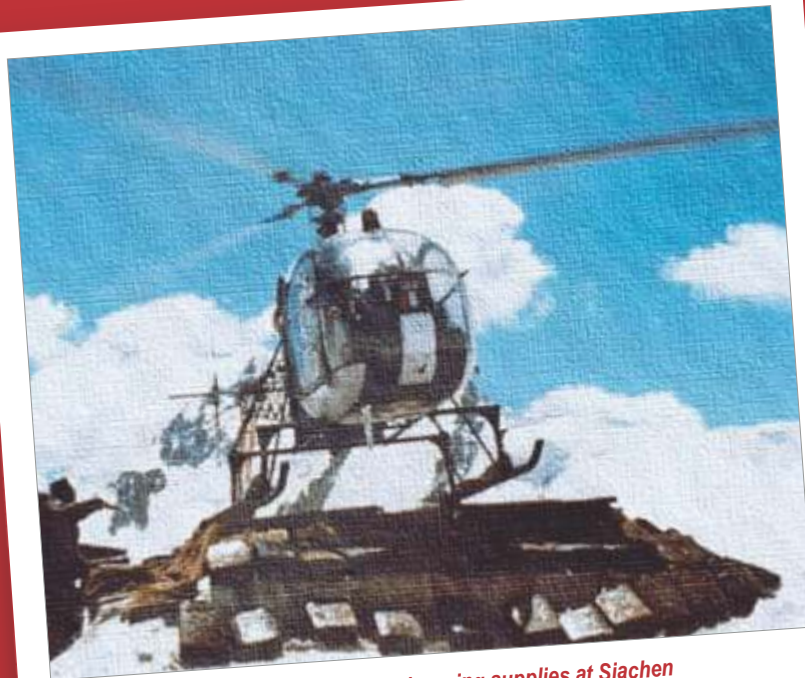


Brig RD Law Vrc



Lt Col RD Law receives Vrc in 1972

A SAGA OF BRAVERY: AIR WARRIORS OVER SIACHEN



A Cheetah Helicopter dropping supplies at Siachen



Saga of Bravery: Air Warriors Over Siachen

Op Meghdoot heralded Siachen Ops in 1984 and this saga narrates the grit and professionalism of our Air Force. Our helicopter pilots in face of enemy shelling carried out super-human feat operating in world's highest battlefield. These pilots delivered under great odds while taking off, flying in rarefied atmosphere, difficult landing and rescuing soldiers. The heroic pilots survived to narrate what happened in that battlefield. AVM Bahadur was amongst the first pilots to land on Siachen in 1978. Here is an account of how he led and participated in the rescue operation and replaced the engine of their helicopter.

AVM MANMOHAN BAHADUR, (RETD)

Every aviator has a unique story to tell of his time in the blue yonder. For someone who has operated on the Siachen Glacier it is usually about his time spent while flying in the highest battle field of the world, where Indian Army posts are located at dizzy heights of 22,000 feet above sea level. While his Army brethren on the icy crevasse-filled terrain battle odds the aviator has his own awe inspiring jaw-dropping tales of bravery, intrepidity and raw courage to tell his grandchildren. While this author has gone through many a hair raising event himself, one of the many awesome tales that needs recounting is one that played out in the summer of 1990. While aircrew

have been in the lime light most of the time, this story brings out the aircrew-technician - jawan bond of professionalism and camaraderie that is the crux of successful Siachen air ops.

Op Meghdoot heralded Siachen Ops on 13 Apr 1984. Now, heated hangars have been constructed, but in yester years the technicians would be up before dawn, in those terrible sub-zero temperatures to get the machines fly worthy for early morning take-offs. It was worse at Base Camp where, in winters and the skin would be left behind on a metal part if touched with bare hands – but the technicians pressed-on regardless. If one may add for the uninitiated, this was (and is)



The unserviceable Cheetah helicopter at Amar, Siachen, whose engine was changed at night - using kerosene lamps and torches

routine day-in and day-out for those who have been operating there for decades now.

The Glacier throws up different challenges off and on, of a kind that test resolve, technical expertise and guts of the extreme kind. This tale is of one such incident that occurred on 03 June 1990 when a Cheetah helicopter of Indian Air Force's 114 HELICOPTER UNIT (christened the SIACHEN PIONEERS) flown by Flt Lt WVR Rao and Fg Offr Suresh Nair had an engine malfunction on landing at Amar helipad. Amar is at 19,500 feet and has a one way approach and a take-off in the reverse direction, because on the other side is Pakistan held terrain. The 'match-box' constitutes an apology of a helipad and is typical of those on the Glacier; there is just *no place for manoeuvring* and during those days, Siachen was a 'live battle zone' with intense exchange of artillery fire. The helicopter just plonked on the helipad creating an immediate problem; the crew had to be retrieved post haste as they were not acclimatised for that altitude - - and high altitude ailments, many times fatal, could strike them very soon.

Flt Lt Balakrishnan Ramesh was flying the wingman helicopter and he moved in immediately to pull them out, even as the Pakistani troops started shelling Amar. With no place on the helipad available (due the stricken helicopter), he balanced his Cheetah on one skid, took on board Flt Lt Rao and took off with shells falling on the snow around him. Rao was dropped at the closest helipad called Dolma and Flt Lt Ramesh flew back to pick up Fg Offr Nair. The shelling, meanwhile, had become intense and the troops frantically waved red flags indicating that the helicopter should not approach Amar. To leave a comrade in harm's way is unthinkable for a SIACHEN PIONEER - Flt Lt Ramesh went in and pulled out Fg Offr Rao without a second thought. Picking up Flt Lt Rao from Dolma enroute, Ramesh came back to Base Camp - flying the last 12 minutes with his fuel warning light on; on landing he had just 10 litres left in his tank! However, the adventure had just begun because then commenced the mind boggling planning of how to change the engine at that altitude - never ever done anywhere in the history of aviation!

To carry out the engine change the Unit's Engineering Officer, Flt Lt G Sreepal, and three technicians were airlifted first to Base Camp, where a set of codes for transmission on HF radio set was decided with the Army; thereafter, they were taken to Kumar post at 15,000 feet and then to Billa base at 18,000 feet for partial and quick acclimatisation, prior to their positioning at Amar on 12 June. Some aviation fuel was carried in two 20 litre jerry cans (along with chamois leather for

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filtering!) for the engine-carrying helicopter that would come with minimum fuel to cater for the replacement engine weight. The positioning of the new engine was a challenging task by itself.

The Cheetah engine weighs 182 kgs and requires a portable crane to lift it out and install a new one. At the best of times, at a helicopter base, it requires expertise and workmanship of a very high order, besides many checks and double checks by supervisors. Also, the Cheetah can carry only between 25 and 75 kgs of load to Amar due the extremely reduced air density - - another pitfall of the low air density, and hence less Oxygen, is that generally engines do not start in the first attempt. So, an engine which had the best history for successful starts on the first attempt was identified at Leh for carriage in a Cheetah - - but the engine would not fit in to the restricted space behind the pilots! So, the co-pilot's seat was removed, the engine positioned and the seat screwed back. The positioning of the engine at Base Camp happened on 12 June 1990, with the take-off much before sunrise. The flight across Khardung La pass and through the Nubra Valley was done, with the sun just coming up and the aircraft landed at Base Camp at sunrise for refuelling for onward flight to Amar.

Meanwhile, what was happening at Amar, the post manned by troops of the Sikh Light Infantry? Well, after the helicopter was left behind on 03 June, they physically manhandled it out of the small helipad to make place for the in-coming rescue helicopters! How they did this, at 19,000 ft without any equipment (the Cheetah has skids and no wheels), only God and those jawans know! They then made a wall of rock and snow ahead of the post so as to shield it from direct observation of the Pakistani post that was just two kms ahead. One jawan had a brainwave and they, the Sikh LI troops, even removed the bolts that attach the rotors to the hub and folded them (the blades) to make more place for the incoming helicopters – just UNTHINKABLE! Leading the Sikh LI troops was a smart officer, Captain Kabir. Flt Lt Sreepal has used the word 'super humans' to describe those Sikh LI soldiers!

The engine change party under Flt Lt Sreepal, with Sgt K Yoganandan and two other technicians, were dropped at Amar on 12 June (as covered earlier) and awaited arrival of the Cheetah with the new engine.

Wg Cdr Mahendra Goli, the Commanding Officer, and Flt Lt Ramesh (who had rescued his buddies on 03 June) flew the mission on 12 June. Before take-off from Base Camp, the Cheetah was made light by removing its tail rotor guard, rear seats, side panels, doors and after the

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aircraft was started up – the battery itself! The crew had no radio contact with anyone else thereafter, and could not have re-started their own engine if it failed in flight!! As the helicopter began its approach to land at Amar helipad, the Pakistani post started firing. The Sikh LI troops frantically waved red flags indicating that the helicopter should discontinue the approach, but Wg Cdr Goli continued and landed. Flt Lt Ramesh unscrewed his seat, moved it forward, and used a knife to cut the cords holding the spare engine to the Cheetah body. The technicians and Sikh LI troops removed the engine but due to its weight it got deposited on the helicopter's skid. The shelling meanwhile intensified and even as the engine was being shifted to a safe distance, 20 litres of fuel was put-in manually from a jerry can. Luckily, there were no hits and Ramesh literally dumped his seat back in the cabin and held on to his straps and the seat of Wg Cdr Goli even as the latter took off for Dolma where, on landing, Ramesh screwed and secured his seat for the return to base camp!

Flt Lt Sreepal and Capt Kabir had decided that all activities would take place at night to avoid detection by the Pakistani post and hence the action to replace the newly arrived engine started at 1800 hours. At the first instance the portable crane broke, as its metal had become very brittle due the intense cold. The code word, 'dog belt broken' was sent down but the SIKH LI troops had other plans. They manually lifted the engine and hoisted the new one in its place with bare hands – once again, no words of praise can be sufficient for those brave IAF technicians and Indian Army jawans! And, just as a reminder, they worked in the evening and through the night, at 19,450 feet coupled with a wind chill factor. Additionally, while even walking at those altitudes is a task in itself due to lack of Oxygen, these men changed an engine that required manual lifting, opening tightly wound nuts and bolts, disconnecting pipelines while ensuring proper alignments - - and the reverse for mounting the new engine. And this was done in one night using torches and kerosene petromax lamps!!

Flt Lt Sreepal started the engine on the morning of 13 June – and it fired at the first attempt! After ensuring that there were no leaks the code was transmitted back that the Cheetah was ready for the flight back.

The flight back was planned mid-day of 13 June. Sqn Ldr AK Sinha and Flt Lt OJS Malhi were dropped at Amar for the retrieval. After a quick visual inspection, and as Sinha says, “with a prayer on his lips,” he put the switch to 'start.' And it cranked in one go again! In normal operations, the engine would have been allowed to be run and addi-

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tional checks would have been done. But this luxury was not available as the noise would have activated the Pakistani troops. He just 'engaged' his rotors and took off. For sure the firing commenced, in the midst of which the wingman helicopters picked up Flt Lt Sreepal and his team and came back to Base Camp, despite being overloaded and against SOPs. Back at base camp, once again in Sqn Ldr Sinha's words, "it was sheer bedlam" when he touched down – plain ecstasy at having pulled off an engine change and a safe recovery of a helicopter from 19,500 feet! A world record for sure, not beaten till date – how are we so sure? Simple, because such helipads are only in India!

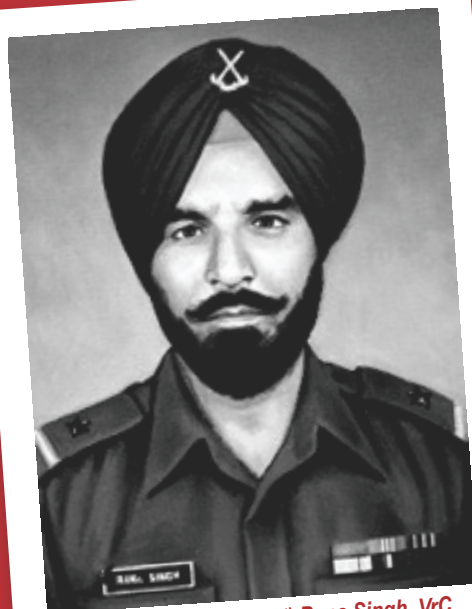
Folks, it is a different class of people who operate there – the Indian Army jawans, of whom Capt Kabir and his Sikh LI soldiers are representative of; the IAF technical personnel, of whom Flt Sreepal and his team are models-of; AND the IAF helicopter pilot, for whom living up to the proud legacy of 114 HELICOPTER UNIT – the SIACHEN PIONEERS - is worth dying for!

If these people have a bit of swagger - - give it to them! And as they guard our frontiers 24x7 may God continue to work overtime, as he has always done - - to keep safe those brave Indians operating on the Siachen Glacier!



The Siachen Pioneers with a Cheetah in a photo from 1997. AVM Bahadur is standing on the extreme right.

1987: WHITE BLOOD SHELLS AT SIACHEN



*Nb Sub (now Hony Capt) Bana Singh, VrC.
The Hero of Siachen, 1987*



1987: White Blood Shells at SIACHEN

This is a narrative history of how 32 years after eliminating Pakistani intruders on the world's highest battlefield 'Quaid Post' (1987) Subedar (Honorary Captain) Girdhari Lal Chowdhary, 8 JAK LI (SIACHEN) who fought as a Rifleman with three years military service, recalls his battlefield tale. His story is endorsed by one of India's few living highest gallantry award winner; Subedar Major (Honorary Captain) Bana Singh, Param Vir Chakra; who fought alongside in the same battle. Approximately half a Company's worth of men braved against all-odds to give India, a strategic superiority over a 200 m wide snow-laden, sub-zero temperature ridge at 21,125 ft where icy winds and avalanches are a bigger enemy, taking heavy toll on the mind and body. Read on to know all that happened in that fateful operation...

SAGAT SHAUNIK

Prequel

Early 1987, we were deployed in the Glacier. While taking charge of our positions, we learnt that Pakistani intruders had established Quaid Post during the winter. "They would do harqat (activity) at Quaid Post which was inaccessible from our side, only helicopters could airlift men and material up to Sonam Post from where a treacherous route led up to Quaid. Numerous crevices in the mountainous terrain prevented any route by foot...." We really didn't know the strength atop Quaid Post that effectively dominated our positions by fire and observation.

Then our Paltan (Battalion) was tasked to order an Officer, a JCO and 7 Other Ranks to reconnoitre the area. The teams' route had a gradient between 65 to 80 degrees across the ice-wall. 2/Lt Rajiv Pandey was the patrol commander and Naib Subedar Hem Raj was the second in command. They started ascent, I think on morning 29 May 1987; Havaladar Mulk Raj was the lead scout fixing the ropes, for others to climb. By evening, everyone was up and the enemy at Quaid Post was alerted about their presence. None of us knew the number of Pak elements there. When Hav Mulk Raj was 15 ft away, they opened devastating fire killing him along with 2/Lt Pandey; Nb Sub Hem Raj; Naik Kuldeep Raj and Rifleman Girdhari Lal. Rfn Kashmiri Lal was hit in the stomach and died while being evacuated.

Actually, I was in the MMG Section and was supposed to be in that patrol, Rifleman Girdhari Lal and I share the same Company and name, destiny had exchanged us. By the time the error was realised, the patrol had already moved out and we couldn't call him back as in those days, we had limited communication gear.

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Left- Right: Sub (Hony Capt) Girdhari Lal with the equipment used in 1987; Sub Maj (Hony Capt) Bana Singh, PVC; Brig Varinder Singh, VRC, SM; Sub Chinni Lal, AC, VRC, SM and 2/Lt Rajiv Pandey, VRC

Only three men survived the ordeal, Nk Swarn Singh suffered a *gun shot wound* (GSW) in his arm, he rose to Subedar and retired as an Honorary Captain. The radio-operator Naik from Signals was handed over the radio-set by Lt Rajiv (in his last moments) and was ordered to speed back with it. While evading, he suffered GSW in his leg that was later placed in a cast.

Only the third survivor Rifleman Suraj Kumar escaped unscratched. He retired as a Havaladar. *'Dus mein se yahi theek aaya tha; Suraj ke dastano k beech se goliyan nikli thi, jab usne khulla haath dikhaya koi signal dene ke liye, toh usse kuch nahi hua'* (of the 10, only he returned intact. Bullets pierced his gloves, between his fingers when he was giving a signal with fingers spread, nothing happened to him). 2/Lt Rajiv Pandey was conferred Vir Chakra for gallantly leading his Patrol... It was not to be in vain, 8 JAK LI would redeem their honour with a vengeance.

Op Rajiv

After suffering heavy casualties against Quaid Post, merely a 200 m ridge with no space for manoeuvre, we learnt that not a single weapon of the Patrol could return fire, as they jammed in the bitter cold. They were massacred when Mulk Raj ordered 'dhava' in retaliation. *"Bus issi mein sab veer-gatti ko prapt hue, nahi toh Pak walo ko muh-todd jawab*

“Actually, I was in the MMG Section and was supposed to be in that patrol, Rifleman Girdhari Lal and I share the same Company and name, destiny had exchanged us. By the time the error was realised, the patrol had already moved out and we couldn't call him back as in those days, we had limited communication gear.”

dete apne rifle-o se....” (That's how they laid down their lives; otherwise they would have given a befitting response to those Paki's, had their weapons worked!)

A high level meeting was conducted, God only knows what transpired. We were informed that Pak had challenged us to come and collect our dead-bodies. *“Jab dead-bodiya kee baat pata chali, toh poori Paltan teiyaar ho gayi, j dead bodiyo ko waapas laane k liye. Sab volunteer ho gaye attack karne ke liye, aisa mahaul bun gaya tha jaise aajkal surgical-strike ka mahaul bana hua Pak ke against”* (The entire Battalion volunteered to recover our dead when they heard this. They were ready to attack just like the current situation followed by the surgical strike as in news...)

Maj Varinder Singh volunteered to command the team that would capture Quaid Post. He had 1 Officer, 4 JCOs and 50 Other Ranks under him. We prepared for the battle by making plans and training for the same. Meanwhile, Pakistanis positioned atop Quaid post kept firing at Sonam Post to mount pressure and deny access from the Indian side.

We kept training in anticipation of *Hukam* (orders). Whenever the weather cleared, a helicopter would lift 1 or 2 soldiers and drop them near our forward assembly area approximately 300m South West of Sonam Post, which was defiladed from Quaid Post.

The moment we had 15 men, our location was compromised. So our zic, Lt Col IJ Gupta ordered a foot-route be created for accessing our base camp and supplying food, as we hadn't carried any rations with us. When our full compliment established itself, Maj Varinder Singh briefed us to say “As long as I am alive on Quaid Post, no man shall withdraw. Once I die, do whatever you want”. That was enough to keep our morale high. Then he grouped us in four Sections under Capt Anil Sharma; Sub Harnam Singh; Sub Sansar Chand and Nb Sub Bana Singh. The Major would command and control the attack from his HQ section.

Capt Anil Sharma was tasked to take a section for infiltrating the Pak Base Camp in the rocky area on the other side by slithering down, once he had climbed up towards Quaid Post. That base camp supplied all the rations and ammunition to the Post. I was under Capt Sharma. We were told to avoid capture in case our mission was compromised. *“Neeche jaane ka rasta tha, upar lautne ka nahi”* (there was a way down, but no way to return or extricate ourselves) so we carried a tablet each and would consume it or shoot ourselves to avoid capture. Sub Sansar Chand would lead No. 2 Section with support weapons, while Sub Harnam Singh leading No. 3 Section, was tasked to capture Quaid

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Brig Varinder Singh memorabilia

Post. Nb Sub Bana Singh leading No. 4 Section was held in reserve to be deployed as per the situation.

Once our sections were made, we practiced snow and ice craft with battle loads and so on...we didn't have any stoves, and our eight tents were small sports tents, each housing 8-10 fully equipped men. All weapons and helmets were painted white and new snowsuits were issued to us. About 10-15 ft of fresh snow surrounded us while we trained with limited food and water. Minute-details were practiced and we all thought "*idhar hee marr jaye to acha hein*" (it's better to die here). Our beards had grown so much that we couldn't recognise each other until we asked for names. "*Daadi par kohra jum jata tha*" (ice would form on our beards).

Then one fine day, Major Varinder Singh came to each tent and remarked "*Jiss dinn ka hame intezaar tha, woh ab aa gaya hein, upar se order aa gaye hein, jis din mausam kharab hoyega, uss dinn ham attack karenge*" (the day we have all been waiting for has arrived, our orders have come, we shall attack on the day when the weather is bad).

Then on 23rd June, the weather deteriorated. A search party was sent to locate ropes fixed by Mulk Raj. Then, Hav Bharat Singh; Nk Benarasi Lal; Rfn Suraj Kumar (sole survivor of the first patrol); Rfn Kulwant Raj and I moved out while it snowed. It was 1800 hrs when we marched. From our base camp till the rope ice wall area, the distance was approximately 800 m. But to cover it, we took 4 hrs as the snow was waist deep and the rope-leader could take only 3-4 steps at that altitude, then the person behind would replace him and so on. In this way, the team followed footsteps of the man in front. After last light, at 2000 hrs, the remainder task force joined our advance party. A storm, coupled with snow and bitter cold was our worst enemy as we were in the open. It was morning 0300 hrs but we couldn't locate the rope!

24th June, Maj Varinder Singh ordered our party return prior first light 0430 hrs. In our debriefing, he wanted to know why we were unable to locate the rope. We told him that there was 7-8 ft deep snow and we would have to re-attempt our search. It was decided to search the rope in daylight.

Nb Sub Bana Singh, Hav Dattaraj Datta and another man were tasked to search for the rope and pull it out of the snow. By 1500 hrs, they informed that the rope had been located. Maj Varinder Singh ordered them to stay put and take up positions.

At 1900 hrs, movement commenced in the marching

Nb Sub Bana Singh, Hav Dattaraj Datta and another jawan were tasked to search for the rope and pull it out of the snow. By 1500 hrs, they informed that the rope had been located. Maj Varinder Singh ordered them to stay put and take up positions.



Author with Hony Capt Bana Singh

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Weather cleared in the morning as the bright sun shined. Rfn Bikram Singh who had rolled off earlier, lay 25m near Pak area and 100m away from us. At about 1200 hrs, we noticed some movement in his legs. Someone informed Maj Varinder Singh that the man was alive, he immediately ordered his recovery. I volunteered to extract him, I went and strapped him on my back and started moving up. While going down Pakis may not have seen me, but when I was bringing him back, they opened indiscriminate fire at us. So I went down again. After an hour, I was able to return.

”

order: Sub Sansar Chand; Maj Varinder Singh; Sub Harnam Singh and Capt Anil Sharma. The weather deteriorated further, bitter cold and an eerie storm muffled all the sound. Our cognition was affected; we couldn't make out what was happening. We just treaded along the ropes we had tied to each other! We didn't carry food and water, just our ammunition and equipment. If we touched our rifles without gloves, the skin would stick to metallic parts and peel off.

25th June 0200 hrs, the entire team assembled on top and took up designated positions at the firm base. By 0330 hrs Capt Anil Sharma prepared to descend down the other side towards Pak Base Camp, while Fire Support Sections took positions.

At 0430 hrs, a Pak sentry moved and opened fire on Sub Harnam Singh's Section. Our support weapons located at Amar and Sonam Post provided covering fire while others manoeuvred. Capt Sharma's route to attack the Pak Adm Base was full of crevices and glacial ice so he called Maj Varinder Singh who appreciated the situation and told him to return to the firm base. The first two scouts of Sub Harnam's Section were killed and Rfn Bikram Singh had rolled off the feature approx. 200 m and was seriously injured. Yet Sub Harnam's section advanced 70-75 m towards the top.

Between 0600-0800 hrs both Indian and Pakistani artilleries shelled the short distance that fire from both sides concentrated in one kill-zone. Prior first light, we didn't know how many casualties we had suffered. As shelling started, we took position wherever we stood. As firing mounted throughout the day, we ordered an MMG support weapon be brought up from Sonam Post. Casualties of frostbite and snow-blindness were withdrawn to Sonam. The rest, held their ground.

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Night 25/26 June, around 2100 hrs, one by one, weapons were heated on a 'fire-king-candle' and prepared for firing as they jammed when temperatures dropped between minus 20 and 30 degrees. Sub

Sansar Chand and Nb Sub Bana Singh who were tasked to lead a Section each while Sub Harnam Singh led the Support Section.

Sansar moved his section at 2200 hrs, progressed well and crawled close to enemy forward trenches when his weapons jammed again. Only one Sten in his entire Section could fire. Three Riflemen died in the attack and Sansar fell back to Harnam's previous location at 0200 hrs on 26 June.

Our numbers decreased as casualties mounted. Yet, Maj Varinder Singh was determined to fight and he didn't show any intention to withdraw. He repeated that until Quaid Post was captured, nobody would withdraw, as the Operation would mean nothing then! As the weapons didn't work efficiently at night, Maj Singh ordered to fight the battle in broad daylight.

26 June 1000 hrs, an attack was planned. Only 12-15 able bodied men were left. The leading Section under Nb Sub Bana Singh had only 4 Riflemen. They moved at 1300 hrs and enemy fired at them. Sub Harnam Singh manning the MMG, retaliated and kept their heads pinned. Bana Sahib then split the group in two each, overcame the enemy and occupied the forward trenches.

Rfn Lachhman Das destroyed the first bunker by tossing a grenade and Rfn Chunni Lal destroyed the second bunker in the same manner. Das earned a Vir Chakra while Chunni earned a Sena Medal for the same act.

Maj Varinder Singh proceeded to the area on top of the Post with a small party of 5 Riflemen. They moved from trench to trench clearing the enemy and within 30 minutes all guns were silenced by 1530 hrs. We were so tired that we didn't know what we had achieved.

After the fall of Quaid Post, Pak counter-attacked with air-burst artillery. A huge shrapnel each pierced our Major and Rfn Om Raj; freezing in their bodies while the others died. Major refused evacuation and continued giving orders till our Commanding Officer, Col AP Rai told him to vacate the post by order.

Maj Varinder Singh summoned Nb Sub Bana Singh to take the radio-set and carry on the operation and hold onto Quaid Post at all costs and to the last man and last round. He withdrew from the front, walked to the rope line and rappelled down to Sonam Post where a hovering helicopter evacuated him.

The enemy had access to everything while our battalion had neither eaten nor slept for 72 hours...We recovered our dead bodies from Lt Rajiv's Platoon and throughout denied the enemy from getting near them. Today, life in the Glacier has improved with better facilities...

Of the 64 who assaulted, 32 became casualties. Some had GSW, frost bite and snow blindness. We were all evacuated to Chandigarh and admitted in hospital. Do you know, a man is authorised to stay for

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only 8 days on Quaid Post beyond which, his body starts deteriorating.....?

We had all left a letter for our families before the mission. We wrote personal-stories that we wanted our next generation to know. All survivors destroyed those letters, never revealing what we wrote in them. Those were our feelings, as we didn't know who would return and who wouldn't!

After that battle, most of us would suddenly wake up with a jolt in the night while recalling that devastating firing. Even on sentry duty, we couldn't sleep, as we would feel that someone slapped us when our heads drifted. It felt as if our fallen had come to wake us up. Much later, we realised that it was just wind!

Recently, Lance Naik Hanumanthappa made headlines due to the unfortunate calamity that took his life. He was buried deep under heavy snow near Sonam Post. Quaid Post was renamed as Bana Post (after my brother-in-arms) overlooks Sonam Post so now, your readers, can imagine what sordid conditions we served in during those days!

In summary, we had 21 wounded survivors constituted by 2 Officers, 4 JCOs and 15 Other Ranks.

When we cremated our brothers killed in action, they were lined up and lay in state with honour. Post funeral, some wind had blown and mixed their ashes, so we sent token amounts to their families. We had written each man's name near his pyre, but then God united them even after death. So our brothers live in each other's houses as memories now. While I say this to you, it is important to tell you that it is very difficult to see all this happen and there is nothing much that you can do about it, such is the life of soldiers in war. We remain haunted in our dreams.

When I look back and think about the battle, I believe that the entire battle was planned and executed by our Officer who led from the front. It was just too unfortunate that our Major was wounded after achieving victory by capturing Quaid Post. Another misfortune for us was that Kulwant Raj, Hav Datta and two others had died and fallen on the Pakistani side, deep in to those crevices. We could never recover their bodies. *"Poora dinn yaad aate hein, kya pata thand se marre ho crevice mein jaakar, ya pehle goli khaakar!"* (We remember them daily, I don't know if they died of cold in those crevices or due to the bullets they received!)

Even after Siachen, when we went for counter terrorist/insurgency duties, and suffered casualties, we would get 'josh' (zeal) and say show us the militant, our AK-47's shall do the talking. Siachen changed my

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Recently, Lance Naik Hanumanthappa made headlines due to the unfortunate calamity that took his life. He was buried deep under heavy snow near Sonam Post. Quaid Post was renamed as Bana Post (after my brother-in-arms) overlooks Sonam Post so now, one can imagine what sordid conditions we served in during those days!

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life forever; as a Rifleman with barely three years of service, I saw my Havaldar, Subedar, Captain and Major Sahibs leading from the front. This regimental spirit carried me forward in life and I am proud to say that I retired as an Honorary Captain. I firmly believe that Mata-ki-Shakti also helped us just as much as the spirits of those who died before us. When a Man joins the Fauj, and wears his wardi (uniform) for the first time, automatically, this spirit enters him while he is a fresh recruit and remains with him till the day he dies!

A note-worthy point was that when Major Varinder Singh volunteered for the task, the entire Battalion volunteered to serve under his command. So he said “mujhe sport wale koi bhi de do” (give me any sportsman). “Major, ladai mein raja key tarah, khade-khade order deeya karte the aur kabhi nahi late-te the” (During battle, the Major gave orders while standing like a King and never lay down). “Bus, ab naam hee reh jaata hein” (now, just the name remains)!

Viru Sahib cared so much for all of us that when we became ex-servicemen; he ensured that we could live an honourable life by working as senior managers in his security company 'The Black Watch'. Usually ex-servicemen become *danda-man* (security-guards) after retirement. But he employed us at senior managerial levels. All those who climbed with him in Siachen, continue to work for him in different parts of North India. Today, he is no longer with us, yet he lives on in our hearts and minds. We remember him every time we step in to our office; it is a matter of *izzat* (honour and pride) to serve his legacy.

Subedar Major (Hony Capt) Bana Singh, PVC

I completely endorse what Subedar (Hony Capt) Girdhari Lal has told you about our Battalion's operation. I just want to say that each man braved the odds against 140 kmph cold winds, heavy snow, 72 hours without food and water. It was never easy. The only thing we kept in mind was “Afsar ka Hukam, Paltan ka Naam aur Desh ki Shaan” (Officer's Order, Battalions Name and Country's Pride). That is all that there is to it.

These medals are honorific titles that were given to some of us. I attribute them to luck. “Jiske seene toh naam likheya hoye, onhanu milleya” (the destined ones got them). I was just a Junior JCO who was ordered to do a task. Yet, we must never forget that 8 JAK LI got Quaid Post at all costs, planned and led from the front by Viru Sahib. The fact remains that we have done it. Now, future generations have to take this forward and continue to serve India. It is unfortunate when your generation demands evidence from the Army for its 'surgical-strikes'. Such things were unheard of, when we served and bled for India.

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Do you know, when Brigadier Varinder Singh, VrC, SM passed away a few years ago; his entire Siachen survivors' team attended his funeral. We held back our tears as we were all soldiers and for me, it was more difficult since I am bestowed with a Param Vir Chakra. I couldn't even shed a single tear in public for my beloved officer. Later in the evening we got together, raised a toast to Brigadier Sahib's legacy and wept. At his funeral I realised "*inne royal afsar nu fauj mein seva karan dee koi lodd naye see, tadd vi oh saanu Siachen ditte*" (such a great officer didn't have any compulsion to serve in the army, yet he gave us glory at Siachen!)

Mrs Anita Singh, wife of Brigadier Varinder Singh, VrC, SM

Viru never told me about the operation. Rajiv's Patrol was told to just get that Post as it was vacant. Once they were massacred, the Paltan learnt that it wasn't vacant. Viru then told the Adjutant to tell the CO that "*nobody else, but me will take that post*".

He came on a short leave and left. I learnt about the operation only when he was injured and evacuated to hospital. Much later, he told me about his operation and that he had written three letters, one for our daughter, one for his parents and one for me. They were destroyed and he never told me what he had written for us.

He spent 15-20 days in the hospital and then received 2 months sick leave. It was just too much to see him in that state. I received news of his injury on the evening when the sit-rep came to the Brigade and we were just 3-4 families including the CO's family that lived in the Battalion location. I was just told that 'Viru's got hurt'. I couldn't sleep the entire night and rushed to Srinagar the next morning, from where a telegram was sent to Siachen. Major RK Singh replied, "Viru came down (STOP).... All right (STOP) Evacuated to Leh (STOP)".

That was all. When he was taken to hospital at night, he told the doctor, "I am famished, can I eat?" After dinner, he slept and the next morning, he was operated upon. The doc asked him if he wanted to keep the splinter to which he replied "No". Much later I told him that he could have kept it as a souvenir to which he didn't reply.

The artillery splinter had got lodged very close to his heart and froze. The doctor said that he was very lucky that it didn't touch his heart or lungs. Those 17-18 stitches left a huge scar forever. The next day he called me up to say "I am fine and all right". The Army remained a matter of honour for him till his very last breath. My heart swells with pride when we all remember him.

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Honours & Awards 8 JAKLI; Battle Honour 'Siachen'		
Param Vir Chakra	Nb Sub Bana Singh	Retd Hony Capt
Maha Vir Chakra	Sub Sansar Chand	Retd Hony Capt
Uttam Yudh Seva Medal	Brig CS Nugyal Col AP Rai	Cdr 102 INF BDE, Retd Maj Gen, PVSM CO 8 JAKLI, Retd
Vir Chakra	2/Lt Rajiv Pandey Maj Varinder Singh Hav Balwant Singh Rfn Lachhman Das	<i>Posthumous</i> Retd Brig & Sena Medal Retd Hony Capt Retd Hony Capt
Sena Medal	Rfn Kulwant Raj Rfn Om Raj Rfn Chunni Lal	<i>Posthumous</i> <i>Posthumous</i> Vir Chakra (2001) and Ashok Chakra (2007) as Nb Sub

HISTORIC MENTION

Nb Subedar Chunni Lal, Sena Medal (1987), Vir Chakra (2001) Ashok Chakra (Posthumous, 2007) is truly one of the bravest sons of India, his valour bestowed the Battalion, 8 JAK LI the honorific title 'Bravest of the Brave'.

The incredible military assault under the sterling leadership of Maj Varinder Singh has no global parallels in military history. Successive, troops over time have sustained the gained victory, albeit not without cost. Till date, the pole position of Indian Army on the Saltoro ridge has undoubted geo-political strategic significance.

An Unsung Hero

Hav Mulk Raj who laid the rope line in the prequel stage of Op Rajiv received no mention or honour in history even though the route first made by him remains the only access to Bana Post. May his gallant actions never be forgotten!

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THE STORY OF SONAM POST



The Story of Sonam Post

Havildar Sonam was part of a patrol that had an officer as the patrol leader. While approaching the given location the patrol leader fell into a crevasse and injured himself badly. The patrol were ordered to split and one party should evacuate the officer and second under Havildar Sonam to continue mission completion. Sonam, a Ladakhi soldier led from the front and reached the location. He and his small band had just a few snow tents which were useless against the blistering winds that swooped around. He ordered his men to dig tunnels beneath the ice to protect from the wind chill factor. They were detected and came under heavy artillery firing by the enemy. The tunnels saved them. He was asked to give report as: *"Sonam whenever you give report you will say Sonam Post all OK". And that was how Sonam Post got its name.*

COL NARINDER 'BULL' KUMAR, KIRTI CHAKRA, PADMA SHRI, (RETD)

“

Sonam a gritty Nunu (Ladakhi soldier) led from the front and reached the designated location. He and his small band had just a few snow tents which were of no use against the blistering winds that swooped around them. He thus ordered them to dig tunnels beneath the ice to protect from wind chill factor. Yet they were soon detected and came under heavy artillery firing by the Pakistanis. The tunnels they had dug, saved them from the shelling.

”

Sonam Post, the site where valiant soldiers of 19 MADRAS lost their lives in an avalanche has been thrust in the national lime-light. Let me tell you how the post got its name. It was from the simple unassuming NCO who first occupied it in a break neck race with the Pakis way back in 1984.

I was an instructor at the High Altitude Warfare School, and I vividly remember the Deputy Commandant, Brig (then Col) Pushkar Chand telling us how he and his team were tasked to occupy Siachen Glacier (Saltoro Ridge) in 1984. He was given no time to prepare because the Pakistani Special Forces were already heading to occupy it and it was a race against time and weather.

Volunteer young officers from Northern Command and from other commands were selected under High Risk Mission, because the enemy here was not only Pakistan Army but terrain and even extreme weather. They were tasked to lead detachments of troops from Ladakh Scouts, Kumaon Regiment and Special Forces to occupy the crucial positions on Saltoro Ridge before the Pakis could get there. They had limited glacier clothing and their high altitude equipment was rudimentary at best.

Troops started moving forward to reach the Saltoro Ridge. The Indian Army beat the Pakistani Army to occupy the positions by a mere three days and in spite of a long arduous route, the gritty young officers led the troops to the highest battleground on earth.

Havildar Sonam was part of a patrol that had an officer as a patrol leader. While approaching the given location the patrol leader fell in to a crevasse and injured himself badly. There was no way the officer could be evacuated by helicopter. Col Pushkar ordered that patrol be

split and one party should evacuate the injured officer and second under Havildar Sonam to continue towards the position it was to occupy.

Sonam a gritty Nunu (Ladakhi soldier) led from the front and reached the designated location. He and his small band had just a few snow tents which were of no use against the blistering winds that swooped around them. He thus ordered them to dig tunnels beneath the ice to protect from wind chill factor. Yet they were soon detected and came under heavy artillery firing by the Pakistanis. The tunnels they had dug, saved them from the shelling.

Though he could not see where the enemy fire was coming from, Sonam realized that he would have to retaliate. He along with two of his colleagues climbed to a vantage point from where he could see where the enemy fire was coming. That evening when Col Pushkar spoke to him on radio, he told him that he had seen the enemy mortar position and requested for artillery fire to engage it. The predicament was that Sonam had no clue how to control artillery fire and it took a great deal of ingenuity for him to be able to give out the enemy positions and then report the fall of shots to successfully engage the enemy position.

Sonam and his men remained at the post for over six months without relief, since whenever they would attempt to move, the enemy would fire at them. But the intrepid soldiers remained there uncomplainingly, undergoing hardships that would have broken any other.

Brig Pushkar told how the name Sonam came about. When he asked Sonam what is the grid reference of his location? Sonam confided that he had no clue as to how to read the map and grid references. Brig Pushkar joked with him on radio set and told him, Sonam I am not worried if you are taken by enemy as prisoner, because you would reveal no information since you know nothing. He told him ***“Sonam whenever you give report you will say Sonam Post all OK’. And that was how Sonam Post got its name.***

A few years later Sonam was posted to High Altitude Warfare School Gulmarg as the administrative Non Commissioned Officer in charge of the student officer's mess. I as a young officer was the Mess Secretary. Every month there would be losses since poor Sonam knew nothing about managing a mess, or of accounting and budgeting. Fed up with continual losses, I complained to Brig Pushkar to remove him and was told to get him to his office.

Yet, when Sonam entered Brig Pushkar's office, I was surprised to see what happened. Brig Pushkar got up from his chair and hugged him like a long lost friend. He forgot why he asked Sonam to come to his

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“

Being an instructor in High Altitude Warfare School you are supposed to be class apart and best in business in the world. I was an arrogant professional, but one day while training on glacier, Sonam saw me rushing up the ice wall during a demonstration. After the demonstration when I was sipping tea, Sonam walked up to me and told me that, "Sahib don't show your speed on ice wall, it does not give you second chance and it also does not give you time to recover. Therefore, be like an Ibex, sure footed." It was a lifelong lesson that saved me from committing hara-kiri someday.

”

office and inquired if he had known that he was the Deputy Commandant of HAWS? He further scolded him, why he did not come to meet him. Sonam smiled and did not utter a word. Then he told me about Sonam's role in helping secure Sonam Post way back in 1984 and my own anger turned into respect.

The same evening I went to the mess and called all student officers. There I introduced this unknown hero to them and asked them to interact with him and understand the practical part of soldiering in extreme weather and terrain conditions. Every student officer rose after I finished introducing Sonam to them and came forward to shake hands with a true soldier.

Later I would often see young officers surrounding Sonam and hearing his experience of Siachen. Being an instructor in High Altitude Warfare School you are supposed to be class apart and best in business in the world. I was an arrogant professional, but one day while training on glacier, Sonam saw me rushing up the ice wall during a demonstration. After the demonstration when I was sipping tea, Sonam walked up to me and told me that, "Sahib don't show your speed on ice wall, it does not give you second chance and it also does not give you time to recover. Therefore, be like an Ibex, sure footed." It was a lifelong lesson that saved me from committing hara-kiri someday.

Later, it was decided to put up his portrait (dressed in full mountaineer gear) in the officer's mess. When this ceremony was organised, the entire staff and officers including families were present. And there was this short stocky man, standing between the Commandant and Deputy Commandant, receiving perhaps the only recognition for his achievements, a simple photograph in the Officers Mess to honour his deeds.

There are so many Sonams, who have done their duty selflessly at these forbidding heights. The ten Thambis of 19 MADRAS who laid down their lives on the post were also like him, simple men soldiering on selflessly in unimaginable hardships. Perhaps the avalanche that swamped Sonam Post helped rouse the national consciousness of the conditions our soldiers undergo to preserve the national integrity. There are thousands like Sonam and nameless others who merely do their duty without reward or recognition. This piece is just a small salute to them all.



Col Narinder 'Bull' Kumar at the Sia Kangri Peak, 24350 Ft at Siachen tenure



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