

Medals and Ribbons

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A SALUTE TO OUR VALIANT WARRIORS



**Special
Commemorative
Issue**

**Valiant & Victorious
in**

OPERATION VIJAY

25 YEARS
Since the
KARGIL
War



The Chief at the Helm
In Conversation with General V P Malik

Tololing - The Turning Point
2 RAJ RIF Opens the Gates to Victory

Operation Safed Sagar
Home Truths out of Thin Air

Col David Devasahayam



The Indian soldier is renowned the world over for his gallantry, courage and resilience; his ability to withstand rigours, dangers and perils is legendary. This has been borne out in countless battle situations and tough conditions in many operations in India and abroad – in the 1947-48, 1962, 1965, 1971 wars in the subcontinent, as also in the **Kargil Conflict of 1999**.

In the summer of 1999, in the Drass – Kargil Sector, our Indian troops fought at 15000 to 18000 feet altitudes in rarefied atmosphere ; heights higher than the highest peaks of Europe. They attacked in small groups along razor thin ridges, over narrow ledges and boulder strewn slopes, over ice-walls and rock faces to evict the Pakistani intruders. These **“men of steel”** charged enemy bunkers and *sangars* while facing a murderous hail of bullets, knowing that these could well be their last steps on earth.

Pride surges through me, when I think of Captain Vikram Batra charging towards the enemy, or of Major Vivek Gupta heading towards the enemy bunker at Tololing, or of Subedar Karnail Singh of 8 SIKH who lay



With Gen Puri at Kupwara -1998

amidst the dead bodies of enemy soldiers, to rise and suddenly open fire on an enemy counter attack and defeat it ! Our citizens in our body public as well, should know about these and many other such heroes, their stories and valorous acts with a deep sense of pride.

I must highlight the stellar military leadership at various levels. As a battalion we had the pleasure of serving under the General Officer Commanding of 8 Mountain Division, Maj Gen Mohinder Puri just the earlier year 1998, in the valley. He was an inspirational military leader who was later to lead his Division into comprehensive victory in Kargil. (picture)

It was the bravery and courage under fire of young officers which made the telling difference. These young leaders were upfront, setting examples of sacrifice while bonding with their men; they brought glory to

all of us. The **Medals and Ribbons** Team has stitched together stories, narratives, reports, analyses and perspectives of the Kargil War in this issue.

To enlighten the Indian public about the actions in that violent summer of 1999, we have compiled this Special Commemorative Issue on **Operation Vijay** (the Kargil conflict), to coincide with the *Rajat Jayanti* of our Kargil victory. It was a tough campaign and 527 of our brothers were *‘killed in action’*, to restore the sanctity of our territory in the icy heights across the Great Himalayan range. This Special Issue is our salute to those iconic warriors of Drass and Kargil. I am sanguine that this issue will become a *‘Collector’s Issue’*, and enhance awareness about some of the iconic heroes of **“Mother India”**.

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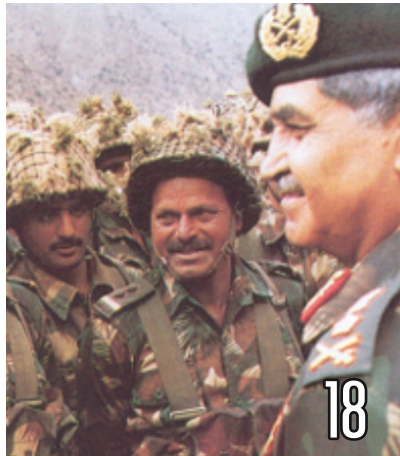
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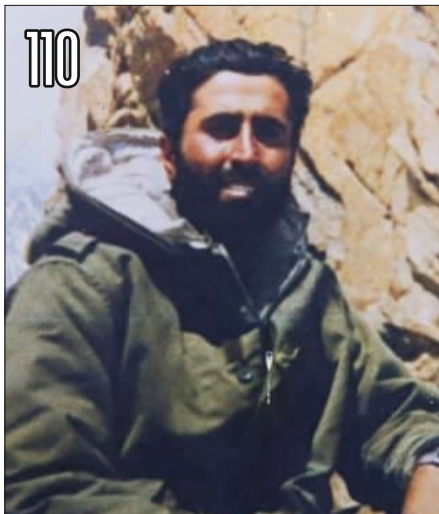
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Lt Gen J S Sandhu, (Retd).

It is not how the war began that is important, what is far more crucial is how the war ended. The Japanese achieved strategic surprise when they attacked Pearl Harbour in December 1941, but they were defeated strategically thereafter in World War II. The Pakistanis too achieved strategic surprise when they crossed the Line of Control (LC) and occupied several dominating heights surreptitiously in the Drass – Kargil Sector; and started firing onto our convoys on the Srinagar – Leh Highway. But, about three months later, India had gained a strategic victory and Pakistan's clandestine deceit came a cropper.

At the forefront of this strategic success was the Indian soldier, hardy, devout and valiant, who conquered those dominating heights against fearsome odds. The Indian Infantry units were the 'cutting edge' who struck telling

blows onto the enemy in physical close quarter battle - the charge over the last few yards into the enemy posts. And, Indian Artillery provided the battle winning firepower supremacy with big, booming BOFORS guns destroying enemy bunkers accurately in direct and indirect fire support. The Indian Air Force also swept in from the skies raining rockets and Precision Guided Munitions onto vital targets. Many others were part of this war winning machine – commanders and staff at different levels, other arms and services who provided much needed combat support, and the media too; the media brought home to the people across the length and breadth of the nation, the gallantry and grit of our troops.

A question which arose and is discussed at times is whether the Indian Government's decision to limit the campaign to the Drass – Kargil area only, and not to cross the LC was appropriate. Should we have utilised the opportunity and escalated the conflict and secured other areas of strategic value across the LC? Should we have inflicted more damage to Pakistan and should we have degraded the Pakistan Army more? General V P Malik (retd), the then Army Chief, has discussed this aspect in his interview (pages 18 to 24). He has indicated that in hindsight, better strategic spin-offs and outcomes have resulted from this limited front campaign. And actually, the option to escalate was available if the limited campaign had not succeeded.

In this Special Issue, we have started with the Pakistani game-plan, called **Operation Koh-e-Paima**, elaborated upon by Lt Gen P R Kumar (retd). An insight into the strategic and operational activities is gained from the articles by Air Marshal Narayan Menon (retd), the then Air Officer Commanding J&K; Lt Gen Mohinder Puri (retd), the then Division Commander in

Drass Sector and Lt Gen A S Chhabewal (retd), the then Colonel General Staff in Drass Sector. Notable narratives are the descriptions of their attacks by some of the infantry units involved, namely 2 RAJ RIF, 18 GARH RIF, 13 JAK RIF, 8 SIKH, 1/11 GR and 11 RAJ RIF. The immense firepower supremacy achieved by the Gunners is described by Major General Lakhwinder Singh (retd), the then Artillery Commander in Drass Sector in his article.

In other reports, Air Marshal D Choudhury (retd) highlights some home truths of **Operation Safed Sagar** (the Air Force operation launched in synergy with **Operation Vijay**); and our Editor (Navy) brings out the actions of the Indian Navy in that period. We have also included a Doctor's experiences with an infantry unit in the Batalik Sector and Group Captain K Nachiketa Rao's first person account. Then a Flight Lieutenant, he was taken prisoner by Pakistani troops after his fighter jet crashed. In addition, Vishal Batra, the twin brother of Major Vikram Batra, PVC, pays tribute to his heroic "*Sher Shah of Kargil*".

In October 24, we plan to focus on the sports arena of the Armed Forces, and plan to cover exceptional sportspersons from the Armed Forces like Major Dhyam Chand, Milkha Singh, Colonel Rajyavardhan Rathore, Neeraj Chopra, and many others from the Shooting Ranges, Yachting, Rowing, Boxing fields, etc; Winter Sports and Para Olympics too. We look forward to articles on this theme. The articles may be sent to chiefeditor@medalsandribbons.com by 07 August 2024.

We have woven together a mosaic of articles covering various facets of **Operation Vijay** in this issue. Hopefully the readers will find them interesting and educative. We look forward to your earnest feedback. The Editorial Team thanks all the readers for your valuable support and your positive kudos, which has enabled us to record and enhance the glory and pride of the Indian Armed Forces.



OPERATION KOH-E-PAIMA

PAKISTAN'S PERSPECTIVE OF THE KARGIL WAR

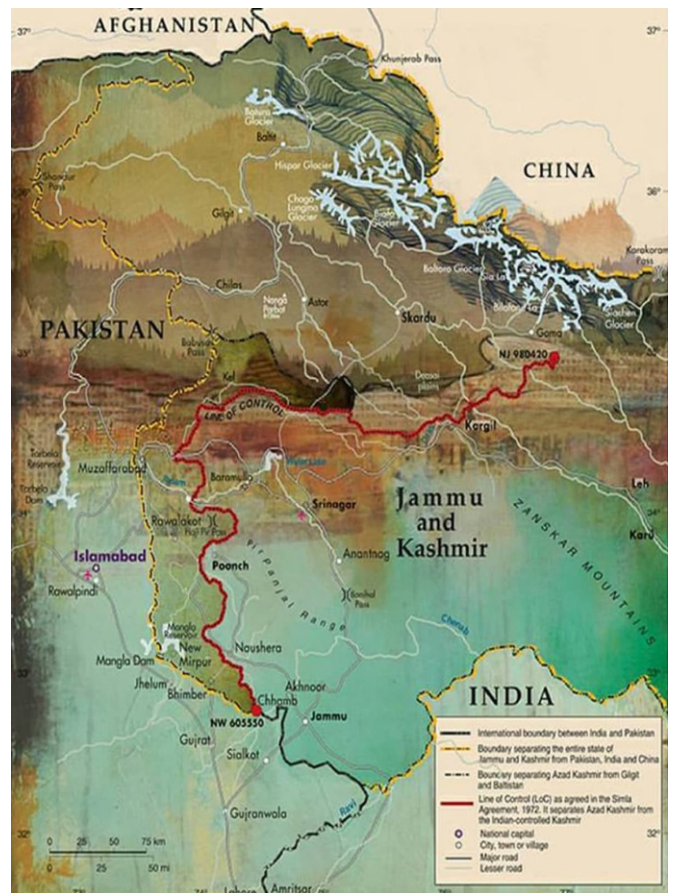
What was the Pakistani design during **Operation Koh-e-Paima (KP)**, also called **Operation Badr** in some reports. They underestimated the power and response of the Indian State, and did not perceive their own weaknesses. This article throws light on the happenings in Pakistan in 1999.

Prologue

The 1971 Indo-Pak war created and liberated Bangladesh, and in 1984 the Indian Army pre-empted the Pakistanis and occupied the Saltoro Range dominating Siachen glacier under Operation Meghdoot. The former was a strategic and decisive, political and military defeat, while the latter ruffled their pride once again as Pakistan wrongly interprets the area of Siachen as belonging to them. While the events had a traumatic and long-lasting effect on Pakistan and her people, the military felt humiliated, and many craved for revenge. To give Pakistan her due, they practiced the concept of multi-domain warfare (MDW: sub-conventional, hybrid, insurgency, terrorism, perception management, geo-political, diplomatic, and psychological) against India; much before it got prominence as a new form of warfare. To India's credit, once the intrusion was detected, she successfully conducted a multi-domain campaign, with equal emphasis on the non-military domains of Information, Diplomatic and Political. **Pakistan named the Kargil war as 'Operation Koh-e-Paima (KP)' meaning 'one who climbs a mountain' in Urdu.**

An Existing Plan Packaged as New

The Kargil operations envisaged occupation of dominating heights, most of which were traditionally vacated during winters by Indian Army troops, by infiltrating through



Operation Kob-e-Paima (KP) is the codename given by Pakistan; illustration by Zebra Nasim author of book 'From Kargil to the Coup' Note: Map shown as it is from article from Herald Dawn, Pakistan

the large gaps along the Line of Control (LC) in the Leh - Ladakh region, astride the Indian National Highway 1A (NH1A) joining Srinagar - Zoji La – Drass – Kargil - Leh. Mrs Benazir Bhutto spoke of General Musharraf suggesting a similar operation to her in 1996, but realising the strategic, diplomatic and geo-political misadventure she rejected itⁱ. When he was the Director General Military Operations (DGMO), Lieutenant General Aziz tried to sell it to his Chief, General Karamat, but fortunately better strategic sense and sense of propriety prevailed. It must be noted that the LC has sanctity internationally and bilaterally; it was *de-jure* not the international border between Pakistan and India, but *de facto* it was considered a border dividing the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Given the peculiar circumstances and secrecy on the Pakistan side, there are the Indian and Pakistani sides to the story of the '**Kargil Conflict 1999**'; and within the Pakistani side – the story told by General Musharraf and his supporters

i. 'The heights of folly: a Critical look at the Kargil Operation', Ejaz Haider, updated 28 Aug 2018, Herald Dawn, available at <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398650>. Accessed on 14 Apr 2024.
ii. 'Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army and Wars Within', by Shuja Nawaz, 2009, Oxford University Press, now available in Amazon.

on one hand and Prime Minister (PM) Sharif and his supporters on the otherⁱⁱⁱ. To provide a Pakistani perspective, I have mainly used reference material originating from Pakistan (books, articles in mainstream and local print and online media including YouTube). Interestingly, not much has been written on Kargil war from Pakistan as it was a strategic disaster, and the Army kept the operational aspects secret even on its termination. Right up to the unilateral withdrawal, the Pakistan Army maintained the façade of **Operation Koh-e-Paima (KP)** having been carried out by Mujahideen! Amusingly, the Mujahideen protested to the PM and were placated that once victory was achieved and Kashmir liberated the Mujahideen would also be celebrated and acknowledged.

Strategic Construct. Kargil was planned as a limited war to secure marginal territory; choke Siachen and the main logistics route into Leh-Ladakh region; threaten the Kashmir Valley from Drass - Zojila Pass Southwards; galvanise and provide impetus to the jihadi elements who were at a low ebb in Kashmir; and to internationalize the conflict. Thereafter, Pakistan hoped to negotiate on Siachen and Kashmir Valley with India from a position of strength. Given that India and Pakistan were newly declared nuclear weapon states (NWS), Pakistan believed that the international community would intervene in a timely fashion and consonant with Pakistan's strategic interest, once it had secured its operational aims early in the conflict.

An Overview of the Initial Plans

The Kargil clique, comprised four

Generals - Pakistan's Army Chief, General Pervez Musharraf; Chief of General Staff (CGS) Lieutenant General Aziz Khan; 10 Corps Commander, Lieutenant General Mahmud and the Force Commander Northern Areas (FCNA), Major General Javed Hasan who planned **Operation KP** in complete secrecy. PM Nawaz Sharif was presented the plan on 17 May 1999, much after the operation was underway. The senior members of the Cabinet, Air Force and Navy Chiefs, key bureaucrats and military veterans, even Director General Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) were hearing of this operation for the first time! The presentation was on a military map marked with troop positions with NO annotation; no mention of crossing LC was given, and a five-phase plan was presented. The PM was presented with a fait accompli. There was no shortage of flattery, with the CGS stating, "Sir, you will go down in the history of Pakistan as the PM in whose tenure Kashmir was resolved, and will be etched in golden letters". Sharif bought it, despite the recent 'Lahore Accord'.

Some like the Foreign Minister, Mr Sartaj Aziz, Minister for Northern Areas and Kashmir Affairs Lieutenant General (Retd) Majeed Malik, Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad and Defence Secretary Lieutenant General (Retd) Iftikhar Ali Khan had serious misgivings but held their peace.

The outline plan as presented by the DGMO to PM Sharif was:

- **Phase One** - Occupation of heights dominating the LC (no mention of crossing LC was made) and Indian NH1A, and choke Siachen and Leh - Ladakh region.
- **Phase Two** - Infiltrate freedom fighters into Valley, Leh and Ladakh, who will create a surge and provide impetus to insurgency in the areas.
- **Phase Three** – Pressure on Indian forces by these infiltrating groups and domination of NH1A, will force Indian Army to bring in reinforcements to Leh – Ladakh leaving the valley virtually drained of troops and vulnerable.
- **Phase Four** - Isolation of Kashmir



The Quartet/Clique who planned it All: General Pervez Musharraf, Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Aziz Khan, Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Mahmud, Commander 10 Corps, Major General Javed Hassan, General Officer Commanding FCNA
Source: Indian Defence Review (Google Images)

iii. 'The Pakistan Diary: 22 Years of Kargil', by Lt Gen VK Ahluwalia, CLAWS, Issue Brief No 297, available at https://www.claws.in/static/IB-297_The-Pakistan-Diary-22-Years-of-Kargil.pdf. Accessed on 14 Apr 2024.



Pakistan Army soldiers with IAF MiG-21 serial number C1539 which was shot down by ANZA-II SAM, piloted by Squadron Leader Ajay Abuja. (photo credit fighterjetsworld.com)

Valley by occupation of Banihal and Zojila passes by large numbers of freedom fighters (from within Valley and infiltration), and domination of the area.

- **Phase Five: the final phase** – Demand talks with India on own terms.
- **Assumptions which Guaranteed Success of Operation KP.**
 - Each post being held was impregnable and logistically sustainable.
 - The Indians did not have the will or the determination to take on Pakistan in a fight and would not make any serious effort to regain the heights.
 - No external international pressure foreseen, as India has done similar actions in Siachen and other areas along LC. Pakistan's friends especially USA and China would support or silently acquiesce.
 - Acknowledging the financial crunch, the government would not be asked for any extra resources, and the Pakistan Army will manage from within.

operational area of FCNA with Major General Javed Hasan as the General Officer Commanding (GOC). Planning and execution was pivoted around FCNA. FCNA had 11 units of Northern Light Infantry (NLI), which were considered para-military forces, officered by Pakistan Army, with troops from the local population. FCNA had 80 Infantry Brigade (Inf Bde) with Headquarters (HQ) at Minimarg under Brigadier Masood Aslam, 62 Inf Bde (HQ at Skardu) under Brigadier Nusrat Sial and 323 Inf Bde (HQ at Dansum/Siachen) under Brigadier Salahuddin Satti. Hasan considered himself an authority in strategy and geo-politics, and was highly regarded by the establishment during Musharraf's tenure.

Infiltration Plan. HQ FCNA and specifically HQ 80 Inf Bde was tasked to prepare the operational plan and Lieutenant Colonel Nisar Ahmad Warraich, the G1 (Operations) actually drew the plan on a 3D map. Tactically, he visualised only 200 troops crossing approximately nine kms across the LC and occupying positions starting East of Zojila pass in the Mushko, Drass, Tololing (a key post only two kms from the LC which could bring observed artillery and even infantry fire onto NH1A), Kaksar and Kargil areas. 62 Inf Bde made contingencies to occupy six positions in the Batalik and Chorbat La areas, and occupy the watershed to interdict NH1A. This was the main supply line to troops in the entire Ladakh sector; the second route being a barely three-months a year open road from Manali to Leh via Rohtang Pass.

Pakistani Troops Occupy the Heights. The plan was approved by the 10 Corps Commander in quick time. Troops crossed the LC starting October 1998 onwards. Mission creep started; having

Initial Surprise and Success. In the initial euphoric days, when such a large-scale intrusion had gone undetected and achieved success beyond expectation, the clique felt vindicated about the brilliance of their flawed strategy, and boldness of its execution. The presentation thus was also an exercise on patting one's back about Army's achievements having occupied 140 peaks undetected, and executed flawlessly thus far.

Operational Details and Execution

Area of Operations and Orbat (Force Levels) of 10 Corps Responsible for Operation KP.

The area of envisaged operations fell in the

successfully occupied areas basically in the Drass/Kargil area, the intrusions were expanded, both in number of posts/peaks (reached 140) and troops. Logistics from simple back packs became more robust to sustain through the winter. The plan was formally approved by Musharraf on 16 January 1999 (last Friday of Ramadan). It was a mix of guerrilla, holding, covert and mountaineering operations. Secrecy was valued above all else. Interestingly, when presentations were made by the G1 FCNA to GOC 10 Corps and to Musharraf, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), hardly any probing questions or contingency plans were asked for. Naturally, there were hardly any dissenting voices. Approximately 700 troops were deployed across the LC, with around 4000 troops supporting; on an average a section (8 to 10 men) occupied a height. Battalion rear locations became logistics bases; helicopters, mules and porters were used for supplying forward areas especially in easier terrain. The main logistics base was at Jaglot around 65 kms from Skardu. By April 1999, forward posts were well stocked with all necessities like ammunition, weapon systems, communications, medical equipment and water. But not all were stocked, and as per Zehra's book, many troops lived on canned food, as cooking was not possible to maintain surprise.

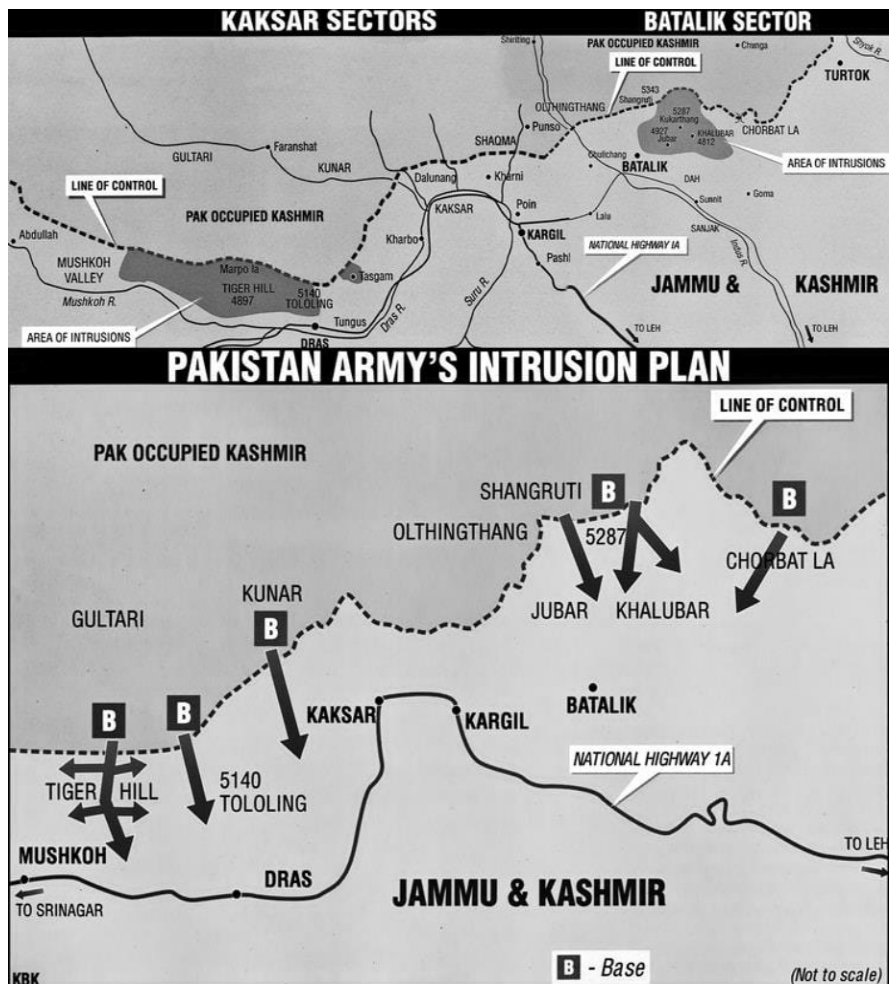
Detection by Indian Troops.

Intrusion was actually realised only once patrolling by Indian troops started sometime in May 1999. Even helicopter sorties did not confirm the scale of intrusion. Indian patrols started getting targeted beginning May, and an ammunition dump in Kargil was destroyed by enemy shelling. Indians focussed more in the Kargil - Yaldor sub sector, where a battalion assaulted a Pakistani company locality. Pakistan also had her first

substantial casualties losing men and five officers to Indian action. Gradually the local and national dailies in India picked up the story of heavy firing and actions in the Kargil Sector and reported large scale involvement of Mujahideen. Scattered media reports and talks of Pakistani Mujahideen in large numbers supported by few regular Pakistan Army soldiers intent on cutting NH1A at Drass, and possibly moving towards

Baltal and Southwards into the Valley of Kashmir towards Ganderbal and Pahalgam, apart from severing the axis moving Eastwards towards Leh, gathered momentum.

Zehra Nasim is quite harsh on the Indian military, when she wrote "the Pakistan Government's ignorance of what its own Army had carried out in Kargil was matched by the Indian Government's ignorance of the extent to which a napping



Map Showing Pakistan Army Intrusion across LC
 Source: Indian Defence Review, Surajit Sharma and Google Images



Nawaz Sharif and General Pervez Musharraf at Keil sector near Rawlakot on the LC, February 1999 (AFP photo) Source: The Herald, Pakistan Paper from article 'The heights of folly: A critical look at the Kargil Operation' by Ejaz Haider, 28 Aug 2018

The Indian Air Force was mobilised and employed ONLY on own side of the LC, to complement the Army offensive while the Indian Navy was on high alert to carry out pro-active actions including naval blockades if required (Karachi). The explosive nature and ferocity of India's response shook the Pakistan establishment. The Pakistan Air Force Chief refused to come to the Army's assistance citing strategic necessity of being prepared for an all-out Indian offensive along the Eastern borders, and the Naval Chief was apprehensive of deep maritime operations by Indian Navy. After sustaining severe casualties in the initial probes and attacks, the Indian Army launched well synchronised and coordinated attacks.

Indian Army had allowed the Pakistan Army a walk-over in the Kargil - Drass area". The Indian Army launched virtually blind, offensive tactical operations, without any operational plan or grand strategy. By end May, the appreciation of what lay ahead for the Indian Army became clearer, of removing a large intrusion; re-capturing significant number of peaks and dominating features, held by a mix of Mujahideen and Pakistan Army troops with modern weaponry supported by Special Services Group (SSG) and Artillery.

Ferocity of the Indian Response

Once the scale and scope of the intrusion and strategic implications was understood by the Indian Government and military, a whole of nation planned and coordinated multi-domain war was launched, pivoted around the Army assaults. All elements of national power from the political, diplomatic, informational (media coverage) were unleashed to support **Operation Vijay**.

Role of Indian Artillery. The artillery created the most disproportionate adverse impact on Pakistani positions, troops and logistics sustenance, and artillery equipment especially Bofors guns were pulled in from other formations. A fairly large number of guns were deployed in 'direct firing' role. Indian artillery pounded the objectives being assaulted/attacked, contingency positions, Observation Posts, logistics nodes and communication hubs. Sustenance of Pakistani forward troops became an existential challenge. The fire was so accurate that Indian troops moved upto 40 metres short of the targets during artillery shelling. Guns in direct firing role had a devastating effect especially the Bofors, even on bunkers. 100 to 120 guns were amassed for every attack. Pakistani troops learnt to dread enemy artillery. Physically and emotionally battered with no sleep or rest, isolated with minimal own fire support, the Pakistani soldiers incurred heavy casualties due to artillery fire.

The Magnitude of the Strategic Blunder Sinks In

The enormity of the operational task, without enjoying the capability and capacity (including the political and diplomatic fallout) of the country and Army to handle the crisis, started sinking in slowly amongst the senior leaders of the Pakistan Government, bureaucrats and Army. At the Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC) meeting held in end May 1999, many more questions and apprehensions on the operations were raised. Orders were given to take the Air Force and Navy on board and provide briefings to the Government regularly. The

full extent of what had happened, and the cul-de-sac in which Musharraf and his cabal had pushed the Army and the country became clear to Sharif when he went to Skardu's Combined Military Hospital and saw numerous wounded soldiers. The hospital's Commandant informed him that he was transporting dozens of wounded soldiers to Rawalpindi every day. Sharif was "crestfallen and teary-eyed as he walked around and comforted the wounded soldiers".^{iv} Military planners had not catered for a full-scale battle once the Indians had detected the intrusion; and did not anticipate the might of the Indian Army's response. Logistical sustenance of war like material and casualty evacuation became well-nigh impossible. The Pakistan Army (within the chain of command) and COAS did not report any adverse developments to the political hierarchy and the media, and only reports of heavier than usual firing along LC was reported.

Unilateral Withdrawal. Once the tactical reversals started, it became a tsunami of daily losses of held objectives. Even the manner of withdrawal as announced by PM Nawaz Sharif in July 1999, due to political compulsions and lack of military alternatives, was humiliating and tarnished the carefully cultivated image of a professional army. Driven to the wall militarily and losing tactically on the front, Pakistan withdrew unilaterally based on India's unequivocal demand, which was fully supported by USA and conveyed as such to Pakistan.

Zehra Nasim writes poignantly that Pakistan's misadventure was a case of flawed strategy, overconfidence, plans made beyond one's capabilities and capacities; but also, a case of secrecy, subterfuge, poor strategic leadership and zero civil-military cooperation. Even up to the last minute, the entire nation was kept on booster shots of victory, teaching India

a lesson, ending with revenge of Siachen and liberation of Kashmir. The bitter truth of international isolation by even traditional supporters and friends, a palpable, embarrassing military defeat, no recognition, honour or even a decent burial to those who fought bravely and died for the country sunk in; the people and opposition were truly distraught. **The war boomeranged on Pakistan.**

Tales of Heroism

Pakistan junior leadership and troops performed their duty unflinchingly, with honour, and resoluteness. Many did not evacuate even when ordered to do so, but chose to stay and fight and achieve 'shahadat'. There were a surprising number of officer volunteers from peace time locations who reported for war without even informing their own units. Major Wahab, a volunteer from an intelligence unit in Wah cantonment was sent from Gilgit to Drass sector and joined 6 NLI at Iqbal post. When Indian troops attacked, Wahab though severely wounded ordered an LMG be left behind for him to continue firing at the attackers. Captain Karnal Sher Khan repeatedly counterattacked a lost post and died doing his duty. They fought with courage, discipline and conviction when all was lost. Many Commanding Officers were confronted with decisions of whether to vacate a post under overwhelming Indian attack; whether to leave behind wounded or risk troops trying to evacuate them in those incredibly tough heights. Orders not to accept bodies of Pakistan soldiers who had died fighting were intensely galling and painful. The nation and troops watched Indian TV showing Indian troops burying Pakistani soldiers with full military honours and dignity wrapped in Pakistan flags. It was the ultimate shame to dishonour your own men who fought valiantly for their motherland. The senior hierarchy who planned this ill-fated campaign fared badly. GOC 10 Corps lost his nerve, and General Aziz moved into the Corps HQ trying to restore the inevitable adverse situation.

Before handing the body of Captain Karnal Sher Khan back, Brigadier MPS Bajwa, Commander of the Indian 192 Mountain Brigade, which re-captured Tiger Hill, wrote a heartfelt citation, lauding his bravery and urging his country to acknowledge that he laid down his life for his motherland and fought with sheer courage. Khan was posthumously awarded Pakistan's highest military honour, the Nishan-e-Haider. Twenty-one years later, on 07 July 2020, General Qamar Bajwa, Pakistan COAS paid tribute to Captain Khan and another martyr of the Kargil conflict, Havaladar Lalak Jan, saying in a message that the "nation is proud of its gallant sons for valour and unwavering allegiance to defend the country, regardless of the cost". Indeed, there can be no greater sacrifice, and there are hundreds of such soldiers, mainly from the NLI, who embraced martyrdom on those icy, inhospitable peaks in India-held Kashmir. There are many tales of individual heroism, the desperate fight to the death in the face of dwindling supplies of food and ammunition, with artillery fire from the other side raining down on them, which are rarely written or spoken about.

^{iv} *The Heights of Folly: a critical look at the Kargil Operation*, Ejaz Haider, updated 28 Aug 2018, Herald Dawn, available at <https://berald.dawn.com/news/1398650>. Accessed on 14 Apr 2024.
v 'Kargil Martyrs', Dawn, July 10, 2020, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1568101>. Accessed on 14 Apr 2024



Pakistani gunners shelling Indian positions from Brasil Chu just 5 kms away from Kargil. 15 June 1999. (photo credit paksfauj.tripod.com)

A Flavour of Geo-Politics: International Condemnation and Global Isolation, and the Nuclear Dimension

International Response. The strong support of USA for India, and her unequivocal call to Pakistan to withdraw troops who had crossed the LC, being violators of its sanctity, came as a brutal and rude shock, and disappointment to the establishment and Pakistan Army. It totally weighed against their geo-strategic calculations, on which the operation was underpinned. The United Nations, particularly members of the Security Council, assured India that there would be no attempt to intervene in Kashmir, although Pakistan was said to have requested such intervention.^{vi} Similarly, the G-8 issued a statement on 21 June 1999, indicating its “deep concern” about the military confrontation in Kashmir, which it saw as being the result of an “infiltration of armed intruders which violated the LC.” The communique called for a “restoration of the LC and for the parties to work for an immediate cessation of the fighting, full respect in future for the LC and the resumption of dialogue between

India and Pakistan in the spirit of the Lahore Declaration.” The responses from multilateral organizations were also unilaterally favourable to India. Pakistan stood isolated internationally.

Nuclear Implications. The conflict represents a watershed, as it demonstrated that even the presence of nuclear weapons might not appreciably dampen the traditional India-Pakistan hostility, and escalatory mechanism safeguards^{vii}. The Kargil conflict posed real concerns about the possibility of the conflict widening to conventional warfare and subsequently escalating to nuclear use. Both nations would have taken strategic lessons based on their individual perceptions on the outcome

of the war. India never advertised Pakistan’s nuclear sabre rattling, as it would encourage and confirm Pakistan’s conviction on the power of the nuclear card. India must forever stay ahead of the loop on nuclear issues, because Pakistan is a risk-acceptant state capable of “irrational” strategic surprises. India must be prepared for all nuclear contingencies that may be forced upon it by Pakistani actions.

Losing Informational Credibility. The secrecy which shrouded **Operation KP** affected the reporting in Pakistan Media. A reading of Pakistan’s press, strongly suggests that at the time of the conflict, editors and other opinion shapers did not know that the incursions around Kargil were not a Mujahideen operation. The surprise and alienation evinced by Pakistani elite and editorials was based on the belief that Kargil was not Pakistan’s doing and that Islamabad therefore did not deserve the opprobrium it received. Even contemporary Pakistani accounts of Kargil deny any direct role of the Pakistani Army apart from close support behind the LC and are thus manifestly incongruent with the accounts published outside of Pakistan. Retired military

vi. “Pakistan Wants International Attention,” by Amit Barnab, *The Hindu*, May 28, 1999. For more discussion regarding the UN reaction to events in Kargil, see Arpit Rajain, “India’s Political and Diplomatic Response to the Kargil Crisis”; See also “Security Council Hands Off Kargil”, *The Statesman*, May 30, 1999; “Pakistan Crossed the LOC Says UN Chief”, *The Hindu*, May 31, 1999; “G-8 Communique”, June 1999; “G-8 Can Now Play Proactive Role in Indo-Pak Conflict,” *The Hindustan Times Online Edition*, June 22, 1999.

vii. “Limited Conflicts Under the Nuclear Umbrella: Indian and Pakistani Lessons from the Kargil Crisis”, by Ashley J. Tellis, C. Christine Fair, Jamison Jo Medby, published by RAND Corporation, National Security Research Division, 2001, available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA400858.pdf>. Accessed from 01 Apr to 30 Apr 2024.

officers and diplomats, academics, and journalists conformed to Army's version of events when writing in the editorial pages of major newspapers, but spoke quite frankly of the Army's involvement during interviews. When news of **Operation KP** broke, there was nil to marginal information available, hence these contradictions. The Foreign Office accounts too were similarly lopsided being out of sync with reality. Reports and op-ed pieces obliquely challenging the Government's version of events began late-July 1999. Candid rejections of the Government's narrative occurred years after the crisis ended.

Introspection Post Kargil

Post Kargil, there were sane analysts who called it a strategic blunder. Several opinion shapers argue that to pursue Kargil-like operations in the future, Pakistan will have to address its own political and economic weaknesses first. For example, Shahid M Amin, a career diplomat who has served the Pakistani Foreign Office in the capacity of Ambassador for 18 years, articulated a commonly held opinion when he stated the following:

"It is high time that the country became ruthlessly realistic about its limitations and priorities. First and foremost, Pakistan's survival must precede everything else, including our attachment to the Kashmir cause. Secondly, it has to be understood that our economy is our weakest point and has to be given priority over any other consideration. Thirdly, we need to set our house in order and require a long period of internal consolidation, based on drastic reforms".

Operation KP a Military Victory, but Diplomatic Defeat. However, there are many who considered the operation a strategic and military victory but a diplomatic defeat^{viii}. One editorial

succinctly stated, *"The strongest grantor [sic] of Kashmiri freedom is a strong Pakistan. This is a lesson of Kargil."*^{ix} Such views were reiterated in various articles. Shireen Mazari wrote that *"the military aspect of the Kargil action was simply brilliant."* Later, in the same piece, she laments that India was able to *"turn a military defeat into a diplomatic victory . . . [and] that Pakistan was unable to translate a tremendous military success into a politico-diplomatic victory"*^x. Interlocutors who held this view asserted, often against the weight of evidence, that the Pakistani Army's operational performance at Kargil was flawless, and they invariably concluded that the Army's attainment of strategic surprise at Kargil was in effect synonymous with the achievement of victory in the campaign. They entirely ignore the fact that the Indian Army, once mobilized, redeployed, and committed to eviction operations, actually secured repeated tactical victories, often against great odds throughout the concluding half of the Kargil campaign. Still they continue to claim that Kargil must be chalked up as an operational victory for the Pakistani Army.

Doors Open for Future Kargil Options? Another related narrative suggested that the Pakistani Army could have held out until the winter snowfall, giving an honourable cover for retreat, had Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif not sold them out in Washington during his

04 July meeting with President Clinton. According to this argument, Pakistan could have easily maintained its commanding tactical positions along the occupied hilltops while, more importantly, India was not in a position to widen the war. Shireen Mazari has argued that *"the reality is that there was simply no danger of even an all-out war between Pakistan and India, because India was not in a position to instigate such a war"*^{xi}. One academic analyst argued that India marketed its weaknesses as restraint and would have been unable to take back the peaks had the withdrawal not occurred. Despite being at variance with facts, these views are disturbing for two reasons; **first**, the Pakistan Army's defeat at Kargil is attributed to the shamelessness of Pakistan's politicians; **second**, the Indian Army's operational and tactical successes in the costly eviction campaign was not realized, and was compounded by ignoring the extensive Indian preparations for horizontal escalation, in case the eviction efforts along the occupied heights were not as successful as they eventually turned out to be. This perception reinforces the canard that Kargil was a military victory; and Pakistan *'was done out of'*, simply due to the actions of pusillanimous civilian leaders acting in concert with a hostile United States. With the passage of time, these false deductions could again give rise to policies that attempt Kargil-

viii. As per HISTORYPAK.com on Kargil war 1999, Pakistan won the war militarily but lost it politically. Available at <https://historypak.com/kargil-conflict-1999/>. Accessed on 11 Apr 2024.

ix. "Limited Conflicts Under the Nuclear Umbrella: Indian and Pakistani Lessons from the Kargil Crisis", by Ashley J. Tellis, C. Christine Fair, Jamison Jo Medby, published by RAND Corporation, National Security Research Division, 2001, available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA400858.pdf>. Accessed from 01 Apr to 30 Apr 2024.

x. *ibid*

xi. *ibid*



Pakistani troops moving up (representational Image)

like operations in the future, with more disastrous consequences.

Some other issues/deductions which surfaced are bulleted below: -

- Systemic deficiencies inherent in Pakistan that permit Pakistan to launch military operations that are not supported by strategic assessment of all possible outcomes and their probabilities. This view of deficient assessment generally, and with regard to Kargil in particular, was expressed by a wide range of public opinion shapers and analysts^{xii}.
- **Whom are we fooling?** One expert questioned the story of freedom fighters fighting at 15000 feet without Army involvement. Is it possible for PTV to beguile its captive audience at home – is the Pakistani Awaam naïve?
- The international community would have understood Pakistan better, had

Islamabad been forthright about the operation and made the case that India has on numerous occasions violated the LC in Siachen, Chorbat La, Qamar and elsewhere. Thus, Pakistan could have cast the Kargil operation as an extension of Siachen, which may have garnered more support internationally.

- One disturbing school of thought is that Pakistan felt compelled to take a calculated gamble in an attempt to alter the status quo: precisely because it perceived that it had no other choices. This view has serious strategic consequences.
- Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities have become the key to successful execution of its political strategies at multiple levels. Nuclear weapons not only enable Islamabad to pursue “strategic diversion” and immunize the country from a violent Indian counter-response; they also serve to catalyse the attention and the interest of the international community. Consequently, they have acquired centrality in Pakistan’s national strategy.

The World View

It is important to record international (interestingly Pakistani too) impressions of the Indian response. The Vajpayee Government’s calm

^{xii}. “Kargil: The Unanswered Questions II—Time to Shed Illusions”, by Shabid M Amin, *The Dawn*, July 26, 1999.

and calculated statements accusing Pakistan of aggression, demanding its troops withdraw, agreeing for dialogue, calling for reverting back to the Lahore Agreement, deploying the maximum possible forces in Kargil but not allowing them to cross the LC even after their MiGs were shot down, and simultaneously ruling out both the spread in fighting or the use of nuclear weapons, won over the world and the war. Assuring the international community that it wanted to remain localised, made India appear reasonable and earned significant international goodwill and support.

Concurrently, disturbing systemic questions about Pakistan surfaced internally and internationally; who had control of the Army? Who clears operational plans and does the Army need to get them cleared by Government and who in Government? At what stage (planning or execution) does civilian input come and do their inputs count? Constitutionally, what rules oblige the Army to seek civilian clearance, guidance and directions? Is the Army obliged to seek civilian inputs and clearance? Who is the Boss and final arbiter?

Lessons for India

Kargil demonstrated to India that Pakistan could be a reckless, adventurist, and risk-acceptant state, capable of behaving irrationally. India should never be surprised in future by any adventure undertaken by Pakistan. Kargil raised grave, unsettling questions about Pakistan's ability to assess its strategic environment, its capacity for coherent decision making, and its ability to subordinate its fear and loathing of India to the more rational demands imposed by the nuclearization of the subcontinent and the fact of India's greater power-political capacity. Even more preposterously, Pakistan's prosecution of

Kargil even amidst its pursuit of the Lahore Declaration process was outrageously duplicitous, irrespective of the strategic calculus. The Pakistan military has an existential stake (in terms of power, influence and status) in keeping the proxy war running and calibrating it. This view strengthens the argument within India that New Delhi really cannot "do business" with Islamabad because it is essentially an untrustworthy partner. "Ugly stability", the persistence of unconventional conflicts, will probably endure in the region. State-sponsored terrorism will remain an attractive mode of operation in large part, because conventional conflicts remain risky. Pakistan's evaluation of Kargil's consequences remains ambiguous. Thankfully, there are those within Pakistan who have increasingly come to question the costs that Pakistan's low intensity conflict strategy has imposed upon the state's economic, social, and

political development. Lastly, Pakistan and more specifically Rawalpindi remains passionately focused on "resolving" Kashmir, and its support for the insurgency is unlikely to dissipate any time soon.

Pakistan has possibly realised that India today has asymmetrically better multi domain capabilities and capacities, and optimistic expectations of the international community's role in South Asian rivalries are unwarranted. Unfortunately, a large segment of the Pakistani establishment, military and people, still believe that KP was a military victory but a diplomatic and political failure; specifically, due to the failure of the political leadership to build the correct narrative and follow it up diplomatically. The Army once again got away, though with some mud on its face; it did initiate the rumblings within Pakistan of the Army being an extra-constitutional authority, not always acting in the nation's interest.



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Lt Gen PR Kumar

GENERAL V P MALIK

THE CHIEF AT THE HELM IN OPERATION VIJAY

Strategic leadership had to handle the adverse situation in Kargil, under difficult and challenging circumstances. Lieutenant General D Anbu (retd), former Vice Chief of Army Staff had an incisive discussion with General VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (retd), the then Chief of Army Staff. General Malik spoke about the operational and national strategy during the conflict in the summer of 1999.

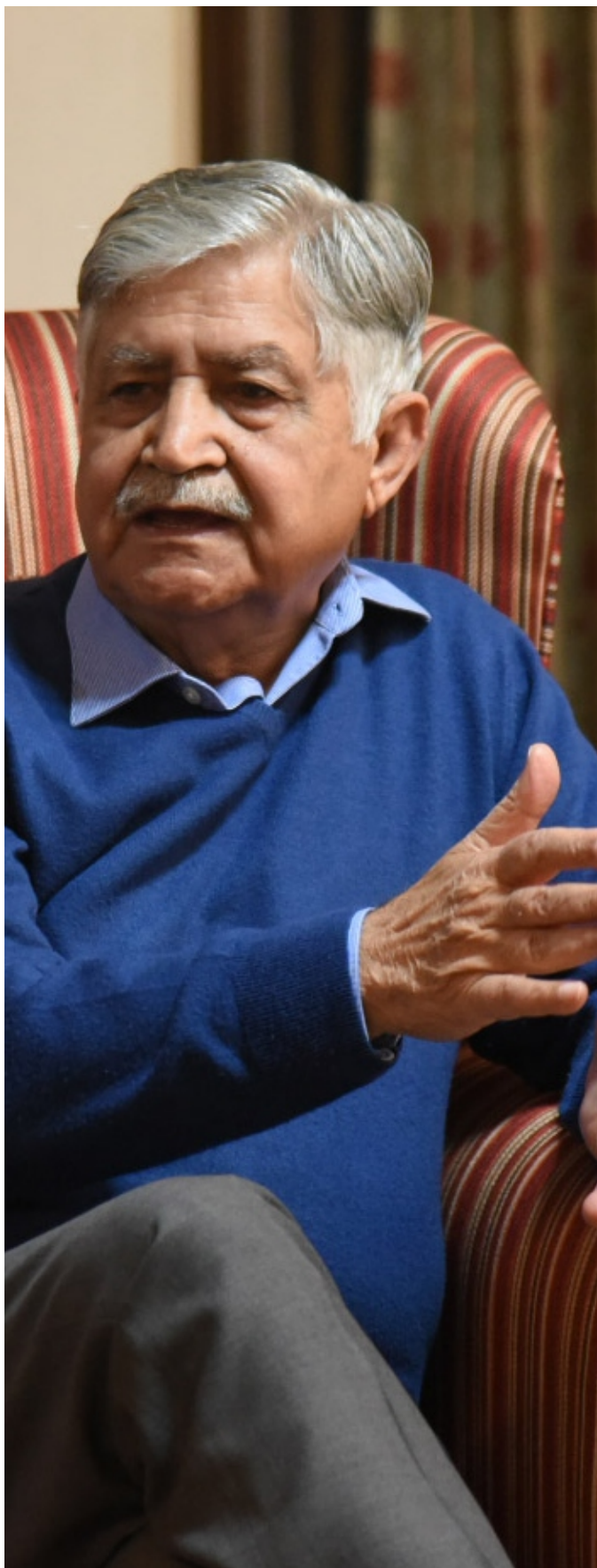
25 years have flown by. When you look back at Operation Vijay, what do you see as the high points of the conflict? What major factors led to our victory?

For me, the high points of the Kargil conflict were:-

Surprise. So soon after the signing of Lahore Declaration by India and Pakistan and due to systemic intelligence and surveillance failures, it was a big surprise at all levels of the Government. For several weeks, there was no clarity on the ground situation. Intelligence agencies continued to make political and operational assessments based on a Pakistan Army deception plan.

Challenges.

- Mountainous, high altitude and glaciated terrain which required specialized equipment (we had very little) and acclimatization before deployment of additional troops.
- Poor intelligence inputs and assessment of Pakistani military or political objectives.



- Shortages in weapons, ammunition and equipment. Since early 1990s, the Army was forced to adopt a 'Bottom Line' approach due to budgetary constraints (We were holding only 70-80% of authorized weapons, ammunition and equipment. Even 30 Rashtriya Rifles battalions raised during that period had not received government sanction for their arms, ammunition and equipment).
- India was facing severe 'sanctions' from Western nations due to nuclear weapons tests carried out in 1998.

Major Factors Leading to Victory.

- **Tactical and Operational Level:** Outstanding human capital of the Indian Army, particularly its junior leadership; synergy in planning and execution after launching of Operation Vijay.
- **Strategic Level:** Joint military strategy to credibly threaten Pakistan on its land border, in air, and on the high seas. This caused a major 'strategic disruption' at political and military levels in Pakistan. The coordination and cooperation within the Armed Forces and civil ministries due to close monitoring and decision making at the Cabinet Committee for Security (CCS) level was also a major factor.

Last year on 07 October 23, the Israelis were surprised by Hamas raids from Gaza, despite the presence of some indicators of Hamas preparations. We too had possibly received reports of some unusual activities in Baltistan in 1998-99 but did not assess the warning signals correctly. Were the Pakistani signatures inadequate or not evident and was this an intelligence failure,

possibly our surveillance along the Line of Control (LC) was tardy too?

In its post conflict report, the Kargil Review Committee had observed, "The Pakistani intrusion was a complete and total surprise to the Government of India and its intelligence agencies." The Kargil War reflected a major deficiency in our system of collecting, reporting, collating and assessing intelligence as well as poor surveillance on the ground.

Before the war, the focus of all intelligence reports and assessments was on Kashmiri militancy or occasional artillery fire exchanges across the LC. Any possibility of a conventional conflict with regular forces was consistently negated in intelligence assessments, which conveyed lack of preparedness on Pakistan's part for a direct military conflict. Most of our military intelligence teams remained obsessed with staff work and neglected the fieldwork. Patrolling activity and incidents reported in different brigade sectors were neither linked nor properly assessed. Efforts of the corps

intelligence groups remained mostly proxy war centric.

In the first week of June 1998, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) had reported that some Jehadi camps were located in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and Northern Areas, about 50 to 150 km North of the LC, opposite Drass and Kargil. The IB kept insisting on this input, and till the third week of May 1999, reports and assessments of Joint Intelligence Committee kept insisting that the infiltrators were Mujahideen. This influenced decision making at military and political levels. There was never any hint of an impending military operation with a view to occupying mountain heights in Indian territory. The fact is that General Pervez Musharraf planned and initiated the war after he took over command of Pakistan Army in October 1998. Six months earlier, the IB could not have predicted the Kargil war.

In a briefing to an American delegation in January 2003, Major General (later Lieutenant General)



General V P Malik interacts with the soldiers in Operation Vijay



Shabash to the warriors! General V P Malik talks to the troops.

Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) that could fly at high altitudes to carry out aerial surveillance. Unattended ground sensors and local surveillance radars had not been inducted. Apart from patrolling, the only other viable means was visual winter aerial surveillance operations (WASO). This was quite ineffective as there was no surveillance equipment onboard.

Military leaders tend to reduce the gravity of adverse situations to avoid being hauled up! After the detection of intrusions in early May, the local formation continued to downplay the intrusions as minor terrorists

Nadeem Ahmed, then Pakistan's Force Commander Northern Areas (FCNA), categorically denied the presence of any Mujahideen or militants in Baltistan area. The scale and extent of the Kargil intrusion involved elaborate planning and preparation. The operation required well-trained, duly acclimatized troops familiar with the ground that would have to be carefully selected. Large quantities of snow clothing and other winter warfare equipment would be acquired. Some new roads and tracks would be required to be built. There would be a lot of movement besides dumping of artillery ammunition and construction/renovation of bunkers. A large number of porters would be needed for logistical back-up support. Additional infantry battalions and artillery units would have to be deployed along the LC. No such information except dumping of some artillery ammunition was picked up by any agency or included in their assessments.

There was serious surveillance failure at the brigade and division levels. Deployment with large gaps in the mountainous terrain lends itself to infiltration. Investigations later revealed that regular patrolling was conspicuously absent. Gaps between defended localities were not adequately covered. Briefing and debriefing of patrols were not given due importance. Winter surveillance of large gaps between defences without advanced technical equipment was a major handicap. In 1999, we did not have Unmanned

presence, and we became situationally aware only in end May or early June. Were some of the commanders lacking in moral courage? Why did it take us so long to get the correct battlefield picture?

This factor cannot be denied considering that even on 19 May 1999, General Officer Commanding (GOC) 15 Corps while addressing a press conference in Srinagar had described the situation as 'a local counter-insurgency operation... a local situation being dealt with locally'. He stated that all groups of infiltrators would be eliminated in a few days as they were on a 'suicidal mission'. Before that, the Director General Military Operations (DGMO) had visited Leh and Kargil on 4-5 May, the Northern Army Commander visited Kargil on 8 May, and the Defence Minister visited the Sector on 13 May 1999.

Post-operations, it came to light that there was tension and mistrust between commanders and senior staff of the Kargil Brigade and the Leh Division, and in Kargil, liaison between Army units and the locals was inadequate. Unit and formation commanders did not maintain close contact with civil population to obtain the ground-level feel in their areas of responsibility.

What were the broad contours of our plan to restore the adverse situation?

Tactical and Operational Level. The initial ground-level reaction to Pakistani infiltration was in the form of counter terrorist operations. Movement of additional units and sub-units at the brigade and division levels was done in haste. The hastily moved units and sub-units had neither adequate combat strength nor logistic support. They were tasked at brigade and division levels in an ad-hoc manner without detailed

planning. With the induction of 8 Mountain Division into Drass Sector in the last week of May 1999, sub-sectors were prioritized and ordered to ensure deliberate planning and preparation before launching any operation. 15 Corps was directed to ensure security of communications and the enemy should not be able to build up on its success. We required strategic superiority to evict the enemy. Additional troops, including combat support arms and logistics units were inducted for defensive and offensive operations in the sector.

Joint Military Strategy. During a meeting held on 24 May 1999 in the Military Operations Room, the CCS had desired that the Pakistani intrusion in our area should be evicted as early as possible. The CCS agreed to joint military planning and employment of all three forces, but asked us not to cross the LC or the International Border. Dual tasked formations of the Army married up with Western, Southern and Northern Commands and located with or close to strike formations. The Navy supplemented its Western Naval Fleet with selected units from the Eastern Naval Fleet. This enabled it to extend the range of its deployment in the Arabian Sea. The Air Force started employing fighter aircraft to engage enemy targets and enemy assets on our side of the LC and brought all its air bases into readiness for aerial tasks on the Western border. In the third week June 1999, the Air Chief sought permission from CCS for fighter pilots to cross the LC while engaging Pakistani logistics base Muntho Dhalo, but the CCS rejected the request. The joint military strategy planned and implemented by the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) was:

- A military posture to prevent Pakistan from reinforcing its military forces opposite Kargil.

- Threaten and maintain pressure on Pakistan throughout land, air and sea border. With an offensive posture, create strategic imbalance for Pakistan's Armed Forces.
- Be prepared to launch own forces across the border or LC at short (6 days) notice, if allowed by the CCS.
- Retain balance on borders with China and Bangladesh.

The decision to not cross the LC initially, suggested a defensive design. Strategically it limited the conflict in area and level and enabled us to apply our combat power effectively in the Kargil battle area. Was Pakistani nuclear capability a major factor in opting for this design, and which other major factors led to adoption of this approach?

As stated earlier, restraint and not allowing the Armed Forces to cross the border/LC was a political directive and part of India's grand strategy. The intrusion took place within two months of our Government signing the Lahore Declaration with Pakistan. Our political establishment was taken aback. No one could believe that all the goodwill and bonhomie generated through Track-1 and Track-2 dialogues had collapsed so abruptly. The Government did not expect that Pakistan Army would be involved in such an intrusion.

For quite some time, the Government was not clear who the intruders were. Infiltration by Jehadis into Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) had been going on for years. Wrong intelligence assessment led decision makers astray. Even though the Pakistan Army was involved in the intrusion, the Government did not declare this conflict a war. Although Pakistani nuclear

capability was never discussed with the military, it was definitely a factor considered by the CCS. After our nuclear weapons tests in May 1998, India was considered a rogue nation. It had lost international support till the very end of Kargil War, when Pakistani intrusion became obvious to the world.

In hindsight, should we have escalated to other areas in J&K and used the opportunity to punish the Pakistan Army more severely as also capture more territory in POK?

The Pakistan Army had taken the initiative (with or without permission from its political authority - one does not know) and achieved tactical surprise, leading to penetration in Kargil Sector. Our first priority was to stabilize the situation in this sector as mandated. The Government allowed us to deploy forces for offensive operations but was not inclined to escalate the situation unless it became unavoidable. That interest was lost when it saw the political aim being achieved without further escalation. The Government had its reasons. If the conflict had escalated, the possibility of major powers intervening to prevent a nuclear confrontation would be there. They would have sought an early termination of the war. This *could* have left a part of our territory in Kargil in Pakistani hands, which would have been a major setback for us politically and militarily. Moreover, Pakistan and countries friendly to it would have played up the issue of J&K in international forums.

Some military analysts have opined that we would have suffered lesser casualties, had we opened another front and crossed the border. This



The Three Chiefs During Operation Vijay - Air Chief Marshal Tipnis (left), General V P Malik (centre) and Admiral Susbil Kumar (right).

Indian soldiers attacked formidable heights in the high altitude along razor thin ridges with partial inputs about the enemy; and pulled off remarkable victories. Your comments please.

Hats off to our troops, junior leaders and formation commanders on the ground! They made the nation proud forever.

Which were the most crucial battles of the war – Tololing, Tiger Hill, Point 4875, Kukarhang, Khalubar, Jubar or any other?

Operationally, these were all crucial battles which helped and gave us the confidence that we shall win the war. Recapture of Tololing was our first major success and a turning point. Capture of Tiger Hill was important operationally as well as strategically. It shattered the Pakistan Army morale. It also conveyed to them and to the rest of the world that the conflict would end soon on our terms.

opinion is questionable, not only because of the given political aim, terms of reference and the explanations given above, but also because of the new combat environment. Modern long-range, accurate and lethal weapon systems, deployed three-dimensionally increase casualties in larger combat environment substantially.

Why did the Pakistan Army balk at not accepting that their troops had occupied positions across the LC?

For the simple reason that its entire planning was based on a false policy; that the intrusion was caused by the Jehadis and Pakistan Army had no role in that. This policy was backed by a credible information and deception campaign. The deception planning was demolished when we were able to give proof of Pakistan Army's total involvement.

What were your major worries and concerns in early June 99 when we inducted more forces across Zojila to evict the Pakistanis? Were you confident of success, and what were your major apprehensions?

After the capture of Tololing, and Point 5140, I was confident of the success. I did not want the war to be stopped with a ceasefire due to international pressure or own political reasoning till we had achieved the mandated political aim.

Airpower also helped in several actions. Could you give us your perspective of the air support operations?

The role of the Indian Air Force in the Kargil conflict – called **Operation Safed Sagar** – was quite different from its conventional role in a war. Its major influence in the war was at strategic level. Once the Air Force (and the Navy) entered the fray, our firm resolve to evict the intruders became very clear to Pakistan. The rest of the world began to take notice that the intrusion was not a routine Indo-Pak border skirmish.

The Air Force carried out its operational missions as effectively as possible, given the terrain configuration and the available technical capabilities. Its successful strikes at Muntho Dhalo and Tiger Hill had adverse effect on the logistics and morale of the Pakistani troops.

The media played a proactive role in covering the campaign and brought home the valour and patriotism of the Indian Armed Forces. How did this media coverage impact our units launching the attacks?

The Kargil War was India's first *'television war'*. Kargil entered homes throughout the nation, both as a battleground and as a symbol. Both the military and the media were (as they still are) on the learning curve as far as new concepts and methodologies were concerned. We won the information battle primarily due to factors such as full accessibility to the

media, transparency (to the extent possible), adoption of a holistic approach towards the entire situation and, above all, the credible daily media briefings conducted jointly by the officers from the Operations Directorates of the Services Headquarters and from the Ministry of External Affairs. These briefings helped the Armed Forces to project the Kargil War in its correct perspective but also brought the whole nation together and raised patriotic feelings amongst the masses.

Our information policy was based on the following directives:

- Expose Pakistani lies about the Pakistan Army not being involved in the operations and about the LC in the Kargil sector not being clearly delineated. Counter any other Pakistani disinformation campaign.
- Put across the national policy of restraint, emphasize the probity of, and the justification for, our military action and support the military strategy for war.
- Make people aware of the traditional strength and the organizational capabilities of the Army. Also, highlight gallantry displayed by the troops, their high morale, the esprit de corps in and among the various units, the competent leadership and, above all, the determination to win the war.
- Convey the news from the war zone as soon as possible without compromising on security.
- *Do not deviate from the truth.* Give out only facts and establish trustworthiness. (Views and analysis to be given by senior officers only.)

As the war progressed, it became easy to expose Islamabad's lies and disinformation about the non-involvement of the Pakistan Army.

What were the most important lessons from Operation Vijay? Are we better prepared today for conflicts which may arise on our disputed frontiers, with new technologies and battle field transparency affecting the methods of war fighting?

Some important strategic level lessons from Kargil War are:

- Nuclear capability notwithstanding, as long as there are territory - related disputes, the adversary can always indulge in a proxy war, a border war, or both.
- **Intelligence-Surveillance-Reconnaissance.** This important national security aspect requires continuous review. As no loss of territory is acceptable to the nation, it is essential to have credible strategic and tactical intelligence/assessments, effective surveillance and deployments close to the LC/Line of Actual Control/border.
- A war requires close political oversight and very close political-civil-military interactions. It is

essential to keep the military leadership in the security information and strategic decision-making loop during peace and war.

- Integrated Defence Structure under the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) is a must.
- Successful outcome of a border war depends upon our ability to react rapidly. This calls for fast decision making, good border infrastructure, integrated combat organizations, rapid deployment and synergy amongst all civil and military elements.
- Counter-militancy operations should never be at the cost of preparations for conventional operations. Safeguarding our borders must be top priority.
- Information operations are important due to greater transparency of the battlefield. The political requirement of a military operation, and to retain moral high ground (and deny that to the adversary), needs a comprehensive media and information strategy.



V for Victory and Vijay! The victorious Armed Forces personnel rejoice, with the Army and Air Chiefs standing in the centre.



General VP Malik (Retd) after garlanding the statue of late Captain Saurabh Kalia in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh, 16 February 2022. (Photo Ravinder Sood, credit tribuneindia.com)

command and control and faster outcomes?

Although there was adequate joint planning and coordination amongst three Services after the CCS conference on 24 May 1999, I believe a CDS system and integrated command structures would have been more helpful in decision making, resource utilization and more effective command and control.

In recent years, “proactive approach” and strong national resolve towards national security have been alluded to. In the late 90s, we were perceived as reactive, and the Pakistani military leadership did not expect such a

resolute fight back from our side. Does the rise in national power result in a stronger, robust security approach by default, and which other dynamics lead to such an approach? Your analysis please.

In security issues, we have mostly been a ‘reactive’ nation ever since independence. Even in 1971, we reacted to a situation caused due to influx of refugees from East Pakistan. A credible political cum military deterrence capability has been non-existent. This had been exploited by our adversaries. For credible deterrence, a nation requires robust military capabilities as well as resolute political leadership. National economy and security have a symbiotic relationship. Weak economy does not allow robust security and deterrence. With improvement in national power and resolute political leadership, we can hope that our national security will improve. For this, it will also be necessary to have a visionary national security strategy, defence strategy and doctrines, organizational changes and infrastructure.



Lieutenant General Devraj Anbu, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM (Retd) was commissioned into SIKH LI Regiment in June 1980. In his long and illustrious service, he has held many challenging assignments in operational areas. He commanded a Brigade on the LC in Kashmir, a Division in high altitude in Sikkim, and the Corps in Tezpur. He went on to become the Northern Army Commander in J&K and finally retired as Vice Chief of Army Staff. He has been an extremely dedicated and inspiring professional and leader.



Lt Gen Devraj Anbu

- We must follow pro-active security policies e.g. surgical strike, Balakot, occupation of Kailash Range in 2020. Political restraint and reluctance to adopt a pro-active strategy in the past led us to reactive military situations. In Kargil 99, it tied down the hands of the Armed Forces and forced us virtually to assault frontally to retake these objectives.
- National security is the ability of a country’s government to protect its citizens, economy and other institutions in peace and war. The Armed Forces and public need political guidance and resolve in a policy document. Like all other democratic nations, we need National Security Strategy and National Security Doctrine documents.
- ‘Man behind the gun’ & Leadership is the ‘**Key to Success**’. Our young officers set a shining example in Kargil war.

The Kargil Review Committee made many important recommendations, several of which have been implemented over the years. Integrated commands are possibly a step away from seeing the light of day. Do you feel that an integrated command would have been better in Kargil 99, with more optimal resource utilization, effective



Tololing, as seen from Drass

TOLOLING

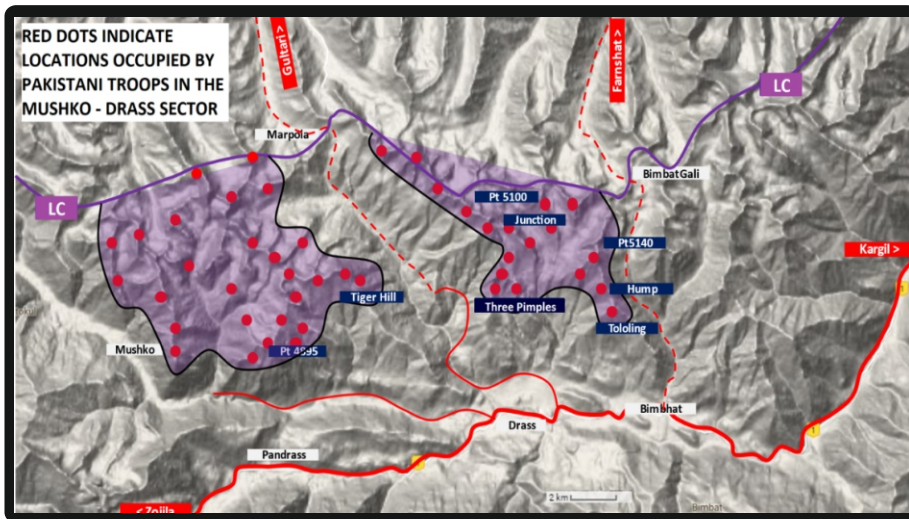
THE TURNING POINT

Several attempts were made to evict the Pakistani intruders from the Drass – Kargil – Batalik heights mid May 99 onwards, but the battalion attacks too did not meet with any success. 2 Rajputana Rifles (RAJ RIF) was then tasked to clear Tololing, and they achieved victory, planting the tricolour on Tololing on 13 June 99. This was the turning point of the war, and Indian infantry units soon started evicting the enemy from other locations. This is an abridged narration of the Battle of Tololing as described by Late Colonel M B Ravindranath, VrC, the Commanding Officer (CO) in his recently launched book: **Kargil War - The Turning Point**.

"We had to attack Tololing, two attacks had failed to dislodge the Pakis. At 15000 feet or so, it was formidable. But we had prepared well, seen the enemy bunkers from different sides, lugged the required ammunition up, and I had planned the fire support bases. My men had trained well too, my subordinate commanders were also on the ball. I knew that the attack was crucial, we needed to open the gates to success and victory.

On 13 June 1999, we were sitting on Tololing, euphoria swept through my veins, we had captured the enemy position. Then the Pakis started shelling our location, bombs rained on to the feature, and we took cover. We braved the enemy fire assault and held on. This was the Turning Point of the Kargil War - our victory led the way and showed other units how to attack along razor thin ridges in rarefied air in high altitude"

For us, the story begins in the Valley where we were busy with counter-terrorism operations, blissfully unaware of the storm that was bearing down upon us. There had been 'langar gup' doing the rounds of some unusual activity going on in the neighbouring Drass/Kargil sector. The grapevine was that some intrusions had taken place, and troops on the ground were finding it tough to evict them.



Pakistani intrusions in the Mushko - Drass Sector

We were re-orbatted on 27 May 1999, and moved from Kigam, Kupwara to Sonamarg and thence to the Drass Sector, under 56 Mountain Brigade in early June 99. We were earmarked as the reserve for the 18 GRENADIERS attack on Tololing. Around 0500 hours at daybreak on 03 June 1999, Colonel AS Chabbewal, Colonel General Staff HQ 8 Mountain Division gave me the distressing news that the attack on Tololing had failed with grievous losses; Lieutenant Colonel Vishwanathan, the Second – in – Command of 18 GRENADIERS, had been killed (awarded a posthumous Vir Chakra later); the battalion had already lost Major Adhikari (awarded posthumous Mahavir Chakra) earlier. We were asked to be prepared to attack **Tololing**.

The intrusions in the Drass Sector were the deepest, with **Tololing** just a four km crow flight from Drass. These intrusions directly overlooked the National Highway and theoretically interdicted all vehicular traffic in and out of Ladakh. 16 GRENADIERS was

Top along the SE Approach with Bravo Company as its reserve. A stagger of one hour was given to keep the enemy guessing about the timings of the attack. Since the last attack by 18 GRENADIERS had been along the SW direction, the aim was to make the enemy feel that the same failure was being reinforced much against the teaching in our training institutes.

Two fire bases were established, one along each axis, each having four Medium Machine Guns (MMGs), four Rocket Launchers, and two Automatic Grenade Launchers (AGLs), and one axis was to have a MILAN Missile Launcher. Two first-line scales of ammunition were dumped in each firebase.

12 June 1999

The attack commenced with the artillery pounding the entire **Tololing ridge** line at 1730 hours. By 1800 hours, the guns were firing tons and tons of TNT on the entire **Tololing ridge** including **Hump** and **Point 5140**. Bofors guns were also firing in direct firing role for the first time. The pounding of the guns on the objective was a sight to remember for every infantry soldier.

When the attacks commenced, Lieutenant Kenguruse and his Ghatak platoon infiltrated behind **Tololing Top** and established a stop between **Hump** and **Tololing Top** to prevent any reinforcements of the enemy from **Point 5140** and also to neutralise the fleeing enemy. Due to a steep cutting he could not reach the exact location, but he did establish a stop at a high ground from where he could monitor some of the movements of the enemy.

holding defensive positions at Bimbat Gali, Rattan and Niyaz. 18 GRENADIERS had attacked **Tololing** along the Southeast (SE), South and Southwest (SW) approaches between 25 May and 02 June, and had then firmed up along these approaches. We were to capture **Tololing**, attacking from the firm base provided by 18 GRENADIERS.

I planned a bi-directional attack to capture **Tololing Complex** with Delta Company (under Major Mohit Saxena) tasked to capture **Point 4590** and **Barbad Bunker** by attacking along the SW Approach with Alpha Company (under Major Acharya) as its reserve. Charlie Company (under Major Vivek Gupta) was to be launched 60 minutes later to capture **Area Flat** and **Tololing**

Delta Company's leading platoon advanced by fire and movement. They had deployed a light machine gun (LMG) at a raised ground while trying to negotiate **Point 4590** to give covering fire. Havildar Sultan Singh on the other hand, had slowly climbed on **Area Rock**, a hill top adjacent to **Point 4590** and had established a foot hold on it. The balance of the platoon tried to skirt **Point 4590** from the East (right) to launch the attack.

Suddenly there was an illumination round fired by the enemy which caught Major Mohit and the leading platoon by surprise in the open. During the illumination fire, which lasted for less than 10 seconds, a group of 10 - 12 men rose from their bunkers atop **Point 4590**, sprayed a volley of bullets on the leading platoon, which was in the open and just vanished. This action by the enemy was also targeted towards Havildar Sultan Singh who had established a foot hold on **Point 4590**.

The enemy had probably reinforced **Point 4590** by thinning out on **Top** which was evident from the number of weapons which had opened fire on the company. With Delta Company halted by the wall of lead being thrown against them, Charlie Company under Major Vivek Gupta moved from the SE direction with two platoons up towards **Area Flat** and **Tololing Top** led by Subedar Dharamvir and Lieutenant Praveen Tomar respectively at 2130 hours as per the plan.

Subedar Dharamvir's platoon closed in with **Area Flat** at around 2230 hours. The LMG was deployed in the SE direction of **Area Flat** to provide flanking fire. It was envisaged by Subedar Dharamvir that the LMG could engage **Barbad Bunker** if it opened up, and could also provide flanking fire support on **Area Flat** to its attacking echelons. Luckily for the platoon, there was not much resistance on **Flat** and it was

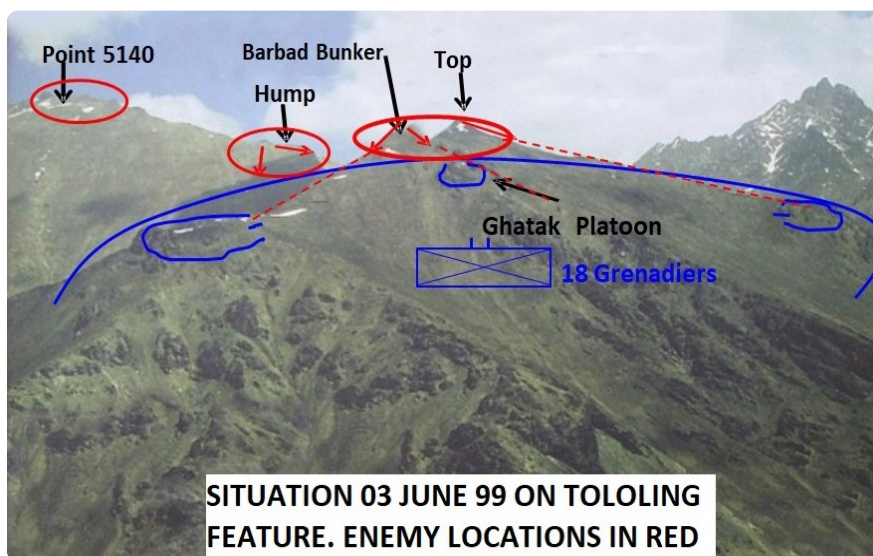
occupied without a fight. While there were three trenches on **Flat**, it appeared that the troops had recently been shifted towards **Point 4590** or **Barbad Bunker** to reinforce those locations to blunt the Delta Company (Mohit's) attack.

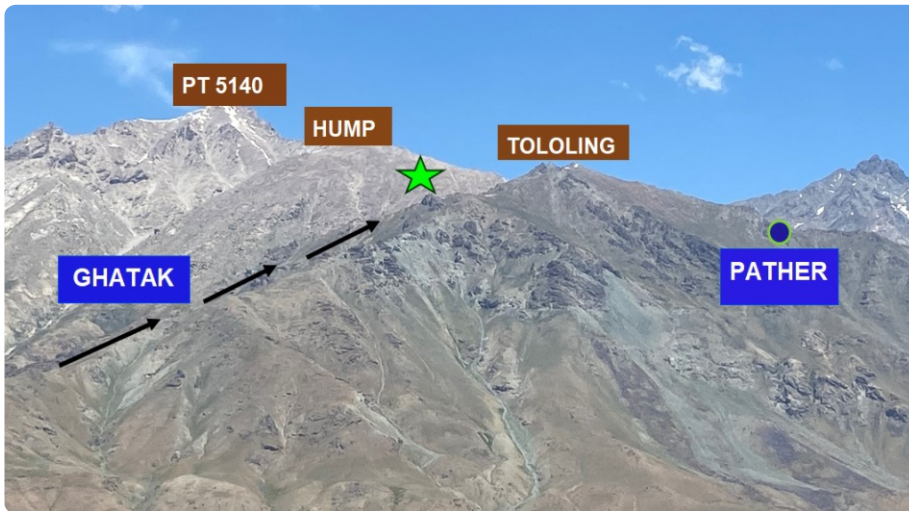
I was monitoring the radio set communication of Charlie Company when Subedar Dharamvir confirmed by 2230 hours that **Area Flat** had been completely occupied. Subedar Dharamvir also confirmed to his company commander that he had observed some movement towards **Barbad Bunker** which was barely 80 metres away. I later came to know that he had some verbal fight with the enemy as well. The enemy was trying to lure Subedar Dharamvir to come and get him but to his and my surprise, Subedar Dharamvir waited patiently, deployed a Light Machine Gun towards **Barbad Bunker** and started firing towards it. However, the moment **Flat** was captured, a barrage of fire came from **Tololing Top** on Subedar Dharamvir's

Platoon. The HMG on **Tololing Top** now started creating a lot of trouble for Charlie Company and had to be neutralised at the earliest.

8 Platoon under Lieutenant Tomar had got stuck against the snow patch which had been appreciated during the reconnaissance. It was actually an ice wall which could not be negotiated without crampons, pick axe and other mountain climbing equipment. The ice wall was about 10 - 12 feet high and was extremely slippery. Till 2230 hours, the platoon had not made much headway.

Lieutenant Praveen Tomar decided to take a detour to attack **Top** from the South. He skirted the ice wall and tried to close in from the Southern direction. He decided to move his leading section through the gap between **Area Flat** and **Top** with Subedar Dharamvir's platoon providing fire support. Having skirted the ice wall, Subedar Bhawar Lal, his buddy, with two scouts moved up and





The route taken by Lieutenant Kenguruse and his Ghatak platoon

closed in with the first bunker on **Tololing Top**. The Heavy Machine Gun bunker on **Tololing Top** had been continuously firing towards **Area Flat**, nearly the same direction from where 8 Platoon was now climbing.

Taking cover of the ice wall and hugging it, both the scouts Rifleman Anand and Lance Naik Bachchan and Subedar Bhawar Lal along with his buddy moved up towards the bunker. When they reached nearly 30 metres from the nearest bunker, all four of them charged on to the bunker firing with all the personal weapons. The Pakistanis in the bunker, sensing danger to their lives, also opened up with all their weapons apart from the Heavy Machine Gun. There was a sudden volley of bullets from both sides. The enemy bullets struck the charging brave soldiers of Charlie Company barely 10 metres from the bunker. Subedar Bhawar and Lance Naik Bachchan both died on the spot while Rifleman Anand was grievously wounded. One of the three Pakistanis present in the bunker was hit

series of bunkers along the ridge. It was not known to Major Gupta that the enemy was actually observing his complete movement while he was changing his direction of attack from Southern to South Eastern and was accordingly prepared to engage them. But I must put on record the bravery of Major Vivek Gupta and Havildar Digender who took the leading section of the reserve 7 Platoon to attack the first bunker. The LMG group was deployed to a side while the leading section assaulted the bunker. There was just no cover available; not even rocks or boulders. It was a suicidal mission requiring an uphill ascent towards the entrenched enemy posts who had the advantage of height and a bird's eye view. Naik Virender and Rifleman Ashish, the leading scouts along with Major Vivek Gupta and Havildar Digender charged at the bunker. Naik Virender and Rifleman Ashish were the first to get hit. However, Major Vivek and Havildar Digender managed to charge inside the bunker and in an exchange of continuous fire neutralised the two Pakistanis inside it. The capture of the first bunker bolstered the confidence of Charlie Company.

Major Vivek knew that the momentum gained had to be exploited in order to reach the **Top**. Otherwise, it could lead to more losses. Vivek quickly ordered Subedar Sumer Singh to push forward the next section for the attack on the next bunker from where the fire had started coming. Subedar Sumer Singh along with his second section moved up for the attack on the second bunker. It was once again Major Vivek, Havildar Digender along with the leading scouts Naik Chaman and Rifleman Jaivir who were part of the assault party to charge at the bunker.

who later succumbed to his injury. We recovered his body after the capture of **Tololing**. These were probably the first fatal casualties for both the sides in this battle.

It was already 2330 hours and success still seemed elusive, except for the initial foothold at **Point 4590** by Delta Coy at **Area Rock** and capture of the vacated location at **Area Flat**. We had also suffered casualties on both the approaches.

Seeing no headway in the attack, Major Vivek Gupta along with Havildar Digender decided to open another front by assaulting on **Tololing Top** from the Eastern direction with the aim to divert the enemy attention and extricate the men who were trapped.

The enemy was firmly entrenched in a

Just before the assault by the two leading scouts along with the company commander and Havildar Digender commenced, a bullet struck Subedar Sumer Singh and he was martyred on the spot. The assault group rushed towards the bunker which was about 50 - 60 metres away. The three had barely moved 30 metres, when Rifleman Chaman received a bullet wound. Major Vivek, Havildar Digender and Rifleman Jaivir were now left with little option as the volume of fire had increased tremendously. They dashed forward and crawled towards the bunker. They could not have gone back and there was no way to extricate them either. While they barged into the bunker with their weapons blazing, the fire base stopped firing and waited for the outcome. After some time, the fire inside the bunker stopped but it was not clear if the enemy had been killed, bunker captured or the worst possible thing had happened. No one was ready to accept or believe that the enemy had won.

There was a lull in the battle for some time. Everyone including me was glued to the radio set hoping to hear from Major Vivek that the second bunker had been successfully captured. There was some smoke that was now seen coming out of the bunker. The support group awaited orders to move forward. There was no radio communication from Major Vivek. Havildar Digender and Rifleman Jaivir had been struck by bullets. Luckily, sense prevailed and the support group decided to rush forward to the bunker. As they reached there, they saw that Major Vivek was lying on the ground, Havildar Digender was bleeding profusely but still trying to put in a brave front. Rifleman Jaivir was also hit but had deployed the LMG towards the enemy. He was in deep pain but was also aware that the bunker had to be held at all cost till the arrival of

reinforcements. By then the third enemy bunker had also started engaging us. There was no commander - Major Vivek and Subedar Sumer were killed in the action; Havildar Digender was injured.

13 June 1999

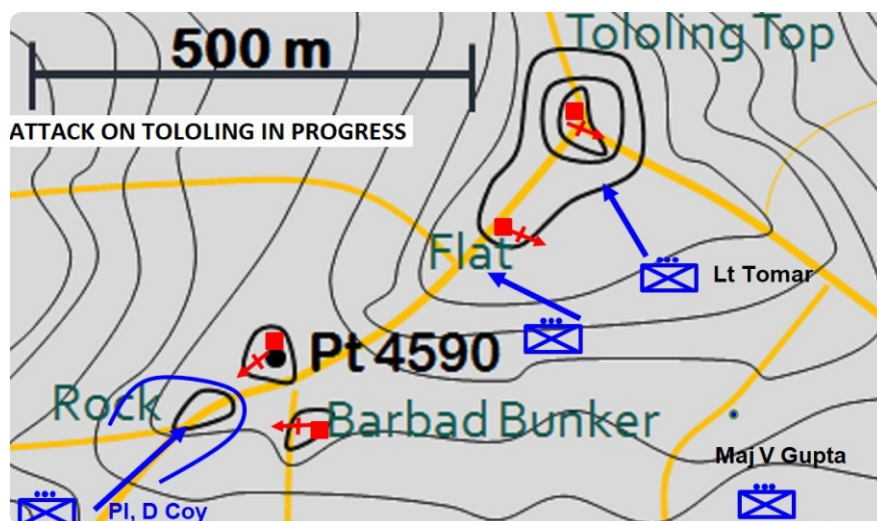
The enemy meanwhile had also started preparing for the counter attack while 7 Platoon was still trying to evacuate the casualties and build up the strength to hold on to the bunker. Lieutenant Tomar learnt of Major Vivek's martyrdom and rushed to that location to take control of the situation at hand. By the time he reached and understood the situation, the enemy launched a counter attack with about eight to 10 persons on the second bunker. At about 0200 hours on 13 June, the enemy section rushed the bunker and recaptured it. Rifleman Ashish kept on firing till the last moment before he was hit by a volley of bullets and was martyred.

I decided to move forward to take stock of the situation as Lieutenant

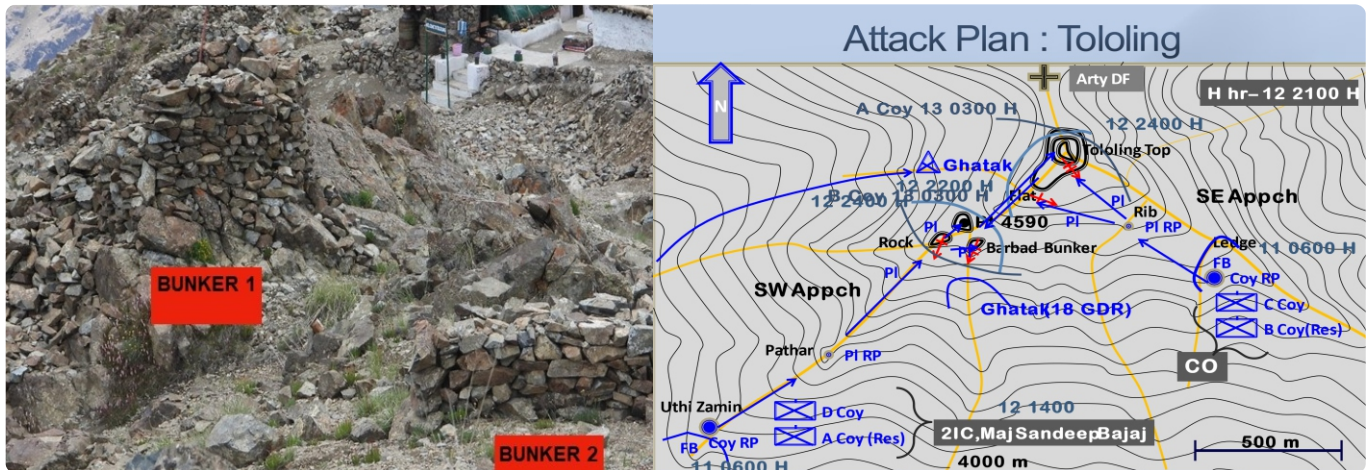
Tomar was too young in service to handle and progress the attack. By the time I reached there, Lieutenant Tomar had the situation well under control. He had taken charge of the company and was my best bet as he was well aware of the success on **Area Flat**, the unsuccessful first attack on **Tololing Top** and now at this front, where Major Vivek had just lost his life and the enemy had launched a successful counter attack.

I simultaneously tasked the first platoon of Bravo Company to move forward to further launch the attack for capture of **Tololing Top** from the direction of **Area Flat**. Lieutenant Tomar by then had taken control of the situation and was planning an attack on the second bunker to recapture it when I reached. I did not want to curb the initiative of the youngster but at the same time a coordinated bi-directional attack had to be launched.

The situation at around 0300 hours in the morning was far from satisfactory with barely two hours left



Attack on Tololing - two pincers moving towards the enemy posts



Left Photo. The enemy bunkers in Area Flat. Right Photo. The attack plan for Tololing.

for day light. Not much success had been achieved till now along either of the axes. D Company had established a foot hold on **Area Rock** while Subedar Dharamvir had captured **Area Flat**. Only one bunker had been captured at **Tololing Top** and consolidated.

Meanwhile on the SW approach, where Delta Company was continuing its attack, Major Mohit, the Company Commander decided to launch a bi-directional attack on **Point 4590** and **Barbad Bunker** with one platoon each to increase the volume of attack against the enemy. **Barbad Bunker** was also being engaged from **Area Flat** by Subedar Dharamvir's platoon. While both the platoons pressed the attack, the enemy held the defences strongly and put up a determined fight. Any progress by the sections of 10 and 12 Platoons met with a heavy resistance of automatic fire. Subedar Karan Singh did manage to reach up to the base of **Barbad Bunker** but could not make it to the top.

It was evident that neither of the attacks had been successful. A and B

Companies were still to get involved in battle. More than fifty per cent of the troops had not got bloodied. I had to overwhelm the enemy with numbers, firepower and even psychologically. The only way was to launch a coordinated attack simultaneously and not allow the enemy the freedom to readjust his defences. The ferocity of the attack had to be increased exponentially. The volume of fire and the war cry of nearly 300 soldiers would surely impact the enemy. With barely two hours left for the first light, I decided to launch an all-out attack on all the features.

In the SW direction, Alpha Company was tasked to take on **Point 4590** while Delta Company was to continue the attack on **Barbad Bunker**. Major Bajaj also moved up to control the battle on that approach. In the SE direction while Lieutenant Tomar was ready for the attack, Bravo Company was also launched from **Area Flat** to capture the **Top**.

While it took some time for Alpha Company under Major Acharya and Bravo Company under Lieutenant Rautela to move up, it was the attack by Charlie Company under Lieutenant Tomar which was the turning point of the battle. The attack was once again launched on the Second Bunker which had been recaptured by the enemy after deploying one MMG, two LMGs at the makeshift fire base to increase the volume of fire on it. Lieutenant Tomar with his section charged at the bunker. This time it was the entire section that was charging at the bunker and successfully captured it. In doing so they neutralised two enemy soldiers.

A near simultaneous attack was also launched by Bravo Company from **Area Flat**. The enemy now started vigorously engaging as it could see a lot of movement on either shoulder of **Tololing Top**. The last bunker on **Tololing Top** was also witnessing a similar build up. A major

build up was also taking place along the SW direction. Major Acharya and his company were moving towards **Point 4590**. It was probably the simultaneity of attack which resulted in the capture of **Tololing Top** and **Point 4590**.

The battle procedure to clear the objective continued and it was by 0500 hours in the morning that Delta Company gave a report that **Barbad Bunker** had been captured. Meanwhile Alpha Company had closed in with the enemy at **Point 4590** by 0330 hours. Major Acharya had launched a bi-directional attack on **Point 4590**. There was not much resistance offered by **Point 4590**.

The enemy on **Top** had got trapped. They were neither able to escape nor were they giving a pitched battle. Probably Bravo Company was now moving towards **Tololing Top** on the same route which was the escape cum administrative route of the enemy towards **Tololing Top**. Alpha Company also continued to press home the attack and due to their momentum were able to capture two persons who were trying to escape. Two Pakistani dead bodies were also recovered. At around 0515 hours, **Point 4590** and **Barbad Bunker** had been captured by Alpha and Delta Companies respectively.

The battle in the other front along the SE direction was much tougher as the enemy was giving a pitched battle. Though the second bunker had been captured by Lieutenant Tomar and Bravo Company had also pressed in the attack along **Area Flat** towards **Tololing Top**; the Top still had one to two bunkers which were holding on.

I pushed both Bravo and Charlie boys to launch the attack as this was the critical moment in the battle. The top was visible, the tide appeared to be turning in our favour after nearly seven to eight hours of battle. The attack was launched by both the

companies. The attack started with Lieutenant Tomar engaging **Top** with maximum fire power from the second bunker which was the makeshift fire base. Simultaneously the attack was launched by Subedar Chandrabhan. At first light, we were closing in with the **Top** from two directions.

At about 0430 hours, I got a call on the radio set from my Ghatak Platoon Commander, Lieutenant Kenguruse saying that he could observe a lot of movement towards **Hump** and further towards **Point 5140**. It was evident that the enemy was trying to escape. Both Tomar and Chandrabhan reported having captured the bunkers. By 0530

hours the entire ridge line had been captured with no further resistance offered by the Pakistanis.

I asked Major Bajaj about the progress of the attack from the SW direction. He told me that Alpha and Delta Companies had captured their objectives and were carrying out consolidation of the area. I asked Major Bajaj to fetch up to the **Top** and meet me. After meeting him, I informed the Brigade Commander Brigadier Amar Aul and I told him, **“Sir, I am on Tololing Top. 2 Raj Rif has completed the task allotted to it.”**

We had lost one officer, two JCOs and seven other ranks.



Late Colonel MB Ravindranath, VrC, an alumnus of National Defence Academy, Pune was commissioned in June 1980 into 17 MADRAS. In 1985, he was amongst the founding team of 21 RAJRIF, one of the experimental mixed-class units created in Infantry Regiments. He served as an Instructor in the Infantry School, Mbow, and then had tenures in WARDEC, ARTRAC and in Rashtriya Rifles. Taking over command of 2 RAJRIF in 1998, he led the battalion in the capture of Tololing and later Three Pimples. He was awarded the Vir Chakra for his gallantry and outstanding leadership on 15 August 1999. Ravindranath voluntarily sought premature retirement in 2001, leaving behind a rising military career to take hold of a family business enterprise. He proved his mettle in the industrial sector, and by 2018, he was on the board of directors for a number of self-owned ventures that included Magod Laser Machining, Magod Fusion Technologies, Preunse India and Tycoon Software Technologies, spread over several sites in India. Ravi died of a massive heart attack on 8th April 2018, with his boots on, as the soldier in him would have desired. He had just returned from his customary early morning jog in the neighbourhood park of Jayanagar, Bengaluru, when he collapsed.



Col MB Ravindranath

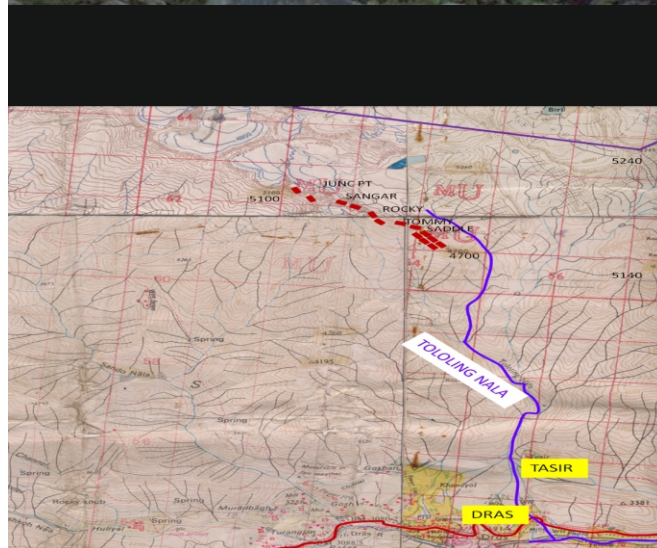
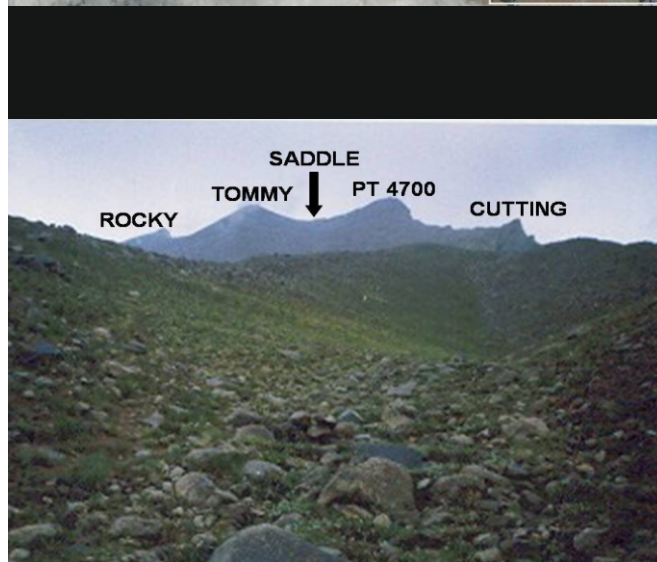
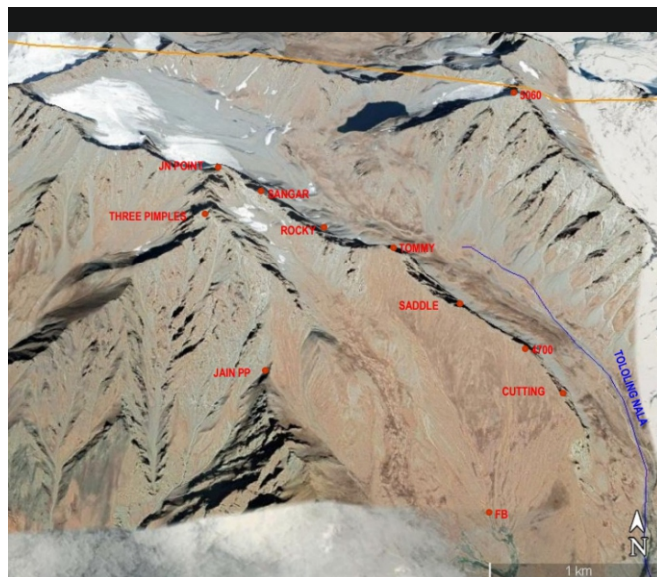
18 GARHWAL RIFLES

CAPTURES POINT 4700 COMPLEX

Infantry battalions were naturally at the cutting edge of all the attacks to evict the enemy from the Drass – Kargil heights, and the Regimental ethos, leadership and grit of the Indian Infantry carried the nation to victory. A battalion commander recalls his unit's operations.

18 GARHWAL RIFLES (GARH RIF) was raised on 11 February 1985 as a fixed class battalion with four different classes i.e. 25% Garhwalis, 25% Marathas, 25% Jats and 25% Dogras. The unit performed commendably in **Operation Pawan** (Jaffna) and earned three Vir Chakras and six Sena Medals. The battalion also served in **Operation Meghdoot** (Central Glacier) from 1993 to 1994 with distinction. On 28 July 98, while deployed at Lolab in Kupwara area, orders were received to convert the battalion into a pure Garhwali class battalion. Lolab Valley was an active hot bed of militants and counter insurgency operations were being conducted regularly and successfully.

Converting the battalion into pure class while in the midst of counter insurgency operations was challenging. We recommended that the battalion be moved to some place in Jammu & Kashmir for a few months so that smooth transition, training and command and control of the newly composed battalion takes place. Our recommendations were agreed to and the battalion moved to Mazbug near Sopore after handing over the operational responsibility to 1/3 Gorkha Rifles sometimes in early May 1999. At Mazbug, the battalion was placed under 192 Mountain Brigade, 8 Mountain Division.



From Top to Bottom - Imagery, Photo and map of the Point 4700 Ridgeline.

Before the conversion could commence, the paltan was ordered to move to Kargil. Changeover was to commence, about 50 to 60 Garhwali personnel from 16 BIHAR had arrived. The companies were still organized in the old fixed class composition; namely, Alpha Company Garhwalis, Bravo Company Marathas, Charlie Company had changed over from Jats to Garhwalis in March 99 and Delta Company was still manned by Dogras. Around 2100 hours on 19 May, Brigadier Ramesh Kakkar (Later Major General), Commander 79 Mountain Brigade informed me that we were grouped with his brigade and that we were going to Kargil.

The next day during the briefing at 79 Mountain Brigade Headquarters (HQ), we learnt that 18 Garhwal Rifles was to move for operations in Mushko, the other two battalions of the brigade were 17 JAT and 12 MAHAR. Things were moving at a rapid pace, and the battalion reached Baltal (short of Zojila) at 0430 hours on 25 May. The battalion moved out of Baltal and reached Matayen at 1600 hours on 26 May. We were granted six days of acclimatization, which were well utilized and the battalion was ready for operations on 03 June. We were now placed under 56 Mountain Brigade.

The battalion operated in the open snow bound area at 17000 feet from 04 June to 22 June and put in two battalion attacks. By 22 June afternoon, the entire battalion concentrated at Matayen for rest, reorganization and preparation for the next task. On 23 June, we were ordered to capture the general area of **Point 4700**, which was to the West of the Tololing ridgeline. **Point 4700** had clear observation of Drass and the highway. **Point 5060**, held by the enemy, was echeloned North of **Point 4700** and maintained **Point 4700** and **Black Rock/Three Pimples** (the objective tasked to 2 RAJ RIF).

Point 4700 Complex was the hub of enemy defences in the area as it was centrally located, provided avenues to **Point 5060** and **Point 5100** and on to the Line of Control (LC). **Point 4700** Complex from 'Cutting' to 'Sangar' was approximately more than a kilometre, and consisted of **Point 4700**, **Saddle**, **Tommy**, **Rocky** and **Sangar** and was likely to be held by a company, manned by an officer. Moreover, the defences were well prepared and the enemy gave a tough fight during its capture. It had a medical treatment centre, register of persons proceeding on leave and night pass register as we learnt later from recovered documents. Large quantity of arms, ammunition and mines were stocked. It had a cook house and large quantity of rations and kerosene oil jerry cans were also stocked.

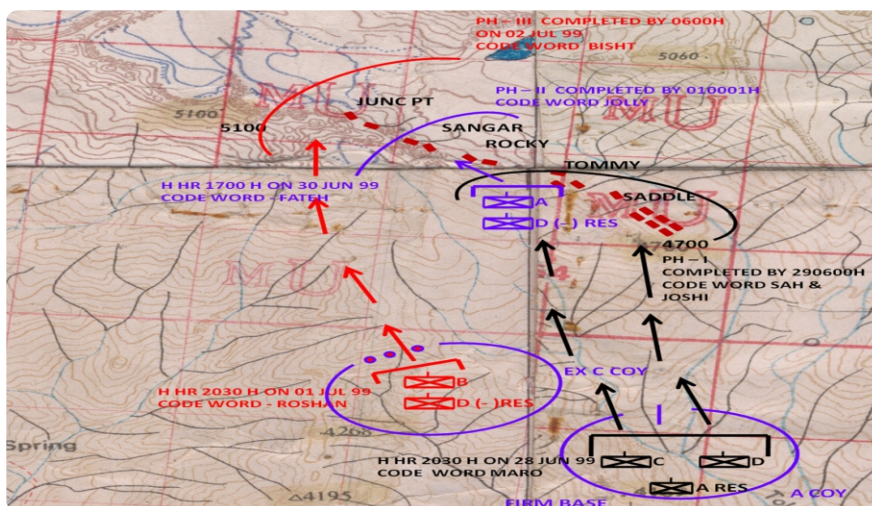
Preparing for the Attack

The D Day, initially planned as 26 June was changed to 28 June. The battalion was in good shape and we were ready to carry out the assigned task. As

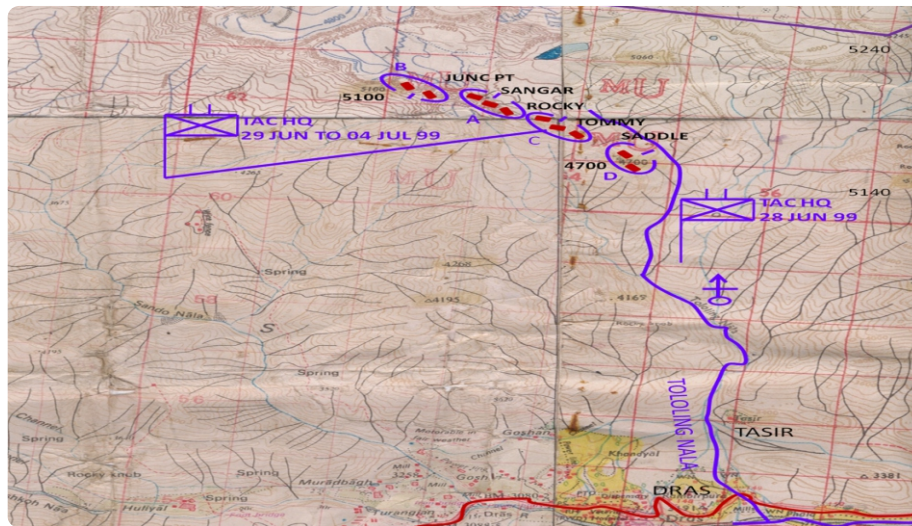
per our plan, we staged forward to village Tasir on 27 June and arrived there at about 2200 hours. This was to give us adequate time on the night of attack to cater for unforeseen contingencies and avoid getting daylighted during the attack. All sorts of surprises spring up in war, notwithstanding the additional time catered for capture of the objectives, we still got held up and 'Saddle' was cleared by 0800 hours on 29 June.

I started off for confirmatory reconnaissance at about 2300 hours on 27 June. For location of a suitable mortar position and placement of fire base, the mortar JCO, Subedar Trilok Singh and Subedar Kuldeep Singh from Delta Company accompanied me. The movement of assaulting troops takes a lot of time due to the gradient, enemy fire, obstacles and terrain conditions. To cover their movement for the last 400 metres, mortars, MMG and AGL fire are essential to keep the enemy's head down.

We approached a re-entrant



The 18 GARH RIF attack plan for Point 4700 complex



18 GARH RIF deployment on the ridgeline after the capture of objectives

before reaching the two main spurs, we went up probing the re-entrant and reached ‘Niazi’ Protective Patrol (PP), of about 10 soldiers from 16 GRENADIERS, who were deployed in that area for the past few days. Approximately 200 metres further on the same ridge, we found a suitable mortar position that was almost at right angle to the objectives, a very suitable location to provide mortar fire support. At the next re-entrant about 150 metres ahead, a small flat area was found suitable for deployment of MMGs and AGLs to provide covering fire to assaulting troops. Then we went down, walked about 100 metres ahead to the edge of the spur joining the Tololing Nala. This was selected as the firm base. It was a suitably spread out area where the companies could deploy. We observed the objective area for two hours at night from the selected firm base. There was just no movement observed, no defences could be located. Subedar Niazi who had been there for few days also said that they had not

observed enemy activity or enemy defences. The H Hour was planned as 2030 hours on 28 June 99. The firm base was to be secured by Bravo Company by 2000 hours on 28 June 1999 and the fire base was to be established by MMG and AGL detachments of Charlie and Delta Companies by 2000 hours on 28 June 1999.

The Attack Commences

By 28 June evening, all preparations, rehearsals were complete and orders were issued. Charlie and Delta Companies were in good shape; Charlie Company had Major Rajesh Sah, Lieutenant MV Sooraj and Lieutenant Manish Dogra and Delta Company had Major SK Joshi and Lieutenant Sumeet Roy. Bravo Company secured the firm base by 2000 hours on 28 June. 2 RAJ RIF was also moving to their firm base nearby; the large scale movement of troops was noticed by the enemy; heavy shelling commenced. Moreover, it was a day after full moon and bright moonlit night resulted in good visibility for quite some distance.

At H Hour, Charlie and Delta Companies started moving up their respective spurs; enemy artillery and automatic weapons were constantly engaging our columns right from the start as the area was devoid of foliage. The enemy artillery and automatic fire was however ineffective due to the terrain configuration, folds in the ground, large boulders and the companies were moving cautiously and tactically. The spurs that the companies were climbing were barren with large boulders. Both the companies had to climb a steep gradient in treacherous terrain. After about an hour or so, the enemy intensified shelling and opened up with

observed enemy activity or enemy defences.

The expanse of the objective area was approximately 800 metres and would entail capture by two companies in **Phase I**, since the extent of the objective appeared more than what one company could capture and shortage of troops in the initial phase could lead to disaster. After the confirmatory reconnaissance, I reached Tasir village at 0500 hours on 28 June. I issued my confirmatory orders at 1000 hours on 28 June 1999. In **Phase 1**, Charlie and Delta Companies were to capture **Tommy** and **Point 4700** by 0600 hours on 29 June 1999. Alpha Company was to capture **Rocky** by 0600 hours 30 June 1999 in **Phase 2**, while Bravo Company would capture **Sangar** by

0600 hours on 01 July 1999 in **Phase 3**. In **Phase 4**, Delta Company minus a platoon was to capture **Junction** by 0600 hours on 02 July 1999.

automatic weapons from **Point 4700**, **Saddle** and **Tommy**. Own artillery also kept engaging these features, when the companies reached approximately 400 metres from the objectives, own artillery fired a heavy crunch on the objectives and ceased fire. The moment our artillery stopped firing, own mortars, AGLs and MMGs started engaging the objectives. Own mortar fire was very effective and Charlie and Delta Companies could further close in to approximately 100 metres from **Point 4700** and **Tommy**.

Attack on Tommy. Tommy was the key to successful capture of enemy defences in the **Point 4700** complex. The enemy was very sensitive to its capture and fought back ferociously. There were eight bunkers firing automatic weapons and some open firing points were also located on every approach. Lieutenant Sooraj was moving up a re-entrant, when the enemy opened up and there was fierce exchange of fire. Lieutenant Sooraj and his platoon were pinned down, his radio operator was killed in action and Sooraj and three others were wounded. This action probably distracted the enemy and Major Rajesh Sah moved to the top. Major Rajesh Sah kept moving section by section and reached the enemy command post and surprised the enemy. There was hand to hand fight and heavy exchange of fire during which Major Rajesh Sah cleared the top bunker and two more bunkers. In this fire fight, Rajesh Sah's buddy Rifleman Kuldeep Singh was killed in action. The other two platoons also fetched up and assisted in clearing the remaining bunkers. We lost eleven soldiers. Due to the determination of our attack, the enemy was panic stricken and ran back toward **Rocky** feature leaving nine dead behind. Some enemy soldiers also got hit during the fire fight and had rolled down the cliff. **Tommy** was captured by 0400 hours on 29 June. Rifleman Narpal Singh

was clearing a bunker but unfortunately got shot and rolled down the cliff.

Attack on Point 4700. In the meantime, Delta Company had advanced in three columns; one led by Lieutenant Sumeet Roy, one by Major Joshi and the third led by Subedar Kuldeep Singh. Delta Company was also being fired upon since the time they had started due to good visibility on a moon lit night and their spur also being devoid of cover except boulders. Lieutenant Sumeet Roy reached area **Cutting** and finding it unoccupied moved on to the top bunker of **Point 4700**. He surprised the enemy and captured the bunker. Naik Rakesh Kumar was killed in action while clearing the second bunker. The balance two bunkers were cleared after a stiff fire fight. Delta Company too closed in through a re-entrant. There were four sangars at **Point 4700**, all well prepared with overhead protection. Delta Company got to the top undetected since they took advantage of small re-entrants and folds in the ground and utilized the boulders very well. Delta

Company suffered seven non-fatal casualties during the capture of **Point 4700**. The enemy ran back leaving four dead and large quantities of arms and ammunition. On reaching **Saddle**, the enemy used ropes to get down into the reverse slope; four ropes were already anchored to **Saddle** along an almost 90 degrees steep rock face, the drop was approximately 30 metres. These ropes appeared to have been anchored long before and the enemy was using these ropes to descend to the cook house and rest area which was located on the reverse slope along the Tololing Nala. Major Joshi gave the success signal at 0430 hours on 29 June.

The Enemy at Saddle. By 0430 hours on 29 June, **Point 4700** and **Tommy** both were captured. These were two prominent bumps on the ridge line but **Saddle** in between was still holding out and firing automatic weapons on **Point 4700**, **Tommy** and also along the re-entrant from where we were moving up. The AGL and MMG detachments of Charlie and Delta



18 GARH RIF troops in Point 4700 area (photo wikipedia.com)



Wreath laying ceremony in the unit by Commanding Officer, Colonel Ksh John Singh and Subedar Major Matwar Singh of 18 GARH RIF on 29 June 2023 on Drass Battle Honour Day. (photo credit hubnetwork.in)

Companies were moved up after midnight. When the Charlie Company MMG Detachment reached the middle of the re-entrant between the two spurs, it came under heavy automatic fire from **Saddle**. Rifleman Anusuya Prasad got injured in the thigh and succumbed to his injuries due to excessive bleeding. We appreciated that once **Tommy** and **Point 4700** were captured, holding **Saddle** was tactically unviable. However, the terrain was such that he continued to hold **Saddle** and an attack had to be launched to evict the enemy from **Saddle**.

Direct Artillery Fire On Saddle. It was day time and assaulting **Saddle** would endanger the safety of troops since the enemy was firing automatic weapons and would have caused many avoidable casualties. We could clearly locate three 'sangars' at **Saddle** from where the enemy was firing MMG and UMG. Captain Nitin Punde, our Artillery officer, tried engaging **Saddle** with integral artillery but with little effect. I then called up Brigadier Lakhwinder Singh (Later Major General), Artillery Brigade Commander and requested him for direct fire by Bofors guns. He was an excellent soldier, on

ammunition. **Saddle** was cleared by 0800 hours on 29 June.

The Enemy Counter Attack Disrupted. Major Rajesh Sah was quick to take stock and reorganize the defences. He went to the edge of the objective towards **Rocky**, from where we expected the enemy counterattack. At daybreak, he was short of ammunition and his MMG detachment could not fetch up from the fire base. He asked for additional ammunition. By the time bunkers were occupied and ammunition redistributed, it was first light. I was also moving up from the firm base to the objective area. Rajesh Sah reported concentration of enemy troops at about 0830 hours in the area to the West of **Sangar**, approximately 400 metres from **Tommy**. He was not very confident of beating back the counterattack since he was woefully short of ammunition. I asked Captain Nitin Punde, the artillery representative to engage the enemy. Our field artillery in direct support, 197 Field Regiment commanded by Colonel Alok Deb, saved the day. The Regiment devastated the enemy for more than an hour. Probably the enemy suffered heavy casualties due to our artillery fire. The counter attack gradually petered off and the enemy could be seen running behind towards **Point 5060** carrying their casualties.

Atop Point 4700 and Tommy. The objective area from **Point 4700**, **Saddle** and **Tommy** had been captured by Delta and Charlie Companies. Major Joshi and Major Rajesh Sah had accomplished an excellent victory for the Battalion. I came across Lieutenant MV Sooraj, who was injured. His radio operator had been killed in action. I spoke to Lieutenant MV Sooraj, while being evacuated; he was in bad shape and in pain. A large quantity of arms, ammunition, grenades, mines, telephones and cable were recovered from **Tommy**, **Saddle** and **Point 4700**. Large stocks of rations, Kerosene oil jerry cans, vegetables were dumped in these three locations especially on the reverse slope of

understanding our predicament, he immediately agreed. He asked me to adjust the fire of direct firing guns, we adjusted the artillery fire and when the guns were hitting bang on **Saddle**, I requested him for 50 rounds of direct fire at a fast rate. At 0730 hours, the Bofors Guns boomed and decimated **Saddle**. I ordered Lieutenant Sumeet Roy with a platoon of Delta Company to roll down on **Saddle** and capture it. Before the dust, smoke and haze could settle and enemy could recover from the shock of 50 rounds of direct fire of Bofors guns, Lieutenant Sumeet Roy charged. The enemy withdrew leaving behind three dead plus weapons and

Saddle where the enemy ran a cook house. The quantity of ammunition and rations was enough to last them for a month if the enemy had the will to fight. There was also a prefabricated hut in a dismantled state located below **Saddle**. At the forward edge of **Tommy** towards **Rocky** on the reverse slope there was a cave like structure being used as a medical aid post by the enemy. Blood soaked cotton and first field dressings soaked in blood were littered all around. Medicines and Pakistan Medical Corps beret and some books including (Glossary of military teams, Pakistan Army) were recovered. The name and regiment inscribed on the book was Major Ashiq Hussain, Pakistan Army Punjab Regiment.

The Next Phase

We had suffered 13 fatal casualties, and 20 non-fatal casualties, and many soldiers were involved in the casualty evacuation. Brigadier Amar Aul, the Commander agreed to my request to delay **Phase 2** by a day. At **Tommy**, we established our tactical headquarters in open bunkers made by the enemy earlier. I congratulated Charlie and Delta Companies for the exceptionally good job done and asked them to go down to Drass for rest, leaving behind a platoon each.

On 29 June, we moved ahead and probed **Rocky** and **Sangar**. We observed a few bunkers but no movement. Since the area appeared unoccupied and the lateral separation between the two was less than 100 metres, I decided to attack **Rocky** and **Sangar** in the same phase. **Rocky** and **Sangar** were lower in height than **Tommy**. It was completely dominated by fire and observation from **Tommy**. Alpha Company was detailed for the capture in **Phase 2**. Lieutenant Colonel Jolly, Lieutenant RD Verma and Lieutenant Vikas Tomar were the officers in Alpha

Company. The attack was launched at 1830 hours on 30 June, after artillery shelling on to the objectives. The enemy also started shelling, but there was no enemy on the objective and it was a cake walk. By 1930 hours on 30 June the objective was captured. There were no enemy casualties, no recoveries, since there was nothing there and our appreciation was right; the enemy had already fled.

Capture of Junction

Bravo Company was ordered to capture **Junction** on 01 July, an important feature a kilometre from **Tommy** echeloned towards **Point 5100** which was occupied by the enemy. As the name suggests, it was the feature where the **Black Rock/Three Pimple Ridge** and **Point 4700 Ridge** converged. This area was also lower in height than **Tommy**. No movement was observed in the area. Captain Rajesh Bisht, the Company Commander of Bravo Company, was an intelligent, bold and smart officer who read and used the

ground well. The previous night he had probed the objective area and also seen the approach to it. But confusion started in the evening of 01 July, when 16 GRENADIERS, the holding battalion, was ordered to clear **Junction**. I spoke to Brigadier Amar Aul and told him that **Junction** was an objective of 18 GARH RIF and a company had been earmarked for its capture. He cleared 18 GARH RIF for capture of **Junction**. We had judiciously utilized troops and time for capture of **Point 4700 Complex** and had carried out speedy exploitation. **Rocky** and **Sangar** were captured by one company in one phase thereby sparing a complete company for the capture of **Junction**. We were observing **Junction** for the previous two days and two nights, though we could not observe movement, the distance being long some doubts still persisted. Captain Rajesh Bisht had planned the capture of **Junction** sensibly. The company moved out at 2030 hours on 01 July and captured the



Captain Sumeet Roy (photo X.com)



Pakistani dead soldiers being buried by Indian troops on Drass heights (photo credit reddit.com)

objective by 0300 hours on 02 July. The enemy fled in panic prior to the attack and there was no enemy on the objective. However, the enemy did fire some artillery ammunition on the objective area.

Respite After the Actions

I was at **Point 4700** since 29 June. The enemy shelling was continuous around breakfast, lunch, dinner and post dinner times, rounds were regularly fired at our location. We were sheltered by boulders, since it was a very rocky feature. Captain Nitin Punde got a splinter injury in his left arm on 02 July. He had been with us all along during the attacks on various objectives and was instrumental in bringing down own artillery fire upon the enemy.

There were a number of media personnel in the sector. One journalist, Vikramjit Singh from the Indian Express tried to reach us at **Point 4700**; but went back halfway from little ahead of Ladder Bridge we had constructed since he was not feeling well. He apparently suffered from mountain sickness and after taking ten steps he had to take rest, so after walking up from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. he

decided to go back. Later, on recovering he was sent to Yaldor and covered the operations of 12JAKLI.

On 03 July morning, I learnt of Lieutenant Sumeet Roy's demise. Later, I came to know that a Jonga and two fatal casualties were recovered from the road short of Drass, which included Lieutenant Sumeet Roy. Major Joshi told me that Sumeet had gone out late at night to call up his mother from the Subscriber Trunk Dialling (STD) booth located at Drass and never returned. Enroute, he stopped to see our Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRL) firing, an awesome sight! In a short while, enemy counter bombardment

commenced, and an enemy rocket probably hit their Jonga. What a great soldier Lieutenant Sumeet was, and what a sad way to die. Sumeet was involved in five brave and daring actions during the Kargil conflict, where he did exceedingly well in all the actions undertaken. His sudden demise under tragic circumstances was a great loss to the battalion.

I can safely surmise that enemy defences in the **Point 4700** Complex and in **Junction** area were well-coordinated and the Pakistanis fought tenaciously too. It was the sheer valour and grit of the Garhwals which ensured victory, notwithstanding the excellent artillery fire support. **Raw courage of 18 GARH RIF in such difficult terrain and circumstances will be remembered for a long time.**



*Major General Samir Kumar Chakravorty, AVSM, SC, SM** (Retd), an alumnus of Indian Military Academy, Dehradun was commissioned into 5 Garhwal Rifles in June 1977 and was later transferred to 15 Garhwal Rifles in October 1980. After serving in Garhwal Scouts, National Security Guard and 36 Rashtriya Rifles, he assumed command of 18 Garhwal Rifles in August 1996. His other notable tenures include Brigadier General Staff of a Corps in the Eastern theatre and command of a Division along the LC in Jammu and Kashmir. A decorated Indian Army veteran with over 36 years of distinguished service, his leadership and courage in battle in the Kargil war was exceptional.*



Major General Samir Kumar Chakravorty



VALIANT 'RANVEERS' OF THE JAK RIF

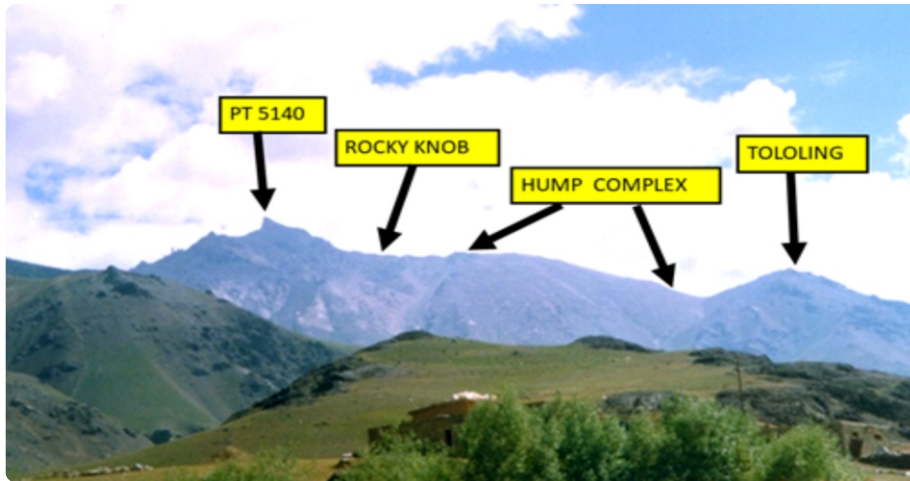
Operation Vijay was unique, fought in very difficult high altitude terrain, at heights ranging from 15000 to 18000 feet. Before we could reach the enemy, we had to fight the weather, the climate and the terrain. But the fearless troops of the Indian Army easily surmounted these minor hurdles to accomplish the mission to evict Pakistan Army infiltrators who had occupied certain features across the Line of Control (LC).

I consider myself to be singularly fortunate to have commanded **13 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles (13 JAK RIF)** as the Officiating Commanding Officer (CO) in the most defining phase in the battalion's history when it played a crucial role in the battles during **OPERATION VIJAY** in Drass Sector 1999.

13 JAK RIF, the **Bravest of the Braves** came out with flying colours and etched its name in the history of the Indian Army. Honoured with 37 gallantry awards, including two Param Vir Chakras, 8 Vir Chakras and 14 Sena Medals, we achieved standards that are very difficult to emulate. This was a proud moment for the battalion, but victory came at a huge cost. Two brave officers and 14 Jawans of the battalion laid down their lives for the honour of the Nation. My homage and utmost respect to these courageous soldiers who will always be remembered. The success of my battalion undoubtedly is attributed to the brave officers and jawans of the battalion who followed the Regimental motto, "*Prashastha Ranveerta*" (Victory in Battle is Appreciated) in letter and spirit. They were always upfront, ready to make the supreme sacrifice.

The Paltan worked as a team, a unit, with clockwork precision, each man doing his job with fervour and pride. Each and every officer, Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) and

*Top. 13 JAK RIF troops after capturing Point 5140. Captain Vikram Batra (wearing balaclava standing centre), with the Army Chief and his CO to the left, and The Division and Corps Commanders to the right.
Centre. Troops atop Point 5140, and Inset Major Ajay Jasrotia, SM (Posthumous).
Bottom. Lt Col YK Joshi, the CO promoting Vikram Batra to the rank of Captain on Tololing.*



Tololing and Point 5140 Complex in the Drass Sub Sector

jawan deserves credit and recognition for our stupendous success. Many however go unrecognized in the melee and the fog of the war. I place on record that every soldier of the battalion rose to the occasion in executing one of the most complicated operations ever conducted. Writing about the battles, giving due to each and every soldier who did his bit, which may have gone unrecognized is not possible here, however, there are a few instances which are etched vividly in my mind which I am recalling hereafter.

The Paltan's First Operation

The battalion reached Tololing Top in the early pre-dawn hours of 14 June. After capturing Tololing, 2 RAJ RIF had de-inducted immediately. Early morning, I ordered Alpha Company under command Major S Vijay Bhaskar to move to **Hump** Complex to capture the balance of **Hump** complex and the **Rocky Knob** area. Very limited reconnaissance could be carried out during the daytime, and the enemy positions were not clearly established.

Though it was the first operation of the battalion, Alpha Company was in high

spirits and launched the attack on the night of 14/15 June. The area was full of boulders; Bhaskar with his leading soldiers moved ahead in the pitch dark night and without realizing bypassed an enemy position. Once they crossed ahead, the enemy started firing on them from all directions. I realized that the company had been trapped. In my conversation with Bhaskar on radio, he explained that the fire was heavy, from close proximity and from two to three directions.

Sitting atop Tololing, I tried to discern what was happening, but the confusion continued, and to top it all, I lost radio contact with Bhaskar and the firing increased. I could hear the enemy

machine guns firing and lots of yelling and screaming from the area of **Hump** and no communication at all. This continued for the balance of the night. And then everything stopped. My heart sank. My eyes were glued to the binocular, looking towards the **Hump** complex, and could see no sign of life. At daybreak, I wasn't hopeful of seeing Bhaskar and Lieutenant Sandeep Tiwari, his Second-in-command (2iC) again.

Suddenly, I saw some movement in the boulders in the area of **Hump**. I was overjoyed when I recognized Bhaskar and then saw lots of movement of our Alpha Company boys, moving towards the rear. The attack did not succeed, however, they were there to fight another day, and fight another day they did, and the whole country was there to see.

Major Ajay Jasrotia Succumbs

After we reached Tololing and Alpha Company had moved up to **Hump** complex, I also followed up to carry out my initial reconnaissance of the area along with Captain Anirban Chatterjee. At the **Hump** Complex, we had taken positions behind boulders in twos and threes, studying the area ahead. On the evening of 15th June, I got a message from Captain Rajeev Kapoor, the Adjutant, that our base location at Drass had been shelled heavily and Major Ajay Jasrotia who was busy evacuating the boys from the area, the brave soldier that he was, had been injured by shrapnel. He had been evacuated immediately to the field hospital at Drass. The next day while we were in the **Hump** Complex, making plans, I got a call from the Brigade Major of 56 Mountain Brigade. He passed some instructions of the Brigade Commander and in the end I enquired about Major Jasrotia, who had been injured the previous day in the artillery shelling, at the administrative base in Drass.

I was shocked when he said, “*Sir, Major Jasrotia is no more! He could not be saved due to heavy loss of blood.*” Despite his injuries, he refused to be evacuated, while he continued to direct the evacuation of the other soldiers injured in the shelling. Ajay Jasrotia was a happy-go-lucky guy, and we had spent many good times together. I lost a dear friend even before our battle had begun in right earnest. The incident had a huge impact on morale of the battalion; however, we had to overcome the loss. It was very difficult, but I composed myself and got busy with the task at hand, planning for the next attack. Such losses in battle are a test of one’s resilience and more importantly, the ability to absorb it and not lose sight of the mission. The leader and the human both are at cross purposes and these are the dichotomies of being a leader in combat.

Losng Naik Ranbir Singh

We moved Charlie Company under Major Vikas Vohra forward alongside Alpha Company. By now we were able to discern some positions of the enemy, which he was occupying using the huge boulders as ‘*sangars*’. These sangars that the enemy was occupying were in close proximity to our locations, so close that we could not bring down artillery fire on them for fear of firing on our troops. We built up four Rocket Launchers (RLs), with which we decided to fire air bursts of high explosive on these sangars and then attack and capture them.

I positioned myself in front with the RL detachments, and both the assaulting companies were lined up behind me, ready to move on my orders. We started firing high explosive rounds over the enemy *sangars* in the airburst mode. Ranbir was firing one of the RLs. After firing a couple of rounds, he told me that he could see the enemy sniper behind one of the boulders

and he told his number two to load another round quickly. As the round was being loaded, I told him to change his position as he had already fired a few rounds from the same position. However, in his enthusiasm he took position to fire the next round aiming for the sniper. But that was not to be. The enemy sniper was waiting this time. The moment Ranbir took position – to my horror – he was hit by a bullet right in the centre of his forehead and fell down in front of me. It happened in a fraction of a second – I was still talking to him – my sentence half way. I can still recall his face vividly – I don’t think I will ever be able to forget this moment for the rest of my life.

Yeh Dil Maange More and Oh Yeah Yeah Yeah

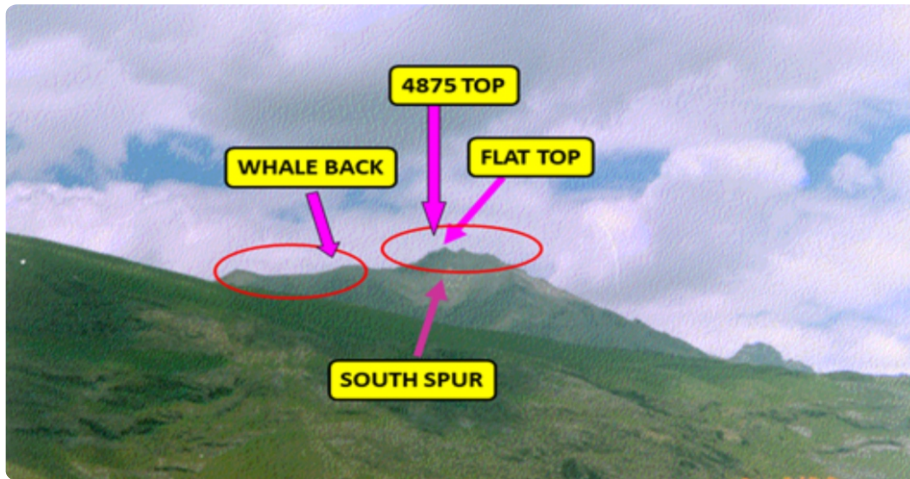
After successfully capturing the **Hump Complex** and **Rocky Knob** area, we moved the entire battalion forward and started planning for the capture of **Point 5140**, the most formidable feature

in the Drass Sector. I had planned that Delta Company led by Lieutenant Vikram Batra and Bravo Company led by Lieutenant Sanjeev Jamwal would be the assaulting companies, while the other two who had been involved earlier would be in reserve.

After briefing both the young company commanders in detail, I gave them a lecture to motivate them. We had not decided on the success signal that they would give me once they had successfully captured their objectives. I asked Jimmy (Jamwal) as to what would be his success signal. Jimmy immediately said, “**Oh Yeah Yeah Yeah!!**” Surprised at this funny success signal, I asked him why he had selected these lines. He replied that while training in Hunter Squadron in National Defence Academy, Pune, they used this slogan, so he wanted this as his success signal. Thereafter I asked Vikram Batra as to what his success signal would be. He gave a little thought and then said, “**Yeh Dil Maange**



General V P Malik, Army Chief congratulates Lt Col Y K Joshi, the CO. Maj Gen Mobinder Puri, the Division Commander (extreme left) and Lt Gen NC Vij, the DGMO and later Army Chief (third from left) watch on.



Point 4875, now Batra Top in the Mushko Valley

More!! I was taken aback a little at these very unusual success signals. However, not wanting to discourage them, I let it pass. In any case it did not matter at that time. Later I realized the importance of these words, when both these youngsters gave me their success signals with full josh and enthusiasm. The words, **“Yeh Dil Maange More”** became household words during OPERATION VIJAY and continue to be so.

Sher Shaah, Do Not Dare To Come Up

All the briefing and motivation done, the preparatory bombardment commenced on **Point 5140**. The artillery plastered the entire feature with high explosive. From our position on the **Hump** Complex, we could see the complete **Point 5140** feature on fire with tons of TNT exploding on it. It appeared that no enemy would be left alive on this huge mountain. However, the moment the artillery stopped and our assault commenced, within a few minutes the enemy automatics opened up and his artillery illuminated the entire area turning it into daylight. The enemy had occupied reverse slope positions when our artillery was pounding them.

then we would see who would go back alive. Vikram’s voice over the radio set was high-pitched with excitement.

At approximately 0235 hours, Jimmy and his company reached the top, on the portion of the objective assigned to his company and assaulted it clearing it by 0335 hours when he came on the radio set and gave me the success signal, **“Oh Yeah Yeah Yeah!!”** Vikram Batra and his company had a frontal and much steeper approach; they reached the area by 0330 hours and linked up with Bravo Company. Thereafter he launched the attack towards the right, clearing his portion of the objective and giving me the success signal at 0435 hours, the famous words, **“Yeh Dil Maange More!!”** My happiness knew no bounds. In this attack we had not suffered a single casualty.

Lieutenant Vikram Batra to Captain Vikram Batra on Tololing

Having captured **Point 5140** successfully, we were ordered to de-induct from Drass to Gumri for rest and refit. On our way down from **Point 5140**, while we were at Tololing we received orders that subject to availability of vacancies we could promote officers to the next rank. This being a war situation, the service limit for promotion was removed. I had the privilege to promote Lieutenant Vikram Batra to the rank of Captain on top of Tololing, an event that I will never forget in my life.

Firing Missiles on Point 4875

The next task for the battalion was capture of **Point 4875** as part of 79 Mountain Brigade. We attacked **Point 4875** and reached the Top, but we still had not captured the complete feature as the enemy was holding on to a narrow ledge, which had only one approach and there was no way to circumvent it. I reached the top of **Point 4875** to assess the situation,

As the attack progressed, I was sitting in the pitch dark night alongside the fire base on **Hump**, eyes fixed on **Point 5140** feature, catching a flash of a weapon firing on and off. Glued to my ear was the handset of the ANPRC radio set, desperate for some words of progress from the company commanders. Suddenly our radio sets came alive, and an enemy soldier came on our radio net. He challenged Vikram Batra, saying, *“Sher Shaah, do not dare to come up, else you will not go back alive”* and words to that effect. All of us who were on the radio, including Vikram Batra yelled back at him and challenged him to stay put for a few more moments as we were about to reach the top, and

but beyond a point I could not go ahead as enemy snipers were firing, besides enemy artillery shelling. I based myself one bump behind the forward troops.

From my location, while looking towards "Whaleback Complex", the 17 JAT objective, which had not been captured as yet, I saw a big bunker of the enemy, and some enemy movement in the area. We had staged forward the FAGOT missile launchers from the fire base below to **Point 4875**. I told Kaushal to load a missile and took aim and fired it at the bunker. As the missile was mid-air, I saw through the telescope, an enemy soldier wearing a white track suit come out of the bunker, just before my missile hit the bunker. "Bach gaya" I thought in my mind. After a little while as the dust settled down, I saw that the bunker was not totally destroyed. Wanting to destroy it completely, I fired another missile. As this missile approached the bunker, the same enemy soldier who had come out entered the bunker just before the missile hit it, destroying it and killing the enemy. The enemy soldier only had a couple of minutes extra to live.

Major Vikram Batra is No More

7th of July was the third day we were in close contact with the enemy at **Point 4875** and were not able to progress operations further due to the difficult terrain, the narrow ledge and no way to circumvent it. We were under pressure to clear it at the earliest. Everyone in contact realized this urgency. Captain Batra and Subedar Raghunath Singh with ten men took a patrol on the Eastern Flank to look for a route to bypass this obstacle. Having surveyed the area from all directions, they realized that there was no way to circumvent the narrow ledge.

Now in hindsight, I visualize that Vikram realized that there was no way to circumvent; on the spur of the moment, he

charged the enemy sangar frontally taking the enemy totally by surprise. He charged firing his AK-47 killing enemy soldiers, but in the melee he was hit by a bullet in the chest and as he fell he was hit by an RPG splinter in the back. The brave soldier laid down his life for the nation, but not before giving the battalion a foothold across the narrow ledge.

Subedar Raghunath who was following him narrated this story to me later but the key at that time was to press home the advantage that Vikram had gained with the sacrifice of his life. Delta Company under Major Vikas Vohra followed up the attack in broad daylight and captured the entire area. Ten enemy soldiers including a JCO were killed. Vikram made the supreme sacrifice and has left me with a karmic debt of gratitude I carry of him in this life and

beyond. The infectious enthusiasm for life and the never-say-die spirit of Vikram lives on with every one of us who had the privilege and honour of living and serving with him. To have been his CO and mentor is a mantle I am extremely proud of. On hearing the calamitous news of his death, my first thoughts were of his parents and siblings who would be shattered as and when the news got to them. We of course remain in touch till date, like a family.

As I look back, during the war, there were moments of elation and joy that I experienced when we had success during the better moments in the battle and my grief and tears at the losses of friends and brave soldiers. These moments will forever remain as much etched on my mind as they certainly are in history.



Lieutenant General Y K Joshi, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VrC, SM (Retd) was commissioned into 13 JAK RIF in 1982. In 1999, during Operation Vijay, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in the war zone and given command of 13 JAK RIF. For its exceptional performance in battle, 13 JAK RIF was awarded the Chief of Army Staff Citation and conferred with the title of the "Bravest of the Braves." As the Northern Army Commander, he spearheaded the Indian response after clashes with the Chinese troops during Operation Snow Leopard. The Indian Army launched Quid Pro Quo operations, and forced the PLA to disengage in the Pangong Tso area. He has served in Military Operations Directorate in Army HQ in various capacities handling the insurgency in North Eastern States, and China and Pakistan affairs. He speaks Mandarin and is considered a China expert having served as the Defence Attache in Beijing, China for three years. Currently he is the Director General of the Centre for Contemporary China Studies and is a motivational speaker relating his experience of Army to day to day life lessons.



Lt Gen Y K Joshi

NISHCHAY KAR APNI JEET KARUN

8 SIKH ON TIGER HILL

The **Battle of Tiger Hill** was the final nail in the coffin for Pakistani troops in the Drass Sector, and the Pakistanis realized that their attempt to dominate the Srinagar – Leh Highway had been nullified. But it was a very tough nut to crack. The author had been wounded in the earlier skirmishes and was evacuated. This narration is based on his discussions amongst the unit officers and men after the battles, when he returned to the unit.

In May 1999, 8 SIKH moved to its new location in Pulwama district for Counter Insurgency Operations. Before we could settle down in Pulwama, the Battalion Headquarters (HQ) received orders to move to Drass, to take part in Operation VIJAY. We firmed in around TIGER HILL at heights of around 15000 feet. On 25th June, the orders to attack **Tiger Hill** on the night of 03 - 04 July employing 8 SIKH and 18 GRENADIERS were received. Immediately after capturing **Tiger Hill**, the neighbouring Brigade was to attack another crucial dominating feature. Hence the success of attack on **Tiger Hill** became all the more important.

18 GRENADIERS was to launch the attack on **Tiger Hill** Top from the East, Northeast and South; and 8 SIKH was to support the attack by providing fire support and causing deception for the enemy by launching an attack from two different directions. However, there is an old saying in the Army that the **“Plan is the first casualty in war”**. A similar situation arose wherein the attack of 18 GRENADIERS from all three directions could not progress due to heavy enemy fire. The situation was getting worse and an unconventional approach was required.



8 SIKH troops atop the Western Spur of Tiger Hill



8 SIKH on top of Pt 4460



*Col SP Singh (standing 2nd Right)
with 8 SIKH Soldiers after Tiger Hill Capture*

While watching the enemy fire coming from **Tiger Hill** complex, the Commanding Officer (CO) realised that the enemy was present at **Tiger Hill** and **Rocky Knob**, which was on the extreme end of the Western Spur. If the unit could establish a foothold between **Tiger Hill** and **Rocky Knob** then a breakthrough could be achieved. **India Gate** and **Helmet**, which were on the Western Spur, were chosen as objectives to be captured by a fighting patrol.

The task assigned to 8 SIKH was a matter of izzat of the Paltan. Major Ravindra Singh Parmar, Delta Company Commander volunteered to lead the patrol of Delta Company and Ghataks. He told Colonel SP Singh, the CO, **“With the blessings of Wahe Guru Ji, we will get you Tiger Hill”**. It was time to live up to the motto of SIKH Regiment **“Nishchay Kar Apni Jeet Karon”**. Seeing his confidence, Colonel SP Singh entrusted him with the task. He advised Parmar not to lose guard after capture of the objective and be prepared to face strong counter attacks as the Pakistanis were known for strong, swift and multiple counter attacks.

Capture of India Gate

Ravindra formed a team of 52 men - two officers, four JCOs and 46 jawans. Lieutenant R K Sehrawat was his Second-in-Command. With very less time to prepare and carry out coordination, the patrol decided to do away with extra clothing and food items and carry more ammunition instead. Parmar appreciated that the toughest challenge would be to control these 52 *‘lions’* and move as per his directions in the face of enemy fire. The patrol had to move dispersed and maintain a minimum distance of 8 - 10 metres between two individuals to avoid multiple casualties with a single artillery shell or an LMG burst. With 52 men, the distance

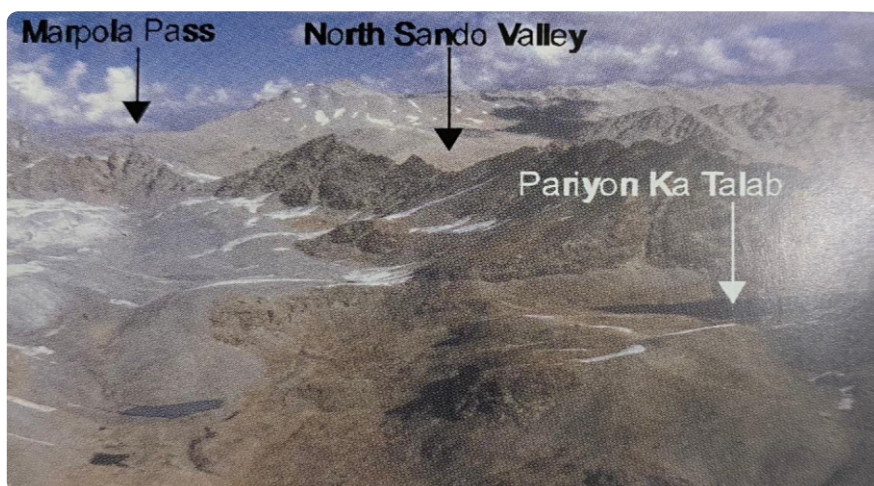
between the first and the last person became approximately 500 metres that too on a steep slope. Moreover, they had to move as silently as possible, to achieve surprise.

Ravindra Parmar decided that the best way to control the movement was to move like a caterpillar, his team agreed to the plan with a condition... that he would not be the first one moving ahead of the column, three jawans will always move ahead of him to give him cover. They said that it would be a matter of shame for the Khalsa troops if the Company Commander had to walk in front and lead the column himself. Throughout the movement there were always three gallant soldiers moving ahead of him to give cover.

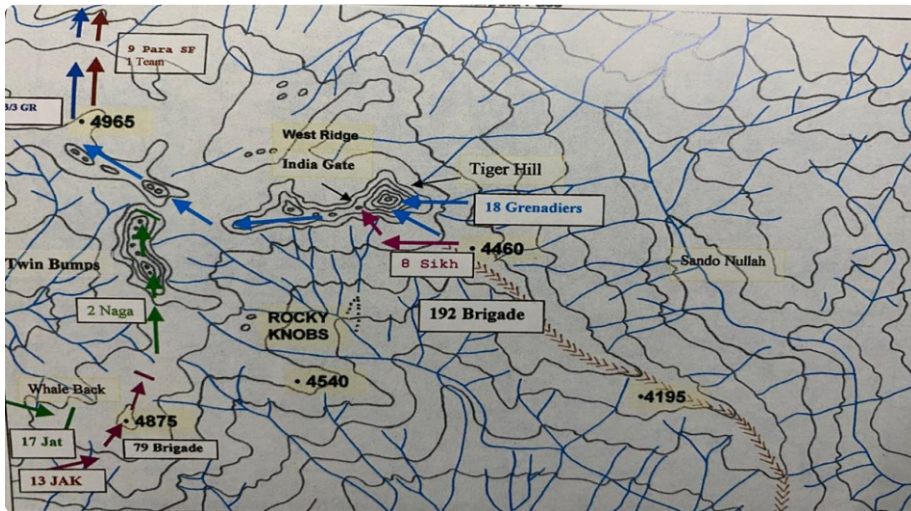
As it became dark, it got cold and windy. The Ghataks climbed straight up towards the North on a steep ridge to reach the Western Spur. The team was full of josh, as they knew that they were the chosen ones to achieve the much awaited breakthrough in the **Battle of Tiger Hill**. They moved swiftly up the

nullah and then started climbing towards the base of Western Spur. By 0200 hours, they had reached the reference point **‘Bara Pathar’**, about 300 metres from the objectives, as the crow flies. A **fire support base was established at Bara Pathar** under Subedar Sardara Singh. The rest of the patrol moved as silently as possible, towards the ridge line and reached the top of the ridge by 0300 hours without being detected.

On reaching, Ravindra realized that they had hit the ridge West of **India Gate**. Luck plays an important role and they were lucky that day. Their position on the ridge was ideal for firing on to the enemy defences, as with a full moon low on the horizon, **India Gate** and its defences were perfectly silhouetted. The distance between **India Gate** and the base of **Tiger Hill** on the Western Ridge was about 100 metres. Parmar saw piles of stones in that gap, which at that time, he assumed to be sangars (ad hoc bunkers made up of loose stones).



Marpola and the Sando Valley as one looks to the Northeast from the Western Spur of Tiger Hill



attack plans of 192 Mountain Brigade and 79 Mountain Brigade for Tiger Hill and Point 4875

He deployed the patrol in suitable firing positions and ordered the Rocket Launcher detachment to open rapid fire onto the two *sangars* clearly visible in the area of **India Gate** and also upon another *sangar* in the gap. Within ten minutes, High Explosive Rockets demolished the *sangars* to pieces and killed the enemy soldiers inside; those who survived the attack were seen running helter-skelter. The team quickly occupied **India Gate**, deployed themselves and firmed in.

India Gate was located in the centre of Western Spur, hence its capture was important to drive a wedge in the enemy defences. Having established the foothold on the ridge, it was now critical to hold on to **India Gate**. Towards one side were the strong defences of **Tiger Hill** overlooking **India Gate**, and to the other side were the enemy defences of **Rocky Knob**. The patrol had to secure the area till as far forward on the Western Spur as possible. During the night itself, the troops started rebuilding the *sangars* and individual defences with loose rocks,

the patrol withstood the enemy fire bravely with no blankets or sleeping bags, all left behind to carry extra ammunition. This meant that not only the able but also the wounded had to endure intense cold, wherein the temperature falls well below freezing point even in July.

The Pakistani Counter Attacks

In the evening, the CO spoke to Major Parmar and told him to be ready to face a strong counter attack of the enemy. That was a long night, a night that none of them would ever forget. There was continuous artillery bombardment and the Sikhs on the ridge had no food or bedding. It was freezing cold. The wounded were in immense pain and were helpless; Ravindra had no means to evacuate them. At 0645 hours the next morning i.e. 06 July, the first counter-attack, by about twenty men, came in. But the team was alert and ready. They engaged them promptly with Medium Machine Guns (MMGs), Automatic Grenade Launchers (AGLs) and rifles – the enemy suffered heavy casualties and could not even reach Helmet.

With the first enemy counter attack beaten back, Parmar was busy regaining command and control, assessing the situation, taking stock of ammunition expenditure and deciding on the next course of action. Subedar Karnail Singh, the senior Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) met the Company Commander and discussed the situation. He said that the second counter attack is inevitable, which would be stronger with more fire power. Considering the large number of casualties, Delta Company and the Ghataks would not be able to hold the position with remaining troops. He paused and waited for Ravindra to think and

which were lying around in abundance. Digging in the snow-covered ridge was not possible. They found two signal cables running from **Rocky Knob** to **Tiger Hill**, which were cut immediately.

Soon after first light, the enemy defences on **Tiger Hill** opened up along with fire from all enemy defences at heights overlooking the patrol, like ‘Trig’ height and a feature known as ‘C’ feature which lay about 1500 metres away, firing heavy anti-aircraft machine guns. Enemy artillery fire also opened up, firing air-bursts. This heavy fire brought mounting casualties. The enemy expected the Sikhs to break down by this heavy volume of fire and did not launch the counter-attack during the day. During the entire day,

assimilate what he meant. He suggested that he will lie down and hide himself amongst the dead bodies of Pakistani soldiers. For the next counter attack, the enemy soldiers would move along the spur from **Rocky Knob** towards **Helmet** and **India Gate**. Once the enemy soldiers cross over and move towards our position, he will start engaging them from rear and balance of our troops will engage them from the front.

The plan was logical and he was absolutely sure of its success. Ravindra told him that he will be surrounded by enemy from all sides and it was too risky with almost no chance of his survival. He said, **“Saab Ji, Ek Khalsa Sawa Lakh ke Barabar Honda Hai, Tusi Fikr Na Karo.”** Realising that there was no other way to beat back the second counter attack, Ravindra agreed. If the patrol was to lose **India Gate**, then the martyrdom of the brave Khalsas would be in vain. Knowing fully well that Subedar Karnail Singh would not come back, Parmar let him go. **Ravindra Parmar recalls Karnail as courage personified.**

Subedar Karnail Singh went approximately 100 metres ahead of the **Helmet** defences and lay down quietly amongst the bodies of Pakistani soldiers. There was absolute silence as they waited for the enemy. Forty five minutes later, heavy fire came on to the forward line of defences, followed by a strong counter attack. The Pakistanis charged and Parmar could make out that two Pakistani officers were leading the charge. Naib Subedar Nirmal Singh who was holding the MMG position at **Helmet** was badly wounded by a burst of enemy fire. He kept firing his MMG and did not let the enemy move ahead. The enemy realized the importance of eliminating the MMG and fired a rocket, which hit the sangar of Naib Subedar Nirmal Singh. The JCO kept engaging the

enemy till his last breath and achieved martyrdom. For his act of bravery, he was awarded **Vir Chakra** posthumously.

The enemy resumed the charge... they were charging with full josh and the Indian troops were on a low due to reduced strength and many casualties. They were more in number... despite our sustained fire, they overran our defences at **Helmet**... Lieutenant Sehrawat, having lost two of his JCOs and having suffered heavy casualties in his detachment, had to withdraw to **India Gate**.

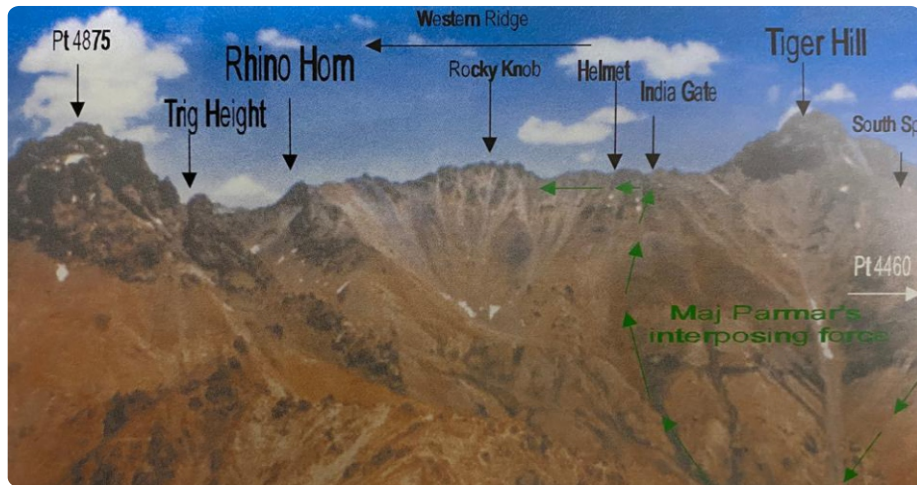
But Subedar Karnail Singh had nerves of steel; he kept hiding with the dead bodies of the enemy and waited for the correct moment to open fire. The fighting patrol was continuously engaging the enemy from **India Gate** with Light Machine Guns (LMGs) and rifles, but the enemy troops were determined. When Subedar Karnail Singh saw that the enemy had reached in front of the defences of **India Gate**, he rose up slightly and started engaging them with his LMG from the rear. The enemy soldiers became disoriented and felt that they have been surrounded... fear of unknown played up in their minds and their morale dropped to zero. Seeing the state of confusion amongst the enemy, our morale went up. Our Khalsas started shouting the Jaikara **“Bole So Nihal... Sat Sri Akal”**. There was a flow of new energy amongst the troops... even the wounded were firing on the enemy with whatever ammunition they had. Both the Pakistani officers who were leading the charge were shot dead just before the perimeter defences of **India Gate**. A few enemy troops managed to enter the perimeter of defences. Sepoy Satpal Singh, who had already been wounded thrice, came out of the cover of rocks and charged at

the enemy with his bayonet. He fought bravely in hand to hand fight and killed three enemy soldiers. For his act of bravery, he was later awarded the **Vir Chakra**.

The counter attack was beaten back... the remaining enemy soldiers ran away towards **Rocky Knob**. Subedar Karnail Singh was still engaging them from the other side, the withdrawing enemy soldiers spotted him and he was shot multiple times. The enemy realized that Subedar Karnail Singh made all the difference. They fired a rocket which hit him directly and Subedar Karnail Singh achieved martyrdom after ensuring that the counter attack was beaten back. For his act of exceptional bravery displayed in the face of the enemy, Subedar Karnail Singh was awarded **Vir Chakra** posthumously.

The patrol had already fought for over 48 hours without any replenishment of ammunition, food and water. They had survived two chilly nights at 16000 feet without any warm clothing and had been awake throughout. That day, Parmar remembered the Battle of Saragarhi fought on 12 September 1897, where 21 brave Khalsas fought against thousands of Afghans till the last drop of their blood, but did not leave the post... his Khalsa troops, were no less... despite such heavy casualties and almost certain death in case the next counter attack comes... his troops were still spirited and ready to fight.

Around mid-day, Brigadier MPS Bajwa, the Brigade Commander, spoke to him on the radio and informed that a radio intercept indicated that a third counter attack will be launched by the enemy shortly. Brigadier Bajwa was



The route of Major Parmar's Force, and their break-in at India Gate - Helmet on the Western Spur of Tiger Hill

aware of the casualties, and Ravindra knew that he had to hold on to the position till the last man, last round. Having full confidence in his troops, who were from the blood line of the warriors of Saragarhi, he assured the Brigade Commander, "Come what may, we will hold India Gate and Helmet or repeat the Saga of Saragarhi".

Western Spur Captured

At 2000 hours that evening, 07th July 1999, Western Spur was finally captured and the much awaited breakthrough in the **Battle of Tiger Hill** was achieved. We had done it... we were indeed victorious and Ravindra was proud to be the Company Commander of the brave Khalsas who repeated the saga of Saragarhi. He got a 'Shabash' call on the radio from Brigadier MPS Bajwa.

In the course of this 58-hour action, from 1000 hours on 04 July to 2000 hours on 06 July, of the 52 men in the patrol, there were thirty nine casualties. Three JCOs and fifteen men achieved martyrdom and two officers, one JCO and eighteen men were wounded. The

battalion was awarded the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Unit Citation for distinguished and gallant services throughout Operation VIJAY. The battalion was awarded the **Battle Honour Tiger Hill** and **Theatre Honour Kargil**. The Government of Punjab also awarded a special citation to the battalion. The battalion received three Vir Chakras and eleven Sena Medals. All three Vir Chakras were awarded to the patrol for their gallant action at **India Gate**. Twelve were Mentioned-in-Despatches, four received the COAS Commendation Card and three were awarded the GOC-in-C's Commendation Card.

In the Indian Army, our soldiers are very simple...they do not talk of big

things like patriotism and pride of the Nation... but they can die for the "Naam, Namak, Nishan" of the Paltan. Izzat of the Paltan is the first and foremost. The troops fought till the last breath for the Naam, Namak, Nishan of 8th Battalion of the SIKH Regiment. SIKH Regiment troops believe that there is nothing which cannot be achieved. They live by the motto given by Guru Gobind Singh:-

“देह सिवा बर मोहे ईहे, शुभ कर्मन ते कभुं न टरं
न डरौं अरि सौं जब जाय लड़ाँ, निश्चय कर अपनी जीत करौं”



Colonel Jaidev Singh Rathore (Retd) was commissioned into 8 SIKH in 1994. During the Kargil War, he was Mentioned-in-despatches (Gallantry) for his bravery and leadership. Having been wounded in the battle, he transferred to the Ordnance Corps and went on to command 9 Field Ordnance Depot and 28 Mountain Division Ordnance Unit. During his command, both these units received the Army Commander's Unit Citation, a rare command achievement. He is also a recipient of United Nations Force Commander's commendation card (Congo 2005) and is a Gold Medalist in Masters in Defence and Strategic Studies, Double MBA in Human Resource Management as well as Materials Management. He has demonstrated consistent excellent performance, leading to various medals and commendations throughout his service career. He retired in December 2023 and is presently the Commandant and Principal at The Maharaja Hanwant Sainik School, Chopasni, Jodhpur.



Col Jaidev Singh Rathore

ARTILLERY

FIREPOWER SUPREMACY IN KARGIL

The battles for the Kargil Heights were stories of courage, valour and tenacity of our young officers and soldiers of the Infantry and Artillery. In the High Altitude mountains, the outcome of the battles were a function of fire power and manoeuvre, the Infantry and Artillery operated in perfect sync to deliver blow after blow to the Pakistanis. India today, a popular magazine summed up the relationship aptly "**Behind the Heroics of Infantry, Lay the prowess of Artillery**".

"Artillery created such fire supremacy and environment on the battle field that the enemy was physically and psychologically degraded to such an extent that subsequent ground operations were pre destined to success. Daring, bold, dynamic handling and unconventional way of employment of Artillery resulted in positive execution and was a good force multiplier".

- Lieutenant General Krishan Pal, Corps Commander, Kargil.

8 Mountain Artillery Brigade mobilized from Kashmir Valley to Drass in the last week of May 99, to restore the adverse situation. While flying across the Great Himalayan Range on 01 June, I saw an ocean of high mountain ranges looking treacherous and ominous with steep bare slopes, a few still dotted with snow. The thought of the task ahead to clear the intruders from these heights was not comforting.

On arrival we were briefed by Commander 56 Mountain Brigade of the prevailing situation in the sector. The environment in the Operations Room was visibly one of gloom, uncertainty and dismay. 56 Brigade, part of 8 Mountain Division had preceded induction of the Division. It had launched operations on 22 May 99 to capture three dominating features around Drass - **Tiger Hill, Tololing Heights** and **Point 5140**. The five 105 mm fire units available to the Brigade

(Photo credit Battle Winning Role of the Gunners in Kargil War by Major General Jagjit Singh, Indian Defence Review January 2019)





(Photo credit Kargil 1999 *The Situation Then and The Situation Now* by Colonel Jaibans Singh, *Indian Defence Review* July 2021)

for three concurrent battalion attacks in high altitude were inadequate both in quantity and quality to provide effective suppressive fire. The end result was a dismal failure, but for **Tololing**, the objective closest to the National Highway (NH), where 18 Grenadiers managed to get a foot hold on the Southern Slopes 100 to 300 metres from the enemy. Smitten by the lack of success, the Battalion made two forays to capture the heights on 28 May and on 02 June, led by Major Rajesh Adhikari and Lieutenant Colonel Vishwanathan. Despite the close proximity to the objectives, they were unable to make any headway. Both the gallant young officers were killed in action.

An aspect which rankled us most was the inability of the Infantry to close up with the enemy, despite being at stone's throw distance. The domination of the bare slopes by the intruders was so complete, that a small posse of men sitting atop laced with automatic weapons could easily repel and defeat an attack many times its size with comparative immunity and heavy casualties to the attacker. We

Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRLs). The onus was now on us to make the best use of this fire power.

The question was how to use these resources to our best advantage and get the manoeuvre force to reach close to the objectives - a challenge indeed. Reflecting back in history, I recalled the use of cannons in the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Babur. The cannons those days were lined up to fire pinpoint barrages in the face of the enemy with good results. The old basic guns could fire accurately at a short range, then why not the sophisticated gun systems of today. We ventured out to replicate history.

The Experiment

On 06 June, the Brigade set out to try Direct Firing (DF) at long ranges, a system where the crew can see the target and align with it on open sights. Two Bofors and two Field Guns were moved to deploy four kms South of **Tololing**. A visible landmark **Barbad Bunker** atop was selected as the aiming point for the trials. Incidentally, the **Barbad Bunker** had caused maximum casualties to 18 Grenadiers. We opened up with a 155 mm Bofors and were relieved to see the fall of shot near the target. The ranging process was completed, and all subsequent rounds hit the target squarely on the dot. By the time we had fired a few shots, the **Barbad Bunker** was devastated.

Direct Firing gave better than expected results. Encouraged by the experiment, we decided to use Artillery in an aggressively offensive mode. We ideated a concept to use 100 guns or more on the enemy objective to blast in TNT equivalent of a mini nuke to pulverize the enemy completely, and augment it with DF Bofors and MBRLs to

realized that unless the enemy was suppressed to a degree where his presence became significantly irrelevant, the infantry attacking uphill would face the same fate as the earlier attempts. To achieve this degree of suppression, there was a need of a qualitative and quantitative addition of heavier calibre guns.

By the time 8 Mountain Division started its operations in June 1999, we were well equipped with Artillery with a large proportion of Bofors Guns. The Artillery Brigade was beefed up from 36 guns to 100 Guns plus, comprising of 105 mm Field Guns, 130 mm Medium Guns, 155 mm Bofors, 160 mm Heavy Mortars, 120 mm Mortars and a troop of Multi

exponentially multiply the destructive impact on the objective. Briefly, the concept was to use a sledge hammer to break a peanut. It also came to be known as the **100 Gun Concept**. In the final and most crucial stage of attack, when the Infantry was on its own, we used the DF Bofors to shoot in the Infantry within a hand shake distance of the enemy.

The Day of Reckoning

The first Divisional attack was launched on 12 June 99. 56 Mountain Brigade was tasked to capture **Tololing Heights** and **Point 5140** in two phases. In the initial phase, 2 RAJ RIF was to capture **Tololing Heights**, comprising of **Point 4590** and **Tololing**, and in the second phase 18 GARH RIF was to capture **Point 5140** in a staggered time frame. 2 RAJ RIF was to tackle **Point 4590** and **Tololing** with a company each along South West and South East Spurs, commencing last light of 12 June. The other two companies were to follow suit as reserve.

108 Guns were earmarked for the Brigade attack, 54 each for **Tololing Heights** and **Point 5140** plus six DF Bofors Guns. The DF guns were deployed on a spur along the NH about four kms from **Tololing**. This incidentally turned out to be a good vantage point to oversee the battle field. The General Officer Commanding (GOC), Brigade Commander and Deputy Brigade Commander had gathered here to witness the opening attack of the Division. The fire plan commenced at 1930 hours on the enemy gun areas with all available Artillery. The fire was then shifted to the objectives. It was a treat to see 54 guns firing in unison on **Tololing Heights**. The effect was one of awe and shock. Colonel SVE David, the Deputy Brigade Commander, remarked, *“I have never seen such perfect firing before, not even in the School of Artillery”*. It is said that

Tololing became shorter by a few inches due to the TNT thrown on it.

2 RAJ RIF commenced the attack at H Hour. The unit reached the periphery of enemy defences without any casualties. The Company moving along the South West Spur towards **Point 4590** made good progress and established an early contact with the enemy. The stiff resistance by the Pakistanis then stalled the attack. Colonel Ravindranath, the Commanding Officer (CO) accompanied by Major A S Kasana, Battery Commander following on the heels of the reserve companies, took a quick decision to launch the reserve company to address the objective from the flank. This yielded a positive result. The other leading company along the South East approach took longer to capture the objective. The DF Guns had kept the enemy’s head down, maintaining the momentum of attack. Captain M K Singh of 197 Field Regiment was the Artillery Observation Officer with the Company moving along

the South East Spur. He did a commendable job by leading the company into attack when Major Vivek Gupta, the Company Commander became a fatal casualty and then rallying them to hold off the enemy's counter attack. He was awarded Sena Medal for this stellar contribution. By first light 13 June 99, **Tololing Heights** were in our hands. The nation woke up to the much awaited news of our first victory in the campaign.

The newly evolved Artillery concept stood ratified. The Infantry - Artillery combine imbued confidence down the line. The innovative use of Artillery brought about many firsts in the high altitude battlefield. In the final stage of attack, the direct firing guns enabled the infantry to reach within 100 metres of the enemy position. The overall impact of the Artillery fire was astounding. Indian Army suffered 10 fatal casualties compared to the enemy's 20. This was to happen again and again for the recapture of other ridge lines and massifs. The Artillery



BOFORS gun deployed in Kargil Sector (photo credit India Today Images)



Brigadier Lakhwinder Singh (later Major General) at a gun position in Drass

was no more a supporting fire for Infantry but Fire Power to set the stage for victory.

Attack on Point 5140

18 GARH RIF's capture of **Point 5140** in the second phase did not reach finality. Well past midnight of 12/13 June, they were nowhere near the objective. To avoid day lighting the Garhwalis, the attack had to be called off. **Point 5140** the most dominating feature of the massif eluded us for a second time, the first attempt was on 22 May. Capture of **Point 5140** was critical to secure our success on **Tololing**. The next attack on it was scheduled for 19 June.

The plan was to launch a three pronged attack from North, South and West by 18 GARH RIF, 13 JAK RIF and 1 NAGA. 13 JAK RIF under Lieutenant Colonel Joshi was to attack along the **Tololing** Ridge running South to North. Enemy's protective outreach in the Rocky Area under the shadow of **Point 5140** was an impediment along this axis. Encouraged by the accuracy and fury of

in demolishing the enemy with consistent fire assaults. He was awarded Vir Chakra for his valour and outstanding contribution for the capture of **Point 5140**.

Evicting Intruders from Marpola Area

8 Mountain Division decided to clean the slate in the Drass - Mushko Sector from West to East successively, ie Marpola Ridge, Tiger Hill and Point 4875. The attacks were launched following a similar modus operandi, pulverize the enemy with fire power followed by Infantry Assaults. There were some telling contributions of the Artillery, over and above the sledge hammer impact, which are briefly highlighted hereafter.

The **Marpola** feature was to be attacked by 56 Mountain Brigade, with 2 RAJ RIF and 18 GARH RIF clearing the South Western and South Eastern Ridges respectively, commencing operations at last light 28 June. The leading company of 2 RAJ RIF moving along the South Western Ridge came under heavy machine gun fire from three enemy strong points in the **Area Knoll**. While the first two were cleared, the third one held on. Major Acharya, the Company Commander and Captain Vijayant Thapar, the Company Officer in their valiant effort to clear the strong point were martyred. It became a no go situation. With no officer left to handle the company, the senior Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) took charge. A request was made to engage the position with DF Bofors. We had visualised such a contingency and practiced to engage pin point targets at night with a modified version of DF procedure, called Direct Indirect Fire (DIDF) mode. For the first time,

the DF Bofors, he took an unimagined bold step to launch a daylight attack on Rocky Area on 17 June under the blazing fire of Bofors. The enemy fled. Artillery was a huge enabler in this first daylight attack. Two days later, the attack on **Point 5140** was launched with the full weight of the Artillery Brigade and four DF Bofors guns. The enemy objective was degraded to a degree where the attack was predestined to succeed. 13 JAK RIF occupied **Point 5140** by the morning of 20 June, sans any casualties. This was the famous point where the slogan by Captain Batra "**Yeh Dil Maange More**" was immortalized. 18 GARH RIF caught up with 13 JAK RIF from the North a few hours later. Major A S Kasana, the Battery Commander played a lead role

Bofors was used in DIDF mode in a live situation. The proximity of our troops to the strong point, added to our concern. With prayers on our lips, the opening shot was fired. It landed close to the strong point. After a few corrections, a direct hit destroyed the strong point. Post this episode, the GOC remarked that the Infantry had *started using Bofors as a Section Weapon*. The attack was successful.

18 GARH RIF also attacked the Eastern Ridge with grit and valour, and captured their initial objectives (**Point 4700** and **Tommy**) by the early hours of 29 June. Enemy *sangars* in the Saddle between the two localities continued to hold, which was blasted by DF Bofors on the morning of 29 June. Sensing the enemy weakening on Rocky and *Sangar* abutting Point 4700, the CO wanted to continue with a daylight attack under the cover of DF Bofors. However, the attack got delayed to last light as the assaulting troops took time moving up.

The Indomitable Tiger Hill

The majestic **Tiger Hill** at 16700 feet, visible from the NH was a symbol for resistance and victory to both the sides. 192 Mountain Brigade commanded by Brigadier MPS Bajwa was tasked to capture the Massif with 18 Grenadiers and 8 SIKH, under command. Bajwa asked for overwhelming fire support for Tiger Hill. He was aware that firepower had been more than an equal partner in the successful operations so far. I responded that fire support can only support him, but fire power can put success in his lap. He got the point. I make this point that by now the concept of fire support had veered to a more aggressive Fire Power.

8 Sikh was to provide the firm base for 18 Grenadiers to attack on 03 July. Before last light of D Day, three MBRLs and 8 Bofors in DF role opened up on

Tiger Hill. It was for the first time in Indian history that live telecast was aired by the TV Channels, a bonanza to many people watching the battle in the comforts of their homes.

At the appointed time, the entire Artillery Fire Power was concentrated on **Tiger Hill**. 18 Grenadiers commenced their attack from three directions with a company each along the North East, East and South Spurs. Around midnight the weather fell afoul with clouds and drizzle. Half way through, the battalion lost direction and were unable to navigate. The GOC asked of me to handle the situation. We had little option but to resort to DIDF with Bofors. The opening shot was fired once again with prayers on our lips. It was bang on the target. Bofors continued firing till the Battalion regained its composure. By the morning of 04 July, the Grenadiers were on the objective. Obviously very happy, the GOC remarked, *"You (Artillery) have done it again - the infantry walked slung arms to the objective"*.

Pakistan was not in a mood to accede so fast and easy. The enemy launched a massive counter attack on the Ghatak Platoon, which had managed to reach the Top. It is here that Naik Yogendra Yadav asked Colonel Kushal Thakur, his CO, to bring own Artillery fire on them. Kushal was hesitant and apprised Yadav that own Artillery fire could be fatal, to which he said, *"Sabib, marna to vaise bhi hai, aur aise bhi, aap Arty Fire karao"*. The Artillery was fired which dissipated the counter attack, and saved the day. Naik Yogendra Yadav was awarded the Param Vir Chakra for his exceptional bravery and courage.

Critical Capture of Point 4875

The day after the attack on **Tiger Hill**, 79 Mountain Brigade under Brigadier Ramesh Kakkar was launched to capture **Point 4875**, tactically the most important feature in the entire Sector. The operation was planned in two phases, commencing last light of 04 July with 13 JAK RIF and 17 JAT



Gunners in action (photo AP wide world photos)



Artillery guns were the game changer in the Kargil War (photo credit sanjhamorcha.com)

launching the attacks. By now the clamour for the DF Guns was on a crescendo. Sensing the significance of the attack on the last bastion of the enemy in Drass, 12 DF Bofors were deployed. These guns started engaging the enemy positions before last light. At H Hour, the complete might of Artillery was concentrated to pulverize **Point 4875**. Phase 1 of both the Battalions was completed by first light 05 July. Phase 2 of 17 JAT ran into a block on **Pimple II**. It was proving a tough nut to crack. The Company Commander was seriously injured and Captain Anuj Nayyar, the Company Officer martyred. At this point, Captain S B Ghildiyal, the Artillery Observation Officer with the Company showed outstanding presence of mind and took over command of the company. He led the company to capture **Pimple II**. By noon, the entire complex was in our hands. Captain Ghildiyal was honoured with Vir Chakra. For the outstanding contribution of Artillery for the **Battle of Point 4875**, it was named "**Gun Hill**", later changed to "**Batra Top**", as Captain Vikram Batra, PVC died in action here. The Gunners

impact of fire power can be gauged by the frequent SOS intercepts of the Pakistani intruders when under Artillery fire "**Hame Bachao, yeha per kehar baras raha hai**".

were justly recognised on 30 July 2020, when **Point 5140**, the highest point in Drass Sector was formally christened "**Gun Hill**".

Bofors Vis a Vis Other Tubes

There is a misnomer that only Bofors won the war. That is not true. The other guns 105mm, 130mm, 120mm, 160mm and MBRL were equal partners to deliver the required TNT on the objectives. The characteristics of each weapon system were exploited optimally for conclusive results. Due to its long range, weight of shell, rapid firing capability and exceptional accuracy, Bofors led the gang. Bofors were exploited beyond the manufacturer's expectations. The

Minimizing Casualties

One of the most noteworthy effect of the evolved Fire Power concept was, to minimize own casualties while causing unbearable attrition on the Pakistanis. By the Army's reckoning the War Wastage Ratio was expected to be as high as 1:6 or more, in favour of the defender. In Kargil, the casualty ratio stood reversed: to 700 Pakistanis dead, we suffered 525 fatalities. Notably it was many times lower than the possible computed figure of 4200 (700 x 6).

Sledge Hammer Silences the Enemy Again

Having restored the status quo ante, 8 Mountain Division was committed to occupy defensive positions from Kaobal Gali to the boundary with 3 Infantry Division. Despite the cease fire, Pakistanis continued to disrupt our preparation of defences with their shelling.

On 20 August, we mustered 40 tubes and 1000 rounds to knock a Sledge Hammer onto the Pakistanis. Colonel George was designated the Task Force commander. He established an observation post atop **Point 13620**, the highest point in Kargil, selected and registered three targets across the LC. At the chosen time, the salvos were fired in quick succession on them. It was a master stroke. Pakistan guns fell silent. The outcome substantiated our belief that fire power, used innovatively can give exponential dividends. It was another mile stone achieved, much less known but an extremely important one.

Artillery – the Game Changer

Fresh Brigade HQ and Infantry Battalions could be nominated for the attacks or at least rotated. There was no such latitude for the Gunners. They were forever in operations, carving tracks on their own, deploying and redeploying, maintaining guns and managing ammunition. The DF guns invariably faced the wrath of the enemy artillery since the deployment was in the line of sight of the objectives. Unrested and fatigued with blisters on their hands, they were relentless in their duties.

Artillery became a game changer in Kargil. It was pivotal to our success in War. The Indian artillery fired over 280000 shells, bombs and rockets during the conflict. Approximately 5600 Artillery rounds were fired daily from 300 Artillery Pieces. During the peak period of assaults, on an average, each Artillery Battery fired over one round per minute for 17 days continuously, a herculean effort by any count. Such high rates of fire over long periods had not been witnessed anywhere in the world since World War II. Artillery was the uncontested Game Changer in Kargil and stands so recognized nationally and internationally. The tallest validation of the Indian Artillery's contribution came from no less than the Chief of Pakistan Army, who conveyed to Mr G Parthasarathy, the erstwhile Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, on a visit to Pakistan after the war, "The way your Artillery was used in Kargil, we were forced to vacate our posts, otherwise we would have never left those heights".

It would be interesting to quote the words of United States Captain Marcus P Acosta, from Naval Post Graduate School, Monterey, California in his research paper on High Altitude and the Kargil War. He writes, "The Indian Army deployed over 300 guns at Kargil, and most of them came under the

command of one of the army's most innovative leaders, Brigadier Lakhwinder Singh. Singh earned the nickname "Enraged Bull of Drass" for his technique of applying overwhelming firepower in support of infantry manoeuvre, which he compared to using a "sledgehammer to shell a peanut." As Commander of 8 Mountain Division's Artillery Brigade at Drass, he played a pivotal role in the conflict's most important battles. Singh lined all the guns in his batteries and concentrated direct fire on Pakistani positions. He first used the technique during the assaults on Tololing in early June, firing over one hundred guns at Point 5140. The ferocity of his direct fire on Point 4875 in the Tiger Hill complex caused the Indian Army to rename the point "Gun Hill."

Lieutenant General Krishan Pal, the Corps Commander, made two very profound observations. On 19 July 99, while driving around the operational area, he said "Army should stop talking of Infantry and Armour alone in combat, instead talk of Artillery, Infantry and Armour". The

ongoing war in Ukraine is a testimony of his visionary statement. He then averred that "Artillery fought like a Combat Arm". It is time that the Indian Army takes note of this and upgrades the status of Artillery as a full-fledged General Cadre Combat Arm. It will exponentially multiply the Combat Potential of the Indian Army at no extra cost to the exchequer.

In Summation

Use of Fire Power is not only a science, it is also an art. The Artillery played the War Symphony in perfect harmony colouring the enemy in crimson and adorning the Indian Army in Blue. While the Commander held the Baton, the finest tunes were played by the ensemble comprising the Gunner fraternity, Radio Operators, Technical Staff, Surveyors, Drivers, Gun Position Officers, Forward Observation Officers and Battery Commanders ably led by the Commanding Officers.



Major General Lakhwinder Singh, YSM (Retd), an alumnus of National Defence Academy, Pune was commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery in December 1967. As a young Captain he fought the 1971 War in the Dera Baba Nanak, Western Theatre. Since then he has seen action in every rank of his career. An 'Out of the box thinker', he ideated a new concept for Artillery Fire Power to force the enemy to submission in the Kargil Heights War. Nicknamed the "Enraged Bull of Drass" for his technique of applying overwhelming firepower, he played a critical leadership role in our victory in Kargil. He went on to command an artillery division.



Major General Lakhwinder Singh

THE BATALIK BATTLES

KIRANTIS CLEAR THE RIDGES

Operation Vijay 1999 in the Kargil - Drass Sector was reported extensively on Indian media; fought on rugged mountains, against daunting odds, with dogged courage and supreme gallantry eventually leading to victory. For contemporary generations, it is the war they remember and the victory they emote with. This first-hand account brings forth the resilience, valour and fortitude of the Gorkhas during operations of 1/11 Gorkha Rifles in the Batalik Sector.

The First Battalion of 11 Gorkha Rifles or 1/11 GR was deployed for 80 days in the **'Kargil War of 1999'** and re-captured over 10 enemy held posts. We defeated the enemy in an area from Dah at 9000 feet 18 Km South of the Line of Control (LC), and onward all the way to **Point 5300** (at 17700 feet) on the LC, from Jubar Ridge to the West to **Point 5203** to the East (see Map on next page).

In early May 1999, our battalion was de-inducting after the high altitude tenure along the Line of Actual Control, followed by a deployment on Siachen. We had handed over cold clothing, radio sets, support weapons, ammunition, sector maps, medical staff etc. On 08 May, we moved post-haste to Dah under 70 Infantry Brigade to 'handle' an emerging situation. The Brigade Headquarters (HQ) proved to be extremely cohesive, exceptionally well led and full of aggressive energy – just what we needed to thrash the enemy in an 'unknown' situation.



This illustration drawn by Brigadier Anul Asthana (retd) depicts the Gorkhas attack on Khalubar

The situation emerged minute to minute and day to day; we were tasked to immediately secure the Dah Helipad to start with. Some hostile fire had been reported even that deep (15 km inside the LC). The next task was to extricate two different strong and officer led patrols of two other units that had been ambushed and which were still in contact with the enemy, on two widely dispersed ridgelines, namely Khalubar and Kukarthang. Their locations were not known, though. The initial task was also to find enemy locations (where is the enemy and in what numbers) and to block the ingress of the enemy across the vast sector (See Map); it involved sending patrols to the shoulders of our axis of advance from Dah to Yaldor, and classical picketing of various dominating points and routes leading to Yaldor.

We commenced our wide-spread manoeuvres across rugged ridgelines and canyons. We assessed that we would be able to fetch up replenishments on porters and ponies later. But for now, we needed every man up front, and so most tradesmen and drivers (we had no vehicles) too were distributed to rifle companies. The Brigade HQ was able to give me one map. To the patrols, I gave a 'sketch' made on a leaf from my notebook or gave just intuitive and typical 'infantry' route directions. But here crept in another challenge – we had just three radio sets (VA Mark 2), since we had deposited our sector stores. We could not find any charging points in these mountains for the re-chargeable batteries of the VA Mark 2 radio sets too!

We had eight patrols out along different canyons and routes as we headed for Yaldor, where we came under artillery shelling. It was baffling, because Yaldor is rather deep and tucked between steep ridges on three sides. Evidently we were under enemy observation. It was important to neutralise the artillery/mortar 'observer',

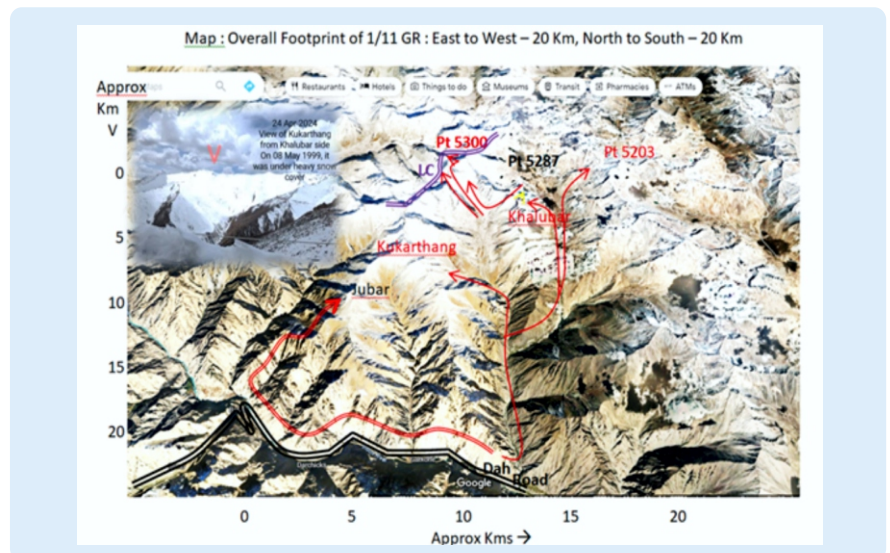
whom we located after about two more days of patrolling in varied directions. We had a brief skirmish after which the enemy withdrew, and we found few packets of dry fruits and wrappers where the enemy Observation Post (OP) may have been.

Next, our patrols were sent to locate the two ambushed patrols of the holding units. We extricated both the patrols and also evacuated their dead in the next two days; and our own death count started too. The logistics problems increased too. The priorities were mortars and their ammunition, then food and then cold clothing. We could hardly manage a few gunny bags (sand bags) of *purees* every few days; to reach these few edibles to various dispersed detachments was a challenge, as we could not send out patrols of less than 10 men. In the absence of cold clothing, many soldiers fell victim to cold and high altitude sickness too.

The vast deployment presented a need for experienced company commanders. This is where the Kiranti

Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) came to the fore. Each JCO took up leadership roles and I never found a JCO or Non Commissioned Officer who was not leading, who was not full of energy and I never saw a tired JCO despite severe shortage of food and water. They were crafty in every situation facing the enemy, led their platoons and companies with tactical guile and achieved success.

Talking of JCOs, the examples are many, herein I cite only one. C Company under Subedar Chandra Bahadur Limbu (CB) was to extricate a patrol of the holding battalion and their location was not known, and CB did not have a map. But CB found them and realised that they were under intense enemy fire. CB then out-did the enemy by craftily climbing to a height above the enemy, and engaged them with sniper fire. He asked me for artillery fire, and being atop Bharkar, I had a fairly good view towards Khalubar. Despite the handicap of not having a map, we managed to iteratively





Khalubar Top (Chucho Dhunga) as seen from Khalubar North

creep the fire of a single gun on to the enemy, with corrections by CB, which I relayed to the Gun Position. Voila – the enemy soon withdrew and we retrieved the patrol and their four dead. Unfortunately we lost Rifleman Lincon Pradhan in this battle to enemy fire.

On 17 May, we were tasked to attack and capture **Kukarthang**. We were already exchanging fire from very close range with **Kukarthang** from Bharkar Ridge, from **Point 4821** and from the East Ridge, and to our reckoning an enemy company was holding the location. With our spread out deployment we could hardly manage 90 men for the attack. Artillery fire was also not available due to enemy counter bombardment on the gun position, and we had only three rounds of 81mm mortar. On the **Point 4821** flank, Lieutenant Manoj Pandey reported that due to too much snow and an ice wall, that approach would be fruitless. I was with a small probing patrol along the East Ridge, and under fire from three automatics. There was a need to review plans, consolidate, degrade the enemy by artillery fire, build up some mortar ammunition, and then launch the

have no radio contact, and it would be nearly impossible to provide any logistics support or casualty evacuation, from my HQ at Yaldor. Manoj Pandey took up this challenge with determination and set out with his 52 Kirantis. The intrusion at **Jubar** was contained, we firmed in and handed over the firm base to 1 BIHAR which eventually captured **Jubar** in July. Manoj returned to Yaldor by 30 May.

Meantime, in the Yaldor – Kukarthang - Khalubar area, the enemy had taken up positions on the Bharkar Ledge, Yaldor - Bhadundas Nala, Khalubar West Slope and at Kukarthang. In our effort to push ahead and reach Muntho Dhalo, and thereby cut off the axis of sustenance of enemy at Khalubar and Kukarthang, even possibly Jubar, we went down from Bharkar towards the junction of Yaldor Nala and Bhadundas Nala on to a ledge, which we called Bharkar Ledge. We engaged an enemy logistics patrol, and came under fire. Hardly had we found cover, that one Orange Smoke round landed in our midst. Within seconds we were under fire from Khalubar West, plus mortar and artillery fire. The orange smoke was a method for target designation. It was difficult to evacuate our injured, since the Northern slope of Bharkar was totally open and dominated by Khalubar. And our medical complement (normally a doctor and few nursing staff) had been detached from 1/11 GR and had gone to other units as we were de-inducting.

We were now planning operations at **Point 5203**, which was under deep snow. The route up to **Point 5203** was still contested, with a few enemy patrols milling around. We had to contain the enemy at **Point 5203**, secure the axis, and support the attack. The only officer available and able was once again Lieutenant Manoj, and he established contact with **Point 5203** by early June. We had a telephone line running up to his location, and we were able to send in some sustenance every few days.

attack. I asked for delaying the attack by a day, till artillery fire could be given. Brigadier Devinder Singh, the Brigade Commander, had himself been at Yaldor with me and agreed to my point of view, and postponed the attack.

But a new situation developed the same night. The enemy was discovered at far away **Jubar**. We were the only troops available. I quickly re-organised a ‘company’ under Lieutenant Manoj Pandey with about 52 men, and tasked him to reach **Jubar** and block the ingress of the enemy towards Batalik. He had to go down to Dah, walk another 15 km to Batalik and then scale up towards Bhanju (10 hours) to face the enemy at **Jubar**. Also, he would

Manoj returned from **Point 5203** by 25 June.

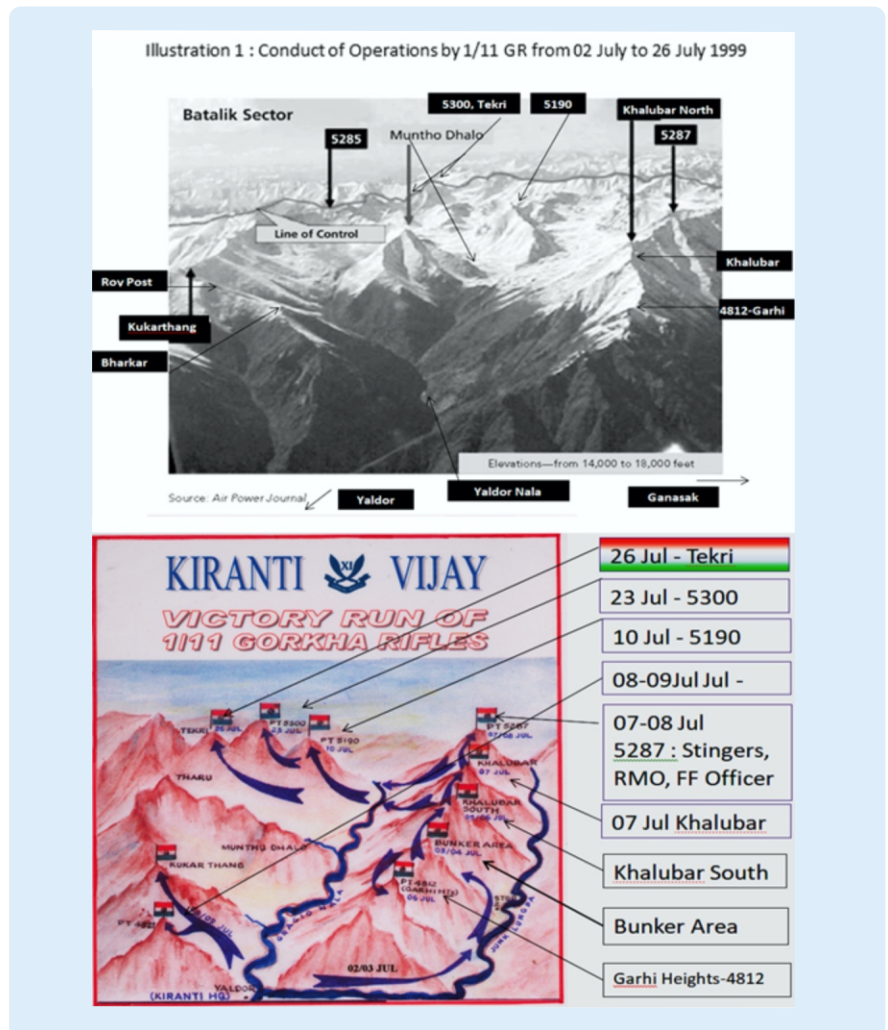
The situation completely changed by the first week of June. Porters and ponies were engaged in a big way and we established a cook house at Yaldor. There was enough food and we could supply the forward positions! We got adequate weapons, ammunition, radio sets, maps and cold clothing. We established a reliable relay for charging of radio and night vision batteries. We had got our entire advance party, leave parties and local duty strength back plus almost all officers. A medical complement with a doctor joined us by 30 May. Colonel Lalit Rai, the Commanding Officer also joined back from leave on 02 June.

Our advance to **Khalubar** started from Yaldor on 02 July led by Colonel Lalit Rai along with B and C Companies. **Khalubar** complex comprised (South to North) **Point 4812 - Garhi Heights** (just adjacent to Point 4812), **Bunker Area**, **Khalubar South**, **Khalubar Top** (Chucho Dhunga) and **Khalubar North**. The climb to **Khalubar** continued, and by early morning on 03 July, B Company was engaged by the enemy at **Bunker Area**, and C Company from **Khalubar South**. **Bunker Area** was captured by B Company after many hours of fierce close combat that saw the most conspicuous act of gallantry by Captain Manoj Kumar Pandey. The assault echelons of B Company arrived at the '**Bunker Area**' after climbing up all night in rain and sleet, while under fire of artillery and random firing from the **Bunker Area**. Under these circumstances, B Company got somewhat dispersed. As first light broke, the troops realised that they were within enemy sangars, few in front, few behind and few on either side; but that was not all. Our Gorkhas were also dispersed in front, rear and to the left and the right interspersed among the

enemy bunkers. We attacked bunker by bunker, mostly using Khukris and grenades to avoid fratricide. Captain Manoj Pandey, rallied his troops in this very challenging situation. Captain Manoj had cleared two bunkers when he was hit by enemy fire. Undaunted, he went on to clear a third bunker. Just as he lobbed a grenade into the fourth bunker, he was fatally wounded by a burst of machine gun fire. The capture of

Bunker Area facilitated and opened the way towards **Khalubar South**. For his exceptional bravery and very significant contribution to the operations, **Captain Manoj Kumar Pandey was awarded the Param Vir Chakra posthumously.**

On the other flank, C Company under Major Ajai Tomar captured the Eastern slopes of **Khalubar South**. On the night of 02 July, Colonel Lalit



The vast area cleared and secured by 1/11 GR (Top Illustration Source Air Power Journal)



The 'Orders Group' on 17 May 99, with Lieutenant Manoj Pandey, PVC sitting centre (encircled in red). Lieutenant Samiran Roy and Lieutenant R S Rawat are sitting to his right and left.

Rai met the guides of 22 Grenadiers who were to lead us to the foot hold captured by Major Ajit of 22 Grenadiers. Colonel Lalit Rai reached right below the **Khalubar** post where Major Ajit of 22 Grenadiers was precariously perched. From here he directed operations to capture the area. He faced enemy counter attacks and was injured. Despite being injured, and in true Kiranti spirit, he fought off the enemy valiantly with a handful of brave Kirantis. He was awarded the Vir Chakra for his exceptional leadership and conspicuous bravery in the face of the enemy. As he was injured in this gallant action, Colonel Lalit Rai moved down to Ganasok on 04 July 1999.

On 03 July, I moved up from Yaldor to take charge of the operations. I met Colonel Lalit Rai as he was walking towards Ganasok, along with his small party. He updated me briefly.

It was a cold and pitch dark night, with sleet, snow and intermittent rain. The terrain necessitated exploring the way forward with hands, and frequently

reconnaissance together. On 05 July, B Company (Subedar IB Limbu), C Company (Major Ajai Tomar and Lieutenant VA Joshi) and Kiranti Task Force (KTF) (Lieutenant Sateesh and Lieutenant Rawat) moved to capture the rest of **Khalubar South**, which was holding out. The enemy near **Point 4812 (Garhi Heights)** was continuing to fire on our attacking columns from 'behind' while we were attacking **Khalubar South**. Hence I, along with the KTF led by Lieutenant Sateesh launched a daring day-light attack with intense fire support from **Bunker Area** to capture **Garhi Heights**. An enemy firing position was wedged between two huge parallel boulders and became the most difficult nut to crack. I re-located the Automatic Grenade Launcher (AGL) to engage this position accurately, and one AGL grenade hit the gap, instantly destroying the enemy. After capturing this position, we removed the bodies of the enemy in the bunker and I took a picture that well illustrates how one AGL grenade had blown the insides of the 'Sangar' to smithereens.

The next post was **Khalubar Top**. We carefully sited two fire base positions to shoot into the observed enemy firing positions (Medium Machine Gun (MMG), AGL, Rocket Launcher (RL) and sniper). The effectiveness of these fire teams in eliminating the enemy by pin-point firing by day and effective covering fire even by night is a lesson for our infantry operations. That night I directed artillery fire of three guns, accurately to the **Khalubar Top** area even though our own positions were hardly a hundred metres short of the Khalubar enemy location. The enemy too adjusted his artillery fire on our locations and continued incessant artillery fire throughout the night.

finding 'no-go' routes and consequent re-routing. We split into innumerable small parties. Maintaining cohesiveness was a serious challenge. As I reached near Khalubar 'South', I found my own party was quite staggered. I always carried the 7.62mm Self Loading Rifle as my personal weapon; not only because we had grown up with it but because it could fire the tracer round (which the 5.56mm INSAS did not have till then). I used to fire the tracer skywards to rally my troops who could see the tracer. This worked very well.

I met Major Ajai Tomar, Charlie Company Commander near the top of **Khalubar South**. C Company had already captured most of **Khalubar South** in fierce combat. He oriented me to the situation and we carried out some



Point 5287 as seen from Khalubar North

The attack was launched at 0300 hours on 07 July from the area of **Khalubar South**. We were using short hooks from the very steep Western slope of the Khalubar feature to creep into the enemy positions, while engaging the enemy accurately with mortar fire. The enemy was well entrenched in numerous *sangars* and even right up to the prominent boulder atop **Khalubar Top** (in Gorkhali we called it '*Chucho Dhunga*' or Pointed Boulder). It was during this attack that I realised the extreme disadvantage of a 'defender' in such rugged terrain; he was completely 'blind', firing intense volleys of fire 'in the air' so to say. He just could not detect us while we, the moving attacker had the clear advantage: we could see each bunker, move in close without being observed, while the enemy fired blindly. Just before first light, I heard a voice calling me '*Sir, here!*' It was Major Ajai Tomar along with Lieutenant Sateesh; both had reached **Khalubar Top** and were beckoning to me to share the victorious moment.

By early morning most of the enemy were killed but some had escaped and established themselves at **Khalubar**

North, which was just a few hundred metres to the North. In the morning we carried out a quick re-organisation: we found numerous dead bodies of the enemy, besides a crucial '*Ration Register*' that accounted for distribution of rations to five subordinate posts and which gave an indication of the 140 man strength that **Khalubar** catered for. We also found various identity cards, pay books, photo albums, gas masks, few British origin Bullet Proof Jackets besides a cooking place under a boulder. We wanted to take a historic '*Victory Photo*', but we did not have the National Flag. I had a pocket notebook with the sticker of the Tri-colour, and we used this notebook for a picture at Khalubar: as I title it '**Small but Proud – The Tri-colour atop Khalubar**'.

Khalubar North which continued to snipe at us at **Khalubar Top** was the next objective, but the approach was along a very narrow spine. Many Gorkhas were affected by the gunpowder contaminated water and had high fever, vomiting, loose motions and severe headaches. We could cull out

about a platoon worth plus the KTF and my own party (now down to about five men) for **Khalubar North**. We had sited two MMGs and an AGL very craftily and could engage almost every possible cover at **Khalubar North**; the enemy had no place to hide and we attacked (crept boulder to boulder by copy-book fire and movement) and **Khalubar North** was also with us by about 1100 hours on 07 July.

The enemy withdrew to **Point 5287** leaving behind over 12 dead. We again found thousands of fired cases of 12.7mm and 7.62mm machine guns here, besides another ration register, one 'pup-tent' and a few UK make khaki bullet proof jackets. More dead were discovered as we looked behind and under the boulders. Most of the casualties were due to bullet wounds and fine shrapnel (possibly AGL), but at **Khalubar Top** the maximum casualties were due to artillery fire.

I could see frantic activity at **Point 5287** and also across the valley (across Gragio Nala and Muntho Dhalo) along the **Point 5300** skyline. We had to



The route leading to Point 5287

capture **Point 5287**, else the enemy would re-group and threaten us on our sustenance routes. It was also the only feature from which a path led towards Muntho Dhalo Bowl, as there seemed no viable route down from Khalubar. And, it was furthering our goal of clearing the enemy intrusions. The Brigade HQ was always in touch, giving clear directions for operations, it was always *'up front'* and fully resolved our logistics or fire support needs.

There was no direct route to climb **Point 5287** from **Khalubar North** and it was flanked by steep rock faces to its East and West. An Air Defence Machine Gun (ADMG) fired intermittently from **Point 5287** and its fire was very accurate and effective. It was also engaging us with a light mortar, two machine guns and other small arms. We planned to establish an AGL + MMG fire base at a point as close as possible to **Point 5287**. B Company (about 20 men worth) under Subedar IB

enemy thought that the MMG and AGL were only firing at him, and no attack was building up.

As seen from **'Khalubar North'**, there seemed to be no way to climb **Point 5287**. But as we got closer, and into the boulders, we did find ways, albeit for ones and twos. That dispersed us into small parties. We would find a route for some distance, but a dead-end would find us retracting, only to look for another passage. We were crawling up in complete disarray like directionless ants. Subedar IB found a route from the North Eastern side and in about the same time, Lieutenant Sateesh found a route from the opposite left flank. Subedar IB Limbu's party yelled the blood curdling war cry *'Jai Mahakali - Aayo Gorkhali'*. He had completely surprised the corner bunker of the post. The KTF to the left flank also joined in the war cry. The war cry was broadcast on my 'radio' and all outstations joined in, even the Brigade Major (Major Inderbalan) joined in! In the sudden onslaught, and the flashing of the deadly *Khukris* the enemy was fleeing as fast as possible. We were all over the enemy post, and enemy troops trying to run away were killed instantly. At about last light, **I fired the success signal - Red over White over Green Verrey light flares - the Tricolour in the sky looked beautiful - victory in the sky!**

Subedar IB had found a Pakistan Army, Frontier Force (FF) officer, a Major, who had been killed in the attack. We got his Identity Card, photo album, pips (badges of rank), name plate and most importantly the 'dated' diary written in English. Subedar IB said *"Sabib, Diary bhetaio"*

Limbu moved to *'find a way'* from the direct or Eastern direction. The KTF (about 15 men worth) under Lieutenant Sateesh along with Lieutenant R S Rawat was to reconnoitre from the Western direction.

I moved with my party of 10 men along the 'B' Company route. We had no artillery covering fire, and we were out of mortar range. The fire base at **Khalubar North** proved to be a battle winning factor. It covered our movement and knocked out any exposed enemy. When we got close, we were vertically below the cliffs on which the enemy was perched. The enemy did not spot us vertically below him as he was dutifully engaging the fire base, with 12.7 ADMG and other automatics. No artillery or medium mortar fire was directed at us. In hind sight, it appears that the



Left Photo. Victorious Kirantis atop Point 5287. Right Photo. The LC Ridgeline to the West.

(sir, I found a diary), next he said “*Sabib, Tarik lekhe chha, angrezi ma chha*” (Sir, it is dated and is written in English). An interesting diary entry of 27 May was: “*Today we shot down an Indian MiG. CO and I went to look at the wreckage.....*” (This diary was deposited with 70 Infantry Brigade).

It was providential that, on 27th May while we were far away, at Bharkar Top, we saw a Stinger being fired from this very post (Point 5287), which brought down the MiG of Squadron Leader Ajay Ahuja. That day, my soldiers had told me, “Sabib, tyo post capture garnu parchha” (we must capture that post). And as things unfolded, here we were! It was indeed a moment of victory.

As we rummaged through the post, we found a large number of gas masks, 60mm mortar, thousands of rounds of ADMG, identity cards of the dead soldiers, etc. Suddenly I heard a ‘eureka’ type of shriek. I found two soldiers looking at a long tube, very curiously!!! **It was a Live Stinger missile!!!** Next morning we also found a fired Stinger in the fired

ammunition garbage area of the post.

On 08 July, we moved towards the LC into the ‘Muntho Dhalo’ bowl, all routes across the LC would have to pass through **Muntho Dhalo**. As we descended the North Western slopes of **Point 5287** the enemy engaged us with artillery fire, which was ineffective. We decided to cross at night the Gragrio Nala, a large open patch completely visible to the enemy. **Muntho Dhalo** was completely dominated by **Point 5190**. My reconnaissance that night (08 July) proved that the lower slopes of **Point 5190** were not held. I left a small patrol about two hours above the base (to maintain vigil over our intended approach to **Point 5190 Top**) and returned to get the assaulting echelon together.

I had about 20 men of ‘B’ Company led by Subedar IB Limbu with me, 12 warriors of the KTF and my own party of four men. With a green signal from the surveillance patrol that I had placed

the previous night, we started up towards **Point 5190** on 09 July evening. There was some intermittent small arms fire, but we could not really figure out where it was emanating from. The terrain was much less rugged compared to Khalubar Ridge and we moved cohesively as three parallel groups. We reached the Top just short of first light on 10 July 1999. It was snowing and **Point 5190** had been vacated. There were tell-tale traces like empty cashew and almond packets (imported with Arabic markings), there was a Pakistani cigarette packet with few cigarettes still in it. There were some hastily constructed ‘*sangars*’.

The enemy on **Point 5300** started engaging us but we were well out of any effective small arms range. Artillery fire possibly controlled from **Point 5300** continued intermittently. Reconnaissance of **Point 5190** revealed that it could be a good ‘surprise’ approach for the capture of



Our Snipers led by Subedar CB Limbu sniped us to Victory

Point 5300, vis-à-vis the possible approach along the Muntho Dhalo Bowl. Only the initial descent from the North Western slope would require descent by ropes. A Company under Major JJS Rautela reached the base of **Point 5190** and were launched for the attack on **Point 5300** at last light on 11 July 99. However as the company was reaching the intended release point, A Company was recalled since 'ceasefire' had been declared from 0001 hours on 12 July.

On 22 July, we learnt that a part of the **Point 5300 - Ring Contour** ridge or the LC Ridge Line had not been vacated by the Pakistanis. 1/11 GR was tasked to capture **Point 5300** and **Tekri**. D Company under Major RP Singh was tasked for **Point 5300**, and Alfa Company under Major LC Katoch along with the KTF was to be applied on **Tekri**. **Tekri** was critical to the enemy since it was on the enemy movement route. I immediately carried out a reconnaissance from the North Western slopes of **Point 5190**. In

attack took very long due to the extremely difficult terrain, but was a complete success. During the reconnaissance for **Tekri**, we chalked out a possible route up to '**Conical**' which was to the South of **Tekri**. From **Conical**, we would hit **Tekri** along the 'Spine', rather than frontally. We set off at about 1700 hours on 25 July.

Artillery Ranging by Night! I got accurate artillery fire on **Tekri** from a 'single gun' since **Tekri** was wedged between **Point 5300** and **Conical**, and both had been captured by own troops. At about 2300 hours, the single gun firing on **Tekri** developed a snag. Against all advice and odds, I ranged Gun Number 3 at **Tekri** at night while moving and also very close to **Tekri**, and we were able to resume artillery fire on **Tekri**. Full credit needs to be given to the Forward Observation Officer and Gun Position Officer. We reached **Ring Contour/Conical** or '**Para Post**' which had been captured by 5 PARA. It was an extremely difficult post to capture and the paratroopers deserve highest appreciation for the gallant feat. I took the KTF along the narrow sharp neck from Para post while A Company under Major LC Katoch was to take a short hook from the East. A fire support base was established at a small outcrop jutting up from the Para Post. Simultaneously fire was brought down from the fire support base at **Point 5190**.

We reached **Tekri** by about 0100 hours on 26th July. The enemy seemed to be armed only with rifles, no automatic fire came from **Tekri**. We kept firing and moving forward from cover to cover and by 0200 hours we crossed the entire post and reached the steep cliffs at the edge. By about 0300 hours on 26th July 1999 we hoisted the Tricolour atop

the last two weeks the enemy had just strewn mines all over. There were minelets delivered by artillery cargo munitions too. We practiced how to step from boulder to boulder and thus avoid mine casualties.

For **Point 5300**, the cat was clearly out of the bag. Anticipating our attack, the enemy had mined the 'nala' approach, which we had taken on 11 July. I decided that D Company should follow the un-expected approach via **Point 5190**. It involved climbing up first, then descending down a cliff on fixed ropes and thus reaching without being observed and completely avoiding the mined route. 3 VIKAS troops fixed the ropes to facilitate our climb and descent. D Company under Major RP Singh achieved surprise and avoided the trap laid by the enemy; the

Tekri. In the morning we found three enemy dead bodies. Also several Pakistani soldiers had descended from the West of **Tekri**, and were wildly running Westwards. We took pot shots at them and saw the disarray the enemy was in, as if they were running from a sudden bomb blast or fire in a 'mela; their state of total disarray was evident.

Notwithstanding combat situations in counter insurgency type of operations, this was the first experience of full scale combat that I had. **Wars have been and will continue to be fought by hardy, rugged, tough, indefatigable and intuitive soldiers;** it is always a 'war of small things' that is of food, water, casualty evacuation/medical and then combat support. **You can win only if you last: Be hardy, train hard and fight craftily.**

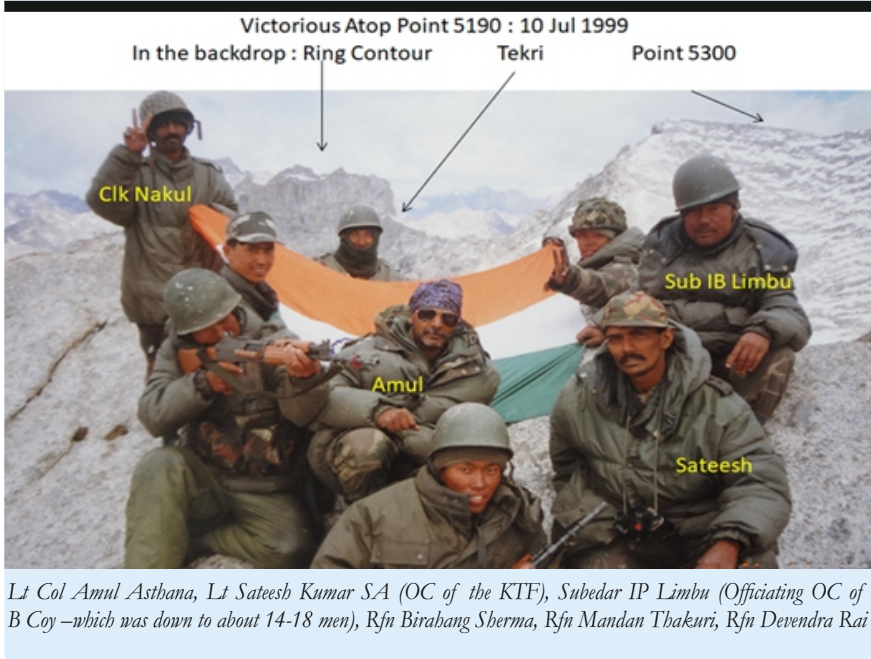


Brigadier Amul Asthana

Brigadier Amul Asthana (Retd) was commissioned into 1/11 GR in 1981 and was the Officiating Commanding Officer and Second in Command of this "Bravest of the Brave" unit in Operation Vijay in 1999. The Battalions' saga of operations spanned a huge area, with numerous challenging ridge lines. Besides his service with the unit, he has been an Instructor at Infantry School, Mhow and served with WARDEC, the Wargaming Centre of ARTRAC. He commanded the 11 GR Regimental Centre in Lucknow and retired in 2015 after 34 years in what he calls 'the most exciting career in the world'. Currently he is working as "Vice President Projects" with Zen Technologies Limited and doing development projects in military training systems, simulators and war gaming.



This Pic is of 12 Jul 1999. A Coy under Maj JJS Rautela (Jaggi) was launched by me from base of Pt 5190 for capture of Pt 5300 on 11 Jul. However, after 2359 hrs, 'cease fire' was declared and I was asked to recall A Coy. The Coy was already at a position of advantage, at the 'FUP'. Jaggi heard me out, that the attack is called off since ceasefire is in place. He answered 'Sir, Nothing Heard!!' He did not want to abandon such an opportunity. He said "sir, later this cease fire will be called off, and we will only have to re-capture our territory ourselves. And when we come next time, they would have laid mines along this route!!" Prophetic words indeed – 1/11 GR (This time D Coy under Maj RP Singh) was launched to capture Pt 5300 on 22 Jul 1999. Anyway, Jaggi came back by morning of 12 July, and we had a proper meal after 10 days (starting 02 July from Yaldor). I think the hearty meal and joy of victory is reflected in this picture taken at the base of Pt 5190 facing towards Muntbo Dbalo



Lt Col Amul Asthana, Lt Sateesh Kumar SA (OC of the KTF), Subedar IP Limbu (Officiating OC of B Coy –which was down to about 14-18 men), Rfn Birabang Sherma, Rfn Mandan Thakuri, Rfn Devendra Rai

OPERATION HANEEF

IN CHORBATLA SECTOR

Far to the North of the media glare and limelight of the Drass Sector, the Pakistanis had intruded across the Line of Control (LC) in the Batalik and the Chorbatala Sector too, on the Ladakh Range. In the Chorbatala Sector, the terrain was far more vicious, with the intrusions at heights of around 18000 feet plus (the Drass intrusions were at heights of 15000 to 16500 feet or so), and glaciers also added in to the operational difficulties. Since the terrain was far tougher, the Pakistani ingress too was much smaller. A battalion commander narrates.

My unit, 11 Rajputana Rifles (RAJ RIF) completed our OPERATION MEGHDOOT deployment in the Siachen glacier area on 30 June 99, and we were promptly moved to Turtuk-Tyakshi along the Shyok River on 15 July 99, to clear the Pakistani intruders in the Chorbatala area. This account narrates the heroic actions of my battalion.

Sub Sector South, Now Called Sub Sector Haneef

Chorbatala, on the Ladakh Range is on the LC and was considered the traditional boundary between Baltistan and Ladakh. The Chorbatal Lungpa flows North from the pass and meets the Shyok River near Chorbatal village, presently called Siksa in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). The LC runs to the Northeast from the pass along the watershed East of Mian Lungpa - Kuru Bar with spurs and glaciers running down away from the LC towards both sides. The heights are prone to rock falls owing to ice formations beneath the surface. These heights on the Ladakh Range to the South of the Shyok River were lightly held and termed as Sub Sector South, now named as Sub Sector Haneef.

South of Sikdo Lungpa and East of Kuru Bar - Mian Lungpa, the LC runs mostly along this watershed all the way to Chorbatal La at an average height of 5500-5800 metres. The



Ice Craft Training at Siachen Base Camp - Climbing an ice wall with ice axe and wearing crampons

terrain was extremely rugged with vertical rock faces and razor-sharp ridges covered with snow from November to June. The glaciers feed the Shyok River that enters POK near Tyakshi.

The Initial Clashes

In May 99, two LC patrol clashes were reported in general area Tyakshi. Strong patrols were sent into Sub Sector South to identify the enemy presence and to occupy positions on the LC/opposite enemy locations, and to firm in for subsequent operations. Major S P Vishwasrao, SM, Major Ranjeet Singh and Late Captain Haneef Uddin, VrC led the patrols of 11 RAJ RIF to identify enemy locations at **Point 5590**, the **Saddle** between Point 6041 and 5590 and in **Point 5930**. Between 08 May and 20 June 99, these patrols established six forward posts and two staging posts to support the operations in the area.

These patrols also apprehended local Anti-National Elements (ANEs) of Turtuk village who revealed huge caches of arms and ammunition which were then recovered from Zing, Area Three Huts and Area Nullah. These recoveries also confirmed the Pakistani infiltration in the general area of **Saddle** between **Point 6041** and **Point 5590**.

On 06 June 99, Late Captain Haneef Uddin, VrC was moving towards **Point 5590**, when his patrol was ambushed by the enemy already present there. As the enemy automatic fire hit the patrol, Haneef Uddin and two other members were wounded in the initial bursts. Despite being mortally wounded, Haneef Uddin continually fired back at the enemy, and enabled his troops to pull back out of the ambush. Late Captain Haneef Uddin, VrC, Late Naib Subedar Mangej Singh, VrC and Late Rifleman Parvesh of the unit's Ghatak Platoon made the supreme sacrifice fighting the enemy during this operation.

Subsequently, 11 RAJ RIF was tasked to attack and capture **Point 5590** and the **Saddle**. This operation was code named **OPERATION HANEEF** to avenge the deaths of the fallen heroes.

The Enemy

The enemy positions ie, **Point 5590** and **Saddle** were on the ridge line along the LC. The spurs of **Point 6041** extending on both sides of the LC were extremely hazardous and could not be negotiated due to vertical rock faces, sharp ridge lines and limited deployment space. The main feature of **Point 5590** itself had a 200 metres vertical wall on all sides and stood out like a cone. A steep ridge emanating from **Point 6041** in the Northeast direction meets the **Saddle**. A ridge from **Point 5590** descends into own territory down to **Point 5260**. This ridge being low (though equally rock fall prone) and gradual provided the

only gradually ascending climb to **Point 5590** thus, leaving the battalion with only one approach to the objective. Haneef Uddin's patrol had also moved up along this ridge.

A platoon of the enemy was deployed on **Saddle** and **Point 5590**. A section at **Point 5590** had three sangars, an OP position and a General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG). This enemy section dominated Karchan Glacier and the area upto two kilometres on own side. Two sections were located at the **Saddle**, a 200 metres stretch of rock a couple of metres wide 50 to 75 metres above the Glacier on both sides. One HMG, four GPMGs, one AA missile detachment, a 60mm mortar, two RPGs and one 75mm RCL were at this position besides the individual small arms. The *sangars* were carefully concealed and sited to avoid detection. The weapons were sited so as to cover the entire Karchan Glacier and heights on own side. The **Saddle** was in mutual support with **Point 5590** which in turn, was in mutual support with another enemy

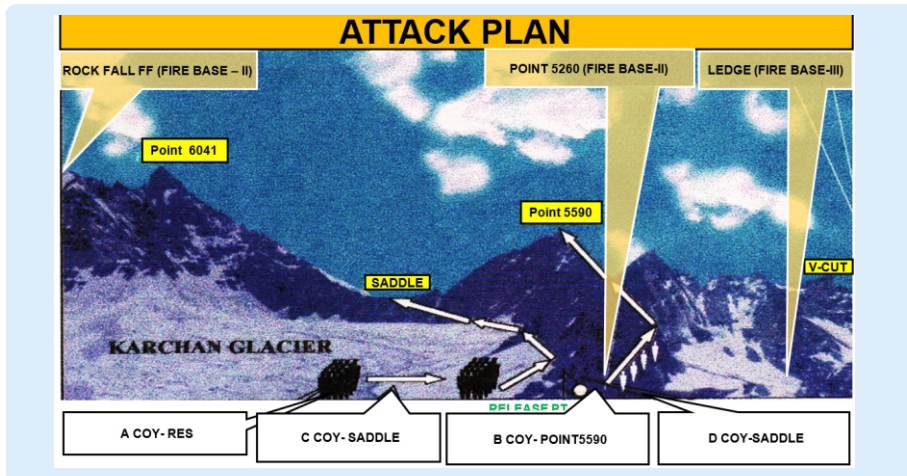
post called **V-Cut**. A platoon minus a section was at **V-Cut** a kilometre away in the Northeast direction from **Point 5720** on the ridge line. The enemy gun positions were at Chuar and Siari. The infantry mortars were deployed in the Mian Lungpa - Kuru Bar.

Our Plan Takes Shape

The unit formed Task Forces (TF) under officers and Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) who could operate independently. Eight such TFs were formed; two out of each Rifle company, one led by an officer and the other by a JCO. Three fire bases were sited with 81mm Mortars and integral weapons. In addition, 155mm Bofors Guns, 120 mm Mortars and 105mm Field Guns were also allotted to the unit.

Preparations. The TFs were to execute this operation at an altitude of over 18,000 feet. The troops rehearsed on cliff assault techniques, direct fire support from fire bases, bunker bursting and on beating back counter





attacks. Aggressive spirit and a determination to close-in with the enemy and fight at close quarters were visible amongst the soldiers as they prepared for the attack. Registration of targets, test firing of all weapons, night firing and such preparatory tasks were completed, simultaneously spares and accessories were stocked at the fire positions.

The most important task was build-up of logistics to include ammunition, rations and other stores at various posts / fire bases to support the attack. The degree of difficulty of this task was multiplied further due to 16 kms of movement on foot from the road head to the forward posts in high altitude. It took us 15 days to stock up.

The enemy positions were pounded with heavy artillery and infantry mortars fire for a week prior to the attack to achieve a psychological edge. The attack was planned to be carried out as highlighted in the picture above.

The Attack

Night 02/03 August 99. TF-I was launched at 2045 hours on 02 August 99 from the release point. The TF moved along the ridge joining **Point 5590** to **Point 5260** under

the cover of our supporting fire. On reaching the base of **Point 5590** at 0015 hours on 03 August 99, they commenced fixing ropes and negotiating their way upwards. The party encountered difficulties due to the steep rock faces. TF-2 was launched at 2300 hours and TF-3 at 0100 hours on 03 August 99. At 0200 hours on 03 August 99, TF-1 had reached 40 metres short of **Point 5590** but encountered a steep rock face. The rock face was reconnoitred but the TF could not make any headway. As there was no cover existing in the area and daylight was fast approaching, the TFs were ordered to return back to the release point.

Night 03/04 August 99. The operation recommenced on 03 August 99. The time plan was modified and time for route reconnaissance and rope fixing was increased. TF-1 was launched at 2000 hours on 03 August 99 and moved along the same route as taken the previous night. TF-2 and TF-3 were launched immediately in the wake of TF-1 at 2030 hours and 2100 hours. TF-4 and TF-5 were kept poised at the release point as reserves. The leading TF reached the base of **Point 5590** at 2300 hours and took a different route for fixing ropes. 30 metres short of **Point 5590**, the team encountered another vertical rock face. With great difficulty, the rock fixing party and the TF negotiated the rock face and gained a foot hold on **Point 5590** by 0530 hours on 04 August 99. The TF was now face to face with the enemy at a distance of 25 to 30 metres. Absolute surprise was achieved due to the unexpected approach and the effective artillery/mortar fire which muffled the noise of the climbing troops. At first light, three *sangars* including one with a GPMG were observed by TF-1 at **Point 5590**.

04 August 99. TF-2 and TF-3 were still negotiating the Cliff at 0530 hours on 04 August 99. As they had not fetched up and the movement having been day lighted, the TF commanders decided to firm in behind the boulders during the day on 04 August 99. Intermittently, the troops continued to exchange fire with the enemy at **Point 5590**. At 1745 hours that evening, the neighbouring enemy locality at **V-Cut** and **Point 5590** brought down heavy automatic fire on TF -1 firmed in near **Point 5590**. TF-2 and TF-3 were ordered to link-up with TF-1 at the earliest; and mortar (smoke and HE), AGL, MMG and KPVT fire was brought down on the enemy position despite own troops being in near vicinity. At 2000 hours, TF-2 joined up with TF-1. TF-1 then advanced closer to the enemy position covered by the supporting fire from TF-2.

Captain Anirudh Chauhan, TF-I Commander and his buddies crawled and lobbed grenades into the enemy *sangars*. Naib Subedar Abhe Singh, Sub Team Leader skirted the enemy *sangars* and encircled them. Havildar Kan Singh inched closer to the GPMG *sangar*, lobbed a grenade and charged the enemy. While doing so the NCO sustained a gun shot in the neck, nevertheless he continued firing and killed the enemy soldier before succumbing to his injuries.

Night 04/05 August 99. Enemy soldiers came out charging from the other two *sangars*, but they were killed in close combat by Captain Anirudh Chauhan and his troops. The TF thereafter, exploited further towards **Point 5720**. TF-2 moved South of **Point 5590** and secured the base of the feature. The TFs thereafter re-organised themselves to beat back any enemy counter attack.

05 August 99. At 0530 hours on 05 August 99, TF-2 and TF-3 commenced operations for capture of the **Saddle**. TF-2 fixed ropes to move down towards the **Saddle**. At 0930 hours, on reaching 50 metres short of the **Saddle**, Captain Ashish Bhalla, TF-2 Commander radioed for fire support as enemy soldiers were still holding the **Saddle**. Fire Base-2 responded immediately with AGL, MMG and 84mm RL fire and two Konkurs missiles were fired on enemy *sangars* which scored direct hits and the *sangars* were destroyed. The enemy soldiers ran out to escape. In a daring action, Captain Ashish Bhalla and CHM Jawan chased the fleeing enemy and killed one enemy soldier approximately 500 metres North of the **Saddle**. The distance between own troops and fleeing enemy being more, Captain Ashish Bhalla called for 81mm mortar and AGL fire. In a fine display of battle drills, mortar and AGL fire was brought down immediately and four fleeing enemy soldiers were killed

approximately one km away from the **Saddle**. The **Saddle** was cleared by 1830 hours on 05 August 99.

Dead bodies of seven enemy soldiers were found and a large quantity of arms, ammunition and equipment was captured during **OPERATION HANEEF** which included a Heavy Machine Gun, five GPMGs, two RPGs, a 60 mm Mortar, a 75 mm RCL gun, an INZA Anti-Aircraft Missile launcher, a sniper rifle, 24 mortar bombs, 34 hand grenades, 12 rockets and around 9000 rounds of small arms ammunition. Interestingly, four gas masks were also recovered besides communication equipment, a night vision device, weapon sights and special winter clothing.

Takeaways

In mountains, multidirectional approaches have inherent advantages in bringing to bear greater combat power on the enemy, as also keeping his reactions divided. But, terrain may at times enable application of combat power from one direction only. Immense firepower can then enable the attacking troops to close in with the enemy. Also, at the altitude of over 18000 feet, troop movement is slower and the operations will take longer. **OPERATION HANEEF** took more than 72 hours. Troops trained in Cliff Assault techniques is a must for fixing ropes and climbing up over steep rock faces. And ultimately, physical fitness, morale and aggressive spirit of the soldiers make the final difference between victory and defeat.

End Note

OPERATION HANEEF culminated with the establishment of a post at **Point 5590**, renamed as "**KANA**

TOP' (after Havildar Kan Singh who died fighting on the feature) and **Saddle**, renamed as **RAJ RIF SADDLE'**. The unit's revenge was complete after a third post was captured and established on the Western ridge of **Point 5720**. The success of the operation was due to the fine leadership, motivation, determination, tenacity and proficiency of all ranks of 11 RAJ RIF.

Captain Haneef Uddin and Naib Subedar Mangej Singh were awarded the Vir Chakra posthumously for their gallant actions and Captain Anirudh Chauhan, Havildar Kan Singh (Posthumous), Rifleman Krishan Singh were awarded Sena Medals. The unit personnel also received two Mention- in- Despatches and five Commendation Cards.



Col Anil Bhatia

Colonel Anil Bhatia (Retired) was the CO of 11 RAJ RIF in OPERATION MEGHDOOT and in OPERATION VIJAY (Kargil/Turtuk) during the year 1999. He superannuated in the year 2010 and is now leading a retired life in Noida.

THE RR BATTALION IN OPERATION VIJAY

Securing the Highway and Supporting the Assault

Rashtriya Rifles (RR) battalions are primarily configured for counter insurgency (CI) operations. But the adverse situation in the Drass – Kargil area in the summer of 1999, resulted in an RR battalion being moved to secure the roads and tracks, contain the intrusions and support the assaulting infantry units. The Commanding Officer (CO) of 28 RR recalls.

Almost to the date 25 years ago, as I pen this, I got a call from the Colonel Administration at the Division Headquarters (HQ), “*Krish, how many vehicles do you need?*” Noticing that I was clueless he said, “*Okay, let me know once your Commander speaks with you.*” Thus began our **Operation Vijay** story. Many reports and books have been published on **Operation Vijay**, quite a few publicising the stories of bravery and glorious victories. This is definitely not anywhere near those, but just a story of one who was there then.

I joined 28 Rashtriya Rifles (28 RR) in December 1998 as the Second -in- Command. In early 1999, the permanent incumbent went on leave and fell ill which left me holding the fort. I had just about got to know the unit. That was a challenge since it consisted of a mix from my parent Regiment, The Jammu and Kashmir Rifles and Regiment of Artillery with other attached troops; a set-up to which I was new.

As spring gave way to summer, a welfare measure allowed limited family members to join units in designated accommodation in Kashmir. Looking forward to spending time together, my family joined me in early May 1999. It was



alas, a short-lived joy. The call from the Colonel Administration came just a few days after my family joined me.

Rumours about something amiss in the area across the Zoji La in early May 1999 were floating. Information was so hazy that though I was instructed to re-deploy my unit from the Baramulla area to the Kargil Sector, I did not know where I was ultimately going. All that I knew was that the Zoji La pass was open for traffic, and I was to get across and report to the first formation HQ I found on the highway!

Moving from Baramulla to Kargil

RR battalions are lightly equipped allowing them to operate easily but are rarely known to relocate and redeploy in entirety. The unit had been static ever since it moved into this sector, and we had no load tables for a permanent movement. Since we had a large component of six rifle companies, our movement was planned in two phases, three companies at a time. I decided to move the three companies closer to the main road first and allow the other three deployed in the interiors a little more reaction time to wind up and come down to the road. This also allowed their posts to be taken over by skeletal elements from the neighbouring two RR battalions. The other locations were handed over to the local village headmen!

The first convoy with three companies set off and balance three were to move the next day. The next day, I marched off the balance of the battalion and sped to the airport where I dropped off my family. I then caught up with the main convoy ahead of Srinagar.

Across Zoji La

While the first convoy was a day ahead, we kept getting updates regularly. The convoy got across the freshly cleared

Zoji La safely. That's when the next surprise came in. The convoy commander reported hearing heavy firing and was not sure of what the condition ahead was like. Frantic calls all over and we realized that hereafter all movement would be at night. Realisation hit...things were really amiss here.

We learnt that either 121 or 70 Infantry Brigade HQ had been established at Drass and that is where we were headed to. Some clarity at least! The confusion was resolved once we actually got there. It was Commander of 121 Infantry Brigade with a skeletal HQ and the Deputy Commander of 70 Brigade (who was at Drass to coordinate the Winter Stocking convoy movements to Kargil).

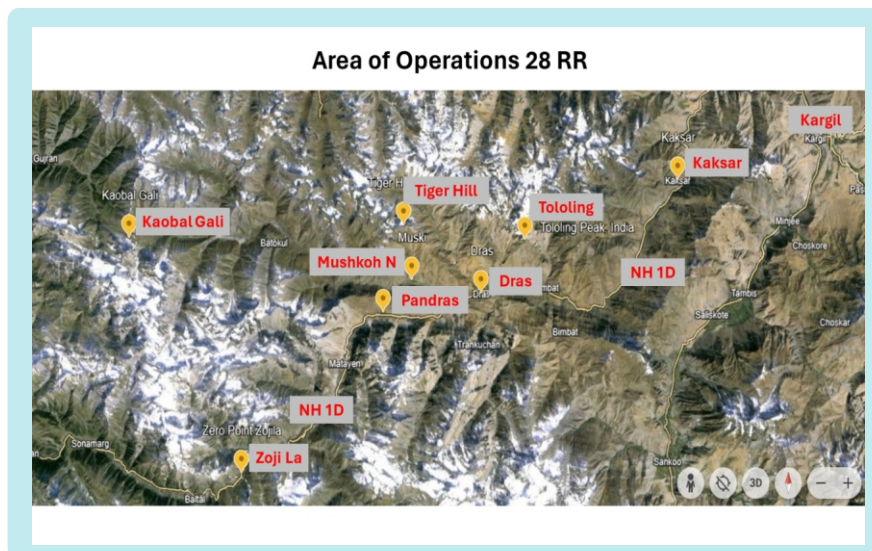
Arrival at Drass

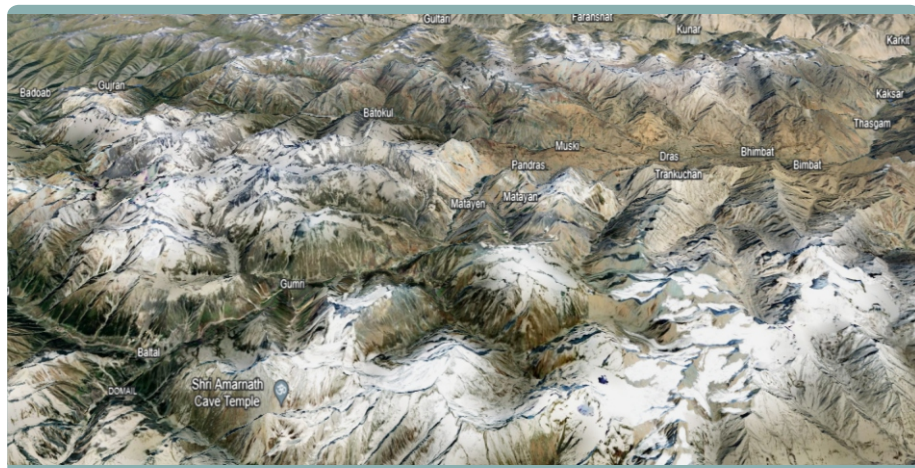
The convoy moved after last light and it took me a few hours to reach Drass amidst all the shelling. The road was, however, well defiladed, sheltered

hugging the hills for the entire stretch with no traffic in the opposite direction.

I immediately met the Commander the same night. His first question was, "Where is your CO?" I got a brief rundown of what they knew till then – very limited inputs actually. The assessment was that some infiltration had taken place by possible militants, and their locations were not known. Hence an RR battalion was sought as reinforcement, but my deployment thereafter was more conventional.

I was to deploy a company to give close protection to the National Highway to Leh (NH 1) and so a company was deployed on the Pandras Ridge overlooking the highway. A second company was to protect the Brigade HQ and another company was to cover the gap between the two infantry battalions in Kaksar. This left me with just half my battalion to cover the Mushko Nala.





Satellite imagery of the Great Himalayan Range and the areas across

Deploying the Battalion

We had no maps and the Brigade HQ had very few to spare. So, we photocopied parts and distributed them among the companies. There were no guides and we just used our judgement and map reading skills to get to our respective locations. To save time while I was busy with my briefings, I asked my Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) to take a part of the Battalion HQ convoy and head into the Mushko Nala area so that we did not present a concentrated target at first light. With limited navigation aids, the convoy missed the turning into Mushko - there were no signboards, and it was just a dark abyss as an indicator. So, they moved ahead and got into the Sando Nala instead! They realized their mistake after some time and had a miserable time reversing the vehicles on that narrow track, retrieving themselves amidst the shelling. Thankfully, they entered Mushko Nala before first light.

I was also tasked to send a platoon to secure the Zoji La pass. We just had the normal winter clothing issued in the valley,

none of the special high-altitude stuff. No acclimatization as mandated by the medical authorities, but here we were – having moved from a height of 1600 - 1800 metres at Baramulla to almost 3500 metres in the heights around Drass – all in a matter of 48 hours! Fortunately, the unit did not suffer a single cold injury casualty during our entire deployment in the Mushko – Drass Sector.

We were deployed over a vast area and I had difficulty in holding a metre map of my battalion area of responsibility in my outstretched arms! Zoji La to Kaksar was over 50 kms crow's flight distance. Communication and staying in regular contact with my dispersed companies was a challenge

and reaching them in person was even more so! All movement was by night and I had to go to Drass first before heading to any of the companies outside the Mushko Nala area. The deployment at Zoji La ended soon, the platoon came down and rejoined the rest of the company.

Reality Sinks In

With our limited information, we went about familiarizing with the terrain and also getting our administration streamlined with the mules from the Animal Transport detachments giving us tremendous support.

I had the privilege of going on a few helicopter reconnaissance sorties from Drass, to get more inputs on what was happening around. What we saw was scary – I use the analogy of Chicken Pox – returning from every flight with more and more 'red pox' marks on my map (red OHP marker) to depict where we saw presence of the Pakistani troops. After allowing us a grace period of few days, the Pakistanis got into action and started firing at our helicopters and so evasive action meant that we started flying away from the range of small arms weapons. This meant that I could no longer see the ground clearly to well enough identify Pakistani presence. That was the end of our aerial sorties.

Our first contact with the enemy and resultant casualty took place in the heights between the Kirdi Nala and Kil Nala. A patrol set out climbing the heights to ascertain the exact location of the enemy in the region. As they neared the upper reaches, the patrol was fired upon and we unfortunately suffered our first casualty. Our patrol had been observed and tracked by the enemy. Retrieving the mortal remains took another operation the next day since the area was very difficult to say the least.

Soon the Pakistanis got more emboldened and started directing artillery fire with much greater accuracy. That was when we realized that they were literally sitting on our heads with a clear view of Drass and adjoining areas. As the extent of the intrusions became clear, the operational plans were made to tackle the situation. We continued our holding operations.

One day towards end May 1999, I got a call from the Brigade HQ mentioning that a “fireworks” display was being organised and I was invited. The ‘fireworks’ was a planned armed Mi-17 assault on Tololing. The initial thrill of seeing the helicopters in action one by one turned into dismay when one of the helicopters was shot down by a missile. Yet another reality sank in – the enemy was, indeed, well prepared and well equipped.

Operational Challenges

While RR battalions were organised, trained and equipped for a CI role, we soon had to change our method of operations into a more conventional one. This brought up many operational challenges.

Composition of RR Battalions.

The very nature of our composition meant that though we were Infantry heavy, there was a sizable Artillery component in the unit with officers from all arms and services. We had mixed subunits right down to the platoon and section level with a few platoon commanders from the artillery. By nature of their training and experience, only the infantry troops had prior experience in conventional mountain warfare, which was what we were involved in. The other troops quickly adapted to the requirements of the situation.

Re-orienting Manpower (Infantry - Artillery mix). Since we redefined our role as more infantry oriented, some of the platoon commanders from the artillery faced challenges. We then ensured that the

platoon Havildars in these platoons were seasoned infantry soldiers. There were still some hilarious instances like one platoon commander who wanted to fire his 84 mm Rocket Launcher (RL) at an enemy Medium Machine Gun (MMG) position. When queried what ammunition he would use, he responded, “India Lima Lima”!!! What he meant was, ‘illumination’ rounds. He had learnt that illumination rounds had a range of 2100 metres and so thought that these could target the enemy MMG post.

Deployment. We had actually got down to conventional mountain warfare defensive deployment. This required some re-orientation of troops, but the biggest disadvantage was that we had no heavy weapons internally to support us. To give an example, just direct firing machine guns had little effect on a well-entrenched enemy. Given the high altitude, mortars with their high trajectory had little impact. RLs had limited range. Automatic Grenade Launchers (AGL) could have been of some use but RR battalions were not authorised them. We did feel the handicap.

Day to Day Operations.

Considering the overall situation, the infantry battalions did the bulk of offensive operations in the sector. I remember talking on the radio set with a coursemate, Ravi Swaminathan who was the Second-in-command of 12 MAHAR. They had a real tough time trying to evict the enemy from the area. We realized that this was going to be classical offensive warfare in high altitude. Since Mushko was to be tackled later, we focussed on holding ground and containing the intrusions in the sector.

Junior Leaders. Typical of the

state of RR units then, we had a mix of officers from all arms and services. Company commanders were from Armoured Corps, Artillery, Engineers and even Army Service Corps (ASC) besides a few from the Infantry. Notwithstanding their core competence, they proved themselves in these trying circumstances. Be it leading a platoon to the heights of Zoji La or linking up with the neighbouring formation at Kaobal Gali, these officers delivered results.

Normal Turnover of Officers and Men.

RR units had a mix of all arms and services, and personnel were regularly turned over with an average tenure of two years. Not realizing that we were involved in intense operations, the officers and men were getting posted in and posted out in a normal manner. This was very upsetting and did not stop when we were deployed in Mushko. The only time I welcomed this was when a Second-in-Command was posted into the unit and helped reduce the load on me.

Vivid Memories

Communication. Confined to using just radio sets ever since we left our bases in the valley, none of us got an opportunity to convey our well-being to our families and near ones. Much later, I learnt that my brother used to call the helplines at Army HQ to check on the daily casualties to confirm my status! Georgy Joseph, my coursemate who was at HQ 15 Corps, knew everything that was happening and kept my wife informed regularly of my wellbeing. It was sometime in July 1999 that we saw the boon of satellite communications. We got an Iridium radio set that was passed on from one company post to another with a 3-



Representational Image. Army soldiers stand guard at snow-bound Zojila Pass, situated at a height of 11,516 feet, on the way to Ladakh. (Photo: PTI)

minute call per person allowed. That was the first time we could speak directly home.

Colonel MB Ravindranath, CO 2 RAJ RIF. Ravindranath and I are course mates and were in the same Kilo Squadron in the National Defence Academy, Pune. Fresh from his exploits in capturing **Tololing** and **Point 4590** (overlooking Drass), he and his battalion got a breather. That was when I invited him over to my HQ for a meal and I remember my chat with him. Discussing the just concluded operations and how he did it, he was his humble self. He said, *“I got all the resources that I asked for; time to train the troops, information and intelligence to plan the operations, equipment and the fire support I demanded. I had no choice but to succeed!”*

Supporting 13 JAK RIF. Much like 2 RAJ RIF, 13 JAK RIF engaged in operations in the Drass and later, Mushko sectors. For their operations at **Point 4875** in the Mushko Sector, we formed a part of the firm base through which they advanced onwards. We helped in providing them manpower to take the

experience – I learnt a lot, as I resolved the multifarious problems and tasks that landed on our laps every day. And I am glad that we played a role in our **‘Vijay’** over the devious designs of the Pakistan Army.

much-needed ammunition to the heights above us and even helped bring down some of their casualties.

Epilogue

When the operations ended and the remnants of Pakistanis withdrew, the formations were reorganized to consolidate their positions. We were anticipating orders for our return to the Valley. Our movement back was delayed since they found it difficult to find troops to replace us. We were relieved by end of July 1999 and were thereafter tasked to provide security to the Amarnath Yatra, stretching from Chandanwari to Baltal.

The RR deployment in **Operation Vijay** was indeed a phenomenal

experience – I learnt a lot, as I resolved the multifarious problems and tasks that landed on our laps every day. And I am glad that we played a role in our **‘Vijay’** over the devious designs of the Pakistan Army.



Colonel S Krishnan (Retd) was commissioned in June 1980 into 1 JAK RIF. An alumnus of Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Krishnan has extensive operational, staff and instructional experience. He commanded 28 Rashtriya Rifles, and led the unit in the Drass - Mushko Sectors during Operation Vijay in the summer of 1999. After leaving the Army, he joined the corporate world and is presently working with Reliance Industries Ltd. When not working, he enjoys reading, travelling, and listening to music.



Col S Krishnan



DEFEATING PAKISTANI

DECEIT IN DRASS

In the mid-90s, the focus of 15 Corps based in Srinagar was on countering Pakistan's proxy war in the Kashmir Valley. The vast Ladakh and Kargil region across Zoji la was held lightly, and the Pakistan Army decided to expand the proxy war Eastward. Taken by surprise initially, the Indian troops reacted with guts and grit – and cleared the Pakistani intrusions from formidable high altitude positions. The Colonel General Staff (Col GS) of 8 Mountain (Mtn) Division (Div) goes back in time to that violent summer of 99.

In May 1999, the summer in Kashmir seemed to be a bit early. Historically, the campaigning season started in early June, once the thaw set in and the high passes on the Pir Panjal and Shamsabari Ranges opened, facilitating infiltration. Formations and units geared up for escalated operational (op) activity along the Line of Control (LC) and the hinterland. Unknown to anybody in the Indian Intelligence or Military hierarchy, troops of Pakistan's Northern Light Infantry had moved into Indian territory North-East of the Great Himalayan Range and established posts at multiple locations in Drass and Batalik Sectors. Limited patrolling and sporadic Winter Air Surveillance Operations (WASO) noticed nothing amiss. The first alarm about Pakistani troops in Indian territory was raised by a grazier in the Batalik area. There was dismissiveness and lack of reaction. A few days later, a patrol



George Fernandes, the RM, takes aim through a shoulder held grenade launcher (RPG) which was captured from Pakistani intruders as Lieutenant General HM Khan, the Northern Army Commander looks on during visit to Kargil 22 July, 1999. (Photo ARKO Datta via Getty Images)

was fired upon in the same area. Fortunately this was taken seriously and patrolling and air surveillance intensified and widened. The gravity of the situation became apparent later in May as two IAF fighter aircraft and a Mi-17 helicopter were downed and the pilots and crew killed/captured. An officer leading a patrol in Kaksar area was captured and tortured to death. Something very serious had happened and we had been caught off guard.

Before going further, let us rewind to February 1999 when the Annual Wargame of 15 Corps was held in Srinagar. This annual ritual is one of the few occasions when the plans for conventional operations are discussed. For most of the year, the formations are focused on Counter Insurgency (CI) operations. General Officer Commanding (GOC) 8 Mtn Div was the Redland (read Pakistan) Commander, assisted by Commander (Cdr) 70 Infantry Brigade (Inf Bde) and staff of Headquarters (HQ) 8 Mtn Div. Ironically, this was the lot which was to be

significant depth. The LC formation, 121 (Independent) Inf Bde and 70 Inf Bde, the reserve of 3 Infantry Division (Inf Div) were unable to evict any incursions despite allocation of additional troops from 15 Corps reserves. The reality was a far cry from the 15 Corps Wargame. Déjà vu?

The Army Chief returned to Delhi from Poland and things started moving with alacrity. 6 Mtn Div, the Army HQ reserve was moved to Kashmir and 8 Mtn Div, the Northern Command reserve was ordered to disengage from the CI grid and be prepared to move to Ladakh. **The Indian juggernaut was moving fast and furious.**

As the build-up continued, an interesting episode with far reaching consequences happened on 29/30 May 1999. As 6 Mtn Div was building up, 56 Mtn Bde of 8 Mtn Div was moved to Drass. On 29 May, the Raksha Mantri (RM) and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) were at HQ 15 Corps and were to visit the op area the next day. Something transpired over dinner and late in the evening, GOC 8 Mtn Div was told to stand down. It was communicated that instead, 6 Mtn Div will take over the Drass Sector. We were flabbergasted, more so as one bde of the Div was already in Drass. Well, orders were orders and we hunkered down for the night, baffled and disappointed.

Early next morning there was another twist to the tale. GOC 8 Mtn Div was directed to reach the Corps HQ in the next 30 minutes to accompany the top brass to Drass. That was well-nigh impossible as no road opening had been done and without that no road movement was possible. Luckily, a helicopter was starting up at the co-located Army Aviation Base, for a sortie towards Kupwara. The helicopter was diverted to fly to the Corps HQ first, before flying to Kupwara. The GOC reached

at the cutting edge of India's Kargil response a few months later. Redland planned to occupy various tactically significant but unheld positions with a view to interdict the Srinagar-Leh Highway and capture territory South of Siachen. Significantly, the plan included occupying **Tololing, Tiger Hill** and heights in Batalik areas. The Redland plans were treated rather casually by Blueland (15 Corps) and all intrusions were 'thrown out' in 48 hours by local actions of LC troops. There was backslapping, beer and biryani and everybody went back happy for a job well done. Nobody had any foreboding of things to come very soon.

Back to the second half of May 1999. Pakistani intrusions were confirmed over a large frontage and



Trucks of the Indian Army head to and back from the war zone, traversing some of the most hostile natural conditions in the world. (representational image, credit flickr.com)

the Corps HQ helipad just as the RM's Mi-17 was revving up to take off. With the rotors of the Cheetah helicopter still running, the GOC dashed across to the Mi-17 and just about made it before the door closed.

The dignitaries were briefed at Matayen, a small hamlet short of Drass. There was a general air of despondency as casualties were mounting and success elusive. After a very pregnant pause, the COAS called GOC 8 Mtn Div aside and in a decision that shaped the history of Kargil War, gave the briefest one sentence direction; *'Mohinder, I am entrusting the task to you'*. It had been less than 12 hours from the time we were asked to stand down. We were to start moving again and be operational hundreds of kms away across the mighty Himalayas. A division had never been moved like this. Everybody rolled up their sleeves and the Div HQ with three bdes was functional in Ladakh on 01 June 1999. The **'Forever in Operations' Division** was on the cusp of another glorious chapter. At that point in time we had very little idea of the enemy and things had not been good at all so far.

The GOC took stock, visited the troops, raised morale and carried out his appreciation based on limited intelligence. The staff organized the build-up, gathered intelligence, improved the equipment profile of the units and generally tried to restore order amongst the chaos. In the next few days, several major decisions were taken. Foremost, 2 Rajputana Rifles (RAJ RIF) was tasked to relieve 18 Grenadiers and capture **Tololing** as part of a bde attack which also included 1 NAGA and 18 Garhwal Rifles (GARH RIF) attacking features to the flanks and depth of **Tololing**.

18 Grenadiers had taken heavy casualties including the loss of their Second-in-Command (2iC). The battalion had virtually been out in the open for over a week.

The attacks were launched on night 12/13 June. Heavy fighting ensued. The Nagas and Garhwalis fought tenaciously but their attacks were not successful. 2 Raj Rif fought valiantly at **Tololing** and despite heavy casualties, captured it the next morning. This was the victory the

nation had been waiting for and was **'The Turn of the Tide'**.

All was not well elsewhere. In the Mushko Valley West of Drass, 79 Mtn Bde with 12 MAHAR and 17 JAT were not able to get toe holds on approaches to **Tiger Hill**. A tactical pause was taken in Mushko and all efforts, particularly artillery were focused on exploiting success at **Tololing**. The change of plans paid off and 18 Grenadiers, 13 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles (JAK RIF) and 18 GARH RIF captured a large number of features North and West of **Tololing**, eliminating all enemy posts in this area right up to the LC. It was in one of these battles at **Point 5140** that Captain Vikram Batra made the now famous radio transmission **'Yeh Dil Maange More'**. Victories in these battles came at a heavy price. We lost a disproportionately large number of officers; Major Acharya, Captain Vijayant Thapar and Lieutenant Kenguruse to name a few.

More Infantry, Artillery, Engineers and logistics units were



Soldiers at a staging area in the Drass area, 01 July 1999 (AFP photo).

made available from the Valley and plains of Punjab. More missiles and automatic weapons were also made available. All this helped to pull out battle weary units for rest and refit and also equip incoming units with almost double the number of support weapons like missile launchers, grenade launchers and machine guns. This preponderance of close support weaponry saved many lives in subsequent attacks. The mood and morale went up everywhere. 3 Inf Div/70 Inf Bde, fighting against very heavy odds in the Batalik Sector scored spectacular victories at Jubar, Kukarhang and nearby areas.

Here, a few sidelights will be of interest, before proceeding with the next phase of operations.

On 01 June 1999, when 8 Mtn Div assumed the new op role in Ladakh, HQ 15 Corps issued a one page Operational Instruction. In brief, we were ordered to capture **Tololing** by 07 June, **Tiger Hill** by 10 June or so and remove all intrusions by 15 June. Obviously, the mindset of the Corps Wargame was still dominating and

the Corps HQ was not fully seized of the enemy strength and difficulty of terrain. We, of course, expressed our reservations. However to its credit, the Corps HQ never pestered us and gave a free hand to GOC 8 Mtn Div.

We were inundated by the print and electronic media. In Kashmir we had gained a fair amount of experience on how some of the fraternity operate but this was an entirely different level. Many came armed with recommendations of the high and mighty in Delhi for preferential treatment including complimentary rides on Army Aviation helicopters. The media wanted to be with the young officers and men who were not discerning enough about the need for op security. The GOC 8 Mtn Div was hauled up by the COAS when

the pre H hour bombardment of **Tiger Hill** was shown live on NDTV 9pm News with the reporter announcing that **Tiger Hill** is being attacked that night. Similar poor judgement was shown by a reporter during the terrorist attack on Taj Hotel Bombay.

As mentioned earlier, the Div HQ was operating on skeletal strength and most of us were wearing many hats and handling jobs well outside our actual domains. The Col GS was assisted by 6/7 officers as against a complement of about 20 officers who handle operations, logistics and administration in a div, under normal circumstances. Surprisingly and happily, less proved to be better. Everybody was working 16 to 18 hours a day but performing par excellence. It should be of interest to military psychologists to unravel this level of motivation when formations in peace areas struggle to cope up with routine workload with much more resources.

HQ 8 Mtn Div never issued any written op or logistics instructions. Almost everything was by word of mouth and based on mutual trust. Most of us had graduated from the Defence Services Staff College and Army War College and were aware of the emphasis on written staff work. Under the circumstances, we had neither the time nor the resources to work 'by the book'. We modified, improvised and trusted each other. Things worked perhaps better as the report card of the div showed when all was done and dusted. The only thing that was done 'by the book' was the daily situation reports (SITREPS).

Being in a Div HQ, our exposure to danger was nothing compared to troops fighting up there. Nevertheless, we had our experiences of enemy artillery fire. One fine sunny morning, before the capture of



Left Photo. At the Kargil War Memorial, Drass (Photo ANI). Right Photo. Troops raise the Tricolour after victory (Photo India TV News)

Tololing, the GOC was sitting outside the under construction underground ops room. Suddenly a few artillery shells landed about 100 metres away onto the Div telephone exchange, which was still in a tent. The exchange operator was killed and the Commanding Officer (CO) Signal Regiment lost his arm. The GOC and the Col GS had a narrow escape. The same afternoon, a few shells landed near the Ops Room shelter and some men panicked and tried to run for safety. The Col GS had to grab a young Captain and take his AK-47 to force the fleeing persons back to work. The next night, a piece of shrapnel pierced through the GOC's caravan at a spot where his head would have been, had he been sitting on his bed.

It is difficult to comprehend as to how death and destruction affect a person and desensitizes humans. The Divisional Field Hospital had been setup about 300 metres away from the ops room. The Army doctors were performing heroically under the most rudimentary conditions, saving many lives. Before starting work one day,

the Col GS strolled through the rows of tents full of casualties. The duty doctor gave the parade state, an omnibus term in the Army often used wrongly. There were about 20 dead and 50 under treatment soldiers. Without any emotion, he walked back to the ops room and got working. About 14 hours later, when he retired for the night, the insensitivity of the morning hit him. He was astounded at his lack of 'feeling' towards fellow soldiers. Reasons for such behaviour are hard to fathom.

Let us get back to operations again. 56 Mtn Bde had fought major battles till the end of June, clearing all intrusions North of Drass. The battalions had performed heroically and won laurels. It was time to expand the area of operations and tackle other intrusion areas.

Concurrently 79 Mtn Bde, 192 Mtn Bde and 50 (Independent) Parachute Brigade (Para Bde) were firming up in the areas of **Tiger Hill** and Mushko Valley. That 'beautiful eyesore' **Tiger Hill**

loomed like a large pyramid. Small scale attacks on approaches to **Tiger Hill** had yielded little success. It was time to up the ante and unleash the full force of our combat power onto **Tiger Hill** and appurtenant features. Some fresh and some rested infantry battalions were brought in, artillery was re-tasked, logistics were built up and fresh plans put in place.

In brief, 192 Mtn Bde with 18 Grenadiers and 8 SIKH was to capture **Tiger Hill**, 79 Mtn Bde with 17 JAT, 13 JAK RIF, 2 NAGA and 12 MAHAR was to capture **Point 4875** (later Batra Top) and the Para Bde with 1 PARA (SF), 6 PARA and 7 PARA was to clear all territory West of **Tiger Hill / Point 4875** right up to Kaobal Gali on the Great Himalayan Range. The Div reserves were 9 PARA (SF), 21 PARA (SF) and 3/3 Gorkha Rifles (GR).

Much has been written about the capture of **Tiger Hill** and **Point 4875**. It was in these battles that three of the four Param Vir Chakras of the Kargil



Pakistani soldiers offer Zuhra prayers in Kargil sector. June 1999. (photo quora.com)

War were awarded. The battles were fierce and fought with high intensity by both the sides. The victories at **Tiger Hill** and **Point 4875** in 8 Mtn Div and **Khalubar** in 3 Inf Div broke Pakistan's will to fight and forced it to pull back from residual intrusions without a fight. Such is the strategic effect of capture of key terrain features that operations which we thought might take us to the winter or beyond, culminated with little additional efforts in the next couple of weeks.

Let me recall a few lesser known episodes rather than dwell upon conduct of ops, which has been written upon in great detail by several erudite authors, not the least amongst them the then GOC 8 Mtn Div.

The day **Tiger Hill** was 'officially' captured was not when it was actually 'fully' captured. Such things happen in the fog of war. In the excitement of success on an iconic objective, 192 Mtn Bde declared '**Fateh**'. Despite being advised to be doubly sure, the Cdr reasserted his success. The Div HQ had also been

monitoring the attacks and we were a little sceptical. Despite our doubts, the news of victory was conveyed right up the chain of command to the COAS and the RM. News broke on national media and there was jubilation. Later in the day, it was discovered that portions of **Tiger Hill** were still in enemy hands. We were stupefied but put up a brave front to the Corps, Command and Army HQ. An analysis of the situation convinced us that capture of remainder pockets was just a matter of another few days and there was no need for retraction of capture to cause national embarrassment.

It is to the credit of 8 SIKH that with an understrength company West of **Tiger Hill**, they beat back repeated fierce counter attacks by Pakistani commandoes. Credit must also go to the Cdr 192 Mtn Bde who held his nerves very well and the GOC 8 Mtn Div who showed full confidence in his command. The whole situation was handled brilliantly and without us having to eat our words. Eventually the entire complex fell 2/3 days after the first '**Fateh**'. Pakistan's highest gallantry award, the Nishan-e-Haider was awarded posthumously to a commando (SSG) officer Captain Karnal Sher for his efforts to retake **Tiger Hill**. On our side, Grenadier Yogendra Yadav was awarded the PVC. A very rare occasion that two opponents bestow their highest honours for the same battle. It would be unfair to not to commend the valour of Pakistani troops; they fought well but with heavy odds against them, they had little chance.

79 Mtn Bde captured **Point 4875**, less imposing but tactically more important than **Tiger Hill**. It was from here that the enemy had continuously harassed us with observed artillery fire on the Leh National

Highway. The attacks on **Point 4875** were the ones where Captain Vikram Batra and Rifleman Sanjay Kumar won their PVCs. The capture of **Point 4875** by 13 JAK RIF and 17 JAT, and subsequent victories by 2 NAGA totally unhinged the enemy defences in the area, leading to their withdrawal back to the LC in the next week or so.

50 (I) Para Bde faced almost no enemy opposition but had to negotiate treacherous terrain to secure areas up to the LC. This bde was literally 'out on a limb' but performed admirably with minimal logistics. The bde was maintained on a hastily prepared mule track more than 20 km long. It is a tribute to the culture of the Paras that they operated without demur in the most difficult area of the Kargil war, an area where even the enemy could not penetrate, as we discovered at the end. No doubt the Paras are the elite of the Indian Army.

At the end of it all when the guns fell silent, there was an eerie feeling of emptiness and fatigue. I don't recall any of us celebrating, but there was a feeling of relief. Sure there was satisfaction for a job well done but the realities of colleagues lost in battles and families bereaved, tempered our thoughts. A soldier after a battle seldom feels the same elation as a citizen in front of a TV. The soldier feels the losses of war and 'bears his cross' silently.

At the peak of ops nobody had the time to think much or experience emotions. Almost everybody worked mechanically round the clock. In hindsight, it was just as well that we got no breather on termination of ops. Winter was not far and the Div had to occupy defences along the LC over a frontage of more than 100 kms from the Great Himalayan Range to the Ladakh Range just South of the Siachen Glacier. The gigantic task was accomplished in less than three months in

most places of deployment. An area that was held earlier by one inf bde was now manned by a full Mtn Div.

A lot of additional troops especially Engineers were brought in for habitat and track construction. Battalions overdue to move to peace areas had to leave before the winter and their relieving units had to acclimatize and occupy defences in super high altitude. We continued with our 12-14 hour workdays till the last defence works were completed and winter stocking for six months done.

Whereas there is no doubt that the singular and most significant contribution to winning the Kargil War was the performance of the Infantry, the impact of artillery fire power on successes achieved was phenomenal. An idea of the amount of ammunition fired by the Artillery can be had from the fact that by the end of the War, the war reserves of Bofors ammunition of the

Army, meant for 30 days war on Northern and Western borders, had been exhausted. The unsung soldiers particularly from Engineers, Signals, Medical and Logistics Corps of the Army deserve great credit for their super human efforts. Never before had such large scale high altitude operations been conducted in the history of warfare.

*Very soon, on 25 July 2024, many of us the surviving veterans of that War waged a quarter of a century ago will assemble at Drass to gaze at those unforgiving heights where the blood of hundreds of colleagues was spilled. We will remember their sacrifices and hug our colleagues, then in the prime of youth and now grey but proud. When we depart from the shadows of **Tololing, Tiger Hill, Batra Top** and other heights to resume our lives back home, we will remember those fateful days with a prayer that let there not be another 'Kargil'.*



Lieutenant General A S Chabbewal, PVSM, AVSM, YSM (Retd) was commissioned into the Armoured Corps in 1974. An alumnus of Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, he was the Col GS at HQ 8 Mtn Div during Operation Vijay. He commanded a mountain division in Jammu & Kashmir, and the Ambala-based Kharga Corps in 2011. Prior to his superannuation in 2014, he was the Master General Ordnance at Army HQ, New Delhi.



Lt Gen A S Chabbewal

ARMY - AIR INTEGRATED OPERATIONS DURING KARGIL

Kargil War commenced in May 1999 and lasted till July 1999. On 26 July 1999, the last of the Pakistani Northern Light Infantry (NLI) intruders were evicted from the Indian side of the Line of Control (LC). This war, fought jointly by the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force (IAF), had a successful outcome despite restraints laid down by the Government and some of the controversies surrounding the conflict. Our Editor (Air) had a chat with Air Marshal Narayan Menon (ret'd), the Air Officer Commanding Jammu and Kashmir (AOC J&K) during the conflict. The questions and responses pertain to events that occurred two and a half decades back.

Headquarters (HQ) AOC J&K is co-located with HQ Northern Command of the Indian Army, at Udhampur. Could you please elaborate on the role and responsibilities of the AOC J&K? How is this different from the AOC Advance HQ, co-located with various Command HQ of the Indian Army?

Co-located within each Army Command HQ, there is an IAF element called Advance HQ representing the AOC-in-C of the jurisdictional IAF Command. The AOC Advance HQ works in close liaison with the Army HQ operational staff and is tasked to provide immediate advice on all aspects of employment of air power and other issues relating to the Air Force. HQ AOC J&K was structured differently with its own HQ at the Udhampur airfield. AOC J&K reports directly to Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C) Western Air



*Indian Air Force Mi-17 helicopter in Kargil in 1999
(photo courtesy Indian Air Force)*

Command (WAC), provides advice to the Northern Army Commander on employment of air power, coordinates air logistics support to all Indian Army units located in the theatre with HQ WAC, and exercises operational control over the IAF Stations at Srinagar, Awantipur, Leh, Thoise, Jammu and Udhampur. He is the “Initiating Officer” for the Commanders of these bases and raises their Appraisal Reports. I took over as AOC J&K on 01 June 1998 and continued in that post till 31 January 2000.

The infiltration by the Pakistani Army into Indian territory came to light on 03 May 1999, when some shepherds reported their presence. When did you come to know of the situation? Could you give a broad picture of actions that were initiated by the IAF and your HQ on learning of the infiltration?

The IAF learnt of the intrusion on 8th May. The Chief of Staff (COS), HQ Northern Command called me over as he had some important issue to discuss regarding employment of helicopters. I took along Wing Commander Parmar, commanding the Mi-17 helicopter squadron based at Udhampur. He had flown fighters earlier, and had converted to helicopters on medical advice.

At the HQ Northern Command operations room, we were briefed about ‘some’ of the winter vacated Army posts on our side of the LC having been taken over by Pakistani intruders. At that time, the Army was not sure how many posts were with the infiltrators. These intruders, positioned at higher heights, were looking down and interfering with the vital Srinagar- Leh road and interdicting the supply lines which had opened up after a long winter. There was a need to airlift troops, ammunition and other essential

supplies to augment the forces at Kargil. We were also informed that the army had lost two Long Range Patrols in the previous few days. The COS also requested for Mi-25/35 gunships to attack the posts held by the intruders.

I immediately agreed to provide required numbers of Mi-17s for moving acclimatised troops and equipment to the Kargil area. I was not sure whether the decision to provide armed Mi-25/35 gunships for the stated tasks lay within my authority. Mi-25/35 are intended for a range of missions such as destruction of armoured vehicles, armed support of land forces, casualty evacuation as well as transportation of supplies and equipment. However, the gunships with IAF had never crossed the Zojila Pass which is at an elevation of 3530 metres, due to weight/altitude restrictions.

Zojila Pass connects the Kashmir Valley to its West with the Drass and Suru valleys to its Northeast and the Indus valley further East. The road from Srinagar to Kargil runs over Zojila. As the intruded posts were to the East, it

would involve crossing the Pass. It was not possible for the Mi-25/35 to be employed for what the Army had in mind. This was conveyed to the COS. Moreover, there was also a written agreement between the Governments of India and Pakistan that no armed aircraft would fly less than ten km on either side of the LC.

I transmitted all this information to HQ WAC and requested for instructions. A request from the Army on 11th May for armed Mi-17s for carrying out the attacks was also passed on to HQ WAC. All other requirements of the Army for air support for various tasks were being carried out at the highest priority.

HQ Northern Command made insistent requests / “demands” to your HQ for pressing attack helicopters (Mi-25/35) and Armed Helicopters (Mi-17s) into service for carrying out aerial attacks on the intruders and forcibly evicting them.



Air Vice Marshal Narayan Menon receiving Prime Minister A B Vajpayee at Udhampur Air Force Station



AVM Narayan Menon receiving Shri George Fernandes, Raksha Mantri at Udhampur

and joint operations with the Indian Army, what actions were taken by your HQ towards resolution of the situation?

The IAF had to consider that offensive action could generate retaliation by the Pakistan Air Force and escalation of hostilities. So WAC was activated by adopting precautionary measures and all actions to fight a war were taken. Additional aircraft and air defence units were moved to Srinagar and Awantipur. I moved to Srinagar with my core team. We liaised with the Corps HQ at Srinagar. Later their officers would come to the IAF Station to carry out joint planning. During the war there

was excellent joint planning at the fighting level.

What reservations did the IAF have in employing helicopters in the initial stages of the operations?

As mentioned earlier, Mi-25/35s could not have gone beyond Zojila. Employing Mi-17s for attacks required Government approval which the Army was reluctant to obtain, as the extent of its own failure would have to be accepted. There were no ‘reservations’ in employing helicopters for other support functions.

As per initial statements, the Army was confident that the infiltrators would be “defeated locally” and that “the infiltration would be vacated in 48 hours”. When and how was the full extent of intrusion established?

Initially Army’s confidence was based on insufficient information. Even the then Raksha Mantri said we will throw them out quickly. But as the spread and depth of infiltration was slowly revealed, the timeline for expelling the intruders also had to be shifted. The Kargil Review Committee had also dealt at length at the colossal failure of intelligence attributable to all the agencies involved.

As the senior most officer of the IAF located in J&K with the responsibility of carrying out joint planning

What were the major deficiencies in resources that you faced? Were these made up in time to be effective for the operations?

A few months before Kargil happened, Exercise Trishul, involving all units of WAC, was conducted. The objective of Exercise Trishul was to evaluate readiness of all combat units to undertake their operational tasks. Having been in Directorate of Air Staff Inspection (DASI) earlier, and since I was available, AOC-in-C WAC appointed me as the Chief Umpire for Exercise Trishul. My team and I travelled the length and breadth of WAC evaluating units and reporting back to HQ WAC. We brought out the weaknesses and action was in hand to take corrective measures. However, during the Kargil War, many deficiencies were revealed. Major ones included very poor and unreliable voice communications, low aircraft serviceability, especially of the MiG-23 and MiG-27 squadrons, low reliability of ‘Radar Warning Receivers’ (RWR), non-availability of GPS on fighters, non-fitment of ‘Counter Measures Dispensing Systems’ (CMDS) on helicopters and shortage of Heavy Duty tractors. There were teams from Base Repair Depots (BRD) and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd carrying out required modifications on both fighters and helicopters but it could be termed as ‘too little, too late’.

There is criticism that the IAF, which started offensive missions on 26th May 1999, came into the conflict late. Could you please elaborate on this?

Yes, there was criticism that IAF delayed coming into the war and

that this delay helped the intruders to strengthen their defences and bring in supplies to the captured posts. It needs to be remembered that the posts were vacated by our troops in the beginning of winter and the Pakistan NLI, who probably were keeping a close watch, had more than four months to fortify and stock up at the vacated Indian posts and features. The IAF very correctly insisted that political clearance was required before it took any offensive action. As soon as political clearance was obtained, the Air Force went into action.

Also, the Army underestimated or downplayed the gravity of the intrusions. The Army Chief went on a pre-planned official trip to Europe after the infiltrations came to light, indicating that the situation was not assessed to be all that critical. As our understanding of the depth and width of intrusions kept improving, our reactions, both by the Army and IAF also became better and more coordinated.

When the IAF got the Go-Ahead by the political leadership on 25 May 1999 to join the fray, it came with the caveat that no aircraft of the IAF would cross the LC or the International Border. Did this impose penalties on the conduct of air operations and did it affect the attainment of objectives?

By 25th May, we had a fair idea of our targets. The Mig-23, MiG-27 and MiG-21 aircrew had their attack plans ready. Given that the known intruded area was about 140 km along the LC with depths varying between one to eight km, the constraint of not crossing the LC posed considerable problems, the most severe being the restrictions on attack profiles of fighter aircraft. A fighter aircraft must sight the target, get into a dive to achieve weapon release parameters, release the weapons

and pull out of the dive while maintaining visual contact with other mission members. Restricting attack direction, as this caveat of not crossing the LC imposed, would lead to suboptimal weapon delivery and our difficulties would be compounded by the irregular alignment of the LC. Many of our mission plans had to be revised in consultation with Army representatives who provided target coordinates and exact location of our own troops in the targets' vicinity.

Attack plan on an individual target is made considering the optimum attack direction to cause maximum damage and some other factors. Many of the plans required our aircraft to cross the LC and attack targets in a generally southerly direction. When the caveat of not crossing the LC was imposed, most of the attack plans had to be redone. The resultant suboptimal attack directions did affect attainment of mission objectives.

The Indian Army called the Kargil Conflict "Operation Vijay" but IAF termed it as "Operation Safed Sagar". Why this variation?

The relationship between Army and IAF today is far better than it was 25 years ago. Jointness has improved and trust levels between the two services are good. There is a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) for coordinating inter-service issues and theatre command concept is looming ahead.

But in 1999, turf wars were playing out and trust between Army and IAF was not as it should have been. Planning for joint operations requires an environment of trust and confidence in each other's abilities. The Indian Army is as fine a professional fighting force as any, but when it comes to sharing intelligence, there is, as I have perceived, a level of reluctance. In the initial phase of Kargil operations, this could be explained away by the fact that the Army also did not know much of



At Udhampur Air Base. The Raksha Mantri meeting officers on arrival.



AVM Narayan Menon briefing the Raksha Mantri in Udhampur

what was happening. But even during later briefings and planning sessions, I had a distinct impression that only a part of the picture was being revealed, the minimum required for the conduct of air strikes. A case in point is the counter attack by Pakistan Army on **Tiger Hill** on 06 July 99 in which our troops suffered casualties. This target – a junction of the spurs from **Tiger Hill** and **Trig Height 4875** – was recommended to be attacked on the night of 05/06 July at 0330 hours by the IAF representative. Aircraft were loaded and readied, but at 2130 hours on 05 July, the Corps HQ called off the attack without assigning any reason. After the counter attack by the enemy on 06 July the Corps HQ requested for an air strike on the same target which was carried out on 07 July by Mirage-2000 aircraft armed with Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs). Had the air strikes been carried out as planned earlier, the enemy's capability to counter attack would have been diminished. During planning, if the full picture had been revealed to the IAF, then other options could have been explored to the benefit of our troops.

Both as AOC J&K and later as Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Operations) at Air HQ, I have interacted very often with my Army counterparts. I have held Indian Army in immense respect for their

professionalism and valour. But I have felt that the Army at times tends to hold back some vital inputs.

The objective in Kargil was to expel the intruders and reclaim our territory. The operation was called **Operation Vijay**, and this was accepted by the Government, but the IAF named it **Operation Safed Sagar**. I am unable to find a reason for this variation. Even in 1971, when India won a fantastic victory, the Operation was Cactus Lily for all concerned. My personal view is that IAF also should have adopted the name **Operation Vijay**.

Could you please give the readers a snapshot of the air effort during Operation Safed Sagar?

The fighter aircraft in the valley flew more than 2000 sorties including 250 by night. Mirages and Jaguars flew 150 sorties. Helicopters flew 23 strike sorties and 2100 sorties for other tasks. Our aircraft targeted enemy positions with approximately 330 tonnes of bombs, 4000 rockets and many thousands of gun ammunition. IAF's tasks comprised missions involving strike, interdiction, air defence escorts, ELINT, reconnaissance, casualty evacuation and air logistics. For the first time after 1971, IAF personnel were exposed to a war environment and the experience would be beneficial to all those involved.

Mi-17, Cheetah and Chetak helicopter units were also chafing at their bits to get a move on. The Mi-17 and Cheetah helicopters also continued to carry out their air logistics missions as did the IL-76 and AN-32 aircraft operating out of Chandigarh to Leh and Thoise airfields. While a lot of focus generally attaches to fighter operations, the

helicopter and transport aircrew are carrying out a magnificent job in delivering essential supplies to remote areas manned by our Army and paramilitary forces. They operate their flying machines to the limits of the performance envelope while they drive their bodies to the extremes of human endurance.

All our strike missions were escorted by Mig-29, Mig-21Bis or Mirage-2000 Air Defence aircraft. This had to be done as there was no radar cover for our strike aircraft in the areas they were operating in. The Mig-29s flew escort missions in a manner that enabled them to 'look' through the strike aircraft to the airspace beyond, and on a few occasions, picked up airborne radar activity across the LC. Our attempts to airlift and establish a ground radar west of Leh met with success towards the end of operations.

By the third week of June our Army had started making considerable progress in recapturing the intruded areas. The fact that on most occasions, recapture had been preceded by air strikes was testimony to the skill of our pilots and effectiveness of air power even under severe constraints.

India and Pakistan were both nuclear powers, when the Kargil conflict took place. The war was fought in the backdrop of nuclear weapons. Did this fact affect the scope and extent of our conventional military operations?

Post the nuclear explosions by India in the summer of 1998, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had legitimised the Pokhran-II tests by describing our nuclear weapons as "*weapons of peace*". A number of prominent people in the country had in turn opined that Pokhran-II, and indeed Pakistan's retaliatory tests at Chagai, would usher in a new era of peace in South Asia.

In that sort of an environment, we

did have the nuclear overhang in our minds, but were reasonably certain that it would not affect the scope of our '*limited area, limited objective*' conventional war.

How effective was the jointness at the Command Level / Corps Level in terms of joint staff work, joint planning and execution? Could you elaborate with some examples?

The Chief of Air Staff (CAS) came to Kargil and had discussions with the Army Chief and the Division Commanders. AOC-in-C, WAC came to Srinagar and discussed plans with the Northern Army Commander and 15 Corps Commander. The Army Chief came and reviewed the operations with his Commanders and with me. CAS and AOC-in-C came on different occasions and confabulated with IAF Commanders. This type of interaction was on continuously throughout the Kargil War. There was excellent joint planning at the fighting level. I am not

aware of the interaction at Air HQ and Army HQ level or at WAC and Northern Command level.

What were the challenges to man and machine that the IAF faced, while operating in the high Himalayas?

Kargil was the first time after 1971 that the IAF went into a shooting war. So the preparations for this conflict generated much excitement among all personnel. Pilots had to practice high altitude weapon delivery at Toshamaidan air-to-ground range. High altitude survival techniques had to be reinforced and Geneva Conventions were re-visited and refreshed. Technical air warriors had to ensure high serviceability including that of combat systems like RWR and ECCMs. Camouflage methods, dispersal of aircraft and assets and actions during an enemy air attack had to be conveyed to all Air warriors.

The presence of shoulder fired



The Raksha Mantri addresses the Air Force personnel at Udhampur Air Base



The Raksha Mantri interacts with the Air Warriors at Udhampur Air Base

had a much larger number of these shoulder-fired heat seeking missiles than we had estimated. The numbers of missiles available with the enemy and their improved performance posed greater threat to our aircraft than envisaged earlier and a change in strategy was obviously necessary.

It had also been thought by many, including me, that there would be a reduction in the performance of these missiles when fired from the heights of 10000 feet (three km) and above. This turned out to be wrong, as the performance envelope of the missile expands because of the increased temperature differential between the missile seeker head and the jet exhaust

Surface to Air Missiles (SAMs) in the battle space became known to the IAF in the early stages itself when a helicopter and later a Canberra landed back with missile hit damage. We subsequently lost a fighter and a helicopter to man-portable SAMs. How did the presence of SAMs in the tactical space affect the air operations? How did it affect weapon delivery and accuracy?

To the best of my knowledge, no helicopter took a SAM hit till 28 May. On 21st May, the starboard engine of a Canberra reconnaissance aircraft was badly damaged by what analysis and observation revealed to be a MANPADS (Man-Portable Air Defence System). While this confirmed the presence of ‘Stinger’ / ‘Anza’ MANPADS with the intruders, their sheer numbers took us by surprise.

On 28th May, a formation of four Mi-17 helicopters attacked a target from where our Army units were being engaged. Three Mi-17s were equipped with Counter Measures Dispensing System (CMDS) or flare dispensers while the Number 3 Mi-17 was not. As Number 3 was turning away, a missile hit his engine and the helicopter went down killing all four crew on board. The gun camera videos brought back by the Number 1 (leader), Number 2 and Number 4 showed missile after missile flashing past their helicopters. It became clear that the Pakistani forces

of aircraft.

After establishing the wide-spread presence of SAMs in the mountains, the IAF had to define a “hard deck” for fighter operations. Could you please elaborate on this?

On 27th May, two MiG-27 aircraft attacked a target a few kilometres on our side of the LC. The engine of the Number 2 flamed out immediately after firing his gun, and the pilot had to eject. He landed in an area under the control of the infiltrators of Pakistani Army and was taken Prisoner of War (PoW). The leader of a MiG-21 mission on hearing of the ejection on his radio set decided to carry out an airborne search for the Mig-27. While orbiting, his aircraft was engaged and struck by a MANPADS. The pilot ejected, but after two days the Pakistanis handed over his body, bearing injury marks, to Indian Army personnel at a pre-arranged point. After the loss of the Mi-17 helicopter on 28th May, helicopters were not tasked with strike missions.

In view of the large numbers of MANPADS in the battle space, a decision was taken to suspend air operations temporarily. Subsequent brain-storming sessions threw up many options, with a young Flight Lieutenant coming up with the idea of using the ‘Global Positioning System’ as an aid to carry out high level bombing. The aircraft were to fly at nine km altitude, out of range of the missiles, and release the bombs at a predetermined GPS indicated point arrived at after having calculated for the forward trajectory of the bomb and wind pattern. It was indeed an innovative suggestion and trials were carried out on 29th May. On 30th May, fighters carried out the first of these High Altitude Release (HAR) missions. Initially, the effectiveness of HAR missions was low, but within three to four sorties, our pilots had gained

confidence and accuracy of weapon delivery improved considerably as evident from Army Intelligence reports and enemy radio intercepts. Since MANPADS require visual sighting of the aircraft being targeted, missions could be flown above clouds and at night with relative safety. Under such conditions, missions could be flown even from lower altitudes with better accuracy, as the threat from SAMs was nearly eliminated. From 04 June onwards, night HAR missions were mounted.

The intruders were operating from small, well-fortified “sangars” / bunkers, located in barren terrain with no contrast, which would have been near-impossible to spot from a high flying fighter. What were the challenges faced by the strike aircraft in terms of target acquisition and neutralising?

The targets were small and difficult to spot but on the first day, both fighters and helicopters carried out fairly accurate attacks. The results were not commensurate with our efforts as the weapons like rockets and guns were not very effective against those ‘stone sangars’. Later when we switched to ‘HAR delivery’ of bombs, the accuracy was not good. But the ‘shock and awe’ effect was evident from the intercepted voice communications of the intruders with their rear lines.

The strike on the logistics node at Muntho Dhalo is considered one of the most effective air operations by the IAF. Similarly, the Laser Guided Bomb strike on Tiger Hill gave outstanding outcomes. Could you please give some details?

Induction of Mirage-2000 and Jaguars on June 6th, operating from Adampur and Ambala, with their ‘laser guided weapons’ had a sort of ‘force multiplier’ effect with

substantial improvement in destruction of targets. These ‘Precision Guided Munitions’ (PGMs) carried by these fighters had a high rate of success against targets at Muntho Dhalo, Tiger Hill and Tololing. The interdiction strike against Muntho Dhalo crippled their supply lines and weakened their war capability. Mission reports for these strikes were sent to WAC and Air HQ.

Quoting from “Air Power at 18,000 feet”, authored by Benjamin S Lambeth, “An informed and insightful former Pakistan Army Brigadier later well characterized the introduction of IAF fighters into the conflict on May 26 as an effective asymmetric vertical escalation that Pakistan could not match without running unbearable risks of a larger and more consequential confrontation.” Could this be considered an accurate assessment of the role of the IAF fighters in the conflict?

I was very much an ‘insider’ during the Kargil War and my limited and total focus was on defeating the enemy. The author of the article you have quoted was an unbiased ‘outsider’ looking at all aspects of the war with a much wider scan area. He and the Pakistani Brigadier had the luxury of drawing information from varied sources available post war and therefore analysed the war from a very different perspective than I did. So, I entirely agree with them.

Quoting again from “Air Power at 18,000 feet”, “Another telling testament to the effectiveness of the IAF’s interdiction attacks came when Pakistan’s Foreign Minister (FM) Sartaj Aziz, during an official visit to New Delhi on June 12 as Operation Vijay was just reaching peak intensity, implored the IAF to ‘stop its air strikes’ as one of three specific requests that he levied on the Indian government.” Was the



The Integrated leadership in the Kargil conflict - from left, Brigadier Lakhwinder Singh (Commander Artillery), Air Chief Marshal Tipnis (CAS), General VP Malik (COAS), Lieutenant General Krisban Pal (15 Corps Commander), Major General Mobinder Puri (8 Division Commander), AVM Menon (AOC J&K) and Brigadier MC Bhandari (MO Directorate)



Mig-29 on Combat Air Patrol provided Air Defence cover to strike aircraft (photo courtesy Indian Air Force)

extent of the effect of the strikes manifest to the planners in the War Rooms of the IAF and the Indian Army?

It is now assessed that the Pakistan Army kept its government out of the loop regarding happenings in Kargil War. The Pakistani FM Sartaj Aziz would have known only what their army told him. So he came and parroted what the Pakistan Army wanted, which was to escape the vertical pincer attack by Indian military, the Indian Army bringing heavy artillery and other weapons to bear on the intruders from below while the IAF rained deadly bombs on them from above. By 12th June, the tide had turned and the Indian offensive was bearing results. Defeat and humiliation was staring the Pakistan Army in the face and they wanted some respite. Yes, India knew and only tightened the screw.

There was widespread media coverage of the conflict on Television, our own Television War version or the “CNN factor”. Did the media play a significant role - positive or negative - in the conflict?

I did not see much TV those days. This was the first time the media was permitted to cover such an operation. The people of India knew at least some bits of what was happening on the Kargil front. Overall their coverage had a positive effect.

Which were the defining moments in the air operations that you consider major turning points in the conflict?

Loss of aircraft on 27th and 28th of May forced us to pause and re-strategize. That was a turning point as we changed to HAR bombing. Commencing night operations was another important change as it brought misery to and fatigued the intruders. Of course, introduction of Mirage-2000 and Jaguars was a critical turning point. I recall that a young MiG-21 pilot filmed the Tiger Hill with a handycam and the results were quite useful for planning attacks against that target.

The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) came out with a number of recommendations towards overhauling and re-structuring the Higher Defence Organisation and the way forward on “jointness”. What is the state of implementation of these recommendations?

The following is extracted from an article written by me a few years ago:-Based on the KRC Report, the Prime Minister set up a '**Group of Ministers'(GOM)** on 17 April 2000 to “review the national security system in its entirety and in particular to consider the recommendations of the KRC and formulate specific proposals for implementation.” The GOM comprised the Ministers of Home, Defence, External Affairs and Finance. The National Security Advisor was included as a '*special invitee*'. The GOM saw in its mandate '*a historic opportunity to review all aspects of national security, impinging not only on external threats, but also on internal threats.*' As the scope was very large, the GOM in turn set up four Task Forces to deal with Intelligence Apparatus, Internal Security, Border Management and Management of Defence, each of these headed by eminent and experienced experts. The Task Force Reports came in by 30 September

2000 and the GOM submitted its report in February 2001.

Visibly, very little or no action was initiated in respect of the interrelated subjects of intelligence agencies, border management or internal security after the GOM report. Whatever was done, only had cosmetic value. If substantive efforts had been taken to close known loopholes and weaknesses, as also highlighted by the GOM, then an event as catastrophic as the Mumbai terror attacks of 26 November 2008 would not have taken place. Since the Kargil War and the exhaustive analysis of it, India has suffered a large number of terror attacks. These attacks have been across the country and random in nature.

From 2014 things have changed; terror attacks were either repulsed or there was retaliation.

A feeble attempt at overhauling the higher defence structure resulted in the creation of the Integrated Defence Staff with HQ in Delhi. The ground situation did not change at all with all three Service HQ carrying out their individual budgeting, planning and acquisitions. The GOI created the post of CDS in December 2019 and the first CDS took charge in 2020. There has been lots of discussions and talk within the Services and the media about creation of 'theatre commands' but progress has been slow.

When you look back, what would you have done differently if it were to be done again?

In the first instance, this war should not have happened if we had been alert. Our response would have been much quicker had the Army kept the Government in the loop right from the beginning. Only fighters should have been employed for offensive operations. Once the wide deployment of MANPADS became evident, weapons

with stand-off capability should have been utilised.

End Note

Before I end, I must pay tribute to the **527 military personnel who lost their lives** in this war and I also recognize the contribution of the 1363 personnel who were wounded.

The IAF lost **Squadron Leader Ajay Ahuja, Squadron Leader Rajiv Pundir, Squadron Leader S Muhilan, Sergeant PVNR Prasad and Sergeant**

RK Sahu. Flight Lieutenant Nachiketa was a POW for a short period. IAF lost a MiG-27, a MiG-21 and a Mi-17.

The victory in Kargil operations resulted from the raw courage and indomitable will of the young leadership and soldiers of the Indian Army and the impetus, the trigger to prise out the Pakistani forces from the occupied heights of Kargil was provided by the fire power and effectiveness of the IAF.



Air Marshal Narayan Menon, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM (Retd) was born in 1944 in Kannur, Kerala and moved to Delhi at an early age and studied in Modern School, Barakbamba Road. An alumnus of National Defence Academy, Pune, he was commissioned in the IAF on 25 December 1964. A Qualified Flying Instructor and a Fighter Combat Leader, he has flown a variety of fighter aircraft, including Hunter, Gnat, Sukhoi-7, MiG-21 variants and twin-seater aircraft Jaguar, MiG 23 and MiG 29. He has extensive war experience and flew 18 strike missions against targets in Pakistan in Sukhoi-7 fighter-bomber aircraft in December 1971. While part of an IAF training team in Iraq, he trained Iraqi pupils on L-39 and Su-7 aircraft. Air Marshal Menon has commanded a MiG-21 fighter squadron, an IAF training base and two fighter stations. He was the Air Officer Commanding J&K during the Kargil operations. The Air Marshal is an alumnus of College of Defence Management, Secunderabad and National Defence College, New Delhi. He has attended courses at IIM Bangalore and IIM Calcutta and has attended an International Security seminar at Harvard University. He has led IAF teams to Russia and Germany to participate in International Air Shows. He superannuated in 2004 as the Air Officer in charge Personnel, Air HQ. As President of Special Olympics Bharat Karnataka for five years from 2009 to 2014, he was involved with training 'Intellectually Disabled' people in sports disciplines. Having settled down at Bengaluru after retirement, he writes regularly for professional magazines and newspapers.



Air Marshal Narayan Menon

HOME TRUTHS OUT OF THIN AIR

OPERATION SAFED SAGAR

Pakistan has historically believed in the policy of covert action especially when it came to border issues. In 1947 and 1965 it had used frontier tribesmen, Mujahids, irregular forces of NWFP and Northern areas, supported logistically and under firm Army leadership, for incursions to foment trouble in the fervent hope of seizing Kashmir. Pakistan has also consistently used a strategy of ‘**plausible deniability**’, so it could internationally claim that it had no connection with the infiltrators. In the Drass-Kargil-Batalik intrusions, it used the trained paramilitary Northern Light Infantry (NLI)¹, which draws the majority of its recruits from the nearby mountainous native tribes and is ideally suited for high-altitude mountain warfare. This article discusses the Indian Air Force (IAF) operations in the conflict, codenamed **Operation Safed Sagar**.

The night was still dark when the drum sounded. The voice came “Wake up! Delay not!”

Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali²

The idiom ‘*out of thin air*’, explained as something that appears in a ‘*sudden and unexpected way*’, couldn’t be more apt to describe India’s Kargil Conflict, especially when one sets out to examine India’s unique air power employment in the ‘*thin air*’ of the rarefied Himalayan altitudes. Twenty-five years ago, in February 1999, the Indian Prime Minister AB Vajpayee, initiated the ‘**bus yatra**’ as part of confidence-building measures taken at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Summit in Colombo in 1998⁴. After the

¹ The Northern based NLI battalions comprised of officers seconded from the Army, and JCOs and personnel who were second-line paramilitary forces, under the Pak Ministry of Interior, but operationally under the Force Commander Northern Areas (FCNA). After Kargil War, Gen Musharraf made it a regular infantry regiment of the Pakistan Army

² A line from Rabindranath Tagore’s iconic song offering ‘Gitanjali’. Macmillan and Co. Ltd, London, 1957, Song 51, p.45

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/thin%20air>

⁴ <https://theprint.in/politics/when-vajpayee-took-a-bus-ride-and-it-seemed-peace-with-pakistan-was-possible/194551/>



Top. IL76 landing at Leh. The massive plane is dwarfed by the towering Stok mountain range in the background. (photo Karunakar Rayker www.flickr.com)
Centre. IAF Jaguar Fighter Jet (photo courtesy Indian Air Force)
Bottom. Armed Mil Mi-17 helicopters early missions in Kargil (photo credit www.bharat-rakshak.com)

international shock and opprobrium in the aftermath of the 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, the ‘bus diplomacy’ was perceived as a softening of approach by India towards normalising relations with Pakistan. The subterfuge that unfolded in the form of **Operation Koh-e-Paima (Op KP)**, or **Mountain Climber**, was an outcome of the masterly deceitful diplomacy perpetrated by Pakistan’s Generals and its servile political leadership.

When General Zia Ul Haq seized control of Pakistan from PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1978, the Army became the dominant power and indeed the driver of national and foreign policy. By November of 1998, according to Nasim Zehra, there were two policy approaches running side by side in Pakistan’s engagement with India - dialogue and diplomacy by the civil government, and a surreptitious approach towards a covert war by a select group of Army leadership to pay back in kind for the loss of Siachen to India.⁵

Having lost three wars and with no success in its aspirational Kashmir agenda, Pakistan chose to make another attempt after a gap of 28 years. Jasjit Singh traces the genesis of the military operation to 1986, when General Aslam Beg had planned the capture of the heights dominating the Srinagar - Leh Road passing through Kargil; the plan could not be executed as the Pakistani President turned it down, based on the advice of the Foreign Minister.⁶

Kaiser Tufail summarises- “The principal protagonists of the Kargil adventure were the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Pervez Musharraf, Commander 10 Corps Lieutenant General Mehmud Ahmed and Commander Force Command Northern Areas (FCNA): Major General Javed Hasan. The trio, in previous ranks and appointments, had been associated with planning during paper exercises on how to wrest control of lost territory in Siachen.

The plans were not acceptable to the then Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, to whom the options had been put up for review more than once. She was well-versed in international affairs and all too intelligent to be taken in by the chicanery. It fell to the wisdom of her successor, Mr Nawaz Sharif, to approve the army trio’s self-serving presentation’. As per Zehra, the Pakistan Army under General Musharraf was busy planning **Op KP** with the strategic aim of reviving the flagging militancy and attempting to focus international attention on Kashmir.⁸ The military aim of severing the NH-1 highway lifeline to Leh would serve to strangle the supply route to the Siachen Glacier, open another infiltration route for militants, and alter the alignment of the Line of Control (LC).⁹ Joshi avers that internationalising the tension in the region would help secure a speedy resolution of the Kashmir issue.¹⁰

According to Subrahmanyam, the doyen of India’s strategists, Pakistan after becoming a nuclear power, felt confident to test the efficacy of ‘salami slicing tactics, (where) under a mutually deterrent nuclear situation, the attacked nation is discouraged from escalating.’ Pakistan assumed that with Kargil - Drass heights occupied and dominating the region,

India would be deterred from escalating the conflict with the new Government, and the matter would be brought before the Security Council. A fait-accompli post-ceasefire would then allow them to hold the territory, revive the Kashmir issue by boosting terrorism.¹¹ The military leadership saw it as a window of opportunity to strike when India’s guard was lowered. Musharraf periodically updated Nawaz Sharif on the **Op KP** plans as it progressed,¹² along with a detailed briefing on 17 May 1999.¹³ Pakistan therefore had not only pre-planned **Op KP**, it was already in violation of the first and third agreements of the Lahore Declaration - “shall intensify their efforts to resolve all issues, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)” and “shall take immediate steps to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons being accidentally or unintentionally used, and shall discuss concepts and doctrines to develop measures for nuclear and conventional conflict prevention,”¹⁴ even as it was signing the document on February 21, 1999.

The Strategic Surprise and Our Strategic Approach

The conflict began in early May 99,

⁵ Nasim Zehra, *From Kargil to the Coup: Events That Shook Pakistan*, Sang-e-Meel Publishers, Lahore, 2018, p.84-85

⁶ *Op Cit*, Jasjit, *Defence from the Skies*, p.172

⁷ M Kaiser Tufail, *The Role of Pakistan Air Force During Kargil Conflict*, CLAWS Journal, Summer, 2009, https://archive.claws.in/images/journals_doc/1400825199M%20Kaiser%20Tufail%20CJ%20Summer%202009.pdf

⁸ *Op Cit*, Zehra, p.8

⁹ *Op Cit* Jasjit, *Kargil 1999*, Chapter 6 by Gurmeet Kanwal, *Pakistan’s Military Defeat*, p.145-146

¹⁰ Brig BS Joshi, *Kargil War 1999*, Surendra Publications, New Delhi, 2016, p.2

¹¹ K Subrahmanyam, *The Hills Grow Distant*, Jul 10, 2009, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-hills-grow-distant/>

¹² Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir*, Simon and Schuster, London, 2006, p.96

¹³ *Op Cit*, Zehra, p.158

¹⁴ https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/ip_lahore_19990221.pdf



The MiG 29 played a major role in Air Defence keeping the Pakistan Air Force at bay, due to the Beyond Visual Range missiles advantage, In pic, MiG-29 UPG armed with R-77 BVR Missile (Image Source RAC MiG)

with the ambush of Army patrols and led to the slow subsequent discovery of widespread infiltration. The intrusions were along the major ridgelines, four to six km in depth, and with 40-60 troops of the NLI at each post, well stocked, kitted, and armed with a wide range of weapons, including anti-aircraft guns and shoulder-fired Surface to Air Missiles (SAMs).¹⁵ The intruding force probably exceeded 2000 men drawn from four NLI battalions, a battalion of the elite Special Services Group, elements of Frontier Corps of NWFP, Chitral and Bajaur scouts and porters from the Mujahideen, supported by 20 Pakistani artillery batteries for providing fire support from the Shingo Valley.¹⁶

Pakistan had been successful in establishing a wide bridgehead stretching 160 km and dominating the vital NH-1A. Jasjit Singh, while conceding the Pakistan Army having achieved total strategic and tactical surprise, avers that it was primarily due to the prevailing dominant mind-set in India and the Army over the last decade, that the primary security threat across the

borders was infiltration to support Pakistan's proxy war.¹⁷ General Malik writes - "By the third week of May 1999, the fog of war started lifting. Our initial reports, particularly the intelligence inputs, were way off the mark. We were not facing militants but Pakistani Army personnel in militants' garb who planned to stay on in our territory."¹⁸

The larger strategic approach adopted by India was that, despite being a victim of intrusion, it was determined to evict the intruders, albeit while exercising maximum restraint. The military objective given by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) was to vacate the intruders without crossing the LC. The military strategy devised by the Chiefs of Staff "required a build-up, not only in Kargil - Leeb sectors but also all

along the rest of the Western border and coastline."¹⁹ In the backdrop of the nuclear and IRBM tests and Pakistan's overt nuclear status declared in 1998, which it was clearly leveraging, it needed an appropriate response. The choice of a firm counter-deterrent conventional response was not only a clear indication of India's resolve, it was also a politico-military strategic signal to indicate that India knew, and now the world knows, that Pakistan was behind the intrusion. India's response strategy also effectively called Pakistan's nuclear bluff and created the space for a limited conventional conflict. Given the categorical denial of its Army being involved by claiming the intruders were Mujahideen, Pakistan foreclosed the possibility of overt involvement of its military directly in the conflict. Should it still elect to do so, it would have to contend with the possibility of the conflict escalating into a full-fledged war.

The initial Army response of numerous patrols and probing attacks suffered heavy losses but confirmed the extent, depth, and intent of the infiltration, clearing the initial fog of war. This was followed up with a partial mobilisation, building up two divisions of troops along with additional artillery.²⁰ Given the high altitudes, harsh terrain, and the well-

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.151

¹⁶ Ashok Krishna and P R Chari, *Kargil War: The Tables Turned*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, p.100

¹⁷ *Op Cit*, Jasjit, *Defence from the Skies*, p.179

¹⁸ VP Malik, *Kargil: Where Defence Met Diplomacy*, July 25, 2002, *The Indian Express*, <https://www.mea.gov.in/articles-in-indian-media.htm?dtl/14821/kargil+where+defence+met+diplomacy>

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Malik

²⁰ Major General GD Bakshi (Retd), *Dynamics of a Limited War Against a Nuclear Backdrop*, *CLAW'S Journal*, Summer 2009, p. 44-45

equipped and armed enemy holding posts which dominated the terrain below, the Army's need was a doctrinal 10:1 force ratio, extensive artillery support, and acclimatised troops. It was going to be a long haul considering the extent of infiltration and would have to be fought peak by peak in the unforgiving Himalayan terrain.

An Undesirable Controversy

The delay in the entry of offensive airpower into this unique conflict evoked much controversy and public debate.²¹ Uncomplimentary views of veterans ranging from "hesitancy of the IAF to come on board"²² to "Air Chief AY Tipnis may have accepted Government orders to launch Operation Safed Sagar, with some reservations"²³ emerged in the print media. Given the acrimony created, a reticent Air Chief Marshal (ACM) AY Tipnis, Chief of Air Staff (CAS) clarified that on 11 May 1999, the Vice Chief of Air Staff informed him that - "Headquarters (HQ) Northern Command had requested fire-support from Mi-25/35 helicopter gunships and armed Mi-17 helicopters to evict a few 'intruders' who had stepped across the LC in the Kargil sector." The Air Officer Commanding (AOC) J&K, who is co-located with the Army's HQ Northern Command and handles all requests for air operations in the region, had already explained that employment of the heavy Mi-25/35 helicopter gunships and armed Mi-17 helicopters in the area was outside their effective operating envelope and suggested that for offensive fire support, Northern Command should approach HQ Western Air Command (WAC).²⁴ Based on these inputs, the Vice Chief of Army Staff (VCOAS), when approached by the Vice Chief of Air Staff to enquire if all was well, stated that the Army was capable of handling the situation, and expressed disappointment that the AOC J&K had not

acceded to the demands of the HQ Northern Command.

On May 14, the CAS personally clarified to the VCOAS the need for political clearance, to which the latter held that political approval was only required if fighters were providing fire support. In the perception of the VCOAS, the use of helicopters, even for fire support, was a decision to be made in-house by the Service HQ. Despite the Air Chief suggesting that the RM be approached and that the former would personally endorse the use of offensive air power, the VCOAS did not indicate whether he would do so.²⁵ According to Harwant Singh, the VCOAS's reluctance to go to the government with scant information about the nature and extent of ingress must be seen in the context that there had been some laxity in sector surveillance that failed to detect ingress; the fact that Pakistan achieved complete surprise was the result of a colossal failure of Indian intelligence; and determining the extent and depth of ingress by foot patrols was a slow and time-consuming process.²⁶ It is also pertinent that in this initial period, Army Chief General VP Malik was out of the country.

Meanwhile, given the seriousness of the situation, Jaguar and Canberra reconnaissance missions were launched, Air Defence (AD) fighters and radars in the Srinagar Valley were kept on 24-hour

vigil, Mobile Observation Posts were deployed, and an additional Air Defence Control Centre was established at Leh. Helicopter and fighter squadrons were tasked with carrying out live air-to-ground firing drills with guns and rockets at the high-altitude firing range, as well as conducting area familiarisation sorties. The CAS also directed WAC to activate HQ AOC J&K and all its units as per the HQ WAC Operational Instructions and to formulate contingency plans. On 16 May, in a Chiefs Of Staff Committee meeting, the CAS clarified the necessity for political clearance - "Unlike the practice of the Army routinely resorting to firing when a situation demanded it, the Air Force firepower was not being used operationally in peace conditions; aerial action had far greater 'visibility'; the response of the adversary to own air attacks was indeterminate, undoubtedly at this stage; there was a high possibility of the adversary raising the ante and we had to be prepared for it."²⁷

The import of offensive action by the IAF in peacetime was realised by the members. Subsequently, the PM and members of the CCS were briefed on 18 May by the VCOAS and the Director General Military Operations. The VCOAS concluded that the Army was capable of bringing the situation under control, but that it would take time, and that offensive air support from helicopters would speed up the process

²¹ Benjamin S Lambeth, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/20/airpower-at-18-000-indian-air-force-in-kargil-war-pub-49421>

²² Lt Gen Harwant Singh, *Kargil Controversy: Mismanagement of Higher Defence Organisation, Issue Volume 24.4, Oct-Dec 2009*, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/kargil-controversy-mismanagement-of-higher-defence/>

²³ Maj Gen Jagjit Singh, *With Honour and Glory: Wars Fought by India 1947-1999*, Lancer, 2000, p. 185

²⁴ *Op Cit, Joshi, p.104*

²⁵ *Op Cit, Tipnis*

²⁶ *Op Cit, Harwant Singh*

²⁷ *Op Cit, Tipnis*



Precision Strikes - Mirage 2000

of eliminating/pushing back intruders. The CAS explained the implications of using air power and explained the need to use fighters instead of helicopters. The Principal Secretary to the PM suggested holding back the use of air power and clearing hot pursuit limited only to the area of operation, which received a nod of approval from the PM.

On May 21, a photo reconnaissance Canberra was hit by an infra-red surface-to-air missile, later identified as a Stinger, with the pilot managing to recover the crippled aircraft. On 23rd and 24th May, the three Chiefs met after the return of the Army Chief, and discussed the use of helicopters despite the challenges of the altitude and the threat of SAMs. The CAS here admits that *“Wanting to save Army-Air Force relations, I had given in against my better judgement”*, and acceded to provide the helicopters. At the CCS meeting on 24th May, Tipnis writes – *“Ved Malik explained at length the difficulty of the situation and how essential it was for the Air Force to step in without delay. I stated as matter-of-fact as possible, that the Air Force was ready.”*²⁸ On 25th May, the PM cleared the offensive use of air

Squadrons in armed role (since the heavy Mi-25/35 attack helicopters were unsuited to high altitude operations). Two MiG 29 Squadrons and one Squadron each of MiG 21 and MiG 23 MF were committed for air defence, along with Canberra and MiG 25 aircraft for reconnaissance. Mirage 2000 and Jaguars were inducted for offensive operations as the conflict progressed.³⁰

The reservations of the CAS proved true when a MiG 21 and a Mi-17 helicopter were lost to shoulder-fired SAMs and a Canberra was damaged, within the first three days. The loss of two aircraft operating at low altitudes to SAMs led to a change in operational tactics, to stay out of the lethal slant range of 6000 to 8000 feet of the shoulder-fired SAMs. Offensive operations by the slow and vulnerable Mi-17 helicopters during the day in the narrow valleys were also stopped. Subsequently, night strikes by helicopters were planned, but after a probable SAM launch on the first mission, it was called off.³¹

There is some doubt as to whether the SAMs fired were the US Stinger or the Pak Anza I modelled on the Chinese HN 5B.³² Between

power from 26th May, but with a firm proviso of not crossing the LC.

Entry of Offensive Air Power

The IAF fighter and helicopter strikes commenced at 0630 hours on the 26th morning, with six attacks in a row by two MiG 21, MiG 23, and MiG 27 aircraft elements. The second wave was at 1430 hours, followed by high altitude reconnaissance by Canberra and MiG 21 sorties at lower levels for battle damage assessment (BDA). It was after 28 years, since IAF Vampires attacked bunkers in the Kargil Valley in 1971,²⁹ that the IAF was using fighters for offensive kinetic missions in the region. The air assets committed were two Squadrons each of MiG 21s, MiG 27s, and Jaguars each for strike role, along with two Mi-17s

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Op Cit, Lambeth*

³⁰ *Arjun Subramaniam, Full Spectrum: India's Wars 1972-2000, Harper Collins, NOIDA, 2020*

³¹ *AVM Manmohan Bahadur (Retd), Print, 16 July, 2019, <https://theprint.in/opinion/kargils-little-known-fact-how-iaf-used-helicopters-to-target-intruders-at-high-altitudes/263391/>*

³² <https://weaponsystems.net/system/729-HN-5>

2000-2500 missiles were supplied to the Afghan Mujahideen by the Americans to counter the Soviets in the late eighties. There were wide spread inputs of the Pakistanis having siphoned off large stocks of Stingers even as they claimed some were stolen by Iran.³³ The disappearance of over 600 missiles led to the top-secret CIA program Operation Missing in Action Stinger (Op MIAS) in an attempt to buy back the missiles.³⁴ These were certainly used in Kargil,³⁵ and according to Kanwal, Stingers were among the weapons recovered from the recaptured posts.³⁶ The lethality of man-portable SAMs in the ideal conditions of cold-clear skies of Kargil was a hard lesson learned. According to Subramaniam, the change of tactics proved successful as though the enemy fired more than 100 SAMs, which is a best guess estimate from a variety of inputs, no aircraft was shot down or suffered battle damage thereafter.³⁷

Difficulties in target acquisition and poor intelligence on exact enemy locations were two persistent challenges. The IAF used the MiG 21M, Canberras, Jaguars, and even brought in the MiG 25 after several adaptations, into the vital reconnaissance and battle damage assessment roles. Unlike the previous wars, aerial reconnaissance played a key role in the Kargil conflict. In the absence of any intelligence on the intrusion, the IAF had already commenced reconnaissance missions as early as 10 May.³⁸ According to Joshi - “it took the incontrovertible evidence of the reconnaissance imagery and other sources, for Malik to realise the full extent of the problem and agree to take the issue to the PM.”³⁹ It was the extensive aerial reconnaissance imagery collated by the IAF that gave the Army invaluable accurate intelligence on the location of the enemy troops, command and administrative echelons, logistics build-ups and weapon positions,⁴⁰ and the IAF all its targeting

information. In the words of Lambeth – “The IAF pioneered during its Kargil campaign what has since come to be called non-traditional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance through its use of electro-optical and infrared imaging targeting pods for conducting high-resolution aerial reconnaissance of the battle space.”⁴¹

The shift of tactics to higher weapon release altitudes brought in added challenges of reduced weapon accuracy. These were offset by changes in attack profiles to steep dive attacks and the use of GPS-aided level bombing by MiG 21, 23, and 27 aircraft, better target-to-weapon matching, the use of laser targeting pods, and precision-guided weapons. There was also innovative exploitation of the older MiG 21s in night weapon delivery with hand-held GPS sets. The continuous bombing by these older platforms, despite their reduced accuracy compared to precision weapons, had a tremendously demoralising effect on the enemy and was a morale booster for the Army which was fighting herculean battles in unbelievably adverse conditions. Newly obtained Litening targeting pods were speedily integrated into the Jaguar and Mirage 2000 aircraft. The Mirage 2000 was modified externally for carriage of the Paveway II laser-guided bomb, and its weapon system was tweaked for delivery of the weapon. This helped in

the neutralisation of the command post on **Tiger Hill** which was being used to direct artillery fire on Indian positions, the largest logistics camp at **Muntho Dhalo**, and other key targets. The sustained and accurate air strikes also surprised Pakistani planners who had not factored in the determined Indian response⁴² and use of air power.

On July 26, 1999, after 49 days of fierce fighting, an undeclared war came to an end. It was a repeat of past attempts by Pakistan to change the status quo in Kashmir. The subterfuge attempt cloaked in plausible deniability failed as the facts spilled out. Taken by surprise, the Indian Army learned a tough lesson for lowering its guard against an adversary that has been consistent in initiating conflicts against India. The Army fought back valiantly and was able to evict the intruders in long hard battles in extremely adverse conditions. The IAFs contributions and the unprecedented high-altitude offensive air power application produced significant outcomes. Jasjit attributes two X factors that affected the outcome of the war. One was the exceptionally hot weather in the region which led to the early opening of the Zojila pass on the Leh - Kargil highway, thus enabling swift logistics flow. The other was the use of the IAF offensively. The “professionalism of the

³³ <https://iran-times.com/pak-general-says-iran-stole-stinger-missiles/>

³⁴ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/07/28/stop-panicking-about-the-stingers/>

³⁵ Op Cit, Tufail,

³⁶ Kanwal, Op Cit, Jasjit, Kargil 1999, p.161 and 167

³⁷ A Subramaniam, Kargil Revisited: Air Operations in High Altitude Conflict, CLAW'S Journal Summer 2008, p. 187

³⁸ Op Cit, Lambeth

³⁹ Op Cit, Joshi, p.105-106

⁴⁰ Op Cit, Jasjit, p.189

⁴¹ Op Cit, Lambeth

⁴² Kanwal, Op Cit Jasjit, p.167



Providing vital Imagery - The MiG 25R (photo courtesy Indian Air Force)

IAF adapted to the challenge of offensive air operations in high Himalayan terrain, with the self-imposed restrictions of not crossing the LC and ensuring that our troops were not victims of friendly fire, as has happened so frequently in other air forces.”⁴³ In all the Air Force flew a total of 7631 operational sorties, 1730 on fighters, 2474 on helicopters, and 3427 on transport aircraft in the conflict.⁴⁴

Future Relevant Home Truths

The specialised high-altitude application of airpower in Kargil allowed the IAF to do what it was restricted from in the 1962 war against China. Though the adversary was different, several aspects stand out which are enduring for India’s future national security.

The political restraint of not violating the LC impacted the execution of full-fledged air operations as the range of offensive options and tactics was significantly constrained. The challenges of high-altitude targeting were made more complex with the additional altitude increase to stay out of the lethal SAM envelope. This further limited the weapon

and fusing choices, restricting delivery options, and attack directions. The IAF swiftly adapted to environmental and operational challenges coupled with restricted offensive options, to fly over seven thousand sorties⁴⁵ in six weeks, and contribute significantly to the world’s first-ever use of combat airpower at altitudes above 15000 feet.⁴⁶ The use of offensive air power will be a vital aspect of any future military strategy and while its employment will certainly be tailored to the desired levels of escalation matrix, it will be worth remembering that both adversaries have capable Air Forces and form a part of their respective military strategies. Thus, constraining the offensive employment of air power in a conventional war, with either or both neighbours, would be a serious mistake in any future war.

Air operations at the extreme altitude of the Himalayas need familiarity with the terrain and environmental factors, training for valley flying and live high-altitude weapon delivery training. Such training is highly specialised and needs all designated units and their aircrew to be operationally current. It also needs constant review of all operational tactics and employment concepts tailored to the threat specifics of both adversaries. Innovative and bold tactics along with future-relevant concepts of operations must continue to be developed and incorporated into realistic joint training. The other Services must

⁴³ *Op Cit Jasjit, Kargil 1999, p.140-141*

⁴⁴ *MOD Annual Report, <https://vayu-sena.tripod.com/kargil-summary1.html>*

⁴⁵ *<https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/20/airpower-at-18-000-indian-air-force-in-kargil-war-pub-49421>, accessed on 9 April 21*

⁴⁶ *Jasjit Singh, Kargil 1999, The Fourth Round, KW Publishers, 1999, p.140*

capitalise on the extensive training and threat-scenario-specific Exercises that the IAF conducts regularly, as these will bolster and widen their warfighting options.

Proficiency in weapon delivery at extremes of aircraft and armament performance limits, in a hostile SAM environment, emerged as the single most operational imperative for offensive air power. Two interlinked imperatives that cannot be overemphasised are the need for an adequate inventory of air-to-ground weapons and fuses suitable for high-altitude employment, and the critical necessity of a high-altitude live weapon delivery tactical range. A high-altitude tactical air-to-ground range in the North and the North-East is as critical to national security as is the need for the development of border infrastructure.

The role of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) in the conflict is little known outside the military domain. It had F-16s flying Combat Air Patrols in the region⁴⁷ and had a flight of F-7P fighters deployed at Skardu airfield across the LC.⁴⁸ As PAF F-16s orbited across the border, IAF's strikes needed full freedom of operations while operating close to the LC. This meant that extensive AD cover had to be provided, to not only ensure freedom of own air operations, but also deny the PAF any opportunity to interfere with our Army operations using stand-off weapon delivery. An important aspect that restrained the PAF from active participation was the fact that the IAF enjoyed the advantage of a better beyond-visual range (BVR) air to air missile capability. From a joint perspective, the vital preponderant of the absence of enemy air, and the consequent freedom of surface and air operations enabled by IAF AD missions, was a lesson not adequately highlighted. Two decades later, the temporary reversal of this BVR advantage

due to the PAF having been supplied with the Advance Medium Range Air to Air Missile by the US, altered the equation in favour of Pakistan in the post-Balakot strike activation, forcing the IAF on the defensive. Maintaining the air-to-air missile range advantage in future conflicts by the IAF will be vital for the freedom of surface operations and minimal interference by the enemy air.

Another vital takeaway is that classical Counter Surface Force Operations, as prosecuted in the plains and lower hills, is not possible in high altitudes. What proved most effective in Kargil was the interdiction of enemy positions, logistics nodes, etc. The successful and incessant attacks on the enemy's logistics machine had culminated in a serious degradation of the enemy's ability to sustain itself across the wide frontage. The series of attacks against **Point 4388** in the Drass sector was an excellent example of timely reconnaissance that detected the enemy's plans to shift to alternate supply routes and enabled accurate follow-on precision strikes. The successful outcome of severing the enemy logistics arteries was borne out by enemy radio intercepts. The efficacy of interdiction targets in high altitudes, as opposed to the very limited Battlefield Air Strike (BAS) opportunities, was unequivocally brought out in this conflict. The selection of targets for air strikes in high altitudes also needs special attention given the severe terrain and limitations

of high-altitude compared to the plains. This is a key lesson the Army needs to factor in future joint operations at high altitudes.

The invaluable air mobility, logistics, and maintenance support provided by the thousands of hours of flying in extremely challenging conditions of terrain, adverse weather, and pushing aircraft operational limits, cannot be missed in the credits. The unsung round-the-clock operations of the helicopter and transport fleets, which were vital in air logistics of troops, weapons, artillery guns, and supplies,⁴⁹ and the extensive casualty evacuations, played an equal part in the conduct and successful outcome of the conflict. This brings to sharp focus the need to develop and maintain forward airfields and advanced landing grounds in the region, making them suitable for all-weather air transport and fighter operations.

The asymmetric advantage of the use of offensive air power was effective, as Zehra points out that *"raining bombs and shells, psychologically hit the soldiers perched on the mountain tops."*⁵⁰ She also highlights that *"as Indian air power bombed out the supply routes, there were no alternate routes available"* and the Pakistani *"troops had been left exposed, vulnerable and unfed."*⁵¹ The planning for **Op KP** was it appears fatally flawed as *"The Pakistani planners had failed to assess the involvement of air power, the capability of the IAF and the Indian Army's determination."*⁵² The Pakistani Army as

⁴⁷ Tufail, *Op Cit*, n.58

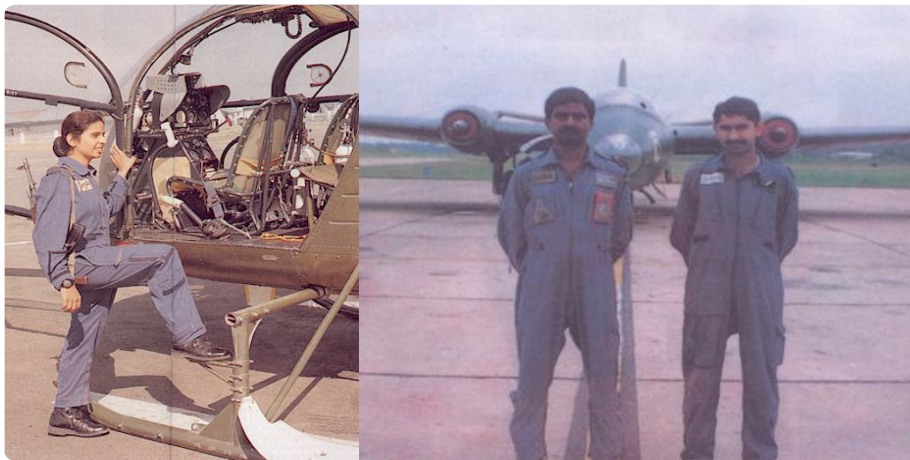
⁴⁸ Jasjit, *Op Cit, Ganesb, Indian Air Force in Action*, p.186

⁴⁹ MOD Annual Report, <https://vayu-sena.tripod.com/kargil-summary1.html>, accessed on 9 April 21

⁵⁰ Zehra, *Op Cit*, p.214.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 431

⁵² Joshi, *Op Cit*, p.91



Left Photo. Flying Officer Gunjan Saxena; the first woman Indian Air Force Officer to fly in a combat zone during 1999 Kargil war. Right Photo. The Photo reconnaissance Canberra crew who survived the Stinger SAM strike on 21 May 99.

synergised with AD operations for the successful prosecution of surface operations, whether defensive or offensive, especially in the high altitudes, is possibly the single most important lesson from the 25-year-old conflict. This enduring lesson was amply evident in the Army-Air Force Jointness in the Galwan crisis two decades later in Ladakh in 2020. **The home truths that emerged out of the thin air, a quarter of a century ago, thus cannot be allowed to fade as they continue to remain relevant for India's future national security and sovereignty.**

in the past did not take the PAF on board in the initial planning, but by mid-June were keen to induct it, not only to reduce the effects of the IAF strikes but also to inflict damage on the concentration of Indian troops. The PAF Chief was opposed to the idea since deploying squadrons in Azad Kashmir would leave Karachi and Lahore unprotected.⁵³

Concluding Thoughts

Jointness, a critical war-fighting necessity, is the most important lesson from the conflict that has endured from the icy heights of Kargil. The excellent joint warfare lessons of the 1971 War appeared to have faded over the intervening 28 years, as the Army became tied up in internal security. To the credit of both Services, the initial dissonance was quickly put aside to fight the common enemy together. The vital role and necessity of offensive air power

□ □ □

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**Air Marshal (Dr)
Diptendu Choudhury**

⁵³ Zebra, Op Cit, p.213-214



*Representational image. INS Delhi in Mumbai harbour, May 2010
(photo credit commons.wikimedia.org)*

THE NAVY AND THE KARGIL CONFLICT

SALIENT IMPACT OF THE SILENT SERVICE

When war clouds shattered the peace in the Himalayan frontier of Kargil and Ladakh in 1999, the entire nation came together – national unity and resolve to the fore. The Armed Forces readied for escalation, and the Navy too sailed out and played a silent strategic role.

“Navies fight at sea only for the strategic effect they can secure ashore, where people live. Sea battles, naval tactics, and ship design are means, and only means, to the gaining of strategic leverage in conflict as a whole.”

Colin S. Gray, 1992

The Navy and the Mountains of Kargil...

It has been twenty-five years since the localized, but intense war in the Himalayas in and around the peaks of Kargil and Drass was fought and which concluded in a clear victory for India. The Indian Army played the stellar, and central role in the bitter fighting that cost several lives. Quite a few of those who led the fight at the unit level in those craggy, windy, snowy and unforgiving heights were my buddies at the National Defence Academy, Pune. They were actively involved in command of Battalions, and in the frontline staff. In addition, there were mates in the Indian Air Force who were actively engaged in flying operations and dropped ordnance on target with precision and to devastating effect.

It was in this setting that the Indian Navy (IN) mobilized in nearly full measure and very expeditiously when war clouds were gathering. It then deployed in considerable strength in support of the Kargil War during the summer of 1999. Kargil was a localised conflict, involving a very small proportion of the Army’s and Air Force’s total numbers; but the possibility of escalation was quite real. As subsequent records, memoirs and scholarship showed, at the national strategic level, it was the Government’s decision to keep the war limited to the spatial



*INS Delhi (D61) departing Portsmouth Naval Base, UK, 20th June 2009
(photo en.wikipedia.org photo by Brian Burnell),*

area of the Kargil mountains and the Desired End State was the restoration of the status quo anté. But larger wars often have small beginnings! It is often a Navy's indirect leverage and influence-through the exercise of robust sea power-that creates pressures on an adversary's leadership in terms of deterrence or to limit escalation or to encourage the enemy to de-escalate. It often cannot be measured quantitatively, but assessed qualitatively with the benefit of hindsight. Fundamentally, though it requires planning and deployment of the naval instrument. These too, can have deck-level beginnings!

A Deck-Level Perspective

I was part of the IN's Western Fleet as the Executive Officer (i.e second-in-command in naval parlance) of *INS Delhi*, then the Navy's newest and most powerful destroyer. About 18 months after commissioning, the ship had entered a scheduled Guarantee Refit, which is part of the new-ship process. The refit had just about started and had been preceded by de-ammunitioning and de-fuelling so that

the ship was safe for "hot work" which again is sailor's lingo for welding that is necessary in many places in a ship during a refit. This was a period when it seemed that a larger conflict was unlikely. However, it was also felt by the apex political-military combine that wider readiness postures by all Services could deter Pakistan from escalating beyond its already considerable intrusions into the Drass-Batalik-Kargil sectors. So, greater demonstration of readiness postures, but with perhaps some inherent deception and information-warfare measures became the way to go.

Each Service has some differences in how they deploy into their ready-to-

fight locations and areas. For the Army these could be along the land borders at the frontier itself or close enough to move up from forward bases and cantonments. The Air Force, with its reach and mobility, distributes its fighting assets along forward air bases as well as stations deeper inland but all with the capability of joining the battle very quickly and in strength. The Navy, similarly, rallies its ships in different areas of the sea, to strike and to defend. Its submarines are also deployed offensively and defensively as may be required. Shore-based aviation and space-tracking nodes geared up further to focus more on Pakistan and its areas of interest to monitor among other things, its naval deployments, locate and perhaps track its submarines and build-up the overall operational pictures. A term in vogue now, but the jargon not used in 1999 is *Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)*!

Thus it was that our ship, *INS Delhi*, received orders to terminate the refit. This is not a very easy matter, but the crew was all charged up to "box-up" all machinery being stripped for inspection and/or repair; embark ammunition, fuel and extra spares as well as rations for long deployments. I felt so proud of our ship's company to see their zest, spirit and commitment in what were tense times. Since 1971, the Navy (and the Nation) had not come so close to the likelihood of a general conflict with Pakistan. In this environment, we started sailing as part of the entire Western Fleet and in detached Surface Action Groups (SAGs) in more realistic conditions and sometimes in areas closer to the adversary itself. Since our Captain was senior to most other Commanding Officers, he exercised tactical command of such SAGs which had significant combat power and were in a highly trained state. It would be adequate to say that there was a likelihood of our deployment in "Presence" turning to the exercise of sea denial or sea control

depending on the context in case of conflict. In sea control and sea denial, navies expect that ordnance could be used and these are not conditions of peacetime as is sometimes erroneously believed. We also fuelled at sea and *INS Delhi* sometimes fuelled smaller ships at sea in an old World War II evolution we had resurrected in 1998 during another deployment which was then adopted Navy-wide.

Messaging readiness, robustness and creating pressure through uncertainties is naturally planned at higher levels, and naturally involves units. Two examples involving *Delhi* could be illustrative. We got a call from the Headquarters Western Naval Command (WNC) one evening, when we had begun to ammunition, that a combined foreign delegation from another country's Military College would be visiting the ship. We conveyed that this would be awkward because of safety and security issues when even modern missiles and torpedoes as well as other ammunition would be on deck, or on the jetty or in barges alongside. The purpose for this visit was conveyed and understood by us. Work went on the next morning in full view as we took the delegation around our ship which was buzzing with activity. One of the accompanying attaches, who may have already known the types of units that usually berthed next to where our ship was, enquired about those vacant berths. I told him that our operational submarines are usually berthed here and obviously they are deployed and unseen at sea doing what submarines do best, "covert presence" to use an oxymoron. Subsequent statements showed that it was the deployed submarines that had the greatest effect on Pakistani leadership who feared not only trade interdiction, but loss of warships in areas where our boats were suspected by them to be deployed.

The second example was also on our

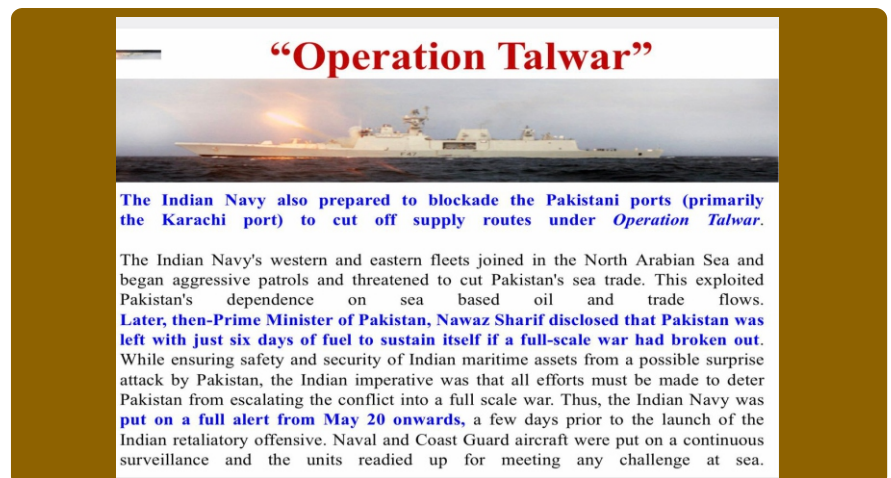
ship's helicopter deck and was, in a sense, at the macro level. The then Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) was visiting Mumbai for an operational review of the situation and a large media conference was scheduled at a few hours notice. He and the Flag Officer Commanding – in – Chief, WNC explained, in generic terms what the Navy was doing and prepared to do further if it came to that. Over the next few days print and electronic media covered what was happening in the maritime dimension to support larger objectives on land and to deter Islamabad / Rawalpindi from even thinking about escalation. Until the last of the Pakistani Army personnel had been neutralized in the Kargil heights, naval deployments continued. Around the end of July, the Navy began its draw down and our ship once again was given the REFSTART Signal ("Start Refit").

A point for the readers may be of interest: ships and other hi-technology hardware require periodic supported maintenance by our dockyards. As a policy, navies maintain certain force

levels that are operationally available and accepts that some ships and submarines would be in refit but available in future. These are never easy decisions and involve complex planning and yet, circumstances like the Kargil War or Operation Parakram later in 2002 remain important, especially if conflict or deployed readiness has to be maintained. In different ways, this is true for the other Services as well.

The Big Picture

Large scale deployments involved the Western Fleet, WNC submarines, missile corvettes, patrol boats, shore-based anti-ship mobile missile batteries and of course, shore-based long range surveillance aircraft across our coast. Deployed in forward areas and even in the western reaches of the Arabian Sea, they had the cumulative effect of adding pressure on Pakistan. Ships and submarines from the Eastern Naval Command further bolstered what could be available to the WNC. It was expected that Pakistani submarines



A thread about the Kargil war (Inputs courtesy Jammu Kashmir Study Centre, thread by @viniresh threadreaderapp.com)



General VP Malik, the Army Chief having a word with Lieutenant Commander Utpal Dutta, a Navy pilot who served in the battle zone with Army Aviation pilots (photo www.reddit.com)

would also be forward deployed and so anti-submarine patrolling and vigilance in our littoral was also increased. The Navy was fully prepared to “sail in harm’s way” and this message was clearly heard across the border. In the official history of this period, authored by Vice Admiral Hiranandani, the motives of General Musharraf, the sequence and the main phases are explained. From Pakistan’s viewpoint, the strategic idea had great potential, but at the military - strategic and military -operational levels, it was poorly planned and executed. Kargil, it could be said, was yet another instance of poor general-ship, almost a characteristic of the brass at Rawalpindi, noticed in previous conflicts and even in 2002 after the December 2001 terrorist attack on our Parliament.

What leverage did the Indian Navy position itself for? In answering this, a few cautions are in order. **First**, there is a wide gap between deploying a navy aggressively in conditions of “peace” (i.e. the absence of a “shooting” war) and in actual conflict. **Second**, from “presence” as a peacetime mission that potentially has deterrent influences on an adversary, the required

conditions of “sea control” or “sea denial” would be in conditions of hostilities. **Third**, short of war, deploying widely enables potential interdiction of an adversary’s trade in areas of choice, or some aspects of a blockade even; in effect however, if the enemy chooses to keep his ships moving to and fro, there is actually not much that can be done until the “shooting” starts. Yet, the enemy appreciates the potential of the other side’s offensive and defensive deployments and this plays into his mind.

Kargil, thus, for the Navy as well as the Air Force was different from what the situation was in the first half of 2002 when the Armed Forces were

again mobilized for Operation Parakram. The fundamental difference was that in the Kargil area, there actually was a state of conflict in which ordnance was being used in significant measure initially by the Pakistanis when they were digging in and then by the Indian side in even greater measure when the counter-offensive gathered momentum. Thus, those deployed on, over and under the sea during the Kargil War were acutely aware that with a “shooting war” on in the Kargil heights, something similar could occur anywhere at sea. In a sense, therefore, even in *INS Delhi*, we were “loaded, cocked, finger on the trigger guard” but with the “safety catch On.”

When seen in an aggregated sense, bold deployment and demonstrated readiness with adequate signalling of resolve had considerable effects. The deployment of submarines was especially useful since their precise locations were difficult to determine and the tasks of trying to ascertain these takes considerable resources in forces and time creating a new, silent and unseen “front” of concern for an enemy.

Lessons from Kargil: Higher Defence Organisation

Given the more seriously fraught security threat environment that India faces 25 years since Kargil, we need to move further on to the path of jointness. Several committees were formed after Kargil that made valuable suggestions and clear recommendations in their reports. Many of them concerned defence reorganization, greater multi-ministry, multi-agency coordination and integration. Specifically for the Armed Forces, there were observations on shortcomings and a road map of sorts that led to the institution of a Chief of Defence Staff, joint commands and further integration. The Andaman and Nicobar

Command and HQ Integrated Defence Staff came up soon enough, but they had limited functionality because of resistance from single Services.

The principles of war and warfare include the principle of surprise. We were strategically and operationally surprised at Kargil. The principle is valued in its proactive attribute in that it is obviously advantageous to surprise the adversary rather than be surprised. Therefore, national, military strategic, military operational and battlefield tactical Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) needs constant attention, imagination, human and technology upgrades.

Multi-Domain Cohesion of Force

Specific to our understanding of all warfare, is the need to develop multi-dimensional strategies and operational planning that incorporates, as and where needed, the dimensions of air, land and sea, but also of space and the cyber domains of warfare. True jointness in force-structuring and warfighting are unquestionably important.

It is now increasingly evident that China's sea power effectiveness is determined by the jointness of its military instruments and the enhancement of capabilities in multiple domains. India's geography, continental / territorial issues with China and Pakistan, essence as a maritime nation, leverages of islands, well-disposed associates in the expanse of the Indo-Pacific and the strength of our democracy, all have to be leveraged in the maritime domain. Besides, there can be no maritime conflict as such; conflicts between nations are necessarily multi-domain even when one domain may be predominant in time and space. The maritime domain for India is vital - as it is for several others, because major powers

need the sea to protect and further their **"multi-domain"** interests. Building those leverages and expanding Indian influence can benefit from joint sinews. Admiral Raja Menon's words, written in 1998, a year before Kargil, may be worth recounting: *"War on land has its own dynamics and so does war at sea. If the progress of the war at sea is out-of-phase with the land war, the ability to influence that land war diminishes."*

To Sum Up

The Navy played its key role in deterring Pakistan from the temptation to escalate in any dimension, including on land itself beyond what it began with a bite at Kargil - Drass, but could not really chew. Sea power also influenced Pakistani decisions to realise the futility of continuing the conflict and begin de-escalation and prevent further loss and humiliation to itself. Deterrence takes will, effort, forces and is costly. However, as is sometimes said, *"If you thought that deterrence is far too costly, try war!"*

Indian hard power, determined by the four-stranded DIME (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic) rope of statecraft, will need to be central to India's own rise as a major power with global interests and aspirations. To achieve this, Indian sea power that is dynamic, future-ready, joint and multi-domain would be vital to deterrence, and to fight until victory if deterrence fails; to catalyse collective security in the Indian Ocean Region and participate further into the global commons. Admiral Richmond's words sufficiently capture the essence of sea power's leverage and influence: *"Sea power did not win the war (World War II) itself; it enabled the war to be won."*

(Editor's Note: This article is partially derived from a much longer essay by the author for an IDSA publication in 2019 on the 20th Anniversary of Operation Vijay).



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Rear Admiral Sudarshan Y Shrikhande

25 YEARS SINCE KARGIL

A DOCTOR REFLECTS

The role of the medics in war, as in disaster struck areas too, is extremely crucial and pivotal to morale and the fighting spirit of the warriors. But the risk of death for the medics is far more in conflict situations, and the difficulties in treating casualties on high mountains behind boulders in darkness are enormous – as this first person account shows.

June 1999, Batalik Sub Sector, 16000 feet

The artillery shelling on Ring Contour was relentless and deafening, and it was our own. The battle-hardened paratroopers lay waiting to attack, one km below the enemy on the ridgeline, as 6000 shells of big Bofors and medium artillery guns pounded the objective. Softening the target, they said. And I was their Regimental Medical officer (RMO), Adjutant and Administration Company Commander, all rolled in one. The worrying factor was “*Shortfall*” they said. In common terms, the payload of 8 kilograms of TNT, fired from our territory 40 kms behind, falling amongst our midst, was absolutely expected due to meteorological conditions. The shelling went on for six hours. Mind you, the barrage of bursting shells, incoming artillery and mortar fire, surely made the night lively. The waiting for the fire-plan to end and our assault to commence was making people jumpy. It was the most nerve-wrecking six hours of my life, as also the 450 odd paratroopers, waiting to attack. Even in the darkness, I could feel raw nerves and the palpable tension in the faces around me, as the relentless shelling continued. Though we were snuggled below hefty boulders, the size of trucks, still each exploding shell caused the earth to shudder. And then we had it, the dreaded shortfall. It landed around 150 metres to our right, in Bravo Company. The screams told me, we had casualties, again.



Top. Major Arup Basu, sitting, second from left, and the medical staff at the military hospital in Kargil during the 1999 War. (Photo credit Dr Arup Basu)

Centre. A wounded soldier in Hospital (photo credit Kashmiri Pandit Network)

Below. Then Captain V S Grewal, the author

The Glacier Experience

The previous two years had been full of action, in other words, a paratrooper's dream. 1997 saw my airborne battalion moving into the highest battlefield in the world. We did our mandatory parachute jumps, which are more thrilling from the jumps in plains, as the atmosphere is rarer and one hurtles towards mother earth like a sack of potatoes. After the necessary and thrilling training in ice-craft and mountain-craft, we manned the glacier in 1998. In the one year on the Glacier, we not only battled all the weather elements of High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema, High Altitude Cerebral Oedema, Acute Mountain Sickness, Frost-Bite and avalanche; but a belligerent and impatient enemy always picking reasons for a showdown. There was constant exchange of fire. Artillery shelling took its toll, both sides. My ears, trained by my alma mater, the prestigious Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), Pune for chest wheeze, crackles, rales and of course heart murmurs, could easily now differentiate between our 81 mm mortar and enemy 82 mm shell, as it whizzed past, as also Grad-P rockets, when they thudded in the snow. Throughout our tenure, we managed to give a bloody nose to the enemy, even thwarting their attack on one of our posts, where at least nine of the enemy got killed.

Movement to Batalik (Kargil)

An eventful two years, earned the paratroopers a well-earned reversion to mother-base, in a peace location. Destiny, though had grander plans as news of deep incursions by the enemy started trickling in. The maroon berets found themselves redeployed to Kargil sector - a long and arduous journey to the Indus River. The climb to Ganasok, on a moonless night, peppered with enemy artillery fire, was another remarkable experience. The line of

paratroopers, with packs, ammunition and winter clothing stretched for more than a km. Thank the Almighty we were an ex-glaciers battalion, in possession of precious winter clothing. The Down sleeping bags and Kapok mattress were priceless when one was forced to sleep in the open, at that altitude.

The days climb took an unusual toll on the attacking troops - Diarrhoea. The reason was equally unique as it was challenging for all logistics planners. The ascent had naturally exhausted the individual water bottles. The only available source for replenishment was from the flowing nullah's and rivulets. Unfortunately, thousands of shells, own and enemy, had contaminated the whole area, in the preceding days. So, the cordite -smelling water led to chemical contamination. The paratroopers were stoic and uncomplaining, as usual. It's an ordeal to go for the nature's call, six to seven times a day, wearing a dungaree, mountain equipment, ammunition pouches and pack, with active enemy shelling as background music. Time, not medicine, resolved the issue, after the attack, when we scouted for an untouched source of water, and troops were sent in batches, to drink excessive water (to wash away the chemical toxin). That was the only cure I had.

Another logistics hurdle encountered for over 40 hours was food. As happens in war, our supply chain just got cut-off. The *shakar-paras* (the Indian soldier's staple diet in operations) finished. A few chocolates, carried over from the glacier special rations, vanished too. I know people who fast and can bear it, but prolonged hunger really can set the mood down. Finally, *kbasta-puris* in sandbags were air-dropped by helicopters, for the 450 odd men. This was one of the tastiest meals many ever

had. Subsequently, the cook-house was established under boulders and general contentment prevailed again.

Casualties and Air Evacuation

The attack on **Muntho Dhalo**, the enemy base camp was effective, quick and in military terms, easy with minimal resistance. The area was a flat plateau, at approximately 15000 feet above sea level, already showered by bombing, courtesy the Indian Air Force. There were gigantic boulders on this flat top, which gave us ample hiding space, from enemy mortar and small arms fire. We lost three braves in the attack and around a score had battle injuries. My Regimental Aid Post (RAP) was set up under an over-hanging rock. The next important step was to set up a helipad. The experience of having done it many times on the glacier helped. The area chosen was around 500 metres away, shielded by rocks and overlooking the valley below. Plotting an eight-figure grid reference, clearing the area, marking an H with atta, up goes the wind-sock; and we were ready. The enemy had sharp ears, on hearing the whirring of helicopters, they would generally start shelling the area with mortar rounds. Hats off to the Army Aviation pilots, who always flew in.

The maximum casualties always occurred at night, post-attacks. The nights in the RAP were a struggle against traumatic amputations, blood and volume loss and hypothermia, compounded by enemy fire. My patients were securely distributed under large boulders. Initial triage, emergency first-aid, establishing secure Intra Vein (IV) access, surgical cut-downs, chest-tubes, injections of antibiotics, pain-killers and most importantly, reassurance; and lo-



A wounded soldier being taken to hospital (Representational Image)

behold my night was over, and the eager, hopeful and desperate wait for the air-evacuation would start. My team of Nursing Assistants and BFNAs would work tirelessly, often running from one boulder to another in active shelling. It is well established that a doctor's presence at the frontline is a great morale-booster to the fighting troops, however only a doctor knows the extreme limitations in rendering effective life and limb saving care in a war zone at a battalion level. The dictum of securing ABC (Airway, Breathing, Circulation), the very basics of emergency medicine, and quickest rearward evacuation to the Forward Surgical Centres, the main mantra of combat medical care was practiced aggressively, with fingers crossed and the Almighty was often remembered.

The nights were long and often, the switching on of torch or battery lights were a give-away for a watchful enemy sniper. First light was a time of hope and air evacuation. The drill for an air evacuation was as dangerous as it was

situated around 500 metres away, with me alongside, holding the IV bottle (don't forget the secured Venflo). Speed was the essence. The eight people would interchange the stretcher for speed. The Cheetah would emerge from the depths, and many a time, just keep a ski on the ledge. Our job was to open the door, shove the casualty on the floor, tie the IV Bottle on the roof and scoot away. My feeling of security lay in the fact that the IV access would have been secure during our melee downhill as well as the 50 minutes flight to the Surgical Centre. During the course of our stay at **Muntho Dhalo**, we had scores of such casualties from artillery fire, mortar fire, small arms and of course landmines.

The Prisoners of War (PoWs)

The day we captured **Muntho Dhalo**, my RAP had the unique distinction of being graced by three Pakistani PoWs whom our unit caught, trying to escape. They were regulars from the Northern Light Infantry and Frontier Force. Two PoWs were wounded, hence my intervention was called for. My first task was to stop the paratroopers urge to rough them up, as being the palpable mood of the troops around. After giving them the necessary medical aid, the three spent around 24 hours with me, before being transported rearwards. They were absolutely dejected and terrified and I had long and interesting conversations with them regarding their Army, family, homes and the situation they found themselves in. A month later, on TV, I saw them being released back on the Attari border check post. I felt nice imagining they would be reunited with their families once again. I often think about

my assertive stance in treating them and feel relieved to recollect what I did for injured persons, irrespective of the side they were on. This is a Doctors credo. Conflicts throw up emotionally and morally demanding situations where perceptions and actions are governed by immediately preceding events and memories. In this conflict, inhuman and dastardly things had happened to our captive brothers, which really swung the mood Southwards.

The Second Attack on Ring Contour

After clearing **Muntho Dhalo**, the formidable task of clearing the ridgeline still loomed. The Pakistani troops would not vacate, hence they needed to be evicted. Our Artillery had done its bit in softening the target. Now it was time for the assault and boots on ground. The attack commenced at 0200 hours. The enemy was stubborn, having been deeply entrenched in fortified bunkers, below the boulders, and offered stiff resistance. The paratroopers remained resilient and persisted. I was with the Commanding Officer and Gun Position Officer, coordinating the attack and planning casualty evacuation. Radio communication told me that Delta Company Commander had stepped on a landmine, 500 metres to the East. His leg had blown off, but he was alive. His buddy had been shot, trying to pull him out. He was finally pulled out by Paratrooper Nursing Assistant, under enemy fire.

My RAP under the boulder was nothing short of a trauma ward. In fact, I had to expand to neighbouring boulders. The night was long and never ending. Sunrise brought light, warmth and victory. Ring Contour and the ridgeline was ours. There were dead comrades, whom we lined up in sleeping bags, to be transported back later on. The wounded took priority

and were triaged. The minor wounded were dressed and told to start marching downwards. 16 sorties were required for the serious casualties and the process of air evacuation started.

Looking Back

25 years have gone past. The fallen are often remembered. Those were testing times as a doctor and an officer. People have often asked me about my experiences and lessons learnt. It certainly was a life-changing experience. But the absolute takeaway for me from my tenure as a medic in operations was the unflinching faith and trust of the soldier on the doctor in the battlefield. A buddy telling his injured mate with a traumatic below-knee bilateral amputation, at 15000 feet at 2300 hours at night, under enemy fire; **“Now you are in safe hands, daktar saab is here”**, still makes me break out in cold

sweat. I’m absolutely convinced that the war was won by one thing alone - the Indian Soldier and his selflessness, attachment, devotion to the point of the ultimate sacrifice for his REGIMENT. A soldier’s life starts and ends for his Regiment. Chanting its war-cry, the Indian soldier will go to hell and capture it.

My experiences of **Operation Vijay** is a reflection of what all the RMOs deployed with their proud battalions across various ridgelines, lungpas and valleys experienced, as also the Surgical Teams treating the casualties at the Forward Surgical Centres and hospitals. Their experiences would be equal if not more exhilarating in other sectors. It was often quoted that **“no casualty that reached a RMO alive, died”**, bearing testimony to our proud contribution.



Brigadier VS Grewal, commissioned into the Army Medical Corps on 24 Jan 1996, is a graduate and post-graduate in Community Medicine from AFMC Pune. He has held various appointments like Instructor at AFMC, Joint Director Health at DGAFMS and Director Health at Command HQ and Army HQ. An expert in Public Health, he has been part of health policy formulation and implementation for the Armed Forces as well as Government of India. A qualified paratrooper, he served as a Regimental Medical Officer of a Parachute Battalion in Operation Vijay and in Operation Meghdoot. The officer is presently attending the NDC course at New Delhi.



Brigadier V S Grewal

THE SHERSHAH OF KARGIL:

A TWIN BROTHER'S TRIBUTE

Even now, when Vishal Batra steps onto the icy peaks of Kargil, the words **'Yeh Dil Maange More'** reverberate in his ears. This was his twin brother's success signal to his Commanding Officer after capturing **Point 5140** during the Kargil War. We had featured this moving tribute to Captain Vikram Batra, Param Vir Chakra, (PVC), 13 Jammu & Kashmir Rifles in our January 2021 issue, and are repeating it in this Special Commemorative Kargil Issue.

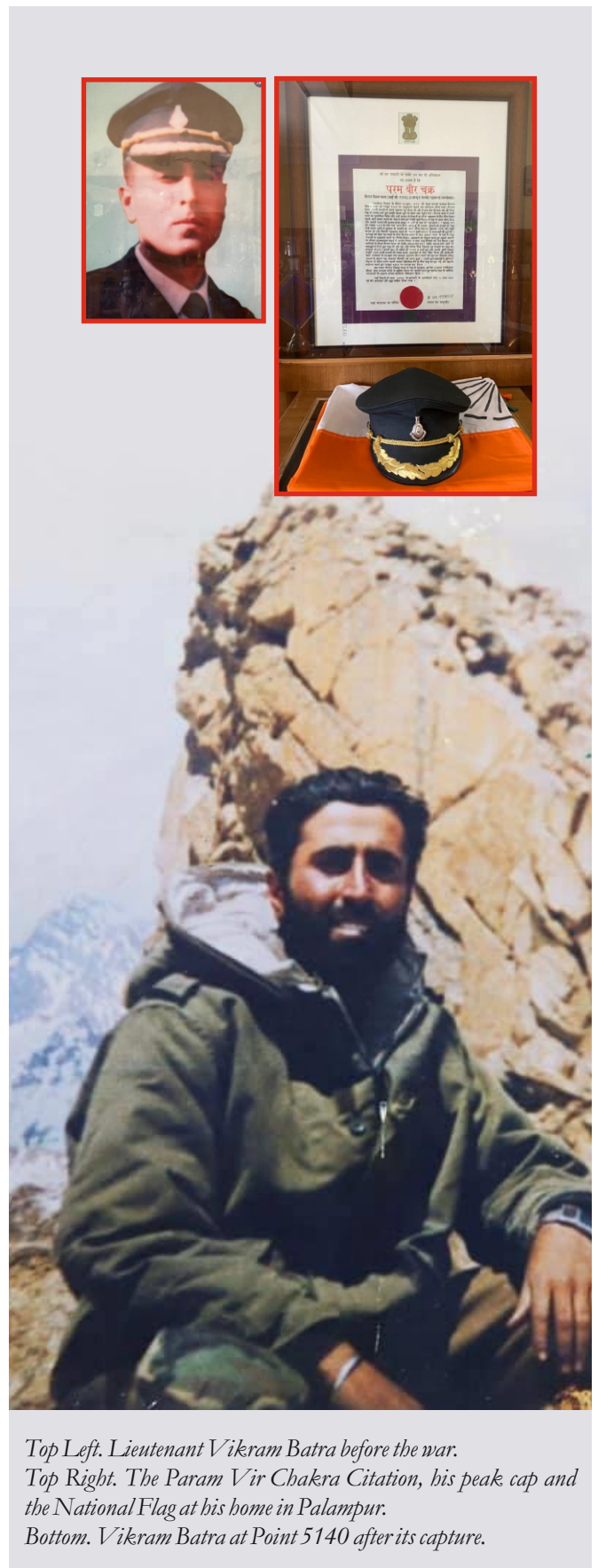
In 1990, our father Girdhari Lal Batra started giving my twin brother Vikram and I, Rs 50 every month towards the school bus fare. While I chose to conform to the intent of its allotment, and travelled to school by bus every day, Vikram had other ideas. He opted to walk, and instead spent that princely sum in the canteen! We were just 14. Even at that young age, he was different from the rest of us, showing uncommon spunk, spirit and enterprise.

I always dreamt that I would be able to visit Vikram as a Commanding Officer (CO) of a regiment. Sadly, some dreams are never meant to be realised. But for me, and every Indian, Vikram still commands those treacherous peaks in Drass and Kargil. The **'Shershah of Kargil'** – that's what the enemy called Vikram. They used to fear his arrival in the missions; that is the mark he made on them while at battle in those unforgiving mountains.

At some point in the years spent growing up, Vikram had marched way ahead of all of us...

Memories: An Idyllic Childhood

Captain Vikram Batra, PVC (posthumous) was fondly called Luv by our family and friends, and I, his identical twin



Top Left. Lieutenant Vikram Batra before the war.

Top Right. The Param Vir Chakra Citation, his peak cap and the National Flag at his home in Palampur.

Bottom. Vikram Batra at Point 5140 after its capture.

(younger by just 14 minutes), was Kush. Our childhood was spent in the idyllic hills of Palampur. True to cliché, we made the most of our identical looks — playing pranks, filling in for each other and at times even getting punished for one another’s tomfoolery! But our similarities went beyond the physical. We also had the same interests.

Vikram and I started playing table tennis at age 10, and ended up representing our school at the All India Nationals. It is another story that Vikram went on to become the school champion for five consecutive years! I’d like to believe that I had a big part to play in that; after all, I chose to lose to him in the semi-finals in the fifth year, so that he could make the school record. Deep down in my heart, I knew that my brother was always meant to be a winner, right from the start.

In 1988, a famous television serial titled ‘Param Vir Chakra’ used to be broadcast every Sunday on Doordarshan, which we used to watch avidly at our neighbour’s house (we didn’t have a television set at home then). One couldn’t have fathomed at that point - 36 years ago - that Vikram would also become one of the 21 recipients of this highest Gallantry award in a battlefield.

**Patriotism & Passion:
The Call To Arms**

Even as schoolboys, we were in awe of the men in uniform, as our school was inside the Army Cantonment at Palampur. The passion to join the Indian Armed Forces was somewhat natural, as most of our classmates and friends were from an Armed Forces background. Both of us were used to seeing men all around in Combat and OG. Though National Defence Academy was always the first choice, we also wanted to enrich our life experiences by attending college in a big

cosmopolitan city. Both of us joined the DAV College at Chandigarh, also marking the beginning of hostel life as independent individuals.

The dream of joining the Forces never took a backseat. In fact, we had a lot of friends with a defence background even during our stay in the hostel, each one of them with a dream to don the uniform. For them, it was about carrying forward the legacy of their fathers or grandfathers, but for us, it meant a new world, a new way of life and a dream that had been embedded in our hearts from our school days.

My brother didn’t just dream. He put in a lot of planning and hard work into a clear step by step process to achieve his dreams. The first step was joining the National Cadet Corps (NCC), Air Wing at DAV College, Chandigarh. While it didn’t mean directly donning the uniform, he imbibed the basics of discipline, professionalism, courage, fearlessness, camaraderie, a secular outlook and an understanding of what was to follow

later. It also meant inculcating team spirit and building leadership traits by mobilising people from different walks under one banner and then taking them through the daily routine of PT, drills, adventure activities, social service and developing an all-round personality with a sense of duty, moral and ethical values, commitment and dedication. Having attended the camps like DCAT 1 and DCAT 2, he excelled and ensured that he booked his berth for the prestigious Republic Day Parade on 26th January 1994 at Rajpath. Leading a contingent was a dream for Vikram that started taking shape, and having been declared as the Best Cadet for his Directorate, the journey had already begun.

NCC became a part of his daily life, and he soon received the prestigious ‘C’ certificate, it was also the time to get into serious studies that were needed for the Combined Defence Services (CDS) Examination preparation. Spending nights at the college campus library and burning the



Captain Vikram Batra and his troops with Pakistani weapons captured by them



Left Photo. Vikram being pipped by his parents on commissioning at IMA, Dehradun.
Right Photo. The twin brothers.

of the men you command, come next. Your own ease, comfort and safety come last, always and every time.”

Mom and Dad pipped the stars on his shoulder. He stood there grinning from ear-to-ear in his crew cut, several kilos thinner after the rigorous training! It was a grand moment. But it wasn't going to be an easy life and Vikram knew that.

Having been commissioned into 13 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles, his first posting was in the strife-torn town of Sopore (District Baramulla in Jammu & Kashmir). Vikram had some intense face-to-face actions with terrorists in Sopore as part of counter-terrorist operations. We knew that he was born to fight against all odds. During his annual leave when Vikram visited us, we

midnight oil had become a routine. Vikram knew well enough that it was now or never, and he in no way wanted to leave anything to chance! In October 1995, we appeared for the CDS examination. In January 1996, we received news that both of us had cleared our written examination. Vikram cleared his Services Selection Board (SSB) in the very first attempt in March 1996 and opted for the Indian Army. I, on the other hand, was rejected twice by the SSB, and settled for business administration. How thrilled and proud we all were when he made it to the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun.

The Pipping Ceremony: A Dream Realised

On 06 December 1997, Vikram Batra's dream came true. He took the oath as an Officer of the Indian Army. In the words of Field Marshal Philip Chetwode, who first used these words during the setting up of IMA, *“The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time. The honour, welfare and comfort*

chatted for hours about the challenges he faced in Sopore. I realised how much passion I myself had for the Forces. There was always great pride in my heart that my identical twin, Vikram was such a wonderful officer, marching ahead in life much faster than I could imagine. During our conversations, we would talk of the day that he would command his unit and I would get a chance to attend some of the regimental functions with his family and children. That dream is lost now.

Victory: The Kargil War

Around this time Kargil happened, and his unit was tasked to flush out the Pakistani intruders who had entered Indian territory. His first mission was to capture **Point 5140** at 17,000 feet. With the roaring sound of their regimental war cry, **‘Durga Mata Ki Jai’**, Vikram led his company on the night of 19 June 1999. He had promised his CO, Lieutenant Colonel Y K Joshi (later Lieutenant General and Army Commander, Northern Command) that he would have his morning tea at **Point 5140**.

He led the attack so ferociously that he was intercepted by some of the enemy soldiers and challenged not to climb to the Top, else he would lose his life. Vikram replied, *“We'll see in an hour who is at the top”*. He strategically regrouped his men and lobbed a hand grenade destroying one of the bunkers, and killed five Pakistani soldiers in a close hand-to-hand combat. As promised, he radioed a message to his CO, **“Yeh Dil Maange More”** by hoisting the tricolour atop **Point 5140** on the morning of 20 June 1999.

The last call he made to our parents was when he went for his first

mission at **Point 5140**. It had given us all jitters, but we knew that Vikram was a daring officer, who treated every challenge like a cakewalk. His last statement to one of our friends, before proceeding to the Kargil War, was that he would either hoist the national flag, or come back wrapped in the tri-colour. He kept his promise, and those prophetic words still haunt us.

A Hero's Sacrifice: Immortalised At 24

It was months later, at Headquarters Western Command, that I met the Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) who was with Vikram the day he was fatally wounded. He was the last man to speak to Vikram. Subedar Major Raghunath Singh (now retired Honorary Captain) started wailing when he saw me. He was in disbelief – as if it were Vikram standing in front of him. He recalled the last moments of Vikram's life.

Lieutenant Naveen, Vikram's junior, was hit by a grenade and needed urgent help in the second mission at **Point 4875** (they say this was the most strategic feature for the Indian Army to recapture, as the entire Srinagar-Leh National Highway was visible from this feature). This mission was led by Vikram on 07 July 1999. The JCO wanted to go out and help, but Vikram stopped him. The enemy was firing heavily. "You have a family and children back home. I will do this," Vikram said, stopping the JCO, and instead going out himself. As Raghunath Singh narrated this incident to me, he wept like a baby, inconsolably.

Vikram jumped onto the other side of the cliff to silence the machine gun that was firing indiscriminately, and got into a close combat with three Pakistanis. He put them to death before being hit from a close range. Having realised that their commander had fallen, the charged company went berserk with anger and destroyed all the enemy bunkers. The tri-

colour was planted atop **Point 4875**—they call it '**Batra Top**' now for his supreme sacrifice, and giving the company the edge it needed to recapture this strategic feature.

Vikram reached Palampur in a coffin before the sun rose on 11 July 1999. He was wrapped in the tri-colour, lying calm, almost as if he was trying to catch up on the sleep he had lost during his arduous assaults on those treacherous peaks. Vikram was awarded the country's highest gallantry award, the **Param Vir Chakra**, posthumously. He was only 24. I can still imagine him saying those famous words at 17,000 feet, "**Yeh Dil Maange More**", after victory over the enemy.

A lot has changed in these last 25 years. A lot remains the same. I have grey

strands in my hair and lines around my eyes. Vikram will stay youthful for eternity, immortalised at 24. Time cannot touch him. There has hardly been a day when I don't talk about him. I travelled to Drass and Kargil and paid tribute to my twin and all his fellow soldiers who laid down their life at '**Batra Top**' on 07 July 2019 to commemorate 20 years of his martyrdom day, along with the sacrifice of all our men for protecting their motherland. 'The call of duty' - the mention of this phrase takes me back to the days he was to be commissioned as an officer. Vikram, you continue to live in the heart of every Indian, inspiring soldiers and civilians alike. '**O Captain, my Captain, my brother, my twin, I salute you.**'



Vishal Batra is the identical twin of late Captain Vikram Batra, PVC, younger to him by just by 14 minutes. The twins studied at DAV Public School and Kendriya Vidyalaya, Palampur. Later, Vishal Batra completed his Masters in Financial Control from the Institute of Management Studies, H P University at Shimla. After a few years with TATA Finance Limited (Asset Financing Division) and IDBI Bank (Retail Banking Division), he joined ICICI Bank. He is presently working as National Business Head – Defence Ecosystem with ICICI Bank Limited and has been with the bank since 2001.



Vishal Batra

NACHI EJECTING AND DROPPING AMIDST THE ENEMY

A Prisoner of
War (POW) narrates

Group Captain Kambhampati Nachiketa, VM (then Flight Lieutenant Nachiketa) was carrying out an airstrike on Pakistani positions in the Batalik sector on 27 May 99, when he had an engine failure. Nachiketa ejected from his MiG-27ML and was captured by a Pakistani unit led by Captain Qamar. He recalls the activities of that month.

“The heart of a pilot is always in the cockpit”. This simple adage has years of underlying sweat and blood and a passionate love for the skies. All pilots, especially military aviators, start this extremely professional journey at a young age of 20 to 21 years; a rigorous training regimen and an uncompromising screening process, makes sure that only those with the necessary attributes make it past the gate. A challenging fighter training syllabus in an operational squadron to get the coveted “Operational” status grants a military aviator the privilege of fighting a war.

I was part of the “Wolf Pack”, a Mig 27 Squadron, based at Adampur in the Western Sector. The MiG 27 aircraft, christened “Bahadur” by the Indian Air Force (IAF), was a versatile, swing-wing strike aircraft of Russian origin. Powered



Flight Lieutenant Nachiketa in 1999



Nachiketa (left) and Squadron Leader A Mandokhot in front of a MiG 27 fighter

by the R-29 engine, which produced 25000 lbs (11,500 kg) thrust, it was capable of supersonic flight, and could carry upto 4000 kgs of deadly arsenal comprising a variety of bombs, rockets and missiles on its external hard points, besides a powerful 30 mm front gun internally. For me, 25 years old and brimming with josh, flying this machine was a dream and only the sky was the limit. Life couldn't have been better!

In early May 1999, we started getting inputs of some adverse developments in the Kargil sector. The misadventure of Pakistani forces infiltrating across the Line of Control (LC) and occupying features and vacant posts of the Indian Army in the Kargil area came to light. On being informed of our likely operational tasking and movement to war locations, the activity cycle of the squadron shifted gears. On the surface, there was humour and banter aplenty, but at a deeper level, it was all serious business, as we went into preparations and rehearsals for full spectrum operations. There was a

conscious effort to keep the families out of the information loop, to save them worry and anxiety.

We deployed to Srinagar airfield on 18 May, acutely conscious of our responsibilities and the immense faith entrusted in us by the IAF. The entire unit - the young energetic fighter pilots, the ever-motivated technical officers and the spirited joshilay technicians – was geared up as a well-oiled, fighting machine, raring to do our bit. We got down to the business of re-familiarization with the terrain and training for operations in right earnest. Due to the harsh and rugged mountainous terrain, a very high level of preparation and ground work was called for. Mission briefings and practice flights were undertaken in that short week to get a hang of high altitude dynamics and firing. Practice missions were undertaken to Toshamaidan range for armament practice. Valley flying, an essential component of operations in mountains, is not just thrilling but extremely

demanding, so we also brushed up our valley flying skills. We were briefed on the prevailing situation on the ground, with special emphasis on infiltration strongholds and own troop locations.

The enthusiasm and confidence levels in the Squadron were at its peak. A similar zeal and eagerness was palpable in all the crew rooms of the various squadron detachments operating from Srinagar. The younger lot was especially inspired to evict the intruders at the earliest. One young fighter pilot wanted to wipe out the infiltrators within a week and then proceed on leave to attend to the more serious matter of selecting a bride!

Since the infiltration was localized to a portion of the LC, it was expected that any action to evict the infiltrators would be confined to the valley. However, the possibility of escalation into a wider conflict was always at the back of the mind. Despite this possibility, the immediate recourse was offensive action to evict the infiltrators.



Flight Lieutenant Nachiketa with PM Atal Behari Vajpayee after return from Pakistan

Leader Ajay Ahuja and Flight Lieutenant PG Reddy of the MiG 21 squadron were to provide the Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) post the strike. Air Defence escorts were provided to give the package aerial protection. Thus far, all our training had consisted of simulated missions with dummy armament load or live armament practice over the air-to-ground armament ranges. This time around, it was the real stuff with live weapons and on a real target.

At around 1100 hours, we got airborne for the strike. We flew below the crest level and maintained radio silence (silent strike), to avoid detection by enemy sensors. The target was a logistics node at a height of around 17000 feet and we had planned to carry

As the first week ended, it was clear that we were to go in for actual missions soon. Commanding Officer (CO) Otter and Flight Commander Bhattu were superb in their leadership and kept the pack highly motivated and inspired.

On 26 May, the IAF launched **Operation Safed Sagar**, and we had our first operational mission in the Batalik sector. Unfortunately weather played spoil sport and extensive clouding hampered our bombing missions. The stipulation by the Government of India that LC was not to be breached at any cost, substantially restricted the manoeuvring space and attack options available for strike missions.

On 27 May, two formations of 2 aircraft each, Boxer formation, led by Flight Lieutenant Anupam Banerjee with Flight Lieutenant Khatana as his No.2 and Hyena formation, led by Squadron Leader A Mandokhot and I as No. 2, were assigned to carry out a strike mission on a logistics node at **Muntho Dhalo**, in the Batalik Sector. We were to carry out the strike with S8 80 mm rockets. Squadron

out a dive attack with rockets. Reaching the target area, my leader, Hyena 1, started his run-in for the attack, but could not spot the target and reported “*negative contact*”. This was quite possible, since the mountainous terrain was ice covered and the targets would have been well camouflaged. And there is always an added pressure on the leader to make contact with the target; moreover, the dust and smoke from the bombs dropped by the preceding formation also contributes to obscuring the target.

As No. 2, I had more time to assess the target site and was able to pick up the logistics site with tents, material and movement of men. I went into a dive for my attack, achieved my weapons’ solution and fired all my rockets in a salvo. On pulling out of the dive, I saw my leader going in for one more pass as he had not fired in the first run in. I followed him in the pattern and this time, I could see heightened activity on the ground as a consequence of the rocket attacks. Since I had finished my rockets, I was only left with front gun ammunition in my 30 mm Gatling gun. I was behind my leader, in line with the targets; the opportunity was irresistible and I decided to fire my guns to cause additional damage on the enemy.

I rolled into my attack, and after firing my gun, pulled out of the dive, opening the throttle to 100 % for climbing back to height. Somewhere in the climb, my engine quit. There were other indications to confirm that it was indeed an engine failure, such as a loss in the thrust, warning lights flashing, corroborating readings of the aircraft instruments, reduction in the rate of climb, and the sudden reduction in the cockpit noise levels. The engine may have failed due to the rarified air



MiG 27 firing a salvo

at high altitude, the effect of the gun attack, change of aircraft trajectory or a combination of factors.

Sweeping my wings to 16 degrees to give me a better glide, I put the aircraft into a descent to maintain relight speed. I gave a R/T call to inform my leader of my engine failure. I steered right of a hill feature straight ahead, jettisoned the rocket pods to lighten the aircraft and attempted relighting the engine. The relight process started and I must have reached around 85 % RPM, when I ran out of altitude. The terrain was around 17000 feet in that area and I could see it rushing towards me. That is when I gave a call, **“Mando, Nachi ejecting”** to my formation leader and punched out. I could see my leader carrying out an orbit over my position to pin point my location to aid the Search and Rescue (SAR) team in locating me, and then exit.

It was quite clear that it was not a missile hit, as there was no visual sighting of a missile, nor was there any damage to the jet or to the engine, since I was getting a positive relight. If I had another 700 to 800

metres of altitude available, I may have achieved a complete relight of the engine.

A fighter pilot is most comfortable in the cocoon that is his cockpit. The entire machine around the pilot is in sync with the man inside (and now, women too!). Once out of this secure environment, other forces come into play, and in this case, made even more complicated due to the high altitude ejection and a hostile ground environment. It was a low level ejection, as I was trying to relight the engine right till the last moment. In the initial grey out stage post ejection, I registered my fighter crashing against a hill edge close to me. I registered my main parachute opening and within a few seconds I had touched down. The knee level snow cushioned my impact as there was no time to stabilize in my descent. I was trying to orientate myself, trying to absorb the abrupt loss of comfort of my fighter cockpit. I was not thinking too much about capture, though I did

wonder whether I would be met by our own forces or those of the enemy.

Then I heard gunshots and knew for sure that enemy troops would soon be around. I could not see anyone initially. My position was on a higher platform, with a valley running NE/SW to my right and hills to my left. I estimated I was NW of the targets we had just attacked. I could see some boulders a few hundred metres ahead. I hid the map and the call signs, etc., in the snow, loaded my Makarov pistol and took shelter behind the boulders. Wet cold was seeping inside my snow boots and through the thin personal jacket I was wearing. Because of the rarified air at that height, I felt breathless. The bullets whizzing past me brought me back to stark reality and I could see five to six armed soldiers climbing up the ridge in a semi-circle. I started firing at them, and as I finished my clip of eight rounds, I realised that I was no match against their AK 56s. Before I could load the next magazine,



Flight Lieutenant Nachiketa (centre) and his parents meeting President K R Narayanan, after returning to India from Pakistani captivity

they had surrounded me and started hitting me. One of them shoved the barrel of his weapon inside my mouth. Fortunately for me, their young Platoon Commander reached the spot and ordered them to stop. They were quite agitated, wanting to hit and kill me, since I had fired on them from the air and on ground. But to my relief, he was able to control his hot headed jawans. He made it quite clear that I was their captive and I was not to be harmed. Ironically, I learnt later that this officer who had saved my life was subsequently killed in action on 04 June, when our troops pushed them back. He is one enemy person I remember vividly even now, for the way he conducted himself and treated an enemy warrior with dignity.

After some time, I was taken by helicopter from the Army camp site to the air base at Skardu. At the air base (as per my guess since I was blindfolded for all movements), I was served food and water. After the ejection and the hectic activities of previous few hours, I was in pain all

over. A morphine shot administered at the base camp gave some relief. Time starts playing on your mind in such situations and the suspense of what is to follow, keeps one confused. I spent one night there, where some initial interrogation took place. The next day, on 28 May, a C130 Hercules took me to Islamabad, blindfolded and hand cuffed. Another day was spent at a safe house there, where they tried some more questioning and indoctrination on religious and identity grounds. On 29th, I was declared non-cooperative and handed over to the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) cell for rigorous interrogation.

The next four days were very tough, in inhuman conditions and mentally and physically draining. As

part of the classic interrogation procedures, I was always kept occupied, to prevent me to think and plan. I knew from historical data that our pilots have rarely come back from such situations, but I never gave up, and kept planning an escape. The tough training at the National Defence Academy (NDA) and our values and beliefs give us the strength to face such odds and overcome such debacles. In one instance, they conveyed to me that my father had suffered a second heart attack and was at the hospital wanting to meet me. The Indian media, while reporting my ejection and capture, had mentioned that my father had recently recovered from a bypass surgery, which had been picked up by their intelligence and was being used on me; I just closed my eyes and said a silent sorry to my father, for having to face such a situation.

On 1st June, I was shifted back to the safe house. I spent one more day there, but there was a noticeable change in their attitude and I guessed that my release orders may have been received. Sure enough, I was handed over to the International Red Cross Society, and further, to the Indian High Commission at Islamabad. After some formalities to deal with the unusual situation (travelling without passport or visa!!), I was shifted to the Defence Attaché's residence. On 03 June, I was driven to the Wagah Border, crossed over into India and returned to my base. An unwavering stand by the Government of India, media pressure building global opinion and the civilian Government in Pakistan coming under internal threats, contributed to my being returned to India in just a few days. Of course a billion prayers were also working round the clock.

After getting back, I learnt of the tragic loss of Squadron Leader Ajay Ahuja. Ajay was a fine officer, a thorough gentleman and a great

human being, always full of infectious energy. At Srinagar, we were operating closely with each other, and were to have breakfast together after the mission that morning on the 27th of May. Unfortunately, destiny had some other plans for us. His death was a terrible loss for all of us, and especially for his family.

Meanwhile, on being informed about my situation, my parents, sisters and other family members had rushed to Adampur. While I was in captivity, wives of my squadron mates, under the guidance of my CO's wife, and officers locally available at Adampur, ensured that my family was supported to cope with the situation. They were extremely brave throughout the entire ordeal and remained confident of a positive outcome. The tremendous bonding and the esprit de corps, which is the essence of the Armed Forces, was a source of strength for all families. In fact, the squadron families would get together at regular intervals to reaffirm their commitment and support for each other. And also to wait for the daily 'All OK' phone call from the front. As combatants, we are trained and prepared to deal with conflict, but families are not. A phone call could mean momentary good news or permanent bad news, and the "Who's Next" question could be excruciating, to say the least.

Back at my home base, I required time to come to terms with my situation. With the support of my family and friends, I gradually overcame the trauma. The ejection at high altitude had resulted in multiple compression fractures in my spine and the immediate captivity, without proper medical treatment, aggravated the condition. Consequently, I was medically unfit to fly for almost four years; I was also declared permanently unfit for ejection seat aircraft, ruling out flying fighters. After regaining my flying fitness, I converted to



Nachiketa with his parents, 1999

transport aircraft, and flew the An 32 and IL 78 tanker aircraft.

In July 2016, I visited Kargil for the Vijay Diwas event and flew in an Army helicopter to see the locations that we had flown over in our missions. The area was now manned by our troops and the snow had melted. I saw the **Muntho Dhalo** bowl where we had attacked the logistics node. It was around 8 to 10 kms inside the LC on our side. So it was clear that even after ejection, I was inside the Indian side of the LC, and it was only due to the Pakistani intrusion that Pakistani forces were present there. And

I became a PoW while being in Indian Territory!

The most precious thing that I have relished on coming back is living itself. After having seen death so closely, in fact three times (a very low ejection, six AK-56 machine guns firing at me and coming back alive from Pakistan after being a PoW, which in itself is a miracle) I have realised the true value of life. Life is short and fleeting, and it is imperative we relish each and every moment of it. **Optimism should be the mantra to face every challenge which life throws at us.**



Group Captain Kambhampati Nachiketa, VM (retd), born on 31 May 1973, studied in Kendriya Vidyalaya, New Delhi before joining NDA, Pune. He was commissioned into the LAF in 1994 and has served in fighter, UAV and transport Squadrons. Based at Hyderabad, he is presently a Captain in commercial airline.



**Group Captain
Kambhampati Nachiketa**

OPERATION PARAKRAM

A MARITIME VIEW

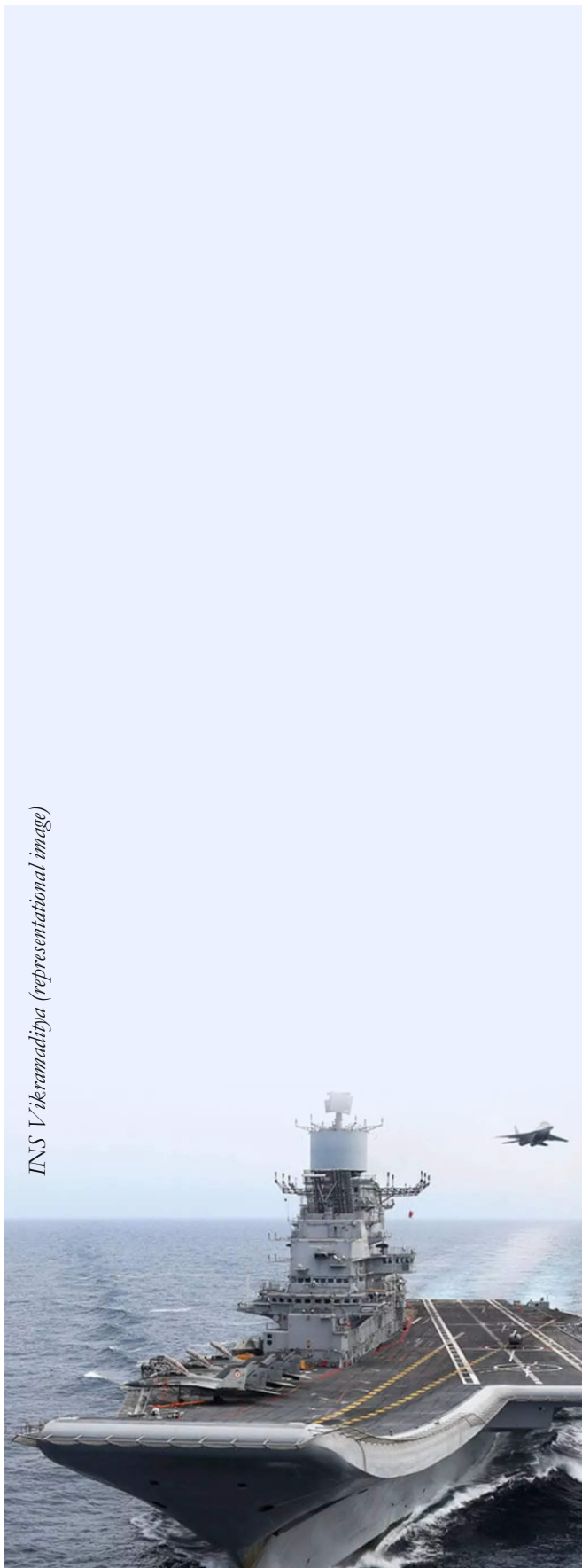
Post the attack on the Parliament of India on 13th December 2001 by terrorists from Jaish-e-Mohammad, **Operation Parakram** was launched. It was evident that a terrorist attack of this nature could not have been launched without either the tacit or explicit assistance from Pakistan. While denials of such complicity were quick in coming, these cut thin ice. Considering the audacity of the operation against the seat of the Government of India, a response was essential.

While the contours of the response were being worked out, the mobilization of the Armed Forces was ordered on a scale large enough to generate a wide spectrum of options for retaliation, as well as to contain the escalation matrix once the response was executed. It was with this background that **Operation Parakram** was launched on 25th December 2001, the largest mobilization of the Indian Armed Forces since the 1971 war with Pakistan.

Issues of Mobilization

Given the friction of terrain, distances, logistical requirements and associated infrastructure to facilitate movement; large scale mobilization of ground forces is complex, arduous, expensive and slow to materialize. It is also difficult to conceal. Naturally, the adversary against whom the mobilization is directed commences to prepare for the eventuality of war. If their lines of communication are short, as in the case of Pakistan, the movement of their strike formations towards their border becomes quicker. This creates a window of risk wherein the adversary may assess that given the circumstances, pre-emption was likely to be an advantage while the adversary was still mobilizing. Then the probability of such an occurrence becomes high. To deter such an outcome, instruments that could be mobilized with speed and visibly poise themselves for the conduct of offensive operations can be quite effective. It is in this context that both the Indian Navy as well as the Indian Air Force played a key role in the early stages of **Operation Parakram**.

Warships and submarines, once operational, constantly remain fuelled, armed and ready for rapid deployment. At most, they may require rapid ammunitioning to take on their full war outfit of ordinance. This is a naval term for a full war load of



INS Vikramaditya (representational image)

ordnance and “landing” any practice ordnance held on board for exercises back to ammunition and missile depots. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that the Western Naval Command reacted to the initiation of **Operation Parakram** with speed and alacrity. While the finer details of deployments executed continue to remain in the classified domain, the broad tenets were based on time-tested plans. The fundamental task of the Indian Navy vis-a-vis Pakistan is to deny them the ability to manoeuvre in the Arabian Sea while simultaneously retaining the option to project power ashore in support of the other services. In seafaring terms - Sea Denial across the Northern Arabian Sea with Sea Control being established at places and times of one’s choosing to support the conduct of operations.

Submarines form a key element for implementation of sea denial, particularly in the region close to the Makran Coast along which traffic would be expected to ply in an attempt to keep Pakistan’s supply lines open under the cover of shore-based assets. If required, they form an important instrument for sea control in case our own side needs to use such areas for our own purposes. Deployments of submarines are cloaked in secrecy and can best be inferred from their absence in harbour. To quote an old adage – *‘once a submarine leaves its pier, she could be anywhere for who is to say otherwise’*.

In 2001, Karwar Harbour was still in its infancy thereby leaving only Mumbai as a base for submarines on the West Coast of India. The harbour has its pitfalls as activity on naval jetties can be monitored from several vantage points in high-rise buildings in its periphery. Further, it has a long approach with gently sloping contours that require submarines to remain on surface for some distance while proceeding Westwards until they have adequate depth to dive. During the early stages of Parakram, these

characteristics were turned around and used to our advantage as the visible absence of submarines in harbour contributed towards deterrence.

East Moves West

Another major step taken by the Indian Navy during the operation was to use the inherent flexibility of Naval assets by redeploying the Eastern Fleet to the Western seaboard, thereby considerably augmenting the number of assets that were available for combat operations in this theatre. What was notable was the overt manner in which this exercise was undertaken with official briefings clearly articulating the deployment. This brought on more pressure on Pakistan increasing their sense of isolation reminiscent of the 1971 War, when forces deployed in Bangladesh felt cut off by the demonstrated presence of the Indian Navy, spearheaded by the aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, in the Bay of Bengal.

Operation Parakram also saw the use of deception as a tool for dislocation. When the aircraft carrier INS Viraat was not available due to maintenance, morphed photographs of Sea Harriers embarked on merchant ships were released in a calibrated manner. Communication channels with different agencies were also used to mislead Pakistan on the disposition of our assets.

As time wore on, the fleet settled down to a less demanding posture, maintaining readiness to deploy more aggressively at short notice. However, due to their lower transit speeds and consequent inability to rapidly occupy designated areas, submarines continued to be rotated in a phased manner. As the operation continued for about eleven months, this took its toll on the force.

Looking “Astern” Through a Periscope

Did **Operation Parakram** succeed in its aims? The results are mixed. While a kinetic response to the Parliament attack did not materialize, the intent to use force in multiple dimensions to deter such actions was conveyed with clarity. So much so, it forced a clearly rattled President Musharraf to publicly announce on 12th January 2002 that he would not permit terrorist activity to emanate from Pakistan’s soil. He further went on to ban six terrorist organisations. Did the commitment hold? Regrettably not! From a material standpoint, while equipment in both the opposing forces underwent considerable wear and tear during the prolonged deployment, the long-term effects on Pakistan’s relatively smaller inventory were larger. The mammoth deployment also brought out the deficiencies in India’s war fighting machine in all its dimensions; material, structural, and operational. A concerted effort was thereafter made to address them in a phased manner.

An analysis of **Operation Parakram** reveals that a mass scale mobilization of this nature is neither effective nor an efficient way of achieving the desired results. There is a clear necessity to deter Pakistan from aiding and abetting those involved in the conduct of terror in India. Feigning ignorance or conveying an inability to curtail the activities of such groups on their soil opens a legitimate window for us to address the situation as we deem fit, irrespective of sovereignty concerns. It is after all disingenuous for a nation to simultaneously convey that they lack the capability or political will to tackle cross border militancy directed



An Indian Navy Scorpene Submarine

against us but their borders are inviolable. At the same time we need to realise that given the nuclear overhang as well as the often-inflated fears of escalation within the international community, the window to execute a response is short. Further, the response has to be dexterously calibrated to a level where it inflicts sufficient pain to deter but is not that devastating that makes escalation almost inevitable. In short, the 'surgical strike' model as executed after incidents at Uri and Balakot is a better one to follow. Based on experience, this could be further smoothed at the edges to increase its deterrence value.

To cut a long story short, whatever the criticism, we came out stronger from **Operation Parakram**. From a maritime standpoint, the Navy today has grown from strength to strength and added capabilities that allow it to operate unimpeded across large swathes of the Arabian Sea. We still lag in submarines, which is being addressed with the conclusion of the ongoing Project 75I negotiations wherein six state-of-the-art conventional submarines will be added to the existing fleet. More importantly, Parakram also clearly brought out the

pitfalls of being dependent on foreign suppliers with complex supply chains for generating and maintaining combat power. Though a work in progress, a large proportion of these dependencies have been progressively addressed through a sustained 'Atmanirbhar' campaign. Instruments have also been put in place to tap the vibrant start-up culture prevailing in the country to plug security gaps using innovative solutions based on emergent technologies.

Finally, with regards to terror emanating from Pakistan, the message today is clear. The strategy to bleed us through a thousand cuts has failed. The lessons from **Operation Parakram** have been analysed and digested. Rest assured, there will be a response to any action of terror against us that emanates from Pakistani soil. While the scale of the response may be calibrated, be assured again that it will be a couple of orders higher than the action initiated by terrorists. And yes, it will hurt Pakistan disproportionately.



Rear Admiral Monty Khanna, AVSM, NM (Retd) was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 01 January 83. He won the 'Best Naval Cadet' award and Midshipman 'Sword of Honour' during his formative years. His afloat commands include the submarine Sindhuvijay and the Frigates Krishna and Gomati. He was also the Naval Attaché at the Embassy of India, Washington D.C. On promotion to Flag Rank, he served as the Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Foreign Co-operation & Intelligence), Commandant of the Naval War College and Chief Instructor, Defence Services Staff College from where he retired in August 19. He subsequently served as the Assistant Military Adviser at the National Security Council Secretariat till December 23. He is a graduate of the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington and Naval War College, Newport.



Rear Admiral Monty Khanna



HOLISTIC WELLBEING

IN THE MONSOONS

We love the monsoon, but it also brings along a host of issues ranging from the pesky to the life-threatening. Dr Renuka David tells us how to stay prepared for the season, and keep healthy!

“How beautiful is the rain! How it clatters along the roofs, Like the tramp of hoofs...” wrote William Wordsworth. The monsoons have always been romanticised in poetry, song and literature, conjuring up images of rainbows, silvery strands of water and piping hot cups of tea. I enjoy long drives with music in the rain, and experience meditative joy in watching the pitter patter of drops on the ocean from my balcony. But along with the magic of the monsoons, also comes mayhem.

Monsoons make us highly susceptible to a gamut of problems – skin damage, frizzy hair, and diseases that range from troublesome to fatal. Let’s take a look at some of these issues, and also how to prevent them.

Skincare Woes

Rainy weather brings with it increased humidity and moisture. Of course, your skin bears the brunt of these seasonal changes. It starts producing extra sebum, which can clog pores if you’re not careful. The result? Acne, blackheads and other breakouts. You’re also more prone to fungal infections, because of the increase in bacteria and viruses. Following a few simple tips can go a long way in skin protection.

- Use a soap-free face wash with salicylic acid, which helps to maintain the skin’s pH balance in the monsoons, and also decongests clogged pores. It is the ultimate deep cleanser.
- At night, use a cream with retinol to combat any inflammation and acne.
- Sunscreen is a must; just because the clouds are out, it doesn’t mean you must skimp on sun protection.

- If your face is sweaty, dab it dry gently instead of wiping it down harshly.
- Twice a week, exfoliate to get rid of dead skin cells and keep your skin glowing.
- Avoid wearing heavy makeup unless the occasion demands it. Try to use light products that combine both skincare and makeup.
- Vitamin C application and dietary intake can lessen acne scars and blemishes, so eat plenty of fruits rich in this nutrient, and also apply a topical serum.
- To avoid ringworm and other fungal infections, keep your feet, hands and nails clean and dry.

Despair Over Hair Care

Ever notice that your hair and scalp suddenly transform (not for the better!) when the monsoons set in? Be prepared for tresses that are extra frizzy and dull, making you look like you’ve just stuck your finger into an electrical socket. The extra moisture and sebum cause dust and grime to stick to hair follicles, weakening them and increasing hair fall. Dandruff and itchy scalp are other pressing issues. So it is important to treat your locks with extra TLC.

- Wash your hair at least 2-3 times a week, using an antifungal shampoo that prevents hair fall. Follow this up with a hair masque or intensive conditioner to soften the strands.
- Don’t get your hair wet if you can help it. Rainwater can wreak havoc on your strands, and the extra moisture flattens it and makes it limp.
- Contrary to popular belief, hair oils can help your scalp – as



Indian Diet (image credit pexels-surabhi-siddaiab-395534-1051399)

they're entirely different in composition from the naturally-produced sebum. They promote blood circulation, and contain nourishing ingredients to combat monsoon frizz.

- Opt for salon treatments once every ten days for dryness, itchiness and dandruff, which will ensure that you're on top of your scalp health game.
- Use hair care products that are meant specifically for your hair type and lifestyle. Shampoos, conditioners, serums, oils, hairspray, hair masques... pick and choose combinations that suit you with the help of a dermatologist or hair care expert.
- Ditch your brush for a loose-tooth comb, since monsoon-ridden hair is prone to damage. A comb is ideal to gently detangle.
- Even if your hair is slightly damp, long and medium-length hair should never be tied up. Wait until you've been able to dry out your tresses completely to avoid breakage.

Mosquito-Borne Illness

With stagnating water during the rains, there is an increase of mosquitoes swarming around urban and rural living areas. And along with this, comes the danger of mosquito-

borne ailments such as malaria, dengue and chikungunya. Sometimes, these illnesses are mild, but other times they can be fatal as well. It is important here, that we recognise the importance of prevention over cure.

- Apply herbal, non-chemical insect repellent at all times, but especially when you're outdoors.
- Use an organic room spray to keep your home free of mosquitoes. Install net-lon sheets over the windows so that they are unable to enter.
- Speak to people in your neighbourhood to ensure that there is a system in place to deal with stagnant water in puddles.

- Keep throwing out water from items like buckets, flowerpots, bird baths, fountains or tires, and clean these items well on a daily basis.
- Both grown-ups and children should stick a mosquito patch onto their clothes before setting out of home. These colourful cute round patches have animated figures on them, and are especially attractive to children who are more likely to fall ill from the mosquito menace.
- If you do happen to catch a mosquito-borne ailment, the treatment varies depending on the nature and severity. As soon as you feel any symptoms developing, visit your healthcare practitioner and seek help immediately.

Digestive Distress

The monsoon season also records a spike in stomach-related ailments such as typhoid, cholera and jaundice, which again can be serious if left undiagnosed and untreated. To avoid the onset of these issues, here are some steps to follow:

- Always maintain personal hygiene and wash your hands with an antibacterial soap before handling any food or beverage.
- Be mindful of the water you consume. Take your own water bottle along, with boiled and filtered water. If you must drink water from outside, it should either be from very trusted sources or sealed mineral water from a reputed brand.
- Avoid raw foods such as salads and cut fruits from outside, as these could be a breeding ground for bacteria. Eat your fruits at home, which have been freshly cut in a hygienic environment.
- Choose hot food over cold dishes. Steamed, boiled, and even fried food is preferable to chilled items, since they're likely to be cleaner and germ-free.

- If you have children or elders at home, they're more prone to stomach ailments. Aim to prepare fresh, home-cooked meals for them rather than ordering from or eating out.

Pointers for the Particular

Adopting a holistic approach to wellbeing in the monsoon can go a long way in ensuring great skin, healthy hair and keeping pesky seasonal ailments at bay. Fortify your immunity with a few basic pointers:

- Include immunity-boosting spices in your diet, such as turmeric, ginger, cinnamon and cardamom. These contain anti-inflammatory properties and can work wonders in alleviating any monsoon-related ills.
- Consume probiotics in dishes such as curd / buttermilk, or through a supplement, to boost digestive health. These balance your gut flora and fight harmful bacteria.
- Fried food is not really alright in any season, but you may be able to get away with it in winter. In the monsoon, it will just damage your skin as well as your gut. Swap it in favour of baked, boiled or steamed food.
- Seafood tends to be a carrier of infection, because the contamination in water bodies increases during this season. Limit your intake as much as possible.
- Hydrate – at least two litres of water and two glasses of coconut water are a must.
- Drying clothes might be quite a chore, but that doesn't mean you should turn a blind eye to the residual dampness that tends to remain. Iron them out completely – inside out, even – until they're completely dry. If you need to, invest in a washing machine with a drier, which will help to completely clean and



Left. Mosquitoes breeding in stagnant water. Right. Tinea Corporis, a fungal infection.

- dry out your clothes, leaving them fresh-smelling.
- Similarly, if your shoes get wet, don't just keep using them. Wash them well in an antibacterial solution and leave them to dry completely before reusing them.
- Practice good bath hygiene, having a thorough bath every day. No matter

- how tired you are, try to shower at bedtime as well – it cleans the pores and eliminates any residual sweat.
- If you're missing your morning walk, or cycling jaunt or swimming, there's no need to skip exercise. Choose indoor exercises such as yoga, body training or even just dancing and keep moving!



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REMINISCENCES

TWENTY FIVE YEARS AFTER OPERATION VIJAY

Twenty five years ago, more or less to the date, the military and the nation were surprised by Pakistan's aggression which came to be known as the Kargil War. This is the story of how the War unfolded and the sacrifices made by the young officers and men to push back the intruders.

I was commanding the famous 8 Mountain (Mtn) Division (Div) at Sharifabad, located near Srinagar. The Div for the better part of the decade was involved in Counter Insurgency (CI) operations in the Valley, but as Rashtriya Rifles (RR) forces were raised, the Div was given the responsibility of North Kashmir. The army was gaining control of the insurgency, though frequent encounters were taking place, with foreign terrorists in larger numbers than the local terrorists.

In April 1999, the Corps ran its customary War Game wherein I was nominated as the Red Land Commander. Ironically, in my plan for Ladakh, we occupied some of the features which became household names during the war, and which we later regained at heavy cost. Since our emphasis was on validating our defence plans in the Valley, not much discussion took place on these feasible intrusions in the Ladakh sector. During the discussion on the situation in the Valley, I was told that since the insurgency was under reasonable control, I should think of de-inducting a brigade or so to our projected Key Location Plan in Doda-Bhaderwah-Kishtwar sector, little realizing that by then the enemy had already intruded over a frontage of approximately 130 kms.

The political climate in India was perceived to be unstable in early 1999 with PM Vajpayee's coalition government in office and Pakistan appreciated that a major reaction to any military adventure was unlikely. Pakistan was losing its nefarious designs in the valley, so **Operation Badr** (also called **Operation Koh-e-Paima**) was launched by the Pakistan Army with a three-fold



Cover image of the 15 episode Kargil War Saga show
(Image credit kukuufm.com)

political aim. Firstly, there was a perception in the minds of Pakistani leadership that the Indian polity did not have the stomach or political will to militarily react to any armed threat from across the border. A second possible Pakistani aim was to create a situation which would enable her to negotiate from a position of strength by securing large tracts of territory across the Line of Control (LC), and thirdly by launching a military operation the Kashmir issue could be internationalised, which had lost momentum in the last couple of years.

Pakistan also assessed that its nuclear umbrella gave it an option of resorting to limited offensive action with minimal risk. With the operations fought in the nuclear backdrop, the international community would intervene, by which time Pakistan would have achieved its objectives. Militarily, Pakistan aimed to initiate the operation in areas where she would be offered the least resistance and a minimal military response. Large gaps in Indian defences were to be exploited. Pakistan aimed at altering the status of the LC for strategic and territorial gains, besides reviving the insurgency in the Valley and elsewhere in J&K as well as isolating Ladakh sector from Srinagar.

The success of achieving the political and military aims of Pakistan were based on certain assumptions, such as opening of Zoji La in June, which would preclude movement of a major force from the valley to counter the intrusion. It was appreciated that even if the intrusions were detected in May, as they were, the reaction from the Indian Army would be slow and limited, thereby allowing adequate time to effectively consolidate the gains. As events unfolded, unfortunately for Pakistan, Zoji La opened in early May resulting in an Indian reaction which was far swifter than what Pakistan expected.

Pakistan's military plan was well-

conceived and came as a total surprise to us. Essentially it revolved around exploiting unheld areas across the LC during winter, establishing and consolidating posts at these locations adequately stocked for sustained operations, and building-up logistics bases in close vicinity of these posts to facilitate replenishment of stocks. Militarily, the objectives selected by Pakistan were of tactical importance. For years it was a practice to vacate selected posts during winters due to logistics reasons and assumption of a non-existent threat in winters. This deployment pattern left yawning gaps in our defences; lack of adequate surveillance and inadequate winter patrolling gave Pakistan the opportunity to exploit this weakness.

The initial phase of the operation involved a two-pronged intrusion into heights in the Drass - Mushko valley, and into the Batalik - Yaldor - Chorbatla and Turtok axes. The Drass-Mushko sector was the closest to the National Highway

(NH) to Leh, and Pakistani troops were to intrude and occupy dominating heights in Drass and Mushko so as to dominate and cut off the strategic NH, capture maximum territory and isolate Ladakh from the valley. Also, posts established in Mushko were to be used as a firm base and a launch pad for infiltration into the Kashmir Valley and into Kishtwar - Bhandarwah area. In the Batalik-Yaldor sector, Pakistani troops were to occupy tactical heights dominating the Indus River so as to isolate this sector from Leh. The occupation of posts in Chorbatla - Turtok axes was to facilitate capture of Turtok and subvert the local population to initiate militancy in this area. Subsequent phase of the operation was to be more ambitious, in which intrusions in Drass - Mushko - Kaksar sectors were to be linked up, thereby achieving substantial gains of territory and totally cutting off the Srinagar - Leh NH. Similarly, gains made in Batalik - Turtok sectors were to



Indian soldiers moving to assault Pakistani positions in the 1999 Kargil War (image credit www.reddit.com)



Indian soldiers in Batalik during the Kargil War (representative image)

be linked up so as to have the entire area in this sector North of River Indus under their control.

In early May, the battalion in Batalik received information from a local grazier of suspicious movements in the sector. As the local formation sent out patrols, it gradually became evident that a number of places had been intruded by the enemy; yet there was no clarity on the identity of the intruders and it was apparent that the undetected intrusions were an intelligence failure.

By the third week of May or so, it was quite apparent that the operational situation was serious and additional troops would be required to retrieve the adverse situation. Though my Div located at Sharifabad was readily available for induction across Zoji La as reinforcements, lifting it was not a decision which could be taken in haste. We were fully committed in CI operations and had the militants more or less on the run. Pulling out the Div would have created a vacuum which would have been exploited

by the militants. To ensure there was no void in the CI grid, Army HQ raised an additional Rashtriya Rifles HQ, and adjusted the deployment of RR battalions to cater for induction of 8 Mtn Div for the operations. I was thus ordered to assume operational responsibility of Drass - Mushko Sector by 01 June.

The first view of the mountains as you cross Zoji La is awesome and you are struck by the high peaks, height varying from 18000 feet to 21000 feet with valleys at an altitude of 10000 to 11000 feet. The entire area or most of it is devoid of cover with razor sharp ridges and steep peaks which are jagged and extremely difficult to negotiate. The soil is loose with gravel and stones rolling down with each step you take.

The paucity of vegetation in the summer months combined with the extreme high altitude makes breathing laborious and adds to the fatigue factor. Snow conditions prevail from November to May and availability of water in the remaining months is dependent on the intensity of snowfall during the winter season. Light snowfall adds to the problems of water scarcity and further enhances the logistics for a deliberate and well-planned military operation. There were limited road axes available with few laterals. Building up a viable military force backed by sustainable logistics is slow, tiresome, tedious and time consuming. Also, movement or shifting of heavy equipment including artillery guns and ammunition from one location to another is difficult. The terrain, coupled with lack of reliable road communications had left yawning gaps in the defences on both sides. These gaps had been in existence for years and the fact that they had not been exploited by either side made us complacent of any change in the status quo.

By the time my Division came onto the scene, Pakistani intruders had established a large number of posts on heights dominating the NH and Mushko valley. The highway opened in early May, mainly due to a lighter snowfall in the winters and efforts of the Border Road Organisation. Nevertheless, the intruders effectively dominated the road and made vehicular movement difficult during daytime. The enemy was well-prepared and depended more on fire power than manpower. With automatic weapons, he had covered all the important nalas, ridges as well as supply routes leading onto his positions. From these positions, he sent out small parties to engage any movement of our patrols dispatched to gain information of his location and defences or troops

attempting to capture the posts. His defences were well-sited and coordinated, his control of fire including illumination plan was very effective. Enemy's minor tactics of firing and quickly shifting the position was paying him dividends and kept us guessing of his actual strength and location of his main defences.

Pakistan consistently declared that the intruders were Mujahids and no regular troops were a part of the operation. We too initially felt that the intruders may have been Mujahids adequately supported by regular troops. However it soon became clear to us, particularly after the recovery of two dead bodies by 3 Infantry Div with army identifications that the intruders were undoubtedly regular soldiers. Also from enemy's tactics it was evident that his claim of the intruders being Mujahids was totally false. Later, my Div buried 140 Pakistani soldiers belonging to the Pakistani Northern Light Infantry. These were the gallant men who had laid down their lives for their motherland but in return were not even accepted by their country and were denied the honour of getting respectful last rites from their nation.

CI operations and conventional warfare are like chalk and cheese. Whereas CI operations required immediate response with rapid planning lest militants ran havoc before timely and expeditious response, conventional warfare required deliberation and unwavering coordination of those assaulting, with the array of supporting arms and services, including the Air Force. Therefore, to change the conventional warfare configuration in equipment and psyche within the short time available at that time speaks creditably of the response continuum that is inbuilt in the training and equipment transformation flexibility of the Indian Army. Candidly, since the Army was preoccupied with militancy and it was after 28 years that a conventional war was thrust

on India, there was sombre scepticism whether the change could be effected early enough to match the timeframe expected by the Nation to 'drive' the Pakistan Army back across the LC. That the Army delivered most creditably is indeed a salute to all concerned in uniform - from the top rung to the soldier. There was no inadequacy in any sphere, except perhaps with the vintage of equipment. That too was overcome to a great degree as the battle progressed.

After the Div's induction, I carried out a detailed analysis of the enemy deployment. I appreciated that in the Drass Sector, he had deployed upto two to three battalions and in the Mushko Sector, upto two battalions. From the deployment assessed and the degree of enemy's interference on the NH, it was evident that the Drass Sector had to be given a higher priority over Mushko, and consequently the complete effort was diverted towards Drass while Mushko was planned to be adequately contained. A quick analysis of the task revealed that the sanctity of the LC had to be restored at the earliest and most certainly well before the onset of winter. Had the operations continued till the winters, the enemy would have consolidated his gains and perhaps made it extremely difficult for us to evict him in the next campaigning season.

There was a lot of talk about our failure to isolate the enemy defences. In the Drass Sector, we would need to get in between his defences or cross the LC to isolate; the former was not tactically sound and the latter was not permitted. Since isolation was not possible, I decided to task the battalions to physically assault the localities where the enemy was dominating the highway. In the Mushko valley, I decided to contain the intrusion and where tactically

feasible to go behind the enemy and cut off his lines of maintenance. I also emphasised to the Commanders and to the Commanding Officers (COs) that there was no need to hurry into attacks without adequate preparation, which must include detailed planning and reconnaissance, proper artillery support, coordination and practice of minor tactics at battalion level. Battle drills and procedures are well documented in the Army, and we only need to follow them.

By 01 June, when the Div took over the new area of responsibility, I was clear about my appreciation and analysis about the situation, plans had been worked out, priorities allotted to various areas and units earmarked for various attacks / tasks. The logistics elements were similarly being geared up to meet the challenging task of the operational situation. I was not prepared to go into my first attack without proper planning or ensuring that the assaulting troops were given the wherewithal to accomplish their task. While the tactical aspects can be speedily attended to, in mountains, logistics form an equally important, if not a larger function of command. We had to ensure that battalions going into attacks were put through their advance acclimatisation, given a short reorientation capsule, the artillery ammunition was adequately stocked for the attack, the troops were properly equipped in terms of clothing and war material, and medical arrangements were in place. All this takes time and I must give credit to my logistics staff, for meeting all the targets in record time.

Tololing feature was representative of the deepest penetration made by Pakistan in Drass. It was a dominating feature which



The tricolour held aloft after the victory (photo National War Memorial)

could effectively interdict the NH. 2 Rajputana Rifles, under the command of Colonel Ravindranath, an intrepid leader, was given the task to capture the feature. The attack was slated for night 12/13 June. The attack was launched with massive artillery support and by first light most of the objective had been captured. **Tololing Top** was still holding on, and the CO in a brilliant move assaulted the feature during the early hours and secured the Top. We finally had a victory which literally turned the tide in the Kargil War. From then onwards we went “ridge hopping” to successfully terminate the war on 26 July. All battalions performed with glory in capturing their given objectives, adequately supported by artillery and supporting arms/services.

The war in Kargil was indeed a saga of heroism and courage where the young officers and men unflinchingly made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty to restore, protect and preserve the Nation’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and honour. The casualties suffered and the gallantry awards earned were a true measure of the army’s abiding faith in the traditions of ‘Naam, Namak and Nisban’

of the Armed Forces has made steady progress and continues at a fairly satisfactory pace. The Chief of Defence Staff is in Chair and the path to jointness has been paved to meet its logical end. Operationally, adequate reserves have been created to respond to an adverse situation. However, border management between the Home and Defence Ministries needs to be streamlined with the paramilitary forces on the Line of Actual Control or along the International Border in the plains of J&K, to be operationally placed under the Army for coordinated and better response.

As we celebrate 25 years of the Kargil War victory, let us pay homage to our Bravehearts who made the ultimate sacrifice for the honour of the Army and the country. It will not be out of place to put on record the fortitude of our “Veer Naris” who despite the loss of their loved ones, have lived a life of dignity and brought up their children as good citizens of the country.



Lieutenant General Mobinder Puri, PVSM, UYSM (Retd) was commissioned into the Fifth Battalion of the Third Gorkha Rifles in June 1966. He commanded his battalion in Mizoram and later an infantry brigade in the Akhnoor sector of J&K. In his command of the famous 8 Mountain Division, his formation spearheaded the Army’s offensive in the Drass – Mushko Sector and restored the sanctity of the LC by capturing Tololing, Tiger Hill and Point 4875 which became household names during the war. Later he commanded a Corps in the Punjab-Rajasthan sector. Before superannuation, he was the Military Secretary and side stepped as Deputy Chief of the Army Staff. He has authored the book Kargil : Turning the Tide and is an eminent motivational speaker.



Lt Gen Mohinder Puri



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