

# Medals and Ribbons

Jul. - Sep. 2025 | Vol.5 | Issue 3 ■ Price Rs.200/- ■ Annual Subscription Rs.700/- (ENGLISH QUARTERLY)

A SALUTE TO OUR VALIANT WARRIORS

## 1965 Indo-Pak War

**Pakistani Designs Demolished**

**Operation Sindoor**

India's Strategic Inflection

**Capture of Haji Pir**

A Historic Victory

**One Vs Four**

Alfred Cooke's Epic Air Combat



DEDICATED TO

# PARAM VIR CHAKRA AWARDEES

## 1965 INDO-PAK WAR



**Lt Col AB Tarapore of Poona Horse (17 HORSE)**, On the 11th September 1965, the Poona Horse Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore, was assigned the task of delivering the main armoured thrust for capturing Phillora in Sialkot sector in Pakistan. As a preliminary to making a surprise attack on Phillora from the rear, the Regiment was thrusting forward between Phillora and Chawinda, when it was suddenly counter-attacked by the enemy's heavy armour from Wazirwali. Lt Col Tarapore who was then at the head of his Regiment, defied the enemy's charge, held his ground and gallantly attacked Phillora with one of his squadrons supported by an infantry battalion. Though under continuous enemy tank and artillery fire, Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore remained unperturbed throughout this action and when wounded, he refused to be evacuated. On the 14th September 1965, though still wounded, he again led his Regiment to capture Wazirwali. Such was his grit and determination that unmindful of his injury, he again gallantly led his Regiment and captured Jassoran and Butur Dograndi on the 16th September 1965. His own tank was hit several times, but despite the odds, he maintained his pivots in both these places and thereby allowed the supporting infantry to attack Chawinda from the rear. Inspired by his leadership, the Regiment fiercely attacked the enemy's heavy armour destroying approximately sixty enemy tanks at a cost of only nine tank casualties, and when Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore was mortally wounded, the Regiment continued to defy the enemy. The valour displayed by Lieutenant Colonel Ardeshir Burzorji Tarapore in this heroic action which lasted six days was in keeping with the highest traditions of the Indian Army.

**Param Vir Chakra (Posthumous).**

**Company Quarter Master Havildar Abdul Hamid of 4 Grenadiers**, on 10th September 1965 at 0800 hours, the Pakistani forces launched an attack with a Regiment of Patton tanks on a vital area ahead of village Chima on the Bhikkiwind road in the Khem Karan sector. The attack was preceded by intense artillery shelling. The enemy tanks penetrated the forward positions by 0900 hours. Realising the grave situation Company Quarter Master Havildar Abdul Hamid, who was commander of a recoilless gun detachment, moved out to a flanking position, with his gun mounted on a jeep, under intense enemy shelling and tank fire. Taking an advantageous position, he knocked out the leading enemy tank and then swiftly changing his position, he sent another enemy tank up in flames. By this time the enemy tanks in the area spotted him and brought his jeep under concentrated machine gun and high explosive fire. Undeterred, Company Quarter Master Havildar Abdul Hamid kept on firing on yet another enemy tank from his recoilless gun. While so doing he was mortally wounded by an enemy high explosive shell. Havildar Abdul Hamid's brave action inspired his comrades to put up a gallant fight and to beat back the heavy tank assault by the enemy. His complete disregard of his personal safety during the operation and his sustained act of bravery in the face of constant enemy fire were a shining example not only to his Unit but to the whole Division and were in the highest traditions of the Indian Army.

**Param Vir Chakra (Posthumous).**





## Col David Devasahayam



Six decades ago, Pakistan attempted to wrest Kashmir from India, sending in thousands of regular and irregular forces to foment an uprising in Jammu & Kashmir. It was not their first attempt ; they had tried this tactic in 1947 too. As in 1947, they failed again with the Indian Armed Forces foiling their insidious attempt. Pakistan's intent to take Kashmir has not died down. They merely changed their method in the last 35 years and used proxies, whom they have nurtured as '*Tanzeems*', primarily '*non state actors*' clearly controlled by the Pakistan military.

These proxies unleashed a carnage in Pahalgam on 22 April 2025. We had to retaliate and our Forces again rose with controlled wrath in **Operation Sindoor**, precisely targeting a few terrorist bases and camps across the length and breadth of Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). We managed the escalation wisely too, destroying many Pakistani assets at airbases and radar sites. Pakistan tried to inflict damage on India as well , but failed miserably as the Indian Air Defence was like a wall in front of their missiles and drones. Expectedly, the Indian Forces and the people shelled in the border areas had some losses as happens in all conflicts, with minimal impact. The end state was that India delivered its planned punitive response accurately, without critical losses and after

inflicting substantial destruction to the Pakistani forces and the terrorist groups. We have covered some of the major aspects of Operation Sindoor in this issue, especially the analytical essay by former Northern Army Commander and Vice Chief, Lt Gen Devraj Anbu.

The primary theme of this issue, however, is the 1965 Indo – Pak War, to mark its Diamond Jubilee. We have walked through the major battles and combat events of the war, and what stands out is the valour and grit of the Indian soldiers, as we foiled Pakistani designs. Over my years in uniform, I remembered the war for the destruction of Pakistani Patton tanks and Sabre Jets, and the fact that the Indian Army had stood on the outskirts of Lahore at the Ichhogil Canal.

The narrative transmitted by the Pakistani State in 1965 to its people was that they had

defended their country against the superior and larger India and that their Army rose to the occasion and defended Lahore. Propaganda has been a part of warfare in the last century, and Hitler continued to sell the story of victories of the Bundeswehr even in the midst of disastrous defeat. Likewise, Pakistan too is a master in '*misinformation*', and the recent May 25 clashes with India have been sold to the public as victories of the Pakistan Armed Forces, inflicting major losses to the Indian State – they also promoted their Chief to Field Marshal to bolster the story!

With Pakistan on Indian cross hairs presently, this Pakistan oriented issue is timely and apt. I am sure the readers will gain from our narrations of the battles of 1965 and will salute the Armed Forces for their courage and professionalism.



*With Lt Gen Devraj Anbu - August 2017.*



# CONTENTS

Vol.05 • Issue 03 • Jul '25 – Sep '25

## Operation Sindoor – India's Strategic Inflection Point 07

by Lt Gen D Anbu (Retd)

The article reprises the recently conducted Operation Sindoor highlighting the strategic shift in Indian Proxy War policy and implications thereof.



## Offensive Air Operations in Operation Sindoor 11

by Air Mshl H Masand (Retd)

The aerial stand-off engagements during Operation Sindoor - incisively analysed giving details of the actions initiated and outcomes.



## Air Defence – Shining Jewel of Operation Sindoor 16

by Air Mshl V P S Rana (Retd)

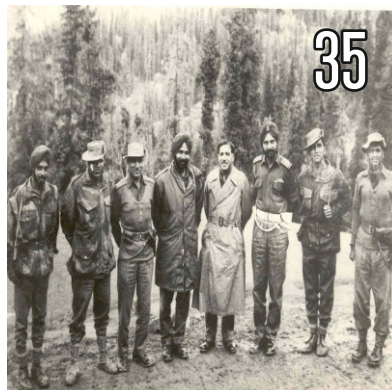
Air Defence protected Indian assets from significant damage during Operation Sindoor, this review highlights the system of systems architecture of the Indian Air Defence network and deconstructs its components.



## Operation Desert Hawk – Rann of Kutch April 1965 22

by Maj Gen Deepak Mehra (Retd)

Operation Desert Hawk was the Indian response to Pakistan's ingress in the Rann of Kutch as a prelude to the 1965 War. This battle report recalls the actions during that conflict.



## Pakistan's Operation Gibraltar 30

by Col Ajay Raina (Retd)

Operation Gibraltar sought to separate Jammu & Kashmir from India. An assessment of the plan, its execution and its failure are discussed while recounting Pakistan's miscalculation.

## Capture of Haji Pir – A Historic Victory 35

by Maj Gen A K Dhingra (Retd)

The capture of Haji Pir was Indian Army's first offensive success in the 1965 War, a feat with few parallels. This narrative brings forth a saga of courage leading to the emphatic victory on the Pir Panjal Range.

## Pakistan's Operation Grand Slam – The Battle of Chhamb – Jaurian 41

by Lt Gen P R Kumar (Retd)

In Operation Grand Slam Pakistan aimed to sever the Jammu – Poonch Road at Akhnur. A detailed analysis of this offensive explores the loss of momentum of this combined arms offensive and its abrupt end.





## 60 Asal Uttar – Decisive Destruction of Pakistan's Pattons

by Maj Gen Harvijay Singh (Retd)

This retrospective examines the resolute defensive stand of the Indian Army against the then formidable Pattons, leading to the largest Pakistani tank casualties of the War.

## 65 Sant Singh – The Man Who Walked Up OP HILL

by Col J Beniwal (Retd)

This narrative traces the intense combat at OP HILL and stands as a tribute to Lt Col Sant Singh, CO 5 SIKH LI, whose courage and leadership was the hallmark of the victory in OP HILL.



## 67 Bonding Beyond Borders – Rann of Kutch 1965

by Lt Col S V Sundar (retd)

A fascinating encounter between two coursemates, attired in opposing uniforms – Fate and Destiny in the salt flats of the Rann.



## 70 Pakistan Army's Perspective

by Maj Gen Ravi Murugan (Retd)

A glimpse of the Pakistani perspective of the 1965 War gleaned from former Pakistan Army military officers and commentators - their interpretation of the war, its strategic assumptions and operational decisions.

## 49 The Tank Battles of Phillora - Chawinda

by Maj Gen Jagatbir Singh (Retd)

India's 1 Corps launched a counter offensive in the Sialkot Sector, and there were major tank battles around Phillora and Chawinda. An account of the tank battles and manoeuvre of forces.

## 54 My Commanding Officer in the Battle of Dograi

by Col H K Jha (Retd)

A first person account of the Battle of Dograi, a seminal infantry battle of the 1965 War at the doorsteps of Lahore fought by 3 JAT under its inspiring Commanding Officer, Lt Col Desmond Hayde, MVC.

## 78 One Vs Four – Alfred Cooke's Epic Air Combat

by Samir Chopra

Squadron Leader Alfred Cooke's legendary duel in his Hunter against four Pakistani Sabre jets, over the skies of Kalaikunda, in the 1965 war has been aptly described.





## The 'Eight Pursoots' in the 1965 War **84**

by Air Mshl V K Bhatia (Retd)

The 'Eight Pursoots' Squadron of the Indian Air Force achieved battlefield successes in their vintage Mystere Aircraft, in offensive air and counter air missions.

## Strike on the Badin Radar **91**

by Air Cmde P Diksbit (Retd)

How the Badin Radar in Pakistan's Sindh, which effectively covered the air space in the border areas of Kutch and Barmer, was neutralized.

## Air Combat in Jet Era – The 1965 Indo – Pak War **94**

by Air Mshl D Choudhury (Retd)

An overview of the air campaign in the 1965 Indo Pak War - the strategy, the dare devilry and the missed opportunities.



## 102 Striking MV Ruen's "Jolly Roger" Flag

by Capt (IN) Sharad Sinsumwal

The narrative chronicles INS Kolkata's significant counter piracy operation off the Somali coast, within the legal limitations on the open seas.

## 107 Andaman and Nicobar Islands – Guardians of India's Ocean

by Cmde Prashant Handu and Cdr Abhishek Jain.

The article explores how the Andaman and Nicobar Islands strategically perched near the Malacca Straits are the sentinels of India's Ocean, anchoring its maritime security.

## 112 Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore, PVC (Posthumous)

by Brig Brijendra Singh (Retd)

A story of battlefield heroism and steadfast leadership and deep commitment to duty in several tank battles in the Sialkot Sector.



114



### Memoirs of Lt Gen Gul Hassan Khan – View from the Other Side of the Hill

by Col Ali Ahmed Zaki (Retd)

114

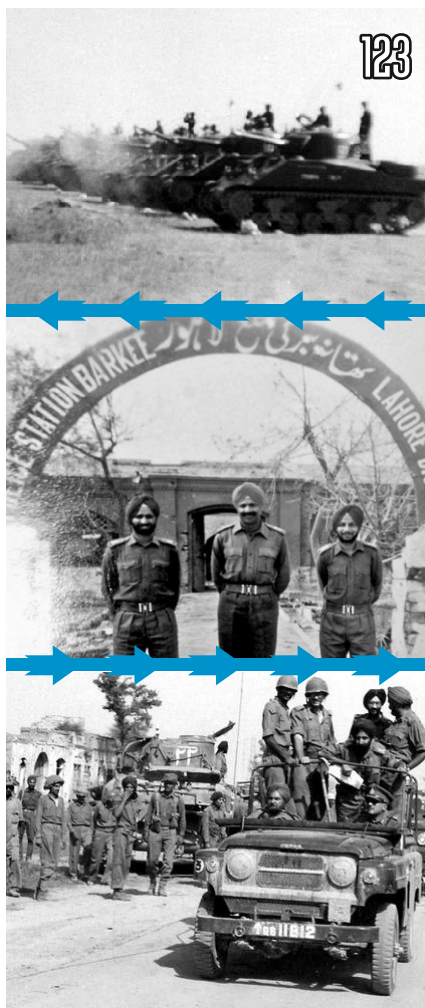
This book review scans the politico-military dynamics of Pakistan during the tumultuous 60s as narrated in the candid and controversial memoir of Lieutenant General Gul Hassan Khan, the Director Military Operations during the 1965 War.

### Life in 1965 and Today – From Charpoy to Cappuccinos

by Dr Renuka David

120

A flashback in time recalling the simple fun filled challenges of the 60s, and comparing the fast paced rapid choices today.



### Impact of 1965 War on India – Pakistan Affairs

by Lt Gen Shantanu Dayal (Retd)

123

An analysis of the impact of the 1965 War on the national psyche and long term relationship of India and Pakistan, viewed in the backdrop of the war affecting both nations' strategic thinking, military doctrine and public memory.

## Medals and Ribbons

A SALUTE TO OUR VALIANT WARRIORS (ENGLISH QUARTERLY)

### Founder and Publisher

COL DAVID DEVASAHAYAM (Retd)

### Editorial Team

#### Chief Editor

Lt Gen J S SANDHU (Retd)

#### Consulting Editors

Lt Gen D ANBU (Retd)

Air Marshal HARPAL SINGH (Retd)

Rear Adm S SHRIKHANDE (Retd)

#### Associate Editor

Maj Gen RAVI MURUGAN (Retd)

#### Creative Editor

Dr. RENUKA DAVID

#### Vice President Design and Contents

Ms NEETI JAYCHANDER

#### Admin & Production

Capt R G PRAKASAM (Retd)

#### Art and Designing

SARAVANAN

SHASHI BANDI

(Captions)

#### Photography

VIGNESH NARAYANAN

(3Leaf Studio)

#### Accounting Team

VINOTH BABU S

#### Subscriptions & Despatch

SUB RAJAN PODUVAL K (Retd)

ANIL KUMAR

#### Published By

Col David Devasahayam (Retd),

Radiant Villa,

VGP Golden Beach Phase 1,

Injambakkam,

Chennai - 600041.

#### Printed At

Vasan Print Mfg Co

29, Dr. Besant Road, Ice House,

Chennai - 600014.

#### Operations Office

Radiant Building, #28, Vijayaraghava Road,  
T. Nagar, Chennai - 600017.

RNI No. : TNENG/2021/86145



Lt Gen J S Sandhu, (Retd).

Pakistan launched **Operation Gibraltar** in August 1965 wanting to 'liberate' Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). Strategically, the Pakistani leadership perceived that India was weak, having been humbled in the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962. At that time Pakistan had better equipment, more modern tanks and aircraft, though India was expanding its defence capability. Realising that India would get stronger in time, President Ayub Khan considered that the opportunity was ripe to wrest J&K.

But Pakistani designs came a cropper, and have continued to fail in the last six decades. So why is Pakistan fanning conflict with India regularly? Primarily, the Pakistan Army and many Pakistani leaders are unwilling to discard the '*Kashmir cause*'. They believe that they can continue to stoke the embers in Kashmir, and someday the Valley will be engulfed in flames. The *tanzeems* are employed to keep the pot simmering, to stoke the embers – hence the Pahalgam terror crime. Pakistan wanted to counter the "*returning to normalcy*"

*rapidly*" narrative in Kashmir, the tourist influx, and break the peace perception.

India's punitive **Operation Sindoor** response to Pahalgam was precise, non-escalatory – but Indian Forces were ready for the expected escalation. India's destructive havoc on several Pakistani air bases and radar sites on 10 May compelled Pakistani leaders to dial Washington for help. There is clear evidence of these facts, but this truth is obscured from the Pakistani *Awaam*. Misinformation expertise enables losers to show the cloak of victory to their audience. Pakistan displayed this skill post 1965 war too.

Pakistan celebrates **06 September** as their **Defence Day** to commemorate the strong defence of Lahore in 1965 against the Indian offensive which reached Lahore's doorstep. The narrative peddled to the Pakistani people is that the brave and valiant Pakistan Army stopped the larger and bigger Indian Army; Pakistan's covert aggression into J&K a month earlier is conveniently hidden. The 1965 war is portrayed as Pakistan's successful "**Offensive Defence**" against Indian aggression. Why am I highlighting this narrative?

This misinformation narrative has been repeated in May 25, and the Pakistani narrative is that Pakistani forces inflicted devastating losses on Indian forces when India attacked Pakistan under **Operation Sindoor**. *Valiant Pakistani warriors defended the nation, forcing India to stop. The Pakistani military leader was praised and promoted to Field Marshal!!*

Propaganda and misinformation is expected in conflicts, as most nations want to uplift and maintain the morale and spirits of the soldiers; national pride and respect of the Army is at stake – accepting

defeat is extremely demoralising and also affects the political leaders, who may have to step down. So, the truth is swept away.

So, in this 1965 war themed issue to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of the war, we have stitched together the major battles starting from the Rann of Kutch, to Pakistan's **Operation Gibraltar** and thence to the Battles of Haji Pir, Chhamb, Phillora – Chawinda, Dograi, Khem Karan, OP Hill and also some exceptional air combat successes. We have analysed the Pakistani perspective, reviewed the air campaign and discussed the impact of the conflict. Since the recent **Operation Sindoor** has been due to Pakistan's Kashmir paranoia, akin to the 1965 situation, we have included assessments of the strategic outcome, the air strike and Indian air defence. We have also included an action report on INS Kolkata's counter piracy success against Somali pirates, and an insight into the strategic value of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. We have also included a tribute to Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore, PVC, one of the PVC awardees of the 1965 War. In our regular column, Dr. Renuka David compares the lifestyle changes from the 60s era with our current 'wellness' life rhythm.

**Hereafter we are not planning any particular theme based issues, but will combine the most interesting and readable articles that we receive, while also paying more attention to current events.** Desirous authors may please send the articles to [chiefeditor@medalsandribbons.com](mailto:chiefeditor@medalsandribbons.com) by 07 August 2025.

This issue effectively summarises the major actions of the 1965 war. We look forward to your earnest feedback. The Editorial Team thanks all the readers for your valuable support and your positive kudos.







*Security personnel examining the scene of the terror attack in Pabalgam, April 2025*

# OPERATION SINDOOR

## Indias Strategic Inflection Point in Response to Cross Border Terrorism

The heinous terrorist attack in the Baisaran Meadows of Pabalgam on April 22, 2025 with possible involvement from the highest quarters of the Pakistan Army would have been obscured, and the world would not have taken notice but for **Operation Sindoor**.

**Operation Sindoor** has redefined the fight against terror, setting a new benchmark and new normal in counter terrorist operations that has placed India in the league of proactive, decisive nations that prioritize their security and superiority without succumbing to any international pressure.

For the past 36 years, India has been subjected to multiple cross border terror attacks sponsored by Pakistan with little or no response. The attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, resulted in launching **Operation Parakram**, a coercive mobilisation with no tangible outcome. The Mumbai terror attack of 2008 was responded to by diplomatic action and strategic restraint. It was only in September 2016, that India responded militarily to the Uri terror attack by launching surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LC) on terror camps and launch pads. In 2019, responding to a car bomb suicide attack in Pulwama, India carried out an airstrike on Balakote terrorists camp well inside Pakistan sending a clear message that a terror attack will be responded to deeper and harder.

### Prelude to Operation Sindoor

The 2019 Balakote air strike brought forth some valuable lessons which demanded planning and preparation to overcome the shortfall. India quickly equipped itself with modern, high-tech precision weapon systems and put in place a well-coordinated Air Defence Command and Control System (ADCCS). BVR (Beyond Visual Range) missiles, loitering munitions, Rafale fighter jets, BrahMos missiles to be fired from ground, air and sea, the Navic (Navigation with Indian constellation) developed by ISRO were some of the



*Pakistan Army soldiers inspect a building damaged by an Indian missile attack near Muzaffarabad, May 25 (photo AP PTI)*

preparations. The layered Air Defence (AD) environment included recently upgraded legacy AD weapon systems like L70s, ZSUs and Schilka along with newly introduced indigenous Akash Surface to Air Missiles (SAM) and Akashteer – Indian Army's fully indigenous automated Air Defence Control and Reporting system which was fully integrated with the Indian Air Force (IAF) Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS). The Russian S-400 systems added to the effective AD umbrella.

### Operation Sindoor

After Balakote, it was assessed that cross border terror attacks from Pakistan would continue. The April 22, 2025 horrific terror attack on innocent tourists at Pahalgam, where 26 male tourists were singled out based on their religion and shot at point blank range in front of their families and children evoked outrage in the entire nation and it became an emotive issue. The Prime Minister lost no time in declaring that the terrorists will be hunted down wherever they are and they along with their backers will be made to pay. The planning and preparation for **Operation Sindoor** commenced.

The success of this operation is mainly

due to meticulous planning and preparation, clear aims and objectives being assigned to the Armed Forces with full freedom to execute the same. The synergy between the Armed Forces and the political leadership was at its best. The Prime Minister interacted with the Chief of Defence Staff, and the three service chiefs jointly and individually on more than one occasion providing clear directions and indicating the resolve of the political leadership. Achieving total surprise as to the timing and targets chosen for the operation was a master stroke.

**Operation Sindoor** lasted for about four days from May 07 to May 10,

2025. The Indian action demonstrated our resolve to strike at terrorist training facilities and infrastructure across Pakistan with no restrictions. Secondly, the strategy retained the option to retaliate to Pakistan's response in equal or greater measure, while allowing Pakistan Army an honourable exit without losing face (Off-ramp option). Thirdly, India was ready to escalate to such an extent where Pakistan would be forced to seek external intervention.

### Conduct of Operations

On the night of May 7/8, India destroyed nine apex level terrorist facilities by precision aerial strikes by the Air Force and Army. Over 100 terrorists, including several top leaders of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and their Headquarters at Muridke and Bahawalpur respectively were destroyed. The Pakistani Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) was informed and India emphasized that the operation was against the terrorists and not against the Pakistani Military or Pakistani people. It added that if the Pakistani forces responded, India would reserve the right to retaliate. It offered an off-ramp de-escalation option.

On 08 May, Pakistan attacked 36 locations along the 3300 km long India-Pakistan border with drones and loitering munitions with an intent to probe the gaps in our AD. All these attempts were effectively neutralized by our robust, multi-layered AD of indigenous, Russian and Western platforms.

On May 9/10, Pakistan claimed to have struck 26 Indian targets. India acknowledged limited damage to personnel at Air Force Station Udhampur, Pathankot, Adampur and Bhuj. Early morning on May 10, India retaliated with force on nine airfields from Skardu and Chaklala in the North to Rahimyar Khan and Jacobabad in the South, besides



attacking three forward AD Units.

The standoff weapons used included the Scalp and BrahMos missiles as well as Crystal Maze, Hammer and Spice 2000 precision guided munitions.

During this period, heavy artillery and heavy calibre weapon systems were fired across the LC from both sides. Pakistani shelling caused 15 civilian casualties and they targeted a gurdwara and church in Poonch too. On May 10, following the conversation between the two DGsMO in the afternoon, a pause in the operations came into effect from 1700 hours IST.

### Strategic Shift

So, what is the Strategic Shift that we perceive? Firstly, India has indicated that Pakistan sponsored terror acts will be treated as an **act of war** and India will respond punitively in a proactive manner. Precision strikes and calculated escalation provides an off-ramp exit strategy for the Pakistan military, allowing it to step back without losing face. As part of the escalation matrix, India has to maintain dominance across land, air and sea domains in case Pakistan decides to escalate.

The above strategy avoids full scale mobilization of the entire force to start with and also pressurizes the international community to dissuade Pakistan from continued retaliation and see its futility. The hardening of India's position is evident in the Prime Minister's Statement: *"Terror and talks cannot go together; terror and trade cannot go together; water and blood cannot flow together."*

The Prime Minister declared that **Operation Sindoor** has set a new benchmark in our fight against terrorism and established a new normal. The three pillars of India's new policy are:-

- Every terrorist attack on India will be met with a befitting response on our terms only. We will take strict action at

every place from where the roots of terrorism emerge.

- India will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail. India will strike precisely and decisively at the terror hideouts developing under the cover of nuclear blackmail.
- We will not differentiate between government sponsors of terrorism and the masterminds of terrorism.

### Implication of the New Strategy

This strategy in contrast to deterrence, depends on retaliating swiftly and in force to every terror attack levying a tangible cost that forces the adversary's future attack to be lesser in intensity and fewer. This is somewhat how Israel feels about Hamas and Hezbollah that it cannot alter their hostility towards Israel, but it can degrade their capabilities. Expanding the scope of conventional operations below the nuclear threshold and seeking to nullify the nuclear overhang would require significant expansion in conventional capability.

The strong Pakistan-China collusivity which was evident through the four days of the short and swift operation, forces India to look at both Line of Actual Control on the China border and LC while dealing with counterterrorism. Defence of these borders is manpower intensive, and must be dynamically assessed and catered for.

Cross-border terrorism is contextualized in the context of India-Pakistan relations and the Kashmir dispute; terrorism is replaced by focus on conflict prevention because of the nuclear risk; the aggressor and the victim are placed at par. This happens every time a terror attack has taken place in India and Pakistan feels it's a victory for them. This needs to be factored in.

Since this is an assertive strategy of escalation dominance to impose steep costs on future Pakistan backed terrorism, tactically, technologically, economically we must have far superior leverages with us for conflict termination on our terms.

As the Prime Minister stated on May 13, that *"There is no place in Pakistan where terrorists can sit and breathe in peace. We will enter their home and kill them."* This was demonstrated on 07 May, with the nine terrorist targets degraded across Pakistan. But the tanzems will now take suitable measures to make it difficult for us to track, identify and target them. The Pakistan Army too will critically examine the shortcomings and adopt suitable remedial measures. We need to be a few notches ahead of them in every aspect.

### Capability Development

The dominant role of the military in Pakistan, its ideological mindset, high risk and its revisionist goals make it harder to deter especially when it pursues cross border terrorism as an instrument of State Policy. Therefore, India should be ready for future terror attacks.

There is an element of flexibility in the new concept since the response will come at a time and manner of our choosing. But, this puts the onus on the Armed Forces to enhance training, capability, level of preparation and technological advancement of a very high order and maintain these at all times. Some of the important aspects are given in the succeeding paragraphs.

Battlefield Transparency (BFT) has to be achieved with our own resources. On 07 May, we achieved operational success, but we used Maxar and Sentinel, two foreign companies for



Press briefing regarding 'Operation Sindoor' in New Delhi with Colonel Sofiya Qureshi (left), Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri (centre) and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh (right) (credit PTI)

across the military spectrum. It plays a key role in strategic military decision making by analysing huge volumes of data quickly. It can augment human capability across multiple domains.

### Conclusion

Four days was a short period for full application of force by both sides which otherwise would have caused large casualties. India struck as needed and stopped when the severity of retaliation was acknowledged. Conflict termination is never an easy choice especially when the match is not outright one-sided. The decision makers and those who execute the decisions are better placed to make deliberate decisions in the overall interest of the nation.

satellite surveillance data which is of concern. The Satellite Based Surveillance (SBS-3) programme has to be hastened up and made available in an earlier time frame than the four-year timeline.

We have to be futuristic in the capability to suppress enemy AD and must adopt a network centric approach that seamlessly integrates manned and unmanned aerial systems with own satellite-based support for surveillance, communication and targeting. The integration of own Electronic Warfare system with Akash AD system and Akashteer must be completed earliest. The recently tested Directed Energy Weapons (DEW) must be inducted at the earliest. Missile and drone defence shield must extend beyond airfields and bases to the towns and cities along the border areas. The USA is planning such a Golden Dome and we must endeavour to develop such a shield too.

Artificial Intelligence is now driving a strategic shift from reactive operations to predictive data driven decision making

India acted quietly and precisely as we could target the intersection of two runways. The operation has redefined the fight against terror, setting a new benchmark and new normal in India's counter terrorism campaign. India had made it clear that it will not wait for the world to define terrorism or its response. It will collaborate with those who call it out when it happens and not only when it hurts them.

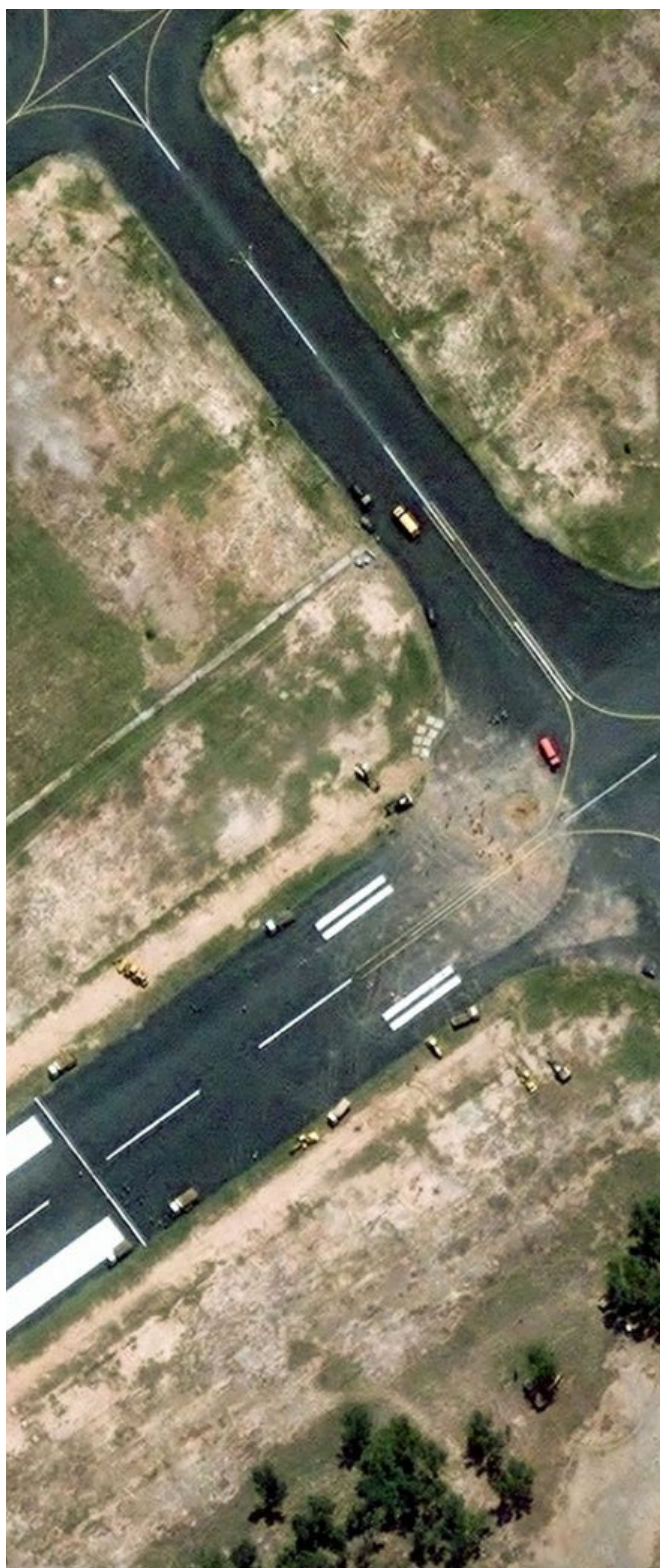


*Lieutenant General Devraj Anbu, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, YSM, SM (Retd) was commissioned into SIKH LI Regiment in June 1980. In his long and illustrious service, he has held many challenging assignments in operational areas. He commanded a Brigade on the LC in Kashmir, a Division in high altitude in Sikkim, and the Corps in Tezpur. Besides having served in Namibia as a UN Peacekeeper, he has also been the Commandant at IMTRAT, Bhutan. He went on to become the Northern Army Commander in J&K and finally retired in 2019 as Vice Chief of Army Staff. He has been an extremely dedicated and inspiring professional and leader.*



**Lt Gen Devraj Anbu**





*This satellite image, dated May 10, 2025, from Maxar Technologies, shows a cratered runway at Mushaf Air Base in Sargodha, Pakistan (credit PTI)*

# OFFENSIVE AIR OPERATIONS IN OPERATION SINDOOR

Considering the terrorist attacks at Uri and Pulwama in 2016 and 2019 respectively and the earlier Indian responses to these, India had to respond in some measure to the terrorist attack at Pahalgam on 22 April 2025. Sure enough, **Operation Sindoor** was launched on 07 May 2025 in retaliation. This article attempts to describe the estimated offensive air operations during **Operation Sindoor** based on information available in the public domain. Due to all the misinformation circulating on the net, as also the limited information released by the official spokespersons of both sides, formulating a clear report on **Operation Sindoor** is extremely difficult presently.

The Prime Minister's policy of zero tolerance for terror dictated an obviously muscular response to this attack. Inaction or a meek response was politically out of the question considering the rage this attack generated in the whole country. The statements by the Prime Minister, Defence Minister, Home Minister and others made it quite clear that some sort of kinetic action was in the offing. Operationally and tactically, the element of surprise was missing to aid any military action that India chose to adopt, due to the announced intent.

The lead service and the first respondent to such attacks was quite obviously air power and the Indian Air Force (IAF) which, despite its depleted strength and shortfalls, rose magnificently to the occasion. Use of offensive air power was always thought to be an escalation which had limited its earlier applications lest it lead to an unwanted and undesirable larger



*The damaged structure of an Islamic seminary in Babawalpur after Indian missile strikes (credit AFP)*

conflict. But this time, the political leadership took a bold decision to unleash the Indian offensive air power in a calculated manner.

The main objective of these operations was to impose a punitive cost on terrorist organizations, and deter Pakistan and the terrorists from attempting future attacks of this nature. Towards this objective, India struck nine terrorist sites with 14 targets at these locations on the night of 06/07 May 2025 with a far greater span and depth than ever before. Targets in Punjab (Pakistan) left untouched by India earlier due to possibilities of escalation, were included, notable being the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) Headquarters (HQ) and training centres at Bahawalpur and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) HQ at Muridke. Apart from these, Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) facilities in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) were also chosen. These strikes were apparently carried out using precision stand-off weapons, including the SCALP and HAMMER from Rafales, perhaps Brahmos missiles from Su-30s and Spice

and Crystal Maze from the Mirage-2000 along with indigenous kamikaze loitering munitions like Skystriker and Harop, with pin-point accuracy. The time chosen was also in the middle of the night, when civilian movement was unlikely, so as to minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage. Reportedly, these strikes eliminated around 140 terrorists including five top JeM and LeT terrorists, with Pakistan admitting multiple hits in at least six locations.

However, due to the lack of surprise, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) reacted quickly to thwart the strikes from across the International Border (IB) and the Line of Control (LC) leading to a large force Beyond Visual

Range (BVR) engagement with reportedly 120-150 aircraft participating in an unprecedented air battle. Unfortunately, the IAF was reportedly restricted from initially engaging PAF fighters across the border till they fired first, since the given objective was terrorist sites and not Pakistani military. This, perhaps, led to some losses before Indian fighters reacted.

Pakistan decided to move up the escalation ladder and on the next night attacked largely civilian targets all the way from Awantipur in the North to Bhuj in the Southwest over 1300 km apart, including a Gurudwara in Poonch, launching Surface to Surface missiles, Cruise missiles and 300-400 attack Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)/drones like the Yiha III and Songar drones, both of Turkish origin, apart from artillery shelling across the LC in Jammu & Kashmir. While most of these drones/UAVs were shot down by the integrated air defence (AD) system of India, a few obviously got through, however with little damage to installations. These Pakistani attacks reportedly left 19 civilians dead and another 50 plus injured. Quite naturally, India hit back, in the early hours of 08 May with artillery firing as well as missiles and Kamikaze UAVs using this escalation to hit at some of the Pakistani AD systems, like the Chinese HQ-9 SAM at Lahore and Sialkot as also other radars at Gujranwala and elsewhere, demonstrating the Indian offensive capability. These selective strikes against specific AD targets were possibly indicative that these AD systems had truly bothered the IAF the previous night since, with selection of just terrorist sites as the initial objective, the customary opening gambit of Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD) had not been undertaken, as would have been the case in any all-out air offensive.

Their drone/UAV attacks having dismally failed to cause any



significant damage, PAF seemed to be in a dilemma about how to respond to these Indian SEAD missions. Reportedly, they resorted to F-16s and JF-17s, the latter armed with the Chinese CM-400 anti-radar missiles, along with some Songar quadcopter drones, to try and take out the Indian S-400 systems in a tit-for-tat fashion. While Pakistan immediately claimed the destruction of an entire S-400 system at Adampur, these attacks again failed, thanks to the well-knit Indian AD and, in the bargain, the IAF claimed some more F-16s and JF-17s. Pakistan resorted to attacking IAF bases with a large number of drones with little effect. In retaliation, on 09 May, the IAF hit more of the AD sites of PAF and, reportedly but unconfirmed, the air base at Kamra which houses the Pakistani J-10s.

By the night of 9/10th May, it was quite obvious that Pakistan had not been able to make a dent or punch its way through Indian AD and was also running out of its Turkish UAVs and drones. The IAF now came into its true offensive self and, having neutralized several of the Pakistani AD systems, struck a hard and powerful blow against the major PAF bases, attacking 11 such targets with Rafales, Su-30s and Mirage-2000 aircraft supported by Kamikaze UAVs at various places. Brahmos missiles were also used to good effect in these attacks. These included the air bases at Skardu in Gilgit Baltistan, the nerve centre at Nur Khan (Chaklala) close to Rawalpindi Army HQ, Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) and Islamabad, Mushaf at Sargodha, Murid, Rafiqui, Shahbaz (Jacobabad), and Bholari. Even the old workhorse Jaguar strike aircraft attacked Sukkur with impunity displaying the level of air superiority achieved by the IAF. In addition, AD systems and ammunition storage facilities

were attacked at Lahore, Pasrur, Sialkot, Aifwala, Chunian and Karachi. In these raids, a number of PAF aircraft, runways, installations and command & control centres seem to have been destroyed or effectively neutralized bringing the PAF to its knees and sending a clear message that the IAF would continue such punitive attacks if the Pakistani forces escalated further. Clear satellite imagery leaves little doubt about the damage done in these strikes. The PAF made one last feeble ineffective attempt, in the early morning hours of the 10th, in the Srinagar-Baramulla area but reportedly lost three to four more aircraft including a couple of F-16s. An attempt against Sirsa by Fatah-1 & 2 missiles was also thwarted by Indian AD.

Seeing the writing on the wall, Pakistan capitulated and the Pakistani Director General of Military Operations (DGMO), Major General Kashif Abdullah contacted the DGMO of Indian Army, Lieutenant General Rajiv

Ghai, on the hotline. At 1530 hours or so on 10 May, in their call Abdullah waved the white flag and sought a cease fire. There are some unconfirmed reports that the IAF also struck two main entrances of the Kirana Hills tunnel complex, next to Sargodha, housing a major portion of the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan which led to a flurry of activity to check radiation leaks in the area and the US to intervene and call for a cessation of hostilities. Air Marshal Bharti, Director General of Air Operations, IAF, flatly denied such attacks in his briefing and answer to a specific question in this regard, going to the extent of stating that India was not even aware of such a nuclear facility in Kirana Hills. The US has also denied any radiation leak in that area. Be that as it may, there are some videos in circulation of two such hits and explosions at the lower slopes of Kirana Hills with a mystery behind “*who dun it*”? In a subtle shift in meaning, Lieutenant General Ghai



*Satellite views of PAF Base Bholari, also known as Bholari Airfield, in Pakistan.*



*Satellite imagery from Maxar, illustrating "Before" and "After" views of damage at PAF Base Shahbaz in Jacobabad, Pakistan after Operation Sindoor (credit newsmobile.in)*

for the satellite imagery clearly showing the damage to PAF installations, it can be presumed that there have been some losses, initially from the IAF and later, larger losses to the PAF both on the ground and in the air. Unfortunately, neither side is likely to reveal or admit the exact extent of losses since all evidence would be on their own sides of the border. Pakistani claims of having shot down six aircraft on the night of 06/07th May by Chinese PL-15 BVR Air to Air Missiles (AAMs), from JF-17 aircraft, seems improbable for a few reasons. Any wreckage in the densely populated Indian side is unlikely to remain hidden from the public since videos of every crash even in peace time are almost immediately circulated on social media. Only one plausible wreckage of a Rafale, SB 001,

reportedly did not accept a cease-fire but agreed to stop shooting with effect from 1700 hours that day, if the Pakistanis did the same. In any event, India had always maintained that such an offer of cessation of hostilities was on the table after the attacks on the very first day against the nine terrorist sites.

This short swift conflict or war was a clear-cut victory for India, notwithstanding the Pakistani establishment celebrating it as a victory for themselves in fake narratives. The few voices that I have heard or the videos circulating on open channels like YouTube certainly put a lie to this false narrative being peddled by Pakistan. Another clear proof of Pakistan capitulating is that, despite declaring that any tweaking of the Indus Water Treaty would be considered an act of war, it still had to sue for peace without having wrested any concession from India in this regard.

As for losses, while there is no clarity on the actual losses on both sides, except

has so far emerged.

The Chinese would have also benefited in terms of the capabilities of their weapons and missiles by showing such satellite imagery of the crash sites and the wreckage there. Since no such imagery has emerged, presumably the claims are exaggerated and based on unproven inputs. The purported audio clip of the radio transmissions between Rafale aircraft with call sign Godzilla is also suspect since in combat, such modern aircraft are unlikely to operate on an open intercept-prone channel. Further, if the J-10 or JF-17 actually launched the PL-15 missile which claims to have downed the Rafale, or some other Indian aircraft, with initial guidance from the SAAB Erieye AEW&C aircraft, surely the Pakistani fighter(s) coming within launch range should have been detected by the Indian AWACS as well as the IAF fighter(s) themselves. The Rafale also has a powerful EW system, SPECTRA, with a missile approach warning system (MAWS) so even if the PL-15 missile opened up its seeker for terminal guidance at 50 km range, as has been speculated by some, travelling even at its peak speed of Mach 5, it would still give about 25-30 seconds to the target aircraft to take evasive action and counter measures. While some IAF fighters may have been lost in this operation, the PL-15 claims of Pakistan/China look suspect. Over time, these figures would certainly come out. In any event, it would be better for the IAF to reveal these at an appropriate time to stop speculation and accusations of hiding something and to be able to convey a truthful convincing narrative.

On the other hand, a recently published report by Wing



Commander Satyam Kushwaha (Retd), a summary of which is available at <https://idrw.org/chakra-dialogues-foundation-releases-in-depth-report-on-paf-logged-8-jets-1-awacs-and-6-tb2/> and the full report at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lydiTTJZBlvYcnCBmrR5jkhSmzg6yC3u/view?usp=sharing>, tabulates the losses suffered by the PAF, both in the air and on the ground in this four day war with claimed authentic sources and intelligence. While the authenticity of this report cannot be vouched for, it may give some clues on the likely losses inflicted on PAF. The report tabulates the losses in the air for PAF as 4xF-16s, 2xMirage-III/V, 1xIL-78 refuelling tanker along with various intercepted major missiles and drones. On the ground, the PAF is reported to have lost another 4xF-16s, 1xC-130 Hercules, 1xSAAB Erieye AEW&C aircraft, 2xHQ-9 SAM batteries, some radars and 2 mobile command centres, apart from the damage caused to the runways and other installations. Comparatively, these losses are far more than those suffered by the IAF which was on the offensive. Once again, these figures cannot be hidden or covered up forever and would likely emerge from other sources too, sooner or later.

Without doubt, **Operation Sindoor** would be analysed and studied by militaries around the world, being the first of its kind in terms of the aerial engagement as well as in scope and duration after the long-drawn out conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Even the two combatants, as well as China, would study each aspect of this operation in minute detail to draw out lessons for the future. We may have thwarted General Munir's attempt this time to pull us down into a futile war, encouraged by China which wants to keep India tied down in South Asia. However, one thing is almost certain; Pakistan is not going to sit idle and lick its wounds. Sooner than later, it would

come back with greater vigour and better equipment, with obvious Chinese assistance, to avenge this setback. Already, there are reports of China expediting the supply of its fifth generation fighter J-35 to Pakistan to as early as August 2025. Apart from this, China is most likely to upgrade Pakistan's defensive capabilities with the HQ-19 SAMs as well its offensive capabilities in terms of electronic and cyber warfare.

Thus, while the Indian Armed Forces performed creditably in this conflict, the current geo-political situation demands that we do not rest on our laurels and establish a clear deterrence against even the increased future threats on the adage of, "*if you wish for peace, prepare for war*". Continued economic growth and prosperity also requires adequate insurance funding for security of the nation. India would, therefore, not only need to seriously and urgently replenish its munitions and losses but also draw the right lessons from this victory, and

prepare for a future conflict.

It goes without saying that in any modern conflict, aerospace power would remain the first respondent and the weapon of choice due to its inherent properties of reach, mobility, flexibility, responsiveness, offensive action and lethality, now possible with pin-point accuracy. Without dominance in the aerospace domain, not much can be achieved, particularly in a short swift conflict. The Army and the Navy are also essential elements of national security providers and each service and arm brings valuable expertise and resources to the table in any conflict. **Thus, there is a need to introspect and evaluate the requirements and essential force-structures of all elements of national military power for future multi-domain conflicts, apart from adopting a whole of the nation approach towards such contingencies in the future.**



*Air Marshal Harish Masand, VrC, VM (Retd) was commissioned as a fighter pilot in December 1967. During the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, he was awarded a Vir Chakra for gallantry while flying Hunter aircraft from Hasimara. In his distinguished career, he has inducted the MiG-29 as a Squadron Commander in 1987 and the Su-30s as the Base Commander in 1997. A DSSC graduate and a flying instructor, he has served as an instructor in most establishments. He is also an alumnus of the Air War College in USA. After retirement in 2006, he settled down in Mhow, writing and speaking on defence and national security matters.*



**Air Marshal  
Harish Masand**

# AIR DEFENCE

## SHINING JEWEL OF OPERATION SINDOOR

The dastardly attack on innocent civilians on 22 April 25, by terrorists in Pahalgam, set into motion a series of events that almost led to a nuclear war between two hostile neighbours, India and Pakistan. With the killing of 26 innocent civilians on religious lines, India had reached her limit of tolerance and needed to respond tellingly. The pressure from the populace was rising by the day, and tempers were running high. The Resistance Front (TRF), believed to be an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), initially claimed responsibility but later denied it.

### Formidable Air Defence (AD): A Critical Necessity to Launch Offensive

To launch any military offensive into enemy territory, a foolproof Air Defence (AD) is a must to safeguard against retaliation and also to protect own offensive platforms from enemy AD. With advancements in military hardware, particularly air-launched beyond visual armament, it is very challenging to launch any offensive deep into enemy territory. Another complexity has arisen due to the extensive usage of unmanned platforms for all kinds of air operations. The increasing usage of low-cost drones in warfare has added to the complexity of providing AD against such platforms.



DRDO Netra Mk1 AEW&CS in flight deploying flares (credit IAF)



The Indian response had to be calibrated with this backdrop. This was also the first opportunity for the Indian military to synergise its operational capability and execution after a very long time. Having drummed up support at the international level and domestically, India finally launched **‘Operation Sindoor’** on the night of 6-7th May 25. The preparation for Civil Defence and announcing that it will be practiced simultaneously in all 244 districts on 07th May was a great diversion. It also oriented the population for any eventuality and to be prepared to assist in minimising the impact of an enemy attack.

### Own AD: Strength, Capability and Integration

To keep the Indian skies safe, a formidable AD is set up by the Indian Air Force (IAF), who are entrusted with this responsibility. This task is on a 24x7 basis, even during peacetime. The four major functions of AD are Detection, Identification, Interception and Destruction. AD is organised through **Air Defence Identification Zones (ADIZ)** within which the responsibility of all AD Functions is allocated to various Command and Control Centres established for this purpose. In peacetime, the interception and, if required, the destruction part is generally undertaken by fighter aircraft. During wartime or on activation, however, the missiles and guns of all three services are used for the purpose, which are seamlessly integrated into the overall AD System.

The IAF undertakes these AD Functions through **Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS)**, an indigenously developed system which integrates all ground and air-based radars of the military, weapon systems including the aircraft, civil radar network, communication grid to all sensors

and shooters and other networks like Akashteer of Indian Army, similar systems of the Navy and even the Ballistic Missile Defence System. With the acquisition of the S-400 AD Missile system, capable of intercepting long-range to medium-range threats (40-400 kms), the already potent AD system comprising MRSAM (approximately 70 km range) and the Akash Missile system (approximately 25-70 km) has been bolstered further. In addition, legacy systems like Pechora SAM, OSA-AK, and shoulder-fired Igla provide a layered AD shield.

In war and active operations scenarios, the AD systems of the Army are also integrated, comprising Akash Missile Systems, L-70 guns, Zsu-23 Schilka guns, Igla and other QRSAMs, as was evident in the present conflict. Akashteer, under development for quite some time, was finally contracted by the Army last year, and the system was fielded for the first time. According to

the reports, the system proved its mettle by integrating all Army AD weapons and radars, providing a clear air picture and the requisite information to all Army AD Control Centres, Control Posts, and Missile/Gun positions promptly. The fusion of data, dissemination of information through the vertical chain of command, and integration with mother systems like IACCS in real-time were key to successful engagements of enemy drones, missiles and other projectiles.

The newly acquired S-400 proved a successful deterrent to enemy air power and an effective interceptor to enemy missiles targeted at our strategic assets. With a detection capability of 600 km and an effective kill range of 400 km, its deployment threatened Pakistan Air Force (PAF) aircraft even deep inside their territory. This gave India an offensive defence capability like never before and thus was a game-



*Akash Prime Surface to Air Missile (Credit DRDO)*



*The Russian SA-3 Pechora Surface to Air Missile, Deployed 5P73 four rail launcher (images © 2009, Miroslav Gyürösi). (representational image)*

systems, civil radars, Ballistic Missile Defence systems, and the networked systems of other services like Akashteer of Army and similar systems of the Navy. All these entities are connected through a robust communication grid. The IACCS are manned by professional crew, like Fighter Controllers, who undertake all the functions of AD, including controlling all air missions and the Missile Liaison Teams from various missile systems like S-400, MRSAM etc. While IACCS is responsible for the entire country and works on the area defence concept, systems like Akashteer provide all-around cover for point defence or for limited areas in the designated Tactical Battle Areas. All these AD systems worked in a flawless manner in **Operation Sindoor**.

changer. Indigenously developed Akash missile system was another shining jewel in the hands of the IAF as well as the Indian Army. The MRSAM added punch to the overall AD capabilities of India. Thus, a multilayered AD system, effective from ground level to the stratosphere, was ensured.

The two most important components were the IACCS and the fleet of multi-role / AD fighters like Rafale, SU-30, Mirages and MiG-29 UG, which remain active even during peacetime. Besides the formidable platforms, the enhanced capability of the recently acquired and inducted air-to-air missiles made the AD of the country impregnable. The air-to-air missiles in the Indian inventory include Meteor and Astra class with ranges over 150 km. IACCS is the brain of the complete AD system, controlling the entire airspace of the country on a 24/7 basis, even during peacetime. The system integrates all AD elements, including ground-based radars, AWACS/AEW&C, airbases, weapon

### **Offensive AD: Fierce Air Battle**

On the night of 06/07th May, when the civilian populace in India was trying to figure out their role, responsibility, processes and procedures of civil defence, Indian Armed Forces launched an aerial offensive to neutralise nine carefully chosen terrorist infrastructure and training centres. The air strikes on nine targets hit the training camps and infrastructure of terrorist groups Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The targets included Markaz Subhan Allah, Bahawalpur, JeM's main centre for training and indoctrination, and operational headquarters. The facility included the residences of JeM chief Maulana Masood Azhar, and other family members. Another important target was Markaz Taiba, Muridke, the main training centre of LeT, which provided arms training and religious indoctrination for recruits from within and outside Pakistan. Sarjal/Tehra Kalan, Punjab, was the launching facility of JeM's and was used for tunnel construction, drone operations, and smuggling of arms and narcotics. Similarly, Mehmoona Joya Facility, Sialkot, belonged to Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Markaz Ahle Hadith, Barnala, Bhimber, was one of the important Markaz of LeT in Pakistan Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (PoJK), Markaz Abbas, Kotli, was a JeM facility led by Hafiz Abdul Shakoor and Maskar Raheel Shahid, Kotli, an HM facility, was capable of housing 150-200 militants. This camp specialised in arms training, sniping, Border Action Team actions, and survival skills in hilly terrain. Other targets included Shawai Nallah Camp, Muzaffarabad, which was a LeT



camp, where the 26/11 attackers trained and Markaz Syedna Bilal in Muzaffarabad, which was JeM's main centre in PoJK.

The terrorist groups were equipped by the Pakistan Army with military-grade weapons and communication equipment and training. The Indian attacks were *"focused, measured, and non-escalatory"*. These attacks were reportedly carried out by IAF aircraft using SCALP missiles and AASM Hammer glide bombs, over a 23-minute duration. Reportedly, BrahMos cruise missiles as well as the Indian Army's Indo-Israeli Sky Striker loitering munitions were also used in the operation. A large number of terrorists, including 14 members of the Masood Azhar family, were killed in these attacks. No Pakistani military facilities or civilians were targeted.

Pakistan acknowledged that the strikes were conducted without any of the Indian aircraft entering Pakistani airspace. However, in their hurriedly called briefing to international media and diplomats on 7th May, a PAF official explained in great detail that India had amassed more than 70 aircraft for the attack, and many of India's aircraft were lost to the action of PAF through air-to-air engagements ably supported by the AEW&C aircraft. The briefing, however, was more for narrative building and as a face saver than factual on any count, as no evidence was there to support it. It is, however, possible that a large number of aircraft would have been involved in the attack, as many would be decoys and supporting missions to ensure the deception and safety of our offensive missions. Similarly, in all likelihood, PAF would certainly have activated their AD to the highest level and would also have scrambled a large number of aircraft, considering their good AEW&C fleet and the number of ground radars that would have been scanning their airspace.

But the formidable Indian AD

provided by long-range AD missiles and excellent radar coverage at all levels integrated into IACCS, probably kept the PAF at bay. In any case, PAF would not have dared to commence a war by firing first at IAF aircraft. The PAF did fire the air-to-air missile, as was evident from the unexploded PL-15 missile which was found nearly intact in Hoshiarpur. These probably could have been fired once the targets were already attacked inside Pakistan. It was possibly against such fired and misfired missiles that the PAF would have counted its success. In addition, the decoy drones imitating the electronic signature of Su-30 and MiG-29 must have also been targeted by the Pakistani AD units. These Decoy Drones reportedly were used to deceive the PAF AD and also to expose its disposition of AD assets, which were then taken down in the next wave of the IAF attack.

#### **Attack on Enemy AD Capabilities: Clearing Path for Offensive Missions**

Since Pakistan attacked Indian

military installations and civilian targets the next night, India launched an offensive in the morning hours of 09th May on PAF AD units, including the HQ-9 Surface to Air Missile, Command and Control Centres and its ground radars. This was in response to Pakistan's relentless drone/artillery attacks on Indian positions and to neutralise PAF AD assets to clear the way for a subsequent offensive mission, if needed. The IAF launched a massive air strike using the Israeli Harop Loitering Munitions to neutralise the AD systems near Lahore. It included the main radar and the Chinese HQ-9 SAMs. Destruction of HQ-9 Battery at Lahore was of critical importance as it was close to the border, and with its approximately 120 km range, it was a major threat to our aircraft operating deep inside our territory. In another important raid, the anti-stealth YLC-8E radar at Chuniyan was targeted. The AD assets were destroyed at the following places in Pakistan:

- Pasrur, Sialkot district, Punjab



*Akashteer System - Integrating Army radars and weapons (Credit PIB, India)*



*Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets Indian Air Force personnel during a visit to Air force station Adampur, 13 May 25 (Indian Prime Minister's Office on X via AP)*

- Sialkot, Punjab
- Churian, Kasur district, Punjab
- Lahore, Punjab
- Malir Cantt, Karachi, Sindh

In subsequent attacks by IAF on PAF airfields on 10 May 25, there were significant attacks on AD assets, which included a Hangar housing SAAB 2000 Erieye AEW&C aircraft at Bholari Airfield. In this attack, one Squadron Leader (an AD Controller) and five airmen also died, and at least one AEW&C aircraft was damaged. At Nurkhan airbase, two shelters were specifically targeted, which were supposedly the Mobile Mission Control Centres. Thus, the AD of PAF took quite a beating in this conflict. In addition to the physical attack, the PAF AD systems were rendered inoperative during the main offensive on 10 May through very successful electronic warfare against the radars and missile systems of Pakistan.

### **Final Assault on PAF Airfields**

After causing a heavy dent on the PAF

AD systems the previous night, IAF now launched a major assault on all major airfields housing the nuclear-capable aircraft. Operation centres, aircraft hangars, runways and many other critical assets at these airfields were also targeted. Reportedly, 15 indigenously made BrahMos missiles were launched at 11 PAF airfields, which included Nurkhan, Sargodha, Bholari, Rafiqui, Jacobabad, Murid, Rahimyar Khan, Sukkur, Pasrur, Chuniyan and Skardu. The attack on Nurkhan, Bholari and Sargodha, particularly, impacted the PAF psyche the most. All these airfields, besides housing critical military assets, had major command and control establishments of repute. The attacks were precise, targets were carefully chosen, and execution was perfect. A

panic was created that some of the nuclear assets had been damaged. The result was devastating, beyond the imagination of the Pakistan leadership. It immediately scrambled to seek US intervention. In a flurry of activities that ensued, the US suggested that the Director General of Military Operations of Pakistan should request his Indian counterpart to stop further attacks. This was a classical Counter Air Operation (CAO) by the IAF, well assisted by effective AD that ensured that the PAF was pinned down. The constant airspace monitoring by various airborne and ground-based radars, and aircraft, and missiles on full alert under the overall architecture of IACCS ensured that all the offensive missions attained their objectives without incurring any loss to their own assets.

### **Indigenisation: The Key to Success in Establishing Formidable AD**

One of the key factors in setting up a formidable AD was the indigenously developed sensors, systems and weapons used for the AD of the country. At the centre of this was the IACCS, the brain of the Indian AD System, an indigenously developed system integrating every element of AD, to facilitate effective protection. Akashteer is another networked solution for integrating the sensors and weapons of the Army in the 'Tactical Battle Area', developed indigenously. It was the Akashteer and its integrated guns and radars that saved the day for India in forward areas. It is a containerised system, highly mobile, which provides command and control to Army weapons at the 'Joint Air Defence Centres' established for the purpose. These centres are connected back to IACCS, which coordinates the overall AD of the



country. Most of the radars of the Indian Army and the IAF are indigenously developed and thus easily integrated. Even the airborne command and control system, AEW&Cs of the IAF, Netra I, is indigenously developed. While the main AD weapon of India, S-400, is of Russian origin, other equally potent missile systems, which played a key role in this conflict, have been developed indigenously. Out of these, the Akash Missile system is fully indigenous and was used in forward areas. The MRSAM has been co-developed by the DRDO with an Israeli company. Some of the QRSAMs and shoulder-fired missiles have also been developed indigenously and were effectively used. One of the most effective weapons against the swarm drone attacks employed by IAF and IA has been the indigenously developed non-kinetic counter-drone systems, comprising RF Jammers and Laser-based systems.

### Modernisation of Legacy Systems: Thoughtful Optimisation

One of the hallmarks of this conflict was the usage of legacy systems, which had long gone past their prime. The L-70 Guns of 1960s origin have been improvised with better radars and systems, and similarly, the Schilka and ZSU-23 twin guns. In classical air warfare of a few years back, where the targets were attacked with stand-off weapons/missiles, these point defence weapons had almost become irrelevant. These however, proved very effective against the drones. The Pechora or SAM III would have been phased out a long time back since Akash had replaced them, but the IAF persisted with these weapons with a bit of upgrade. Similarly, the OSA-AK or SAM-8 missiles were retained, upgraded and used effectively in this conflict. The IAF also innovatively used some of the old air-to-air missiles and converted them for

the surface-to-air role and used them effectively in this conflict.

### To Sum Up: AD, the Shining Jewel of the Conflict

This conflict will be remembered for various reasons: for just 23 minutes of coordinated firepower that rained down on terrorist infrastructure deep inside Pakistan, shocking the terror network; for the shock and awe created in just 90 minutes to target all major airfields of the PAF, unsettling that country; and for the precise, carefully chosen targets and well-crafted political signaling. However, above all, this

conflict will leave an everlasting memory of thousands of drones, projectiles, and missiles flying in all directions and being neutralised consistently by our AD. The AD of the country served its nation exceptionally well, saving thousands of civilian lives as well as critical military and civil infrastructure. Even sweeter was the fact that most of the weapons used were indigenously developed, and the personnel operating those weapons and systems were entirely Indian, unlike some Turkish and Chinese personnel involved with Pakistan on the other side.



*Air Marshal VPS Rana, PVSM, VSM (Retd) served in many important operational as well as administrative appointments. He commanded an AD Radar unit during "Kargil Operations" and was instrumental as Director (Operations), in the development and operationalisation of LACCS. A Category 'Aye' Master Fighter Controller, he has been an instructor at Defence Services Staff College, Wellington and also at Defence Services Command and Staff College Lusaka, Zambia. He also served as Director Air Staff Inspection (C&R) and later assumed the command of 'Air Force Administrative College'. He was Air Officer-in-Charge Administration (AOA) during the COVID crisis and coordinated the overall LAF effort in supplies, administration and medical response. His academic qualifications include Post Graduation in Plant Breeding & Genetics and Defence Studies, PG management diplomas in public administration and business administration and M Phil. He is presently working as Chief Advisor, Himalay Unnati Mission (HUM), a movement to preserve, protect and resurrect the ecological, economic, cultural and spiritual heritage of the Himalayas. He is the author of 'Invisible Warriors', a book on the Air Defence of India. Besides writing on service matters, he has also published works on water security and environmental issues.*



**Air Marshal  
VPS Rana**

# OPERATION DESERT HAWK

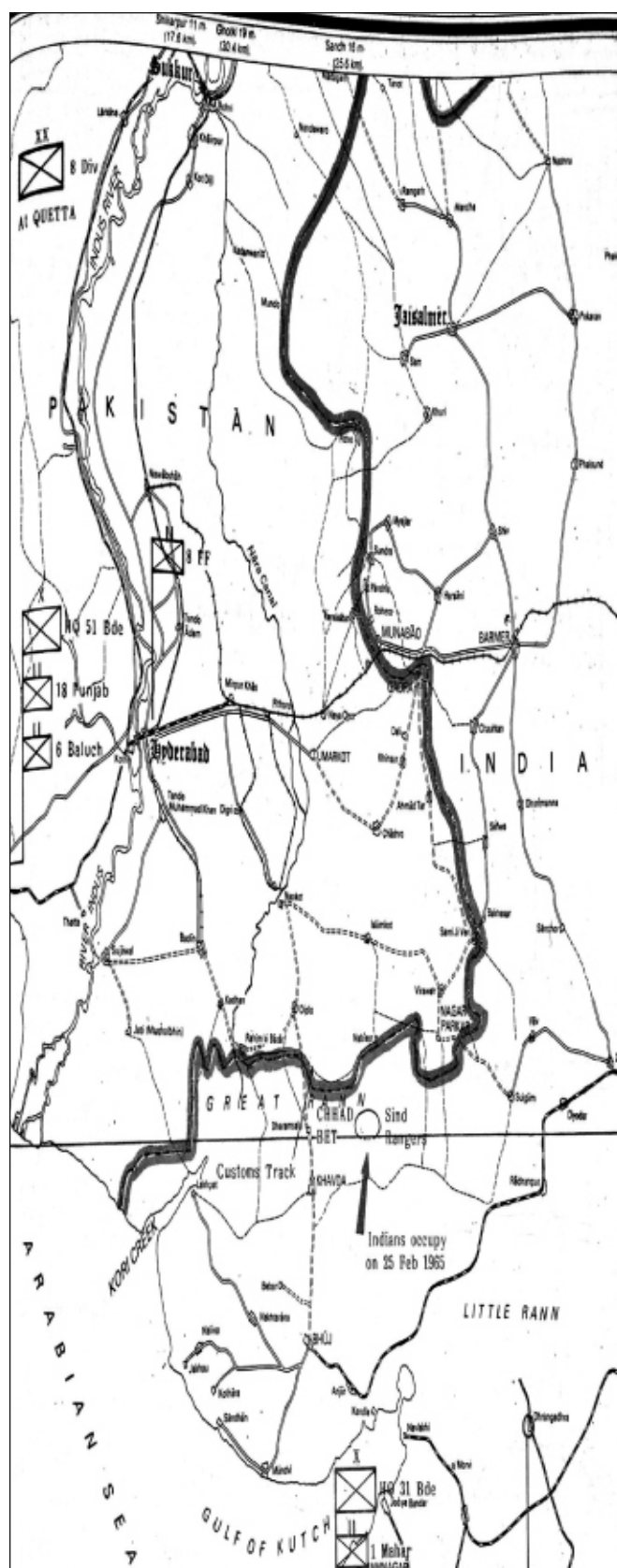
## RANN OF KUTCH APRIL 1965

The dominant narrative in the history of 1965 war, usually covers the operations in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and Punjab, however, it was in the inhospitable and little known terrain of the Rann of Kutch that the military hostilities leading to the war of 1965 between India and Pakistan, commenced.<sup>1</sup>

### Significance of Kutch

**Terrain and Existing Lines of Communication.** The Rann of Kutch, along the border with Pakistan, is an area of almost 23310 square kms separating the erstwhile kingdom of Kutch from Sindh and extends from East to West towards the Arabian Sea. Kutch literally means something which intermittently becomes wet and dry. The Kutch region, located in the North Western part of Gujarat, and South and East of Indus River Delta, features a diverse and unique terrain. It is home to the *Great Rann of Kutch*, and the *Little Rann of Kutch*. The *Great Rann* is a seasonal marsh that floods during monsoons and dries to a salt desert in summer. The *Little Rann* is located Southeast of the Great Rann and is a home to diverse wildlife, including the Indian Wild Ass.

In 1965, the **Great Rann** was connected from the Southern side by only **one fair weather road** from Bhuj to Khavda (44 miles from Bhuj) passing via Banni. Ahead of Khavda the track led to Diplo (in Pakistan). The **Northern portion of the Rann was easily accessible** from the Pakistani cities of Hyderabad and Karachi via the town of Badin, approximately 26 miles to the North of the Indian claim line. Badin was connected by rail and an all-weather road across the bridges and ferry points over River Indus. The forward areas were fairly accessible from Badin through fair-weather motorable roads. Also, along the border on Pakistan's side a motorable fair-weather road linked Luna with



Map showing Sindh and Kutch areas with opposing forces in April 1965 (credit defenceclub.live)

<sup>1</sup> "Bajwa, F. (2013). *From Kutch to Tashkent: The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965*. London: Hurst & Co Ltd, p. 65



Rahim Ki Bazaar via Vigokot. On the Indian side, the **nearest railway station at Bhuj was located 110 miles from the border** and the closest Army formation, 31 Infantry Brigade was at Ahmedabad, 160 miles East of Bhuj. Overall, **the region's terrain, communication network and logistics were favourable to Pakistan.**

**Historical Significance.** The area of Kutch was not always like this. The **Allah Bund**, a significant geological feature almost 80-100 km long running from East to West was formed as a result of a major earthquake in 1881. It is believed to have blocked the Easternmost distributary of the Indus River system, known as the Puran River, which was flowing through the region into the Great Rann of Kutch. Puran River contributed to the seasonal flooding of the Rann of Kutch and maintained wetland conditions. The **Allah Bund** blocked the flow of the river, drying up its former course and inducing major changes in the hydrology of the region through increased salinity and changes in flood patterns. Puran River was navigable during the monsoons and high tides and drained into the Arabian Sea via Kori Creek. It supported the **riverine trade** of the **Indus Delta, Sindh, and Kutch areas with the regions as far as Arabia and East Africa.** It had a number of thriving trading ports like Lakhpat, Koteshwar and Fatehgarh. Lakhpat at the mouth of Puran River was the most prosperous trading port. The name Lakhpat itself means city of millionaires. **These towns fell into decline post the drying up of the river and in present times are more known for their historic ruins, forts and spiritual legacy.**

### The Boundary Issue

#### Kutch-Sindh Boundary Question.

Sindh was annexed by the British in 1843. It was then stated that the Rann lying

between Sindh and the territory of the Kutch ruler was part of Kutch. Since there was no immediate urgency, the **border remained un-demarcated.** In 1947 Sindh was given to Pakistan and Kutch remained with India. Immediately after independence on 14 July 1948, **Pakistan wrote to India that the Sindh-Kutch "boundary was still in dispute and must be settled".** Pakistan contended that the Rann is a dead sea and according to international conventions, **seas are divided equally** between the states situated on either side. India refuted Pakistan's claim on the basis of **Survey of India maps issued during British rule which showed the entire Rann marked as part of Kutch.**

#### Border Skirmishes Prior to 1965.

As early as 1949, Pakistani intrusions into the Rann and military movements along the border had commenced. Both sides over a period of time strengthened the patrol arrangements and by 1955 Pakistan had built a motorable track right up to the border and stationed

contingents of Sindh Reserve Police across Chadd Bet in Pakistan claimed area. India lodged a protest with Pakistan on 12 January 1956 to no effect. On 17 February 1956, Indian patrols found that armed personnel of Pakistan had intruded into Pakistan claimed Chadd Bet area and occupied well dug in positions. A routine camel mounted patrol of **7 Grenadiers located at Khavda (72 kms away) was fired upon** from these prepared positions injuring one jawan and killing three camels. **Once again protest notes were exchanged to no avail.** India immediately took measures to clear the area of intruders and moved 112 Infantry Brigade from Dhrangadhra to Bhuj. The brigade concentrated at Khavda and established a firm base at Bedia Bet. **Pakistan vacated the area and no major incursions by Pakistan occurred for some time.** Realising the vulnerability of the area **India took measures to improve its defensive**



*A 1965 picture of jawans cleaning their weapons during the Indo-Pak war (File pic Getty Images) (representational image)*



Map of Gujarat showing the Little Rann of Kutch and Great Rann of Kutch (credit en.wikipedia.org)

posture, by moving one battalion of State Reserve Police between Bhuj and Khavda, upgrading Bhuj airstrip, constructing some fair-weather airstrips at forward locations and establishing a plant for the distillation of salt water at Chadd Bet. By November 1962, 112 Infantry Brigade Group was replaced by 31 Infantry Brigade Group and the borders continued to be manned by Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and State Reserve Police (SRP) personnel.

The 1956 Chadd Bet incident was successful in drawing attention to the Rann as an area of territorial dispute considering that till then J&K had been the focus of India - Pakistan conflict. Furthermore, it underscored the logistical vulnerability of the Indian position imposed by terrain.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> (1965- *A Western Sunrise* by Shiv Kunal Verma)

<sup>3</sup> Bajwa, F. (2013). *From Kutch to Tashkent: The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965*. London: Hurst & Co Ltd, p. 68

the area and Indian routine patrols reported a build-up in general area Kanjarkot, as Pakistan claimed that the boundary ran to the South of it<sup>3</sup>. It was assessed that approximately one **platoon of Indus Rangers was at Kanjarkot** and the company minus supported by 3 inch mortars and MMGs were on the sand dunes to the North. The rest of the battalion of Indus Rangers was at Rahim ki Bazaar and two more battalions of Indus Rangers were kept in reserve at Hyderabad (Pakistan) and Chhor respectively. On the Indian side two companies of SRP were at Vigokot, one at Karim Shahi and two at Chadd Bet.

**Conduct of Operations.** On 21 February, Major General PC Gupta, MC, Maharashtra and Gujarat Area Commander, issued his first Operation Instruction to Commander 31 Infantry Brigade Group to use his integral resources to **capture Kanjarkot**. As part of the forward deployment, on 13 March 1965, CRPF, on a featureless mud flat area, established **Sardar Post** 4.6 kms to the South West of Kanjarkot, which effectively blocked the Pakistani route of access to Kanjarkot. The CRPF was beefed up to four companies under Major Karnail Singh with one company deployed at the tactical post and balance behind Sardar post. It was reinforced by One Officer, Four Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and 15 other ranks (OR) of 1 Mahar.

Pakistan retaliated by ordering Major General Tikka Khan, General Officer Commanding 8 Infantry Division to **assume operational command of Indus Rangers** for effective retaliation. By 06 March 2025, Pakistan's 51 Infantry Brigade Group had reinforced the post at Rahim ki Bazaar and Kanjarkot with a company each along with some heavy weapons. Headquarters (HQ) 51 Infantry Brigade also moved to

## Operation Kabaddi

Trouble started in 1964 in the area of **Kanjarkot**, where Pakistani patrols frequently trespassed into Indian territory. On 13 May 1964 three intruders were arrested and subsequently released by SRP. Kanjarkot Fort is located approximately 1370 metres South of the border in Indian territory. The geography of the area favours Pakistan as, to the North of Kanjarkot in Pakistan, are a row of sand dunes running parallel to the border providing a dominating and unimpeded view of Kanjarkot Fort and the area to the South of it.

**Troop Deployment.** There were no permanent troops stationed by either side in this area. By January 1965 Pakistan started inducting troops into



South of Diplo along with 25 pounder guns. Some tanks and armoured vehicles were also placed at Badin. 12 Pakistani aircraft were stationed at Badin airfield. Pakistan also established a platoon post at Ding to the North East of Sardar post.

From 26 to 28 March 1965 a joint exercise was organised by the Indian Army and Indian Navy at the sea port of Mandavi and naval aircraft were flown from INS Vikrant to familiarise with the terrain. In retaliation, by 08 April, Pakistan moved two squadrons of F-86 jets to Badin air field.

**Ready for Action. Operation Kabaddi** ended with the deployment of new posts where earlier only patrolling used to be carried out. Some track improvements and aggressive patrolling by both the sides accompanied the deployment. As against the earlier deployment of state troops, Pakistan moved its regular units. At the government level, a number of notes were exchanged between India and Pakistan however, neither side was ready to back down. With ongoing aggressive patrolling from both the sides, it was but a matter of time before fighting broke out.

### Operation Desert Hawk-I

An account by Major S Ahmed of Pakistan Army reveals that establishment of Sardar post, aggressive patrolling and the joint exercise by the Indian Army and the Navy seemingly gave an impression to the authorities in Pakistan that an **attack on Kanjarkot by Indian forces was being planned**. In anticipation, Major General Tikka Khan, General Officer Commanding (GOC) 8 Infantry Division, ordered Commander 51 Infantry Brigade to **capture Sardar post**.

**Attack on Sardar Post.** Pakistan Army had identified three main camps in and around Sardar post and 51 Infantry Brigade planned the **attack with two battalions** up i.e. 18 PUNJAB and 8 FF on the night of 7/8 April 1965. 6 BALUCH was kept as a reserve. The attack commenced with heavy artillery fire, however, due to tough resistance by the Indians **only one Pakistani company could reach the defences**. Balance of the Pakistani force could not press home the attack. Subsequently Pakistani forces withdrew after suffering heavy losses. The **intermittent shelling of Sardar post continued throughout the next day**. In this engagement the Pakistan Army suffered four Officers and 30 OR killed and four jawans taken as prisoners of war. On the Indian side, four CRPF personnel were killed and five wounded. Major Karnail Singh was taken prisoner of war and one JCO and nine OR were declared as missing. The **CRPF personnel withdrew to Vigokot**. Subsequent Indian patrols found **Sardar**

**post vacant** and on 11 April 1965, a company of **2 SIKH LI occupied Sardar Post** as a standing patrol. The fighting at Sardar Post only served to emphasise the point that a well-entrenched defensive force that was willing to fight and not get intimidated by the bluster of 'superior weapons systems' was a formidable entity<sup>4</sup>.

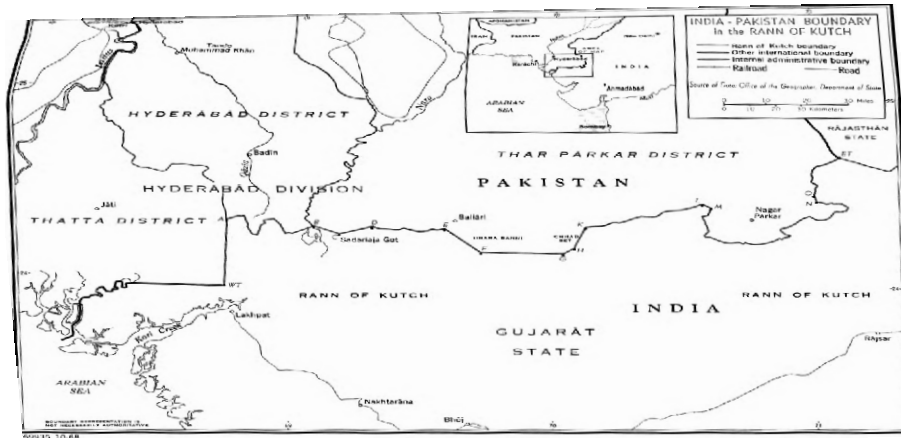
### Reorganization of Opposing Forces

In **Desert Hawk-I**, operational commanders from both the sides handled the situation ineptly. Quick reorganisation of forces was carried out by both the sides. By 14 April, 1 Mahar established itself at Sardar post and 2 SIKH LI concentrated at Vigokot. On the Pakistan side, **Kanjarkot was occupied by approximately two companies of Pakistan regular troops with RCL guns and other heavy weapons**. Indian Army was given the responsibility for the defence of Kutch and by 20 April 1965, Indian forces operating in the area were



Google Map showing locations where troops were deployed and battles fought during Operation Desert Hawk 1965

<sup>4</sup> (1965- *A Western Sunrise* by Shiv Kunal Verma)



India Pakistan Boundary in the Rann of Kutch (credit en.wikipedia.org)

designated as **Kilo Sector with Major General PO Dunn appointed as the GOC**. 50 Independent Parachute Brigade came under command Kilo Sector. Indian and Pakistani dispositions by the end of **Desert Hawk-I** are given hereafter.

#### Indian Army Dispositions:

- **HQ 31 Infantry Brigade Group:** General area Sardar Post with Brigade HQ at Bhing and 1 Mahar at Sardar Post, 2 SIKH LI at Vigokot, 17 RAJ RIF at Dharamsala with company each at Chadd Bet and Bela. Two screen positions of a company each of SRP were deployed at Point 84 (Six km North of Dharamsala) and Hanuman Talai.
- **HQ 50 Independent Parachute Brigade:** Brigade HQ at Khavda with 2 PARA near Dharamsala with a screen position at Point 84, 3 PARA at Dharamsala with a company at Biar Bet. 4 PARA was concentrated at Point 183, South of Dharamsala.
- HQ M&G Area had 2 Grenadiers under its command which was deployed along

Artillery and Engineer elements deployed opposite Sardar post.

- **HQ 6 Infantry Brigade Group** was deployed 8 kms South of Diplo with 6 Punjab at Jatrai, 15 Punjab at Vingi and 2 FF at Sirey Jo Got, along with integral artillery and mortars.
- A reserve force with elements of 12 Cavalry, 24 Cavalry, one company each from different battalions along with 15 FF were constituted at Sirey Jo Got.

#### Operation Desert Hawk-II. (Operation Arrow Head of Pakistan <sup>5</sup>)

Post the attempt on Sardar post, 8 Infantry Division of Pakistan was tasked to maintain an offensive posture through advance, capture and securing maximum possible territory and destruction of two Indian Brigades inside Kutch. Between 10 April to 19 April 1965 Indian and Pakistan forces were deployed face to face and engaged in aggressive patrolling and exchange of artillery fire. Frequent patrol clashes leading to casualties were also reported from the areas of Vigokot and Sardar posts.

**The Action.** Pakistan's 6 Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Eftikhar planned to raid the Indian outpost at Point 84 on 20/21 April as a precursor to the main offensive on Biar Bet and Chadd Bet on 23/24 April. This was to be accompanied by softening of the targets by heavy artillery fire. Continuous shelling on Sardar post on 20/21 April by Pakistan Artillery was accompanied by a heavy continuous Artillery barrage on Point 84 (Sera Bet). On the night 20/21 April, Lieutenant Nadir Parvez of 6 PUNJAB accompanied by 20 men and a forward observation officer **raided the Indian post at Point 84**. The post suffered eight fatal casualties, lost one LMG and six rifles apart from widespread destruction. The raiding party withdrew under heavy Indian artillery fire.

Suigam-Nagar Parkar Axis.

- Anti-tank and anti-personnel mines were laid at Vigokot and Sardar post and 106 mm RCL guns and 3.5 inch Bazookas were also placed with the forward battalions.

#### Pakistan Army Dispositions:

- **HQ 8 Infantry Division** moved from Karachi to Hyderabad (Pakistan) with Tactical HQ at Badin with effect from 22 April 1965.
- **HQ 51 Infantry Brigade** was at Rahim Ki Bazaar with 18 Punjab, 6 Baluch, 8 FF and one platoon of 15 FF (Recce and Support) along with

<sup>5</sup> Bajwa, F. (2013). *From Kutch to Tashkent: The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965*. London: Hurst & Co Ltd, p.77



The Indian side continued to hold on to its defences with Infantry only. Apart from other deployments which continued as hitherto, a company of 3 PARA was tasked to occupy Sera Bet. An additional battery of medium guns and engineer companies were orbated to Kilo Sector. **No Armour, despite Major General Dunn's requests, was inducted.** One of the reasons was probably the fact that, the area on the Indian side becomes impassable due to inundation.

### Operation Desert Hawk-III: (Operation Arrow Head of Pakistan)

The Pakistanis planned to launch a major offensive in the Kutch area to destroy Indian Forces in Chadd Bet - Dharamsala. The objective Sera Bet was estimated to be held by a company of regular troops. A silent attack on Point 84 was to be led by 6 PUNJAB along with a company of 15 FF (Recce and Support). Alongside, 15 PUNJAB was to carry out a feint attack on Chadd Bet from Vingi.

**The Battle Starts.** Sera Bet was actually occupied by a company of 3 PARA commanded by Major P P Singh along with a section each of RCL Guns and MMG. A troop of 17 PARA Field Regiment was also deployed at Sera Bet. On 23 April 1965 a reconnaissance (recce) patrol led by 2nd Lieutenant Sharma with three OR was sent to ascertain the enemy's strength at Jat Talai. The patrol never returned and was captured by the alert Pakistan Army.

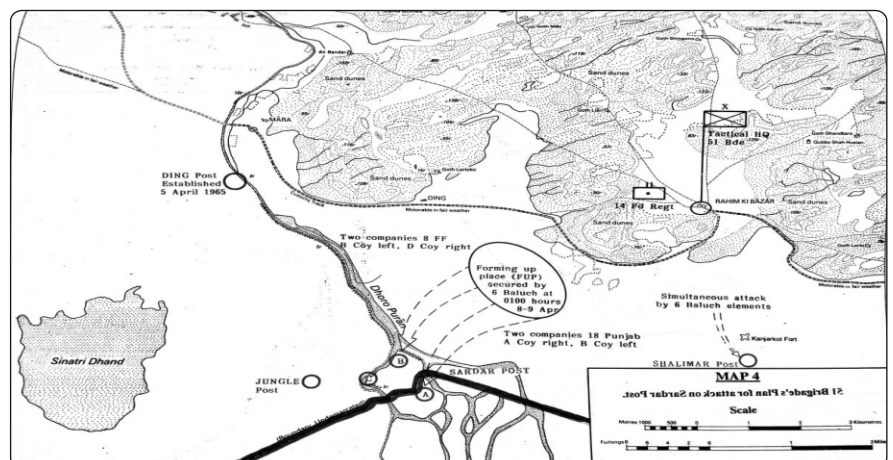
As per the account by Major Ahmed, on the night of 23 April 1965 during the advance to Sera Bet the **troops ambushed 2nd Lieutenant Sharma's patrol and captured them alive without firing a shot.** During the night of 23 April noise of tracked vehicles could be heard by the Indian troops at Sera Bet. At about 0300 hours on 24 April heavy shelling of the post by Pakistan artillery commenced. By 0600

hours Indian troops engaged the Pakistan Army troops about 1000 metres from the post with MMGs and 3 Inch Mortars. The advance faltered, however, by about 0715 hours it resumed, with armour leading and Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) following. Soon APCs were seen forming up for assault under the covering fire of Pakistani tanks. The tanks moved towards the defences employing fire and movement tactics and reached within 600-700 metres. Three advancing tanks were destroyed. **Major P P Singh, realising the weight of the assault and without any armour or air support, decided to withdraw his troops under the cover of artillery and mortar fire from the post.** By noon **Pakistan Army had occupied Sera Bet.** As per some accounts Pakistan Forces suffered significant casualties during the attack with about 100 killed/wounded and the Indians had one jawan killed, two wounded and nine personnel including one officer reported missing. Further probing by Pakistani tanks towards the South-West of Point 84 was repulsed on 24 April. On 25 April, armed recce was carried out by B

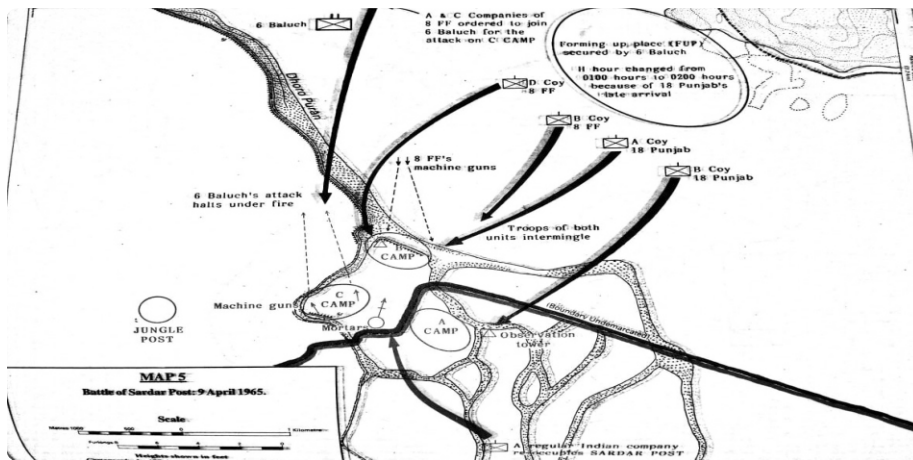
Company 15 FF with an airborne Army aviation aircraft for surveillance and direction of artillery fire.

**The Battle Continues.** The next Pakistani objective was **Biar Bet**, estimated to be held by a company of regular troops. The attack was to be led by B Company 15 FF (Recce and Support) and A Squadron of 24 Cavalry. 2 FF and two companies of 15 PUNJAB mounted on vehicles were to follow in the wake of armoured vehicles. Two regular companies were left behind at Sera Bet to secure the firm base. Biar Bet was defended by a company of 3 PARA led by Major Kumar. It had in support 17 Para Field Regiment, section each of MMG, 3 Inch Mortar and 106 mm RCL Guns.

**The Action.** At about 1630 hours on 25 April, three APCs (probably 15 FF on Armed Recce) were seen approaching the company position at Biar Bet. Due to accurate fire from the weapons at the post they quickly withdrew. Subsequently, at about 1750 hours, Pakistan Infantry supported by 12 tanks was seen bypassing the Biar Bet position. Apprehending, a full-



Pakistan 51 Infantry Brigade Plan for attack on Sardar Post, 08-09 April 1965 (image defencehub.live)



*Battle of Sardar Post, 09 April 1965 (image defencehub.live)*

fledged attack on this position an additional section of MMG and some RCL guns were rushed to the post. The assault was preceded by heavy artillery firing for over an hour in the early morning hours on 26 April targeting Biar Bet and neighbouring localities. As per the Pakistan Army version, even before the Pakistan troops could reach the forming up place, Indian troops at Biar Bet opened fire with all weapons. This led to the disclosure of Indian troop and weapon dispositions. As the Pakistani troops advanced, they were effectively engaged and soon three Patton tanks were set ablaze and three others were rendered out of action. As the tanks reached almost 700 metres from the defences the Indian troops began to withdraw from Biar Bet. Most of the heavy weapons, except for one RCL gun which kept on firing till the end and was captured intact, were withdrawn from the post along with the troops. By 0800 hours the Pakistanis had occupied Biar Bet. Besides taking four prisoners of war they captured huge quantities of war equipment left behind on the post.

By the end of Desert Hawk III, India had lost the posts Sera Bet and Biar Bet and Pakistan had consolidated in the general area Biar Bet. Pakistan's General HQ, was well aware of the rising anger of the Indian public and fearing an all-out war in Punjab and/or J&K, put on hold all further operations in the Kutch area.

**General Mobilisation in India and Pakistan.** On 26 April, Armed Forces in the rest of India were put on alert all along the India-Pakistan border. Similarly Pakistan Armed Forces were put on twelve hours alert. 52 Infantry Brigade and 21 Infantry Brigade Groups were moved from Quetta to Sindh to reinforce 8 Infantry Division and cater for any Indian escalation.

### Ceasefire Negotiations

On 28 April 1965 the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson wrote to his Indian and Pakistan counterparts expressing his concern and suggested ceasefire and restoration of status quo ante as on 01 January 1965. The proposal was accepted by both the nations. For Pakistan, apart from a tactical win, it was acknowledgement of the fact by India and the international community that the Kutch Border was disputed. On 01 May 1965 orders were issued to Indian formations not to take any offensive actions and by 23 June 1965 the responsibility of Kutch border was taken over by 11 Infantry Division from Kilo Sector.

### Ceasefire Agreement

After negotiations, the ceasefire agreement was signed by India and Pakistan on 30 June 1965 and implemented with effect from 01 July 1965. Status quo as on 01 January 1965 was restored and both sides withdrew their regular forces from the border deployments. Police

Indian troops suffered 48 casualties as against the 140 casualties of Pakistani troops.

**Consolidation by Pakistan.** 6 Infantry Brigade of Pakistan concentrated around Biar Bet and the field and medium artillery were moved forward to cover the Indian approaches to Biar Bet. Recce and Support detachments were sent well forward to gain early warning of any Indian counter attack or troop movement. To add insult to injury, Pakistan flew National and International journalists to the post of Biar Bet to showcase the arms and ammunition left behind by the retreating Indian soldiers.



forces re-established their posts and commenced patrolling with the same intensity as they were doing prior to 01 January 1965. Also, Ministers from both the countries were to meet within one month to **demarcate the border**. And in the event of no agreement being reached within two months by the Ministers, the matter could be referred to the Independent International Tribunal for mediation.

**Final Award by the Tribunal.** The tribunal was constituted as per the laid down norms under the overall aegis of the United Nations. It met for the first time in Geneva on 19 February 1966 and after a series of meetings announced the award on 19 February 1968 which was accepted by both the Governments. As per the award, **Pakistan's claim that the border must run from middle of the Rann was rejected and the Northern rim as per the Indian claims was accepted as the border.** The Tribunal however, awarded an area of about **828 square km around Kanjarkot and Chadd Bet to Pakistan.** The posts of Biar Bet and Point 84 remained with India<sup>6</sup>.

### Prognosis

The nature of terrain made the conduct of military manoeuvres in the area of Kutch difficult for India. The elevated region on the Pakistan side along with good communication lines to the hinterland, **provided Pakistan with the advantage**

of deep observation into Indian territory, quick mobilization and switching of forces. India's poor showing in the *Rann*, experts argue, **convinced some Pakistani leaders** – most importantly, Bhutto – that **the Indian political and military leadership were still demoralised** following their defeat at the hands of China in 1962. As Shuja Nawaz states, Bhutto and a group of younger generals understood this to be the right time to '*resolve the Kashmir dispute through military means*'<sup>7</sup>.

For India, Kutch was a **low priority area** and there were no preparations for operations in these desolate plains. Also, the aspect of inundation of the area of operations played on Indian decision makers minds and they hesitated in inducting tanks and other heavy arsenal in the area of operations. On the other hand, **the induction and the use of armour by Pakistan probably made a significant difference in the battles.** Pakistan's

aggressive use of artillery directed by air observation posts was accurate and inflicted heavy damage on Indian positions.

The operations at Rann of Kutch had a larger impact on the events that were to unfold in the later months of 1965. Scholars make the case that the decision in 1965 to seize J&K using military means was shaped by the view in Pakistan that the Indian military was in a weakened state.

Aware of the huge rise in the defence budget and rapid pace of India's armament programme following the defeat in 1962, '*Pakistan*,' as Stephen Cohen states, 'initiated the 1965 War with India with a "*now or never*" mentality, which gripped the decision-makers in Rawalpindi'<sup>8</sup>. The '*window of opportunity*' was said to be '*narrowing with India's growing military strength*'. The bottom-line, as scholars point out, was that '*Pakistan was running out of time if it wanted to affect a military induced solution to the Kashmir imbroglio*'<sup>9</sup>.



*Major General Deepak Mehra, KC, AVSM, VSM (Retd), an alumnus of National Defence Academy, Pune was commissioned into 5 Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force) in 1987. He has served as Military Attache in Embassy of India, Moscow, commanded a brigade in Kashmir and a division in North East India. An accomplished scholar, he specialises in Geopolitics with a focus on Russia Studies and is currently pursuing his PhD in the field, further enriching his depth of knowledge and global perspective. He is the Founding Director and CEO of ThorSec Global Pvt Ltd, a Security and Strategic consulting firm. He can be reached at deepak.mehra67@yahoo.co.uk. and deepak.mehra@thorsecglobal.com*



**Maj Gen Deepak Mehra**

<sup>6</sup> [https://phipsn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll\\_india/documents/1965Chapter02.pdf](https://phipsn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_india/documents/1965Chapter02.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Shuja Nawaz, *Crosses Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars Within* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 200-201.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *The Pakistan Army* (California: Univ. Of California, 1984), 139.

<sup>9</sup> Shuja Nawaz, *Crosses Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars Within* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 20-23

# OPERATION GIBRALTAR

Operation Gibraltar aimed at creating internal disturbances inside J&K, thus obstructing movement of the Indian troops before invading the territory overtly. The planning was based on the assumption that guerrilla attacks would trigger a sympathetic uprising by the Muslim majority population of Kashmir. This article describes the events that unfolded.

## Introduction

The story of kinetic operations during the 1965 Indo-Pak War (August-September 1965) actually began in April 1965 when Pakistan launched an operation, codenamed '**Operation Desert Hawk**', in the Rann of Kutch to test India's political and military response. At the end of it, after India was forced to move reinforcements to counter an infantry division-sized invasion, Pakistan was encouraged by the outcome and evaluated the episode as a sign of Indian weakness.

A ceasefire was brokered by the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, and both sides agreed to desist from the use of force. A '*status quo ante bellum*' was maintained. But while India did abide by the ceasefire terms, Pakistan was already planning for two subsequent operations-**Operation Gibraltar** and **Operation Grand Slam**. This is the story of **Operation Gibraltar**.

## Genesis of Operation Gibraltar

Many observers believe that **Operation Gibraltar** was a plan hatched by the Chinese and handed over to Pakistan after the latter surrendered the Shaksgam Valley of Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir (PoJK) to China in 1963. While the border talks between Pakistan and China were going on in 1962-63, some kind of resolution to the Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) problem was also being discussed between India and Pakistan, allegedly mediated by Lord Mountbatten, who was the Chief of Defence Staff in United Kingdom at that time. It



*A column of Indian soldiers climbing in the Haji Pir Pass during the 1965 India-Pakistan War. © AFP/Getty Images*



is whispered that when Pakistan seemed hesitant to hand over Shaksgam as the proposal for talks with India were evolving, the Chinese had shared the plan to assure the Pakistanis about the forced annexation of J&K.

In an oft-quoted conversation, the Chinese Chairman Mao Zedong gave then Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a strategic piece of advice: *"In the future, concentrate on a particular point of India's weakness and launch your attack to completely destroy that formation. You will soon find the rest of the Indian Army on the run, just as it ran before the Chinese Army in 1962."*<sup>1</sup> Apparently, the Pakistanis fell for it, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto made the announcement about Shaksgam from Beijing while a Swarn Singh-led delegation from India was in Pakistan to resume the discussion. The delegation was then ordered to return to India post-haste by Pandit Nehru himself.

The broad plan of **Operation Gibraltar** involved infiltrating Azad Kashmir (AK) Battalions/Pakistan army personnel, including Special Services Group (SSG)/subunits/Razakars inside J&K to stir unrest, blow up road communication infrastructure, and take on the Indian Army through guerrilla warfare. This was to be followed by a Pakistani invasion of J&K, declaration of its independence on 14th August 1965 - Independence Day of Pakistan - culminating in seizing full control of the state. The obvious aim of inserting *mujabideen* was to highlight the conflict as a home-grown uprising, with no active involvement of Pakistan.

### The Plan

The plan hinged on guerrilla operations inside the state by several hybrid militia groups, each of a battalion or a battalion plus strength, comprising regular troops and commandos along with many irregulars-*Razakars*- who were trained by the Pakistan Army and operated along with the regulars. The force was raised, organised and commanded by Major General Akhtar Hussain Malik, General Officer Commanding (GOC) 12 Infantry Division. Major General Malik prepared the plan for the operation in consultation with the Pakistan General Headquarters (GHQ), after many iterations.

Finally, using a sand model, Major General Malik presented the final plan to the Pakistani Supreme Commander, Field Marshal Ayub Khan at Murree. The latter agreed with the proposed plan and approved its execution for 05 August 1965. General Musa, then Army Chief, was also present, accompanied by the Chief of General

Staff, Major General Sher Bahadur and the Directors of Military Operations and Intelligence (Brigadiers Gul Hassan and Irshad Ahmed Khan, respectively). No civil official attended this briefing.

The code name **Operation Gibraltar** had a romantic tale associated with it. During the Arab invasions of Morocco in the 8th Century, General Tariq, also known as General Tarif-ibn-Zarca, was among the most prominent persons to convert to Islam. He was later appointed as the Governor of Mauritania and Tangiers. He was the man who led the Arab army during the conquest of Spain. It was to commemorate General Tariq's landing at Mons Cape that a fort was built there and named **Gebel Tariq**, meaning *'The Hill of Tariq'*. That name then got corrupted by the Spaniards into **Gibraltar**, the name it is known by to this day. It was in the shadow of the rock at Gibraltar that he had burned his boats so that there was no going back when the Muslim army's first entry into Spain failed.<sup>2</sup>

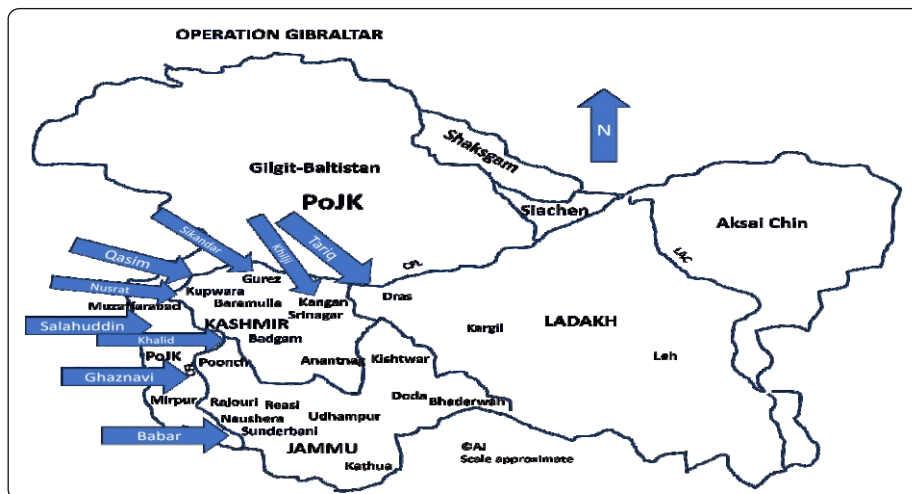
One of the **Gibraltar forces**, thus,



A ruined village in Jammu and Kashmir, India, during the war between India and Pakistan, 1965. (Photo by © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images)

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.indiatoday.in/history-of-it/story/kashmiri-foiled-pakistan-plan-snatch-jammu-kashmir-india-mujabideens-1965-war-operation-sindoor-2722234-2025-05-09>, accessed on 11 May 2025

<sup>2</sup> Ajay K Raina; *In the Nick of Time: Saving Kashmir Valley 1947-48*



*The Pakistani columns that infiltrated as part of Operation Gibraltar*

was named after this crusader, Tariq. As per later Pakistani reports, the total strength of the 'Gibraltar Force' for the entire J&K state was about 7000 men. Indian sources claimed that about 30000 men had infiltrated into the state as part of **Operation Gibraltar**. Some observers put the figure at anything between 12000 and 15000.

The complete force was subdivided into five major forces- 'Salahuddin Force' to operate in Srinagar Valley, 'Ghaznavi Force' for Mendhar/Rajouri/Poonch, 'Tariq Force' in Dras-Kargil area, 'Babar Force' in Naushera-Sunderbani area and 'Qasim Force' in Bandipur-Sonarwari area of the Valley. In addition, there were four other smaller forces- 'Khalid Force' in Kazinag-Naugam area, 'Nusrat Force' for Tithwal-Tangdhar area, 'Sikandar Force' in Gurez area and a 'Khilji Force' for Kel-Minimarg (Kangan) area. Each major force constituted approximately 800 men, divided

into five companies, also called columns. In the case of the **Ghaznavi Force**, which had a larger and deeper area to operate, the strength reportedly was of about a thousand plus, comprising six or seven companies. Each company /column had approximately 140 personnel, and each was organised into a proper subunit with its Headquarters (HQ), support elements/weapons and three to four platoons.<sup>3</sup>

In an attempt to spark the planned insurrection, a 'rebel radio station' that was shown as established within Kashmir Valley but in reality was based in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, reported on the activities of the "mujabideen" in an aggressive manner.<sup>4</sup>

The operation of the columns and forces was to be coordinated, directed and controlled by Sector Commanders, who established their command-and-control HQ on the Pakistani side of the Cease Fire Line (CFL). In the case of the **Ghaznavi Force**, it was reported that there were two separate Sector HQ controlling the operations—one for the Rajouri-Bhimber Gali-Thana Mandi Area and the other for the Mendhar-Poonch area. The force's training was rushed and pushed through all its stages in just six weeks.

Regular Pakistani army battalions stationed along the CFL were redeployed to occupy key locations along the infiltration routes of Gibraltar columns to provide secure launch pads and effectively support **Gibraltar Force's** operations. In the second week of July 1965, Ayub Khan himself spoke to all of the **Gibraltar Force's** sector and column commanders.

### Operation Gibraltar- Execution

In the first week of August 1965 (some sources put it as 24 July), the Pakistani troops, SSG Commandos and irregulars began to cross the CFL. The mission assigned to the various **Gibraltar Forces** was guerrilla warfare in the rear, including disruption of communications, destruction of bridges, logistics installations, and HQs to create conditions for an armed insurrection. Several columns were to occupy key heights and encourage a general revolt, which was to be followed by direct combat intervention by Pakistani troops.

As per the plan, columns infiltrated into the designated areas, and occupied bases and hides in the forested hills and mountains. They were able to achieve tactical surprise for a while before they were discovered and engaged by the Indian Army. In Jammu Province, in the areas of

<sup>3</sup> Rattan Kaul: *Repository of Bravery*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34136689>, accessed on 12 May 2025



Rajouri-Poonch, they took up defences on the ridges dominating the area around. The Indian Army had to launch deliberate operations to push them back over the next month. In Kashmir Valley, there were incidents of the killing and injuring of the locals by the intruders. As the matter got reported and the Indian forces were rushed in to tackle the intruders, the infiltrators, fatigued and desperate by now because of non-functional logistics, started to run back into PoJK. The critical part of **Operation Gibraltar**, the local uprising never materialised contrary to Pakistan Army's planning and expectations.

**Operation Gibraltar** is seen as the trigger that started the 1965 War. Its failure was spectacular and with the Indian Army occupying Haji Pir Pass, the situation in Pakistan actually became precarious.

### Why Did Operation Gibraltar Fail

Opinions about the reasons for the failure of **Operation Gibraltar** are divided even today. Most, however, agree that it was a brilliant idea on paper, but the haste in its conduct and poor execution, eventually led to its failure. It may be noted that PoJK boys, **as young as 13-14 years**<sup>5</sup>, had been made a part of the force after a short training regime. Many others, however, are of the view that the plan was unrealistic and was doomed to fail.

It is learnt that Ayub Khan had shot down the proposal when it was put forth by Bhutto's foreign ministry and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) for the first time. However, Bhutto had insisted and, after taking GOC 12 Infantry Division onboard, he had relentlessly pushed the idea. It is worth noting what Colonel Syed Ghaffar Mehdi, who commanded the SSG and was privy to the plan and a witness to

its bungled execution, had to say:

"In late May 1965, I was directed by the Vice Chief of General Staff, Major General Abid Bilgrami, to go to Murree and see GOC 12 Division, Major General Akhtar Hussain Malik. I listened to his briefing, which in a nutshell involved my SSG boys training a group of **"Mujahideen"**, comprising regular army troops and volunteers, infiltrating them into Indian Held Kashmir, creating a general uprising and bringing India to the conference table without provoking general war. I asked him whether the Army was on board. He responded that it was his plan. I then asked him when he expected to launch the **"Mujahideen"**. When he said July, the same year, I nearly choked. I had initially assumed the plan would materialise in a year or two. I told him, **"You will never get away with it."** The GOC's briefing on the outline plan of the **Gibraltar** operation left me stunned. The plan was so childish, so bizarre as to be unacceptable to logical, competent, professionally sound military persons anywhere in the world. I frankly told Major General Akhtar Malik that the operation was a nonstarter and that I would render the same advice to the Chief and Vice Chief of General Staff. He insisted that I depute some of my (SSG) officers for the immediate training of his **"Mujahideen"**. I had taken three of my officers with me for the briefing; I decided to leave them behind with General Akhtar and tasked them to do their best in the remaining four to six weeks.

I rushed to the GHQ, the same day and briefed the CGS and VCGS, who listened to me patiently. The result of my presentation, however, was bereft of results. Major General Malik Sher

Bahadur (The CGS) posed only one question. ***"You (Mehdi) say that Operation Gibraltar, as planned, stands no chance of succeeding, but Akhtar Malik (GOC 12 Division) feels confident of its success."*** My reply to the CGS was that, the conflicting viewpoint of Mehdi and Akhtar Malik notwithstanding, as Chief of General Staff of Pakistan Army, he should also have an opinion on this important matter, as we were not playing a peace-time war game, but with the destiny of Pakistan itself. To this date, I remember the reaction of the CGS. He went red right up to his ears, and after a painful pause, got up, extended his hand to shake and brought the interview to an end with the remark that ***"it is always interesting to listen to you!"***

Undaunted by the rebuff at Murree and later at the GHQ, I decided to put my arguments in writing, as to the reasons why **Gibraltar** shall fail. My observations in brief, were:

- No ground had been prepared before launching of the operation, in concert with people of the valley.
- The raids were to be launched in a total logistical vacuum, relying exclusively on what the troops would carry in their packs or living off the countryside. Without any covert support across the CFL, living off the land proved fatal to the security of the guerrillas. Most of them were betrayed.
- GHQ had mixed up classic guerrilla operations with commando raids.
- All SSG and other officers, responsible for training and later leading groups across the ceasefire line, were critical of the

<sup>5</sup> Ibid



Two Pakistani army officers, dressed as mujahideen, captured by an Indian military officer during the 1965 India-Pakistan War (AFP Image) (courtesy indiatoday.in)

soundness of the plan, unsure of the means and uncertain of the end.

Initially, I was pressurised to withdraw my observations and go along with the plan. When I did not budge, I was relieved of my command on 30th July and told to destroy all copies of my correspondence with GHQ on the subject.”<sup>6</sup>

### Conclusion

The main goal of **Operation Gibraltar** was to exploit the perceived vulnerabilities of India to start an insurrection in Kashmir, finally leading to Pakistan seizing control and securing its water sources. The Pakistani leadership, under President Ayub Khan, believed that widespread dissatisfaction among Kashmiris would spark an uprising, which would weaken Indian control and create conditions favourable for a political or military resolution in Pakistan's favour.

<sup>6</sup> <https://criterion-quarterly.com/operation-gibraltar-an-unmitigated-disaster/>, accessed on 12 May 2025

mission. Ultimately, **Operation Gibraltar** backfired, drawing Pakistan into a conventional war that did not yield any gains.



*Colonel Ajay K Raina, SM (Retd), is a Poonchi Dogra whose parents had migrated from Bagh and Pallandri (now in PoJK) during the 1947 crisis. Growing up listening to the stories of those days from his parents and grandparents, he developed a passion for the history of those times leading him to author five books solely on the 1947-48 conflict. He joined the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun and was commissioned into 93 Field Regiment in December 1990. He was awarded Sena Medal (Gallantry) during his tenure in 6 RR (SIKH). He is a graduate of the Long Gunnery Staff Course, Technical Staff Course and is also a PG in Business Administration (2-year regular course) specialising in Finance. An adventure enthusiast, he and his family have been mentioned in the Limca Book of Records 2011. During one such adventure trip, he was hit by a landslide and severely injured. With his medical category permanently downgraded, he took premature retirement in 2017. He is now a successful hospitality professional and consultant. He has authored 29 books.*



**Col Ajay K Raina**





*First photograph of the Haji Pir Pass after it was captured by 1st PARA, taken on 29 August 1965*



*Brig ZC Bakshi, Commander 68 Mountain Brigade with 1st PARA officers Maj R S Dyal is fourth from left.*

# CAPTURE OF HAJI PIR

## A HISTORIC VICTORY

The Indian counter-offensive to **Operation Gibraltar** led to the capture of the strategically vital Haji Pir Pass. Situated at an altitude of 2637 metres in the rugged Pir Panjal Range, the pass serves as a critical link between Srinagar Valley and the Jammu region. Indian forces captured the pass through a determined, audacious and courageous military campaign. Despite its strategic importance, the Haji Pir Pass was returned to Pakistan following the Tashkent Agreement in January 1966.

*'Agar te jit liya Haji Pir to tu hero ban jayega,  
ne to meinn wah kaid kar lenge'.*

*(If you win Haji Pir, you will be a hero; but if you don't, I will be arrested for taking a unilateral decision)*

- Brigadier Zoru Bakshi to Major Ranjit Singh Dyal

In the first week of August 1965, Pakistan launched **Operation Gibraltar**, initiating large-scale infiltration into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) when heavily armed civilian guerrillas (Mujahids) accompanied by regulars disguised as civilians **infiltrated Indian Kashmir at several spots along the 470-mile Cease-Fire Line (CFL)**. The operation aimed to incite an uprising amongst the local population against Indian rule - an assumption that proved to be unrealistic as **it failed to account for the political and social realities on the ground**, primary amongst which was the lack of local support in J&K.

The Pakistan Army then initiated intense shelling of Indian positions along the CFL in the regions of Uri, Tithwal and Poonch. On 24 August, the Indian Army

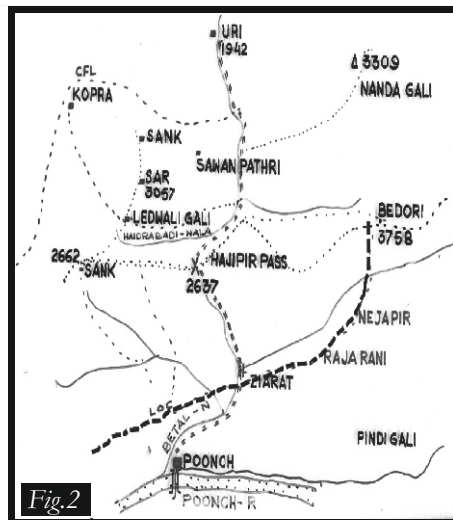
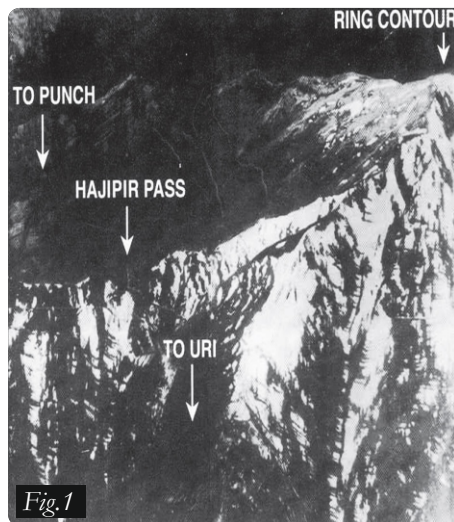
responded to **Operation Gibraltar** swiftly and decisively by launching an offensive across the CFL in Tithwal Sector, successfully capturing two important Pakistani positions. The Indian Army subsequently progressed to the Kishanganga River, effectively sealing the infiltration routes through Kargil and Gurez.

### Haji Pir – The Terrain

Haji Pir Pass is situated on the Western edge of the imposing Pir Panjal Range, which separates Jammu region from Srinagar Valley (Figure 1). Located on the Uri-Poonch road in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, it is eight kms South of Uri and close to the CFL. Strong, well-established posts and pickets defended the Pass. An important link of

Pakistan's plan to infiltrate Kashmir, the pass was the lifeline for infiltrators-cum-saboteurs in the Uri-Poonch area, serving as a conduit for all communication amongst them.

Bedori, standing at 3760 metres; Sank, reaching 2895 metres; and Ledwali Gali, at an elevation of 3140 metres, **were the three prominent hill features that dominated the pass and terrain around it**. Securing these outposts was deemed essential before advancing to Haji Pir Pass (Figure 2). Bedori was situated 14 kms Southeast of the CFL, while Haji Pir Pass lay approximately 10 kms Southwest of Bedori. In order to seal off infiltration via this route, the **Haji Pir Pass had to be captured**, and this task was given to **68 Mountain Brigade** commanded by



**Brigadier ZC Bakshi** (later Lieutenant General) and was designated **Operation Bakshi** after the Commander's name.

### Operation Bakshi

**1 PARA** disengaged from the pickets it was manning and linked up with 68 Mountain Brigade at Seb on 23 August. The remaining battalions of the Brigade included 19 Punjab, 4 Rajput, 6 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles, and 4 SIKH LI. Brigadier Bakshi assessed that enemy forces in the operational area opposing his brigade comprised approximately **three and a half battalions or 14 rifle companies**, with around one battalion stationed opposite Point 8370, occupied by own troops. The enemy was adequately armed with medium machine guns (MMGs), light machine guns (LMGs), and small arms. Their **defensive positions were meticulously built and coordinated, indicating that formidable resistance would be forthcoming**. The estimated enemy strength of approximately three and a half battalions also comprised 20 Punjab of the Pakistani Army.

Considering the topography and enemy deployment, Brigadier Bakshi opted for a **two-pronged simultaneous attack to capture the Haji Pir Pass**. The left prong was assigned to progress along **Uri-Sank-Ledwali Gali-Haji Pir Pass**, while the right prong was to move along **Uri-Bedori-Kuthnar Di Gali-Kiran-Haji Pir Pass**. The responsibilities for the left and right prongs were designated to **1 PARA** and 19 Punjab, respectively. The operation was planned in **three phases**, with H-Hour being 2200 hours on 24 August:-

- In Phase 1, 19 Punjab was to capture Ring Contour and Pathra by 0100 hours on 25 August, whereas **1 PARA** was designated to capture

Sank Ridge extending to Ledwali Gali and Sawan Pathri by 0500 hours on the same day.

- In Phase 2, 19 Punjab was tasked to capture Bedori and Kuthnar Di Gali by 0600 hours on 25 August, while 4 Rajput was to secure the Ring Contour and capture Haji Pir Pass by 1200 hours the same day.
- Phase 3 required consolidation by 19 Punjab, assisted by one company of 4 Rajput. 4 SIKH LI and 6 JAK RIF were allocated the responsibility of establishing firebases throughout the operation, while 6 JAK RIF was further tasked with securing captured territory.

Concurrently, the remaining units of 19 Infantry Division, to which 68 Mountain Brigade was affiliated, were tasked with executing diversionary assaults aimed at drawing enemy attention away from the principal axis of advance towards Haji Pir Pass. The timeline of the above plan was adjusted due to heavy rainfall, as the attacking battalions (19 Punjab and **1 PARA**) had to be relieved from their defensive positions in Uri sector.

### Attack on Sank

On 24 August, **1 PARA** commenced preparations to assault Sank, which stands at 9591 feet. Situated on the adversary's communication route from Bagh to Bedori through the Haji Pir Pass, Sank overlooked the Indian Army's fortifications at Seb. The Pakistanis knew the significance of Sank, which was held in strength by a contingent of Rangers backed by MMGs and mortars.

**1 PARA** quickly moved to its assembly area to launch the pre-dawn attack on Sank Ridge. Two companies were assigned to the assault: 'A' Company, commanded by Major Ranjit Singh Dyal (later Lieutenant General), the Battalion's Second-in-Command, in the absence of the



Company Commander, and 'C' Company. It had been raining intensely for the preceding three days, rendering the terrain slippery and creating treacherous conditions, particularly on the slopes of Sank. The **adverse conditions necessitated the postponement of the attack to the following day.**

At 2000 hours on 25 August, 'C' Company, along with the Mortar Platoon, started for the designated forming-up area. The assault was to commence at 2230 hours, but progress was slow over the muddy terrain, and two of the companies lost their way in the darkness. By the time all the companies were in the forming-up area, the clock had struck 0330 hours. Before long, as dawn emerged, an assault by the battalion in full daylight was bound to incur significant casualties. Yet there was no alternative, as the Battalion Commander was intent on securing the objective with utmost expediency. Major Dyal issued the orders to advance, prompting the troopers of **1 PARA** to resolutely ascend the steep inclines of Sank.

The Pakistani defenders refrained from firing until the leading troops approached within 45 metres, at which juncture they opened fire of all their weapons. Despite the fierce enemy fire, the assaulting troops persevered, resulting in approximately 28 casualties. Continuing the assault was futile, at least for the time being, so the troopers of **1 PARA** were instructed to disengage in order to evacuate casualties and regroup. Artillery fire was directed at the enemy to suppress them, allowing the evacuation to occur in broad daylight. At 2230 hours on 26 August, **1 PARA** spearheaded the second assault on Sank.

With artillery fire from 19 Division, 'B' Company, under the command of Major Dyal, advanced up the steep slopes, followed by 'D' Company. The troops of **1**

**PARA** were able to close up on the enemy behind the cover of intense artillery bombardment and in a decisive manoeuvre, threw grenades and fired small arms towards enemy positions, effectively neutralizing opposing MMGs and LMGs (Figure 3). After more than six hours of intense action, the success signal went off, and Sank was safely in the hands of 'B' Company. The enemy retreated to Sar and Ledwali Gali features, leaving 16 dead, but successfully evacuated around 100 injured personnel.

Though the enemy had been eliminated at Sank, the feature could not be fully secured immediately because of effective fire from Sar. 'D' Company of **1 PARA** was therefore asked to clear the enemy from Sar. The company swiftly seized Sar and progressed to Ledwali Gali, where the defender had established his position to cover the retreat of troops from the adjacent locations. In the interim, 'B' Company had successfully occupied Sawan Pathri by

1400 hours, encountering only minor resistance from the enemy. 'C' Company, having arrived in Sank during this period, was tasked with clearing the area south of Sank, including Point 10033. It effectively completed this task by last light. Thus, **the objectives that 68 Mountain Brigade had assigned to 1 PARA had been successfully captured.** Unfortunately, 19 Punjab was unable to capture Bedori, even after launching two attacks, with the enemy still strongly defending Bedori.

#### Capture of Haji Pir Pass

At this point, Lieutenant Colonel Prabhjinder Singh, Commanding Officer **1 PARA**, asked Commander 68 Mountain Brigade to **allow his battalion to attack Haji Pir Pass.** Bedori was still with the Pakistanis, and the delay in capturing Sank had alerted the enemy, who had begun reinforcing the bulge with a regular brigade. Since the right flank of the pass was still unsecured, the only way for 68

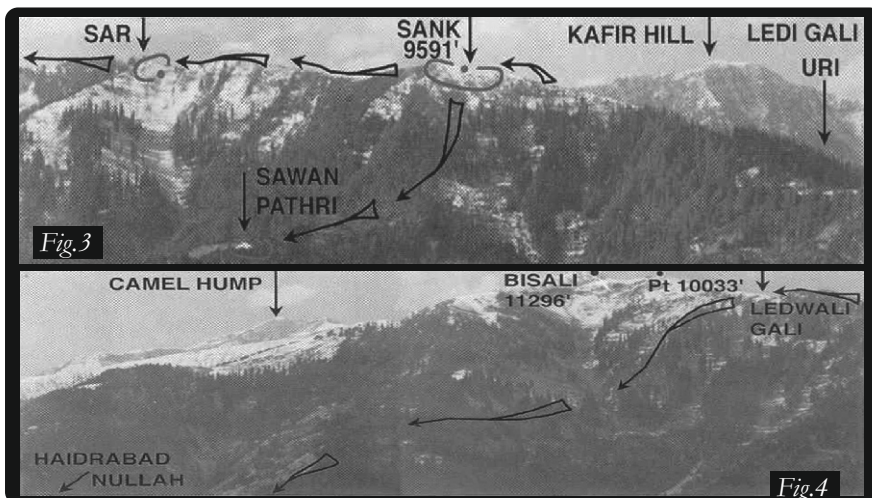
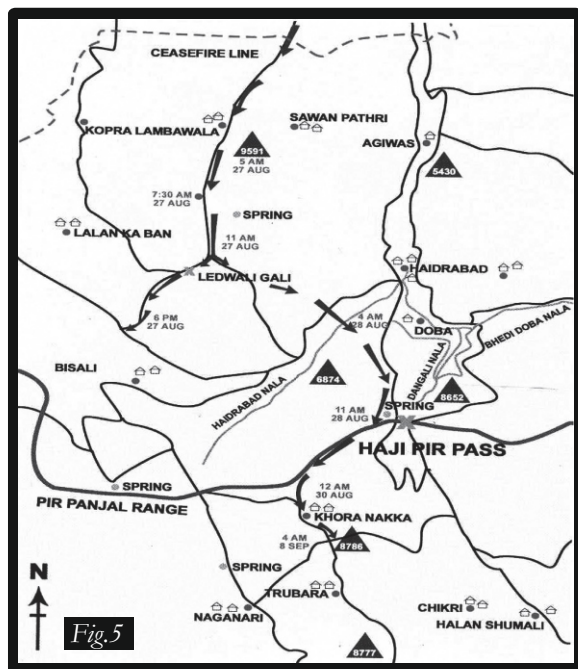


Fig 3 - Direction of attack on Sank and onward operations for capture of Sar and Sawan Pathri.



(Fig 5) Capture of Haji Pir Pass via Ledwali Gali on 27-28 August 1965

Mountain Brigade to successfully capture Haji Pir Pass was to conduct a frontal attack using a re-entrant that ran North of the pass. Brigadier Bakshi chose to take the risk and gave executive orders to **1 PARA**, disregarding the possibility that the enemy would be watching the movement.

Under Major Ranjit Singh Dyal, a company column drawn from 'A' and 'D' Companies was promptly formed with the mission of capturing Haji Pir Pass. The Pass had to be approached in the hours of darkness and required a climb of more than 1200 metres. On the evening of August 27/28, the force had to start from Ledwali Gali, infiltrate into Haidrabad Nullah, and capture Ring Contours 1194 and 1094 in order to continue the operations (Figure 4). At 1400 hours on 27 August, the force began their descent from Ledwali Gali into the Haidrabad Nullah, following the spur that ran Southwest, before ascending to Haji Pir Pass. A group of Pathans retreating from Sawan Pathri saw the column and opened fire on the paratroopers. Ignoring the small arms fire, Major Dyal ordered a platoon to deal with

the Pathans. He and his soldiers then continued to advance along the left bank of the Haidrabad Nullah, wading through knee-deep water. It began to rain fiercely at around 1800 hours, which made traversing through the rough terrain quite challenging.

Progress continued to be slow, and as night fell, a light drizzle accompanied by dense fog surrounded the troops. This increased the degree of difficulty faced by the men who had been in action for over two days and were significantly exhausted, yet the inspirational leadership of Major Dyal motivated them to continue. At 2000 hours, the paratroopers encountered a solitary *bebak* (a temporary hut) occupied by the enemy, prompting the troopers to encircle the *bebak*, resulting in the capture of one LMG, nine rifles, and ten personnel from the Azad Kashmir militia, who had fought at Bedori. **The prisoners were disarmed, and with no available escort, they were utilized as porters.** At 0430 hours, the company reached the old Uri-Poonch Road, where the troops had a brief respite.

The column commenced movement at 0600 hours and proceeded along the road till it came within 700 metres of the Pass. **The enemy seemed completely taken aback to discover the 1 PARA column directly on the Pass, as they had lost contact with the advancing company the night before due to heavy rains.** They opened up with rifle and LMG fire from the pass area itself, as well as MMG fire from the Western shoulder. Major Dyal asked the accompanying artillery officer to direct fire on the hostile targets. He then led two platoons to climb up the spur, while leaving the leading platoon to be in contact with the enemy. **The aim was to launch an assault from the Western side of the Pass and roll down to eliminate the enemy forces.** The adversary was unable to endure the bold daylight assault and withdrew in confusion to a location West of the Pass.

**By 1100 hours on 28 August, the column secured the Pass, with 1 PARA fully in control of the objective.** Major Ranjit Singh Dyal communicated that Haji Pir Pass was now under Indian control (Figure 5). Concurrently, Point 10033 was also captured by the troops of **1 PARA**. By midnight on 28 August, 'D' Company arrived at the Pass and established a link-up with Major Dyal's force. It was an amazing victory for **1 PARA** to be able to capture Haji Pir Pass. Not only did the battalion attain the objectives that were assigned to it during the first phase of the brigade's attack, but it also accomplished the mission that was assigned to 4 Rajput during the second phase of the operation. **The ability of 1 PARA to quickly regroup and continue attacking, the element of surprise, and the bold and inspirational leadership of Brigadier Bakshi and Major Dyal, all contributed to the success of this operation.**

### Battle for Ring Contour NR 1093

On 29 August, when 19 Punjab advanced towards Kuthnar Gali and



further to Kiran, the **enemy launched a furious counterattack in a desperate attempt to reclaim the Haji Pir Pass.** During the night of 29-30 August, reconnaissance patrols from **1 PARA** identified Pakistani troop movements approximately 1500 metres Southwest of the Haji Pir Pass at Ring Contour NR 1093. A platoon-sized patrol from 'D' Company was despatched to ascertain the enemy's strength, which was assessed to be considerable. Additional forces were necessary for their eviction; thus, **Major Dyal ordered two additional platoons from 'D' Company to advance, with No 1 Platoon of 'A' Company to provide subsequent follow-up support.**

To reach the other side of the nullah, the forces had to descend almost 1000 feet. Since it was daytime, the enemy quickly spotted them and opened heavy automatic fire. Hand-to-hand combat broke out, with bayonets being used with vigour and rifles pouring fire. The bodies of eight Pakistani soldiers identified as being from 20 Punjab, were left behind as the enemy fled in panic, stunned by the intensity of the attack. The enemy quickly regrouped and launched another counterattack on the platoon position of 'D' Company. **After three hours of fighting, 'D' Company started to suffer losses, with seven soldiers killed and twenty-six wounded.**

Major Dyal led a platoon of troopers to reinforce 'D' Company. As he crouched to speak with the Company Commander, a volley of machine-gun fire tore the Sterling submachine gun off his left shoulder, and he had a narrow escape. The nine remaining paratroopers successfully repelled two more fierce enemy counteractions with the help of artillery supporting fire. In addition to wireless sets and other warlike equipment, **1 PARA** had captured three mortars and nine LMGs.

The Pakistanis launched a number of

counterattacks on 30 August that were beaten back successfully. Seizing the initiative, 'C' Company attacked and captured a nearby location known as NR 1092. **The remaining soldiers from Pakistan's 20 Punjab subsequently retreated and established their positions on Points 8786 and 8777,** two prominent hill features that overlooked an extensive section of the Uri-Poonch route. Capturing both of these hills was necessary to ensure opening of the road to Poonch. **1 PARA was directed to seize Point 8786 first, followed by its twin peak.** In the meantime, on 1 September, the linkup at Haji Pir Pass via the right prong by 19 Punjab was established.

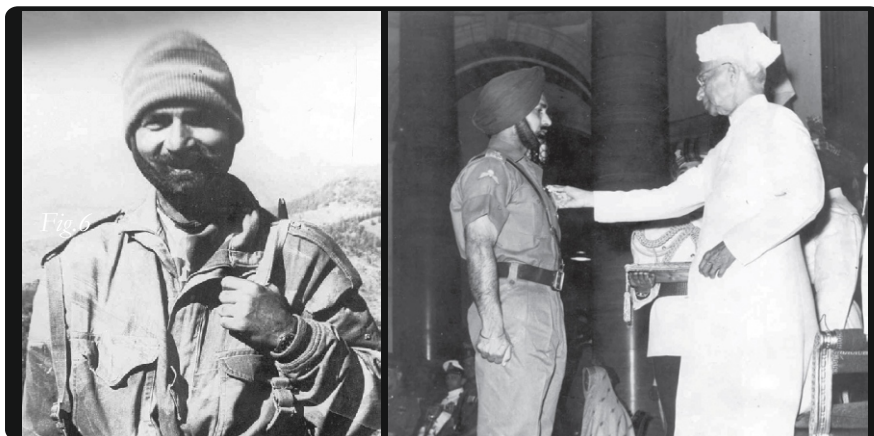
At 2300 hours on 07 September, 'B' and 'C' Companies of the battalion ascended the steep slopes of Point 8786 and initiated their attack. The Pakistani forces refrained from firing until both companies approached within 75 metres of their positions, at which point they engaged with all available weaponry. Under the cover of artillery bombardment, 'C' Company made three valiant attempts, resulting in 26

casualties: one fatality and 25 injuries. Consequently, Major Dyal replaced 'C' Company with 'D' Company. Simultaneously, 'B' Company was engaging enemy positions on the left flank. **The two companies progressed steadily, and following a protracted day-long engagement, Point 8786 was secured despite significant opposition.** Before **1 PARA** could capture Point 8777, **cease-fire was announced and implemented,** resulting in the hill feature remaining under enemy control.

### Honours and Tribute

The capture of Haji Pir Pass **garnered significant international attention** and dealt a considerable setback to Pakistan's morale. Its fall completed the linkup of Uri with Poonch. The Sappers effectively restored the Uri-Poonch road link, while the strategic Jammu-Rajouri-Srinagar road, which had remained inactive since 1947, was brought back into operation.

**The first reason for this**



*Major R S Dyal after capture of Haji Pir Pass.*

*Major R S Dyal being conferred Maha Vir Chakra by President S Radhakrishnan*

astounding success was the achievement of surprise. A silent attack in difficult terrain in the most adverse weather conditions caught the enemy defending Sank by surprise. They did not expect a major attack and were literally caught sleeping. Even the enemy troops defending the Pass were surprised by the speed of movement of the paratroopers and assault from an unexpected direction and fled without offering a determined fight. The second important reason for the victory was the ability of the Battalion to exploit success. A defeated enemy requires time to regroup, reorganize, and resist. 1 PARA gave the enemy no time, and their relentless offensive action without classical reorganization after a battle, kept the enemy off balance. The third important reason for the success was the outstanding leadership of Major Dyal. His gallantry and personal example inspired the men to perform great feats of bravery and endurance and achieve what was considered impossible.

Brigadier ZC Bakshi was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra for his exemplary leadership. 1 PARA received a Maha Vir Chakra awarded to Major Dyal, one Vir Chakra, and four Sena Medals, in addition to the Battle Honour of Haji Pir and the Theatre Honour of Jammu & Kashmir 1965. The Pakistani Army had reportedly announced a monetary reward for the capture of Major RS Dyal. This information was obtained via a radio intercept in which a Pakistani officer expressed to a colleague, 'I wish I had Major Dyal's head. I could obtain fifty thousand rupees from the Pakistani Army.'

The operation at Haji Pir was marked by the resolute bravery and unwavering commitment of the commanders, coupled with the relentless commitment and high morale of troops, who were instrumental in ensuring its success. Numerous heroes

emerged during the Battle of Haji Pir, yet one figure distinguished himself above the rest: Major Ranjit Singh Dyal. He spearheaded the assault on Sank and successfully captured the most critical and decisive objective of Haji Pir Pass.

The raising of the Tricolour at Haji Pir Pass was met with celebration, yet it was soon succeeded by the demanding task of preparing for winter at the posts. This involved the laborious task of transporting supplies manually over considerable distances along steep inclines. The pass was frequented by a host of visitors, including the Army Chief, the Army Commander, and the Corps Commander. Notably, Indira Gandhi, the Minister for Information and Broadcasting at the time, also visited the Pass.

### Tashkent Agreement and Aftermath

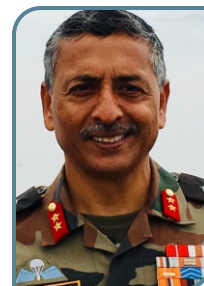
As per the Tashkent Accord, the strategically significant Haji Pir Pass and its surrounding areas, having cost numerous courageous Indian lives, were returned to Pakistan - a decision which is debated to this day. The military forces of India and Pakistan returned to their original positions as they were prior to 05 August 1965. Had the Haji Pir Pass been retained by India, the journey from Jammu to Srinagar via Poonch and Uri would have seen a reduction of more than 200 km, in addition to blocking major infiltration routes.

The return of this pass has been deemed a significant strategic failure by numerous scholars. During a 2002 interview, Lieutenant General Ranjit Singh Dyal, renowned for his pivotal role in the capture of Haji Pir Pass, remarked, 'The Pass would have provided India with a clear strategic advantage... It was a mistake to hand it back... Our people don't read maps'.

### References

1. 1st Para Archives, Historical Gallery and Digest of Service
2. Indian Army after Independence by Major KC Praval (Lancer: 2009)
3. India-Pakistan War of 1965: A History by SN Prasad (Natraj: 2011)
4. My Version: India-Pakistan War by Mohammad Musa (ABC Publishing: 1983)
5. USI Centre for Military History and Conflict Studies Presentation on Battle of Haji Pir

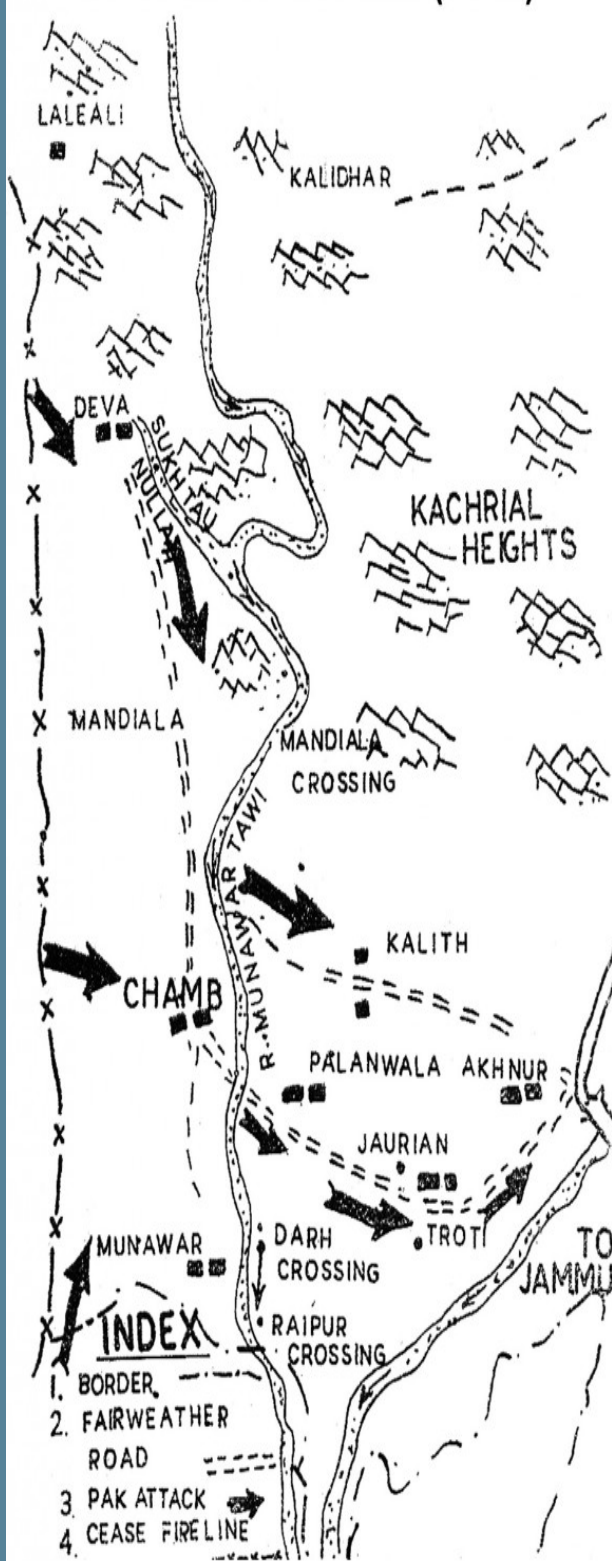
Major General Ashok K Dhingra (Retd) was commissioned into 1 PARA (SF) in 1983 and has varied operational experiences, including in Sri Lanka (IPKF) where he was severely wounded. He went on to command his Battalion in Jammu & Kashmir. He has also commanded the prestigious Parachute Brigade and a Division on the Northern Borders. He was the Defence & Military Attache to USA during 2013-16 and raised the Special Operations Division integrating the Special Forces of the three Services, prior to superannuating in March 2020.



Maj Gen Ashok K Dhingra



## BATTLE OF CHAMB (1965)



Chhamb - Jaurian Sector (Image derived from Kargil to Kurukshetra by Brig K Kuldip Singh, USI Journal Oct -Dec 2021 Issue)

# PAKISTAN'S OPERATION GRAND SLAM

## THE BATTLE OF CHHAMB-JAURIAN

The Battle of Chhamb - Jaurian in September 1965 was the most dangerous Pakistani offensive during the Indo Pak War, as the Pakistani Army captured 288 sq kms of our territory and had reached within 10 kms of the critical Chenab Bridge on the Jammu - Poonch Highway, and was on the doorsteps of Akhnur. This was a critical battle of the war.

### Pakistan Perceives a Strategic Opportunity

Having joined the US allied CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation) and SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organisation), Pakistan got a major impetus of Western and US defence equipment, armaments and munitions in the late 50s and early 60s, to include the formidable Patton tanks, artillery (self-propelled 105 Howitzers, 155mm heavy artillery guns), jeep mounted 103mm recoilless anti-tank guns and newer Belgian 7.62 SLRs for the infantry soldier. Most Indian soldiers were still equipped with the Second World War vintage .303 rifle. The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) too with new acquisitions from USA specifically of 12 F-104 Starfighters, F-86 Sabre jets and Canberra bombers was superior to the Indian Air Force (IAF) which had a chaotic mix of Western and Russian aircraft in the form of Hunters, Gnats, Canberra (UK), Mig-21s (Russia) and Mysteres (France). Some defence experts feel there was virtual parity in forces and formations, and Pakistan was qualitatively superior in air, armour and artillery.

Fresh from the 1962 debacle, India maintained a fair amount of forces to defend against any adventure by the Chinese and the Pakistanis did harbour the hope of Chinese intervention in their strategic calculations when planning the 1965 operations. Pakistan was basking in their perceived military victory during Operation Desert Hawk in



Pakistani soldiers with a captured Indian AMX-13 of the 20th Lancers at Chhamb-Jaurian in 1965 (Credit Inter Services Public Relations, Pakistan)

the Rann of Kutch during April to June 1965, which ended in a UN sponsored ceasefire calling for 'status quo ante bellum'. The Pakistani leadership felt that once right conditions were triggered the locals in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) will rise in revolt. **Pakistan cannot be faulted in thinking that this was a strategic golden opportunity to wrest the state of J&K from India.** In fact, President and Field Marshal Ayub Khan perceived that "*Hindu morale would not stand more than a couple of hard blows at the right time and place*"<sup>2</sup>.

### Strategic Construct

Pakistan considers the international boundary with J&K as a working boundary. In 1965 they wanted to complete the unfinished business of capturing the remaining areas of J&K after 1948; but wanted to avoid broadening the conflict by addressing only J&K. While General Akbar Khan was the architect of the 1947-48 infiltration operations with tacit support of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Major General

Akhtar Hussain Malik, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Pakistan's 12 Infantry Division (Inf Div) was the architect of both **Operation Gibraltar** and **Operation Grand Slam**. Both operations were to complement each other. Strategically, **Operation Gibraltar** was to capture a major portion of J&K by infiltrating a mix of *mujahideen*, *razakars* and regulars through eight thrust lines starting from Kargil Sector (to cut the Leh - Srinagar Highway), down to Naushera / Sunderbani in the Jammu-Akhnur sector, and create mayhem which would catalyse the local uprising into an armed revolution. Almost concurrently and based on the tempo of **Operation Gibraltar**, **Operation Grand Slam** involved a blitzkrieg offensive into

the Indian Jammu sector to capture Chhamb, and the strategic communication hub of Akhnur with a dream to exploit up to Jammu. Pakistan, appreciating the vital and strategic importance of Akhnur, allocated a formidable offensive force for its capture. This offensive would have resulted in cutting the strategic Jammu-Poonch highway. While Indian operational commanders understood the importance of the Chhamb - Akhnur sector, they gave priority to the hill sectors of Naushera - Jhangar - Rajauri.

### Events Prior to Operation Grand Slam

As events panned out, **Operation Gibraltar** fizzled out very quickly and most infiltrators were killed or captured with left overs retreating back to Pakistan. **Despite the reversal in Operation Gibraltar, President Ayub Khan decided to launch Operation Grand Slam to ensure some strategic territorial gains to save face at the termination of hostilities.** He had a worthy, formidable adversary in Lieutenant General Harbakhsh Singh, the Western Army Commander, who not only foiled all the Pakistani plans but also carried

<sup>1</sup> "Status quo ante bellum" is a Latin phrase that translates to "the state of affairs existing before the war". In other words, it refers to the situation that existed before a conflict or war started, with no side gaining or losing any rights or territory as a result of the conflict

<sup>2</sup> Pakistan's Endgame in Kashmir, Hussain Haqqani, Originally published in India Review, Volume 2, July 2003, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20181226142602/http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1427%20>. Accessed on 28 April 2025.

out two important limited offensives North of the Pirpanjal Ranges in the Uri (capture of Hajipir Pass) and Tithwal sectors (capturing four heights dominating the vital Muzaffarabad-Kel road). His true masterstroke was to launch a major offensive of 1 Corps into Pakistan territory with the aim of capturing/threatening Lahore. This forced the rapidly advancing Pakistan 12 Inf Div forces from Akhnur sector to recoil.

### The Battle of Chhamb - Jaurian / Operation Grand Slam

**The Area of Operations.** The area of operations was a mix of hilly, riverine and plains terrain. With the Kalidhar Range to the North, River Munawar Tawi cutting North to South (with numerous dry nullahs like Sukhtao Nallah crisscrossing) and River Chenab on its Southern flank, the Sector was like a triangle with the base on Munawar Tawi and two sides being the Kalidhar Range and Chenab River. There were two axes leading to Akhnur, one through Chhamb - Jaurian and the other through Kalith - Sohal. The terrain is good for both the attacker and a well-prepared defender. Chhamb, a small township was a good launchpad for both Pakistan (towards Akhnur and Jammu) and India (Marala Headworks) for strategic objectives. The only bridge over the Chenab River for Pakistan was the Hardinge Bridge which was a chokepoint. Pakistani forces had a secure right flank, the Chenab River, and manoeuvre space initially for mechanised forces was excellent, and they had a short logistic turnaround time. Akhnur Bridge could not take heavy tanks and thus only AMX tanks defended the Chhamb Sector.

### Opposing Forces

**Pakistan.** Pakistan launched **Operation Grand Slam** with 12 Inf Div with another inf div in reserve, two

armoured regiments, two medium, three field regiments, two heavy batteries, one locating regiment and one light anti-aircraft battery.

**Own.** Indian 191 Infantry Brigade (Inf Bde) with two battalions in Kalidhar and two in the plains defended area Chhamb supported by a lone squadron of AMX tanks of 20 Lancers, and a field regiment and medium battery for artillery support. Brigadier Masters, the Brigade Commander unfortunately lost his life in enemy artillery shelling prior to hostilities; and Brigadier Manmohan Singh who was new to the area took command. 10 Inf Div was still being raised in Bengaluru and Belagavi, with Major General DB Chopra as the GOC. 191 Inf Bde was to come under operational command of 10 Inf Div only on 15 September along with 80 Inf Bde in Naushera. When the GOC was touring 80 Inf Bde on 28 August to understand the contours of his command, he was directed to immediately take charge of operations in 191 Inf Bde too, as the sector was

hotting up. As events turned out, just when a fully prepared, trained and grouped enemy was about to launch her offensive into India's Chhamb-Akhnur sector, the Commander 191 Bde and GOC 10 Div on the Indian side were not only new but hardly knew the area.

Given the strategic location of Chhamb and Akhnur, Indian forces were inadequate and unprepared to defend the sector. Interestingly, General Harbakhsh had appreciated the strategic importance of Chhamb-Akhnur Sector but after interaction with General J N Chaudhari, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and obduracy of Lieutenant General K S Katoch, GOC XV Corps who insisted that the Naushera-Jhangar salient was more pivotal, decided not to reinforce the sector, but reinforce the hill sectors of Naushera-Rajouri. In fact, the medium battery allotted to 191 Inf Bde was moved to Poonch. In his book *War Despatches Indo Pak Conflict 1965*, General Harbakhsh quotes an order to XV Corps ordering them to hold the



*Captured Indian AMX-13 Squadron in Chhamb 1965 (credit en.wikipedia.org)*





*The Leaders Involved - President Ayub Khan (left), Lieutenant General Harbakhsh Singh (centre) and Major General Akhtar Malik (right)*

bridgehead covering Chhamb and Mandiala heights with a battalion each even at the cost of thinning out border posts.

**Defensive Dispositions.** The disposition of 191 Inf Bde was apparently hill sector biased at the commencement of operations. They were spread from the Kalidhar Hills right down South to the Chenab River, with just one regiment of artillery and a squadron of light armour (AMX tanks) which not only were grossly inadequate but much inferior to Pakistani Patton tanks. The Brigade was deployed as under:-

- HQ 191 Inf Bde -Mandiala Heights
- 6 SIKH LI - Along Cease Fire Line (CFL) in the hill sector of Kalidhar
- 15 KUMAON – Area Mandiala
- 3 MAHAR and elements 3 J&K Militia- Area North of Pir Jamal in the hill sector
- 6/5 GR (FF) – Area Kalidhar
- C Sqn 20 Lancers – Area West of Mandiala
- 14 Field Regiment less a battery at Chhamb, with a battery at Dhok Baniyar
- Troop Medium Battery (3 guns only) – East of Chhamb

## The Chhamb – Jaurian Battle

**Preliminary Operations.** Pakistan had activated the CFL across J&K, but one of the most active sectors was Chhamb. On 15 August 1965, when Indian formations were celebrating Independence Day, Pakistan artillery carried out a massive bombardment focussing on the gun positions of 14 Field Regiment which was in direct support of 191 Inf Bde destroying a battery worth and huge stockpiles of ammunition. General Harbakhsh did buttress this loss by orbiting a medium battery but this was woefully inadequate for the entire Chhamb sector. The same day, in an artillery bombardment at

Dewa in the hill sector, Brigadier Masters, Commander 191 Inf Bde was killed. Our intelligence agencies finally began to wake up to the enemy force build-up opposite Chhamb. The first intelligence report relating to Chhamb was received on 14 August. It reported, for the first time, that enemy forces had concentrated at Moel, West of Chhamb. This was immediately followed up with a report indicating the movement of a squadron of tanks to Mattewala opposite Chhamb. Infiltration operations were also ongoing including a raid at Police Station Palanwala by raiders.

**01 September 1965: Commencement of Operation Grand Slam.** On 01 September, Pakistan's 12 Inf Div with two assaulting inf bdes, supported by divisional plus artillery and over two regiments of armour equipped with the superior Patton tanks and air defence cover crossed the CFL at 0500 hours. Prior to that at 0330 hours, artillery fire assaults rained down on Indian positions at Chhamb, Dewa, Mandiala, Munawar and Borjeal, by nine field, seven medium and two heavy artillery batteries. In terms of force specifics, Pakistan attacked with eight infantry battalions, six tank squadrons and 18 artillery batteries; the numerical equivalent of roughly 8000 soldiers, 90-100 tanks and 100-120 artillery guns. Borjeal (Borajal), a dominating Indian fortification located on the CFL at an altitude of about 950 feet, fell first after some resistance. The Indian forces at Chhamb and surrounding areas put up some resistance initially, but were defeated by the Pakistanis after brief but fierce fighting. 191 Inf Bde defences had been caught off-guard, and the Pakistan Army, with its superior equipment, tactics and training, made steady gains. Offensive manoeuvres cut off or strained most of India's supply lines in the area. Surprisingly, the command of 12 Inf Div was changed from Major General Akhtar Malik to Major General Yahya

Khan with the orders to advance deep into Indian territory.

Enemy forces quickly reached the Munawar Tawi. The squadron of 20 Lancers which fought a valiant rear-guard action managed to withdraw to the South of the Tawi with only three tanks and were virtually decimated. By nightfall, it was clear that 191 Inf Bde would not be able to withstand the broad enemy thrust especially of armour and intense artillery barrages; its defences collapsed. Astonishingly, on the first night itself, they were asked to withdraw at 2050 hours to Akhnur, less 3 MAHAR (and elements J&K Militia) and 6/5 GR (FF) who were defending the Kalidhar Hill sub-sector. It appeared to be the best course of action given the time and space and enemy momentum.

3 MAHAR commanded by Lieutenant Colonel GS Sangha acquitted themselves admirably during the next week by defending the hill sub-sector stoutly, despite repeated attacks, and being bypassed from the South; they even requisitioned machine guns from the AMX tanks and delayed the Pakistani advance and retained the Northern flank resting on the hills. Along with 6/5 GR (FF), they protected the Southern flank of the hill sector of Naushera - Poonch which was extremely sensitive to XV Corps. The collapse of this flank could have resulted in cutting off Indian troops to the North. Colonel Sangha was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra for his grit and courage, and delaying the marauding forces. The Gunners fought heroically at every stage, and 15 KUMAON fought with grit and determination.

### Reorganising of Defences and the Fight Back

**Battle Situation on 02 September.** The change of command of Pakistan's 12

Inf Div, undertaking river crossing, and some spirited fighting by some of the infantry defensive positions delayed the Pakistani advance. The pause in the close contact battle enabled General Harbakhsh to rush 41 Inf Bde from a neighbouring sector to form a forward defensive line around the town of Jaurian which dominated the main axis to Akhnur. 20 Lancers less a squadron moved from Pathankot and was placed under command 41 Inf Bde. 161 Field Regiment, the direct support regiment of 41 Inf Bde, hastily deployed near Jaurian. The remnants of 191 Inf Bde along with 6 RAJPUT (mobilised by XV Corps from the Hill sector and rushed to Akhnur) were tasked to defend Akhnur and the vital bridge over the Chenab River. 28 Inf Bde (less 1/1 GR) moved swiftly from Pathankot to Damana and was nominated as the Corps reserve, while 1/1 GR deployed to protect the axis and line Akhnur-Sunderbani leading to Naushera and Poonch. All three brigades were placed under command 10

Inf Div of XV Corps in a reorganisation of forces. It is recorded that when one of the Pakistani brigade commanders sought permission to continue the assault onto Akhnur, Major General Yahya Khan, the new GOC cautioned him as he expected a strong counter attack from the Indian side. Fortunately, they were not aware that the Indians too were in the throes of reorganising under attack which is an extremely difficult operation to conduct, and building up fresh line of defences along the Jaurian - Troti heights - Akhnur line.

**Battle Situation 03 - 04 September.** An honest assessment of the situation would reveal that there was an air of despondency and despair, bordering on panic on the Indian side. There were reports of easy capitulation and troops abandoning posts and running back. At 1915 hours on 03 September, the enemy mounted a major attack on Jaurian with infantry and 30 tanks supported by artillery fire.



*From left to right. Flight Lieutenants Trevor Keelor, VrC and VS Pathania, VrC, Lieutenant Colonel G S Sangha, MVC and Major General Yahya Khan.*



*Battle of Chhamb (credit wikimediacommons.com)*

41 Inf Bde would not be able to hold on; and even 191 Bde had not consolidated around Akhnur. In fact, 41 Inf Bde wilted under the armour and artillery attack of the enemy and requested permission to withdraw to Akhnur. To ensure that defences around Akhnur were better prepared, 28 Inf Bde, the Corps reserve (less a battalion which was on the Sunderbani axis) was rushed West of Akhnur to create a defensive line along the Fatwal Ridge six to 10 kms West of Akhnur. 10 Inf Div by then had 191, 41, 28 Inf Bdes, 20 Lancers, 14 and 161 Field Regiments and two batteries of medium artillery under command.

#### **General Harbakhsh Takes Charge.**

General Harbakhsh was personally monitoring the operational situation and was in direct communication with the Vice Chief and Corps Commander. The Army Commander decided to fly to Akhnur and see the situation for himself; as inputs were being received of defences of 41 Inf Bde at Jaurian collapsing. When he was in HQ 10 Inf Div, Pak 12 Inf Div again attacked 41 Inf Bde positions with a brigade

also ensued during this battle around Jaurian; 161 Field Regiment abandoned its guns and fell back. Despite orders to recapture the gun position, it was not done. Apart from losing valuable firepower, the ignominy of running away leaving the guns fell on 161 Field Regiment. Having said this, the astute, aggressive and courageous leadership of General Harbakhsh Singh saved the day and Indian Army the blushes. He personally supervised the operational and tactical battle and lent spine to it. His dominating personality ensured that the forward defensive line held at Jaurian (they eventually pulled back, but in an orderly manner to Akhnur), while the main divisional defences were strengthened around Akhnur.

**Battle Situation 05 September Onwards.** Pakistan 12 Inf Div patrols and forward elements made contact with 28 Inf Bde delaying positions in Fatwal Ridge by 1530 hours on 05 September. 2 GRENADIERS which held the Southern flank resolutely beat back Pakistani attacks. 12 Inf Div had run out of steam especially armour and were decisively beaten. Concurrently, Indian Army's XI and I Corps launched their offensives in the Pakistani Lahore and Sialkot Sector in the early hours of 06 September 65. The Pakistan Army reacted instantly and recoiled, and within a few hours the major portion of medium armour, artillery and brigade of infantry were pulled out of Chhamb Sector. Pakistan's ambitious and undoubtedly blitzkrieg style **Operation Grand Slam** was checkmated in the nick of time.

**Attempts to Retake Captured Territory.** A plan was drawn up by XV Corps and 10 Inf Div to counterattack and recapture the lost territory. There was an urgency as news of UN desperately trying to force a ceasefire were trickling in, which the Pakistanis initially strongly

supported by a regiment of Pattons and the forward two companies were overrun. General Harbakhsh, the Army Commander, personally ordered Commander 41 Inf Bde to launch a counter attack on enemy forces rather than withdraw, which succeeded and stemmed the rot. This slowed the advancing impetus and imposed caution on the advancing Pakistan forces. Fortunately, the situation in the Kalidhar Hill sub-sector remained stable despite repeated attacks by the enemy. The Northern flank of the Chhamb-Akhnur sector was holding firm. Assessing the situation in the plains, the withdrawal of 41 Inf Bde from Jaurian to Akhnur during night 03/04 September was ordered. A very sad tale for the gunners



resisted, as they felt they were in an advantageous position. The divisional counterattack involved 28 Inf Bde with 20 Lancers less one squadron to advance on the main axis and secure Jaurian. 191 Inf Bde to advance on axis Akhnur – Kalith and seize Mandiala crossing on Munawar Tawi River. In the next phase, 28 and 41 Inf Bde were to advance across the river and recapture Chhamb. However, the counterattacks did not make much headway, with strong enemy resistance and intense artillery and tank fire. 10 Inf Div reorganised and tried to retake territory in small phases but with limited success. On 10 September, 41 Inf Bde was moved out to XI Corps zone of operations; which took the offensive content out of 10 Inf Div and the defences around Fatwal took a permanent shape. The enemy too shifted his focus of operations to the Kalidhar Hill sector. For this eventuality 10 Inf Div regrouped once again with 28 Inf Bde tasked to defend Fatwal Ridge and guard both axes (Jaurian and Kalith), while 191 Inf Bde was to operate in the Hill sector. By 19 September, 10 Inf Div was tasked to

- Hold present positions forward of Akhnur and defend Akhnur at all cost.
- Hold Kalidhar Ridge.
- Be prepared to resume offensive to regain Troti-Kalith defences and exploit upto Munawar Tawi River.
- Protect line of communication Akhnur – Sunderbani.

**Ceasefire on Night 22/23 September 1965.** At the time of cessation of hostilities and ceasefire, roughly 288 square kms in and around Chhamb and Jaurian were captured by Pakistan.

**The Meghdoot Force: Clandestine Operations.** Led by Major Megh Singh, who had vast experience in behind the lines operations in Myanmar, a special unit comprising of troops from the Rajput

Regiment and Rajputana Rifles, carried out some clandestine operations behind enemy lines. From 01 September onwards, they carried out a couple of raids and ambushes on enemy convoys, gun positions, logistics nodes in the Poonch Sector. Subsequently, they were inducted to the Chhamb Sector where they destroyed an administrative dump, when ceasefire came into play.

### The Air Battle

Honouring the 1948 UN Security Council resolution on Kashmir, India had no IAF airbase in J&K. Since General Harbakhsh wanted to exploit the third dimension, the Air Chief modified Mi-4 (fitted with machine guns and carrying 25 lb bombs) helicopters for innovative and effective employment. The IAF helicopters flew offensive runs in the Valley, provided logistics support, casualty evacuations and airlifted small sized forces in quick time; providing a much-needed psychological degradation rather than actual destruction.

Pathankot was the closest operational airfield to the Chhamb area of operations. As on 01 September, the base had two Mystere squadrons and a large detachment of Vampire jet trainers. They did not have an allotted specific air role. The IAF was not requisitioned by 191 Inf Bde till mid-day of 01 September 1965; a major operational lapse as this should have been pre-planned and tied up once intelligence of Pakistani build up was known. **The immediate employment of air power would possibly have aborted the Pakistani offensive before it could have taken off.** The Government authorised employment of air power at 1630 hours on 01 September, and three waves of Vampire

jets from 45 and 220 squadrons in four aircraft formation took off in anti-armour role. By this time both Indian and Pakistani formations and armour were in close contact battle. There was a major problem of IFF (Identifying friend or foe) and while IAF did some damage, there was some fratricide of Indian AMX tanks too, own ammunition dumps and troops of 3 MAHAR. PAF Sabres too swooped down on IAF Vampires, and in minutes we lost four aircraft in the initial IAF response. However, the IAF performed commendably in the next few days and played a big part in slowing and halting the Pakistan offensive. As per IAF records they accounted for 12 to 13 Patton tanks and few Chaffee tanks and some artillery guns and soft skinned vehicles. The highly manoeuvrable Gnat fighters of 23 Squadron provided air cover once inducted on 03 September. Worth mentioning is the downing of two Sabre jets by Flight Lieutenants Trevor Keelor and V S Pathania over Chhamb airspace; they were subsequently awarded the Vir Chakra for their bravery in combat.

The Battle of Chhamb was the first air-land battle fought by India in the modern era against a much better trained and equipped adversary (PAF crew were trained in aerial combat and ground support operations in USA). A most valuable lesson of employing air in preventing enemy build up and interdiction operations, rather than close support was learnt. A joint air-land appreciation of battle would have proved a game changer. Fortunately, the PAF too did not employ their force optimally for offensive support (interdicting Pathankot airbase and supporting the ground offensive of 12

Inf Div), as also for intelligence missions which could have spotted and interdicted Indian reinforcements from deploying.

### Own Jottings

As a military professional one must state that Pakistan got the better of us operationally and tactically in the Battle of Chhamb. They almost reached their strategic objective Akhnur. As General Chaudhuri, the COAS stated 'Pakistan saved the day for us'. Change of command of 12 Inf Div at a crucial time when they had the momentum and initiative of operations stalled their advance. Also, Indian military intelligence gave no warning of the impending Pakistan invasion. The Indian Army failed to recognise the presence of heavy Pakistani artillery and armaments opposite Chhamb and suffered significant losses as a result.

The Pakistan Army's failures began with the supposition that a generally discontented Kashmiri people would revolt against their Indian rulers, bringing about a swift and decisive victory. The cautious approach of Major General Yahya Khan cemented it. In his memoir later, General Musa, the then Pakistan Army Chief blamed General Yahya Khan for going slow especially after the capture of Jaurian.

From the Indian side the confident, aggressive and visionary leadership of Lieutenant General Harbakhsh Singh saved India the blushes (he took over the operational command at critical stages of the battle). His decisive orders to 41 Inf Bde to counter attack and not retreat, moving of timely reinforcements and opening another major front in the sensitive Pakistan Punjab and that too contiguous to Pakistan's Chhamb

offensive forced Pakistan to recoil and pull back his offensive elements and abandon his plan to capture Akhnur. At the time of UN sponsored ceasefire, Pakistan had captured Chhamb and Jaurian and approximately 288 sq kms of Indian territory. Status quo was maintained after the Tashkent Summit, and both sides returned captured territories.

Pakistan's **Operation Grand Slam** was much better planned, prepared and executed and almost succeeded. It will not be wrong to say that India was taken by surprise strategically and operationally. The substantial superiority of forces, firepower and armour allowed Pakistan to make significant territorial gains in 24 hours including capture of Chhamb and crossing the Munawar Tawi River. Indian AMX tanks were no match for the superior Pattons, infantry was stretched thin and Pakistan artillery support was overwhelming including heavy calibre guns.

Although the two countries fought to a standoff, the conflict can be considered a strategic and political defeat for Pakistan as the envisaged local Kashmir insurrection failed to materialise. India's military deterrence was found wanting, and we failed to capitalise on our offensive momentum before the ceasefire was declared.

### References

- Book "War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict 1965", by Lieutenant General Harbakhsh Singh, Lancer International Publication, 1991
- Book "The India-Pakistan War of 1965: A History", Chief Editor AN Prasad, Natraj Publishers, Dehradun, 2011
- Book "India's Wars: 1947-1971", by Arjun Subramaniam, Harper Collins Publishers, 2016
- Wikipedia: 'The India-Pakistan War 1965' and 'Operation Grand Slam'
- 1965 India – Pakistan War Commemoration Day; Honourpoint at <https://honourpoint.in/indo-pak-war-1965/>
- Battle of Chhamb; Military History:fandom.com at [https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Chhamb\\_\(1965\)](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Battle_of_Chhamb_(1965))



*Lieutenant General PR Kumar, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) served in the Indian Army for 39 years, He was the DG Army Aviation, before superannuating from the appointment of Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) in end 2015. He continues to write and talk on international and regional geo-political, security and strategic issues. He can be contacted at perumo9@gmail.com*



**Lt Gen PR Kumar**



Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore,  
PVC (Posthumous)



Phillora police station in Pakistan's Sialkot sector after its capture by Indian forces during the 1965 India-Pakistan war.

# THE TANK BATTLES OF PHILLORA AND CHAWINDA

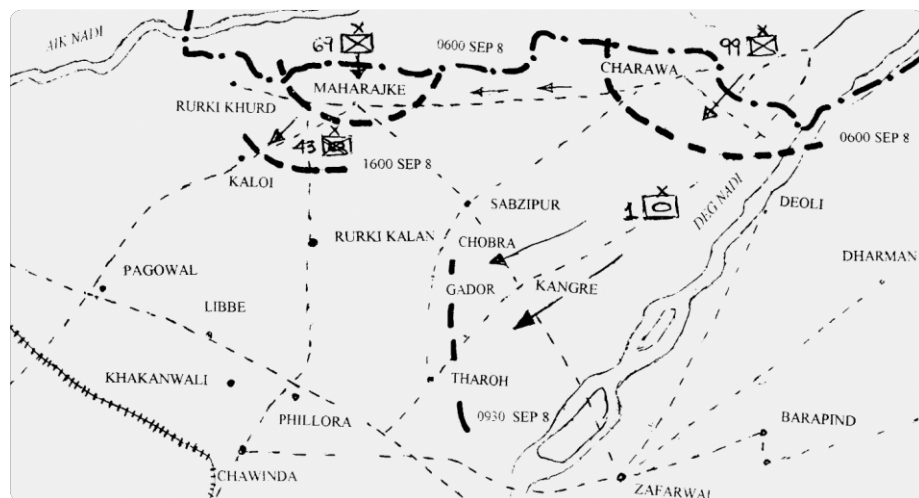
The history of conflict between India and Pakistan illustrates a pattern where Pakistan has been an aggressor, while India has dealt with the challenges posed and emerged victorious in safeguarding its sovereignty. In 1965, Pakistan felt strengthened by its friendship with China having in 1963 handed over Shaksgam Valley to them in the disputed Gilgit Baltistan region. It was also emboldened by the fact that the Indian Army had suffered a defeat at the hands of the Chinese in 1962 and felt India lacked strong leadership with the passing away of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964. It then devised an ingenious military strategy to push the Kashmir question centre stage by initial incursions into Rann of Kutch, and post the perceived success of which, launching **Operation Gibraltar** in Kashmir.

## Failure of Operation Gibraltar

The failure of **Operation Gibraltar** by Pakistan saw the last Phase, **Operation Grand Slam** put into effect by **Field Marshal Ayub Khan** on **01 September 1965**. It was launched across the Southern most portion of the Cease Fire Line (CFL) and was aimed at Akhnur; thus, the Pakistani offensive intended to isolate **Indian positions in Naushera, Rajauri and Poonch**. Thereafter, as part of **Operation Grand Slam**, an **Armoured thrust was planned to be developed towards Jammu**, the capture of which would have severed all land communications to Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). This would place Pakistan in a position to dictate terms to India on the future status of J&K.

**The Pakistani offensive** in Chhamb had achieved surprise and made good progress initially but had **lost its momentum by 03 September 1965**. The gallantry of Major





1 Corps Operations, on 08 and 09 September 1965

Bhaskar Roy of 20 LANCERS who skilfully placed and manoeuvred his AMX-13 tanks in the face of superior enemy armour in Chhamb Sector is now enshrined in our military history.

### Operations Of 1 Corps (Operation Nepal)

As part of India's strategy against Pakistan's **Operation Grand Slam**, the newly raised 1 Corps under Lieutenant General P O Dunn was tasked with launching the **main offensive in the Sialkot Sector to relieve pressure in Chhamb and degrade Pakistan's war fighting potential**. There were many options discussed regarding the launch of the offensive, Lieutenant General Harbakhsh Singh, the Western Army Commander preferred crossing the Ravi at Gill Ferry; Major General Rajinder Singh 'Sparrow,' MVC, the Armoured Division Commander advocated capturing the bridge at Dera Baba Nanak; while General J N Chaudhuri, the Army Chief proposed advancing from the Samba area.

Codenamed **Operation Nepal**, the offensive aimed to divert Pakistani effort in the Akhnoor-Jammu Sector and draw its strategic reserves into the Shakargarh salient. The attack began on the **night of 07/08 September 1965**, with the frontage of contact spanning Suchetgarh in the West to Degh Nadi in the East. 1 Corps thrust comprised of 1 Armoured Division (Major General Rajinder Singh 'Sparrow', MVC), 6 Mountain Division (Major General S R Korla, DSO, MC), 14 Infantry Division (Major General R K Ranjit Singh), and 26 Infantry Division (Major General M L Thapan). The Corps was tasked to secure areas Bhagowal – Phillora – Chawinda – Cross Roads (Badiana) with a view

to advancing towards the Marala Ravi Link (MRL) Canal and eventually to the line of Dhalliwali – Wuhilam – Daska – Mandhali.

India's 1 Corps was opposed by Pakistan's 1 Corps commanded by Lieutenant General Bakhtiar Mohamed Rana comprising of 6 Armoured Division and 15 Infantry Division. The battles between the two were fought in general area Bhagowal – Badiana – Pasrur – Zafarwal.

### Battle of Shakargarh Bulge

The Shakargarh Bulge is a strategically vital area in the Rachna Doab between the Chenab and Ravi rivers. The bulge juts into India from Pakistan, spanning roughly **150 km North to South and 100 km in depth**, with its Western baseline running from Sialkot through Pasrur to Narowal. Shakargarh town lies between the Bein River and Basantar Nadi, with key roads and rail lines connecting it to Sialkot, Pasrur, and Lahore. On the Indian side, Jammu anchors the North, Pathankot lies due East, and Dera Baba Nanak marks the Southern edge. A highway and railway run roughly 30 km West of the border and parallel to it, with five rivers/Nalas (Aik, Degh, Basantar, Kirur, and Bein) crossing the area, North to South.

The Indian counter offensive commenced at **2300 hours on 07 September 1965**. 6 Mountain Division crossed the border, and 99 Mountain Brigade captured Charwa. 69 Mountain Brigade and 62 CAVALRY took Maharajke in Phase 1, then advanced to Niwe Wains, Unche Wains, and Bajragarhi in Phase 2. **By mid-day on 08 September, a bridgehead was established. 1 Armoured Division, forward-positioned at Ramgarh, was now inducted.** 43 Lorried Brigade under Brigadier HS Dhillon, led by 62 CAVALRY, advanced North

towards Bhagowal. Simultaneously, 1 Armoured Brigade commanded by Brigadier KK Singh and spearheaded by 16 CAVALRY and 17 HORSE under Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore, equipped with Centurions advanced South towards **Phillora**. 4 HORSE under Lieutenant Colonel MMS Bakshi and 17 HORSE aimed to encircle **Phillora** in a coordinated pincer movement. 43 Lorried Brigade reached Kalol by the evening and harboured for the night, with 35 Infantry Brigade following in support. By 10 September, both had reached Nathupur.

In the advance by 1 Armoured Brigade, 16 CAVALRY encountered enemy tanks and RCL fire at Gadgor, while 17 HORSE was blocked by Pattons at Tharoh. The Indian tank gunners, owing to superior training and skill, dominated the early tank battles. Despite being close to its objective, **17 HORSE was pulled back due to a perceived flank threat, later revealed to be only a half-Squadron of Shermans.** On 09 September, 1 Armoured Brigade, concentrated at Rurki Kalan and 14 Infantry Division also linked up. The Brigade held defensive positions throughout the day, with minor enemy activity on the Western flank while staying out of range.

The **Battle of Phillora began on 10 September.** 2 LANCERS less 'B Squadron repositioned from Rangre overnight reached the Brigade box at first light. 17 HORSE and 4 HORSE isolated **Phillora**, while 16 CAVALRY and 62 CAVALRY secured the Sialkot axis against possible counterattacks. On 11 September 1965, during the lead-up to the battle, Lieutenant Colonel MMS Bakshi of 4 HORSE spotted a squadron of Patton tanks near the Libbe-Phillora road. Reacting swiftly, he knocked out two enemy tanks drawing the attention and fire from the other tanks of the enemy squadron. Undeterred, he advanced and

charged through the enemy tanks, receiving two direct hits in the process. He then knocked out yet another enemy tank while being hit for the third time. Notwithstanding this, he charged through the enemy line of tanks, some of which were on fire, crossing the Libbe-Phillora road, despite being hit for the fourth time with his tank catching fire.

As Lieutenant Colonel Bakshi and his crew bailed out of their burning tank, they were met with heavy enemy machine-gun fire and surrounded by Pakistani tank crews. Taking cover in nearby sugarcane fields, **they were rescued by 17 HORSE after three hours. Meanwhile B Squadron of 4 HORSE knocked out six enemy tanks.**

17 HORSE at Libbe moved on to take up fire position between Khananwali and Kot Izzat, just to its South. Intelligence indicated that a Pakistani squadron was advancing from Alhar toward **Phillora**. In response, B Squadron was repositioned and deployed

two Troops to guard its Western flank. Soon after, two Pakistani Tank Troops approached from Kot Izzat, likely intending to attack C Squadron from the flank. The battlefield was open, with sugarcane fields offering the only cover. Security depended on rapid manoeuvring. **The ensuing tank battle unfolded at point-blank range—just 100 yards—and lasted 45 minutes. In this battle the Pakistanis lost a total of 28 tanks as against one by 17 Horse.** Two tanks were knocked out by Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore, Commanding Officer POONA HORSE. **With Pakistani armour broken, Phillora's outer defences collapsed.** The objective was now open for an infantry assault. 43 Lorried Infantry Brigade launched the final attack with 5/9 GORKHA RIFLES and 5 JAT leading. **By 1530 hours, Phillora, including the key crossroads, was secured. The Battle of Phillora was decisively won.**



*Defence Minister Y B Chavan interacting with Jawans during the 1965 Indo-Pak War*



*Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri flanked by Lieutenant General P O Dunn (extreme right) and Major General R S Sparrow (second from left) on a captured Patton tank in the Sialkot Sector, 1965*

The maintenance axis Sabzpur-Chobra-Gadgor-Phillora was established, facilitating repairs and replenishment, while **Mirzapur** and **Zafarwal** were captured. **The next target was heavily fortified Chawinda** which was surrounded on three sides by 4 HORSE to the North, 17 HORSE to the North-East, and 16 CAVALRY from the South. Despite the encirclement, **Chawinda** held firm.

On 13 September, a two-pronged coordinated attack was launched by Pakistan's 6 Armoured Division's Patton tanks and Infantry from Chawinda and Badiana. The attack, intended to push into **Phillora**, quickly became ineffective as they faced Centurion tanks, resulting in a dozen destroyed Pakistani tanks with no Indian losses. On the Bhagowal axis, Pakistani forces attempted an assault with Chaffee and Patton tanks but lost one tank before retreating. By 15 September, **43 Lorried Infantry Brigade, with 5 JAT, was tasked with capturing Chawinda.** However, as 20 RAJPUT moved towards Wazirwali, they suffered 27 casualties from

Pakistani artillery. The plan shifted South, with 1st Armoured Brigade ordered to advance towards Jassoran and Sodreke. 4 HORSE, supported by 9 DOGRA, moved toward Sodreke, while 17 HORSE advanced on Jassoran. Simultaneously, 8 GARHWAL RIFLES, supported by 17 HORSE, launched a Western assault on **Chawinda**. 2 Field Regiment (Self-Propelled) and 71 Medium Regiment were allotted to 4 HORSE and 101 Field Regiment (Self-Propelled) as well as 34 Medium Regiment to 17 HORSE. 8 GARHWAL RIFLES, led by Lieutenant Colonel J E Jhirad, advanced under intense shelling and para flare illumination, reaching Wazirwali by midnight.

On 16 September, **17 HORSE, led by Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore, reached Butar Dograndi** and faced a fierce Pakistani counterattack from Wazirwali. In a ferocious tank battle, ten enemy tanks were destroyed. Despite being severely wounded, Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore refused evacuation, continued leading from the front, and was later fatally hit by artillery while dismounting. Under his command, **POONA HORSE decimated an entire Pakistani Armoured Regiment.** He was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra for unmatched gallantry and leadership.

A ferocious battle took place for **Chawinda** on 17/18 September, in which 14 Division, 6 Mountain Division, and 1 Armoured Brigade were involved. Around 200 Pakistani soldiers were killed, and 20 more tanks destroyed. The final salient captured stretched from MS 8 through Tilakpur, Muhmadpur, Chanan, Sabzpur, Wazirwali, Pagowal, Rurki Kalan, Alhar Station, Phillora, and Jaasarn. Most of the battles were fought around **Chawinda** between road Jammu - Sialkot in the North and Degh Nadi in the South. 1 Artillery Brigade provided excellent support to the formation throughout the war.

All guns fell silent on 23 September 1965. **1 Armoured Division had advanced approximately 40 kms into enemy territory in 15 days against heavy opposition but decimated the might of Pattons by destroying 100 plus US made M47/48 tanks in Armour battles at Phillora and Chawinda.**

### Consequences of the Shakargarh Offensive

The **Phillora** tank battle is regarded as one of the fiercest mechanized battles since World War II. The Tank versus Tank



engagements intended to secure Shakargarh Bulge witnessed some of the most heroic acts of individual valour. Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty and was awarded Param Vir Chakra (Posthumously). Major General Rajinder Singh 'Sparrow', MVC, Brigadier (Later Lieutenant General) K K Singh and Lieutenant Colonel (Later Brigadier) M M S Bakshi, were awarded Maha Vir Chakras.

The high points of the battle were the manoeuvres of 1 Armoured Brigade commanded by Brigadier (later Lieutenant General) KK Singh, which included 4 HORSE commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) MMS Bakshi and 17 HORSE commanded by Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore, who were operating on both flanks of **Phillora**. The manoeuvres undertaken by them were textbook, drawing away the enemy armour (11 CAVALRY) deployed at **Phillora**. **1 Artillery Brigade during the battle was commanded by Brigadier OP Malhotra, who later became the Army Chief** while 601 EME Battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel H S Banga, who later became DGEME. During the war, the Battalion ensured that the serviceability state of the Armoured Division was maintained by speedy repair and recovery efforts.

The **Indian Armoured Division secured several critical victories during the 1965 war, most notably dispelling Pakistan's belief that its US supplied weapons, a major part of which were Patton tanks, would provide it a technology edge in conflict.** The 1 Armoured Division not only fulfilled its assigned mission but exceeded expectations by delivering severe blows to Pakistan's armoured capability. In multiple tank engagements, it destroyed substantial numbers of tanks and equipment

belonging to the 6 (Pakistan) Armoured Division and elements of the 1 (Pakistan) Armoured Division. These defeats severely undermined the morale and confidence of Pakistani tank crews, both in their machines and in their own combat capability. However, an achievement of greater strategic significance was the loss of confidence of Pakistan's senior leadership in their armoured formations' ability to hold their own in direct tank battles. This strategic crisis of confidence not only stalled a counter-offensive in 1965 but lingered into the 1971 war, influencing operational decisions.

It was for the first time **in the modern history of the subcontinent a new military concept emerged in India in 1965 of employing a 'Strike Corps' for operations into the plains of Pakistan Punjab.** This could have evolved from the lessons of World War II, particularly the combined arms fighting initially practiced by General Hans Guderian of the German Army. 1 Corps came into being in the middle of May 1965 and was an adhoc assemblage

of formations that had never trained together. Yet with the entry of 1 Corps in the Rachna Doab, the weight of effort and the strategic centre of gravity shifted to the Northern plains of Pakistan Punjab, resulting in the migration of Pakistan's focus from Khem Karan to Sialkot Sector.

The operations of 1 Corps in Rachna Doab remain **'lost victories'** because without additional qualitative armour, the strategic moment that separates resounding success from stalemate had been lost. By its offensive into the Rachna Doab, 1 Corps had forced Pakistan to pull out forces from its successful attacks in the Chhamb Sector removing the threat to Akhnur and secured J&K. The Corps had demolished the offensive capability of Pakistan by the destruction of over 162 enemy tanks and other war material. If Western Command had reinforced 1 Corps with armour from the stable 11 Corps Zone, the Pakistani potential to wage war would have been brought to its knees.



*Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd), a second generation Army Officer was commissioned in December 1981 into 18 Cavalry, a Regiment he subsequently commanded. He has held varied command, staff and instructional appointments which include commanding the First Armoured Division. Post retirement, he is a Distinguished Fellow with United Service Institution of India and apart from writing for various newspapers and magazines has co-authored Armour 71 and co-edited Valour and Honour.*



**Maj Gen Jagatbir Singh**

# BATTLE OF DOGRAI

## MY COMMANDING OFFICER

Lieutenant Colonel Desmond Eugene Hayde, MVC was a dauntless leader who led 3 JAT to a series of outstanding epoch-making victories at Batapur and Dograi on Pakistan's Ichhogil Canal during the 1965 conflict, which propelled the unit to exceptional heights of glory and eminence, adding yet another chapter to its more than 150 years of illustrious combat history. The Battle of Dograi is one of the exceptional and hard fought Indian victories of the 1965 war.

### Introduction

The late Lieutenant Colonel Desmond Eugene Hayde, MVC, stands immortal in the annals of the Indian Army and particularly in the battle lore of the JAT Regiment. As the Commanding Officer (CO) of the battle hardened 3 JAT (raised in 1823) during the 1965 India-Pakistan War, he led the Battalion through a string of audacious victories deep inside the most populous district of Lahore in Pakistan. Lieutenant Colonel Hayde was not just a supreme tactician or a strict disciplinarian—he was the epitome of a **warrior-saint: fearless, chivalrous, simple and completely dedicated to his men and his Regiment**. It was my rare privilege, as one of 17 young officers of the unit - all under three years of service - to serve under him, get baptised in a triumphant campaign and witness his decisive towering battle leadership during what became one of the most hard-fought battles in modern Indian military history.

### 3 JAT's Blitzkrieg of 06 September ('Operation Riddle')

The unit arrived at Khasa near Amritsar in July 1965 after



*Lieutenant Colonel Hayde on 23 September 1965 in battle scarred Dograi, immediately after the Ceasefire*



*Prime Minister Modi paying respects at Dograi Memorial, Khasa, near Amritsar. 11 November 2015 (Photo PIB, India)*

the 'field' tenure in Sikkim and Binaguri (West Bengal) and was settling down as a part of 54 Infantry Brigade/15 Infantry Division (both headquartered in Amritsar) under the Jalandhar based 11 Corps. In a perfidious attack on 01 September, the Pakistani Army attacked Chhamb - Jaurian and by 05 September, was threatening Akhnur (**'Operation Grand Slam'**). On 06 September India retaliated and ordered 11 Corps to cross into Pakistan and strike towards Lahore (**'Operation Riddle'**) and 3 JAT moved towards Dograi and Ichhogil Canal along the Grand Trunk (GT) Road axis.

On that opening day of the 11 Corps offensive in the wee hours of 06 September ('H' hour - 0400 hours) and marching on foot, Lieutenant Colonel Hayde led his troops through the inundated mud-filled paddy and sugarcane fields in a sultry Punjab summer towards Lahore. They first overran 3 Baluch / 15 Frontier Company delaying enemy positions at Ghosal-Dial near the border by 0700 hours.

### Capture of Dograi and Batapur

With this first success, the unit morale ran sky - high, by midday, under stiff enemy air and ground resistance, they rushed forward, secured the GT Road-Ichhogil Bridge and captured Dograi by 1130 hours from the North, fully achieving its objective.

After capturing Dograi and seeing the remnants of a defeated enemy, fleeing in complete chaos, Lieutenant Colonel Hayde now saw great opportunity in the enemy positions of Batapur and Attoke Awan complex on the Canal's West Bank which lay beyond the given objectives of 3 JAT. Exercising uncommon initiative, he now swiftly crossed over the crumbling GT Road Bridge over the Ichhogil Canal at Dograi with his two Rifle Companies at 1145 hours. They had used a narrow path

that was still available temporarily, as the debris of the blown up steel and cement structure was gradually disintegrating and falling into the swirling waters of the Canal below (the enemy had blown up the bridge as a reserve demolition that morning at 0700 hours). By 1200 hours, 3 JAT had captured Batapur and Attoke Awan and threatened Lahore from the East.

### Threat to Lahore

The three decisive 3 JAT victories on 06 September (Ghosal-Dial, Dograi and Batapur across the Ichhogil Canal) had put the troops of 114 Infantry Brigade ex Pakistan's 10 Infantry Division not only on the defensive but also on the run, back to Lahore. 3 JAT was now posing an existential threat to their most populous city of Lahore from the East. This action forced the Pakistani General Headquarters (GHQ) to halt their offensive under **Operation Grand Slam** towards Akhnur and draw reserves for the reinforcement and bolstering of

Lahore defences against progressive Indian attacks.

The advancing Pakistani 12 Infantry Division was stopped eight kms West of Akhnur. This holding of the Batapur bridgehead by 3 JAT and consequent threat to Lahore, albeit temporarily for about three hours, had also immobilised air traffic at Lahore airport, created panic in their critical city, triggering a mass Westward exodus of civilian refugees and enemy soldiers fleeing the conflict zone.

### 3 JAT Withdraws from Batapur

In spite of recurring enemy tank and infantry counterattacks to dislodge 3 JAT from Batapur and Attoke Awan, the Battalion bravely held on to the captured bridgehead till 1445 hours on 06 September when, due to a rapid enemy build-up and lack of requisite reinforcements coming up from the Indian side, Lieutenant Colonel Hayde was ordered to fall back to the Dial-Santpura area that had been overrun



*Birds Eye View of Dograi, the Ichhogil Canal and GT Road towards Lahore, September 1965 (Credit sainiksamachar.nic.in)*





*Captured Pakistani Prisoners of War at Dograi*

earlier in the day. Lieutenant Colonel Hayde, however, deeply regretted this uncoordinated higher command decision, as a winning outcome had been turned into a tactical withdrawal, in the process foregoing a great opportunity for Indian forces to consolidate across the Ichhogil Canal.

Accordingly, the unit tactically withdrew without much enemy interference and arrived at the Dial-Santpura area by 1730 hours that afternoon. The successful 3 JAT blitzkrieg that day had changed the tide of the war clearly in India's favour. This was one of the several high points of the conflict. The Battalion now held a well organised defended area at Santpura, astride the GT Road, next to 54 Brigade HQ till it moved out cross country once again on foot to recapture Dograi on the night of 21/22nd September.

### **Recapture of Dograi on 22 September**

On 22 September, just before the ceasefire came into effect at 0330 hours

early the next day, Colonel Hayde and the highly motivated troops of 3 JAT, again created history, when they recaptured Dograi. I still remember Lieutenant Colonel Hayde's inspiring words as he briefed us (the 'O', or the Order Group of the Unit) in our Santpura defences on the GT Road at 1700 hours on 21 September for the ensuing second Battle of Dograi in the coming night. Intense enemy shelling of this area was still continuing with our Band Platoon (Stretcher Bearers) Lance/ Havaldar Manohool Singh, falling victim to a whizzing fragment of an exploding shell.

Colonel Hayde's concluding exhortation to us was:-

*"Koi peeche nahi hatega. Zinda ya murda, Dograi mein milna hai! (No one will fall back. Dead or alive, we shall meet in Dograi.)"*

*Gentlemen, remember, we are pitted today against the forces of extreme autocracy and barbarism in Pakistan. They have no scruples left. We must hit them hard tonight at Dograi and bring them to senses."*

### **Dograi Recaptured**

True to his expectations and orders, all ranks in 3 JAT fervently followed him to Dograi for a dance of death and a grand victory over the enemy on 22 September at immense cost to our gallant troops. In a multi-pronged attack, supported by massive artillery covering fire (22000 rounds were fired by the Corps and Divisional artillery, including 60 Heavy Artillery Regiment) and led by a resolute Colonel Hayde, his fiery Jats recaptured Dograi in a 27 hour non-stop and intensely fought battle, subduing the defenders present in greater numbers, just before the ceasefire went into effect all along our Western front early next morning. Our artillery gunners supported us with accurate and effective artillery barrages against the enemy defenders not only for this victorious assault on Dograi but also to successfully break-up three enemy infantry and armour counterattacks that followed our recapture of Dograi on 22nd September. Each time, the confident Jat defenders and our gunners defeated their attempts to dislodge us, inflicting heavy casualties on them.

Dograi's defences had comprised a full enemy battalion (16 Punjab - Pathan, ex 114 Infantry Brigade), supported by a squadron of armour (M-47 & M-48 Patton tanks) ex 23 Cavalry and other additional troops. Interlaced with dense mines and obstacles, Dograi had been

converted into a so-called **'invincible fortress'** (as also claimed by their Army Chief, General Muhammad Musa on 10 September after inspecting Dograi defences). The recapture of Dograi on 22 September had once again laid open the possibility of an Indian advance into Lahore city but for the announcement of the ceasefire at 0330 hours the next day, 23 September.

### Combat Odds Faced by 3 JAT

Throughout the 17 days of war, 3 JAT's mounting casualties, superior enemy opposition and several other adversities of combat like being under strength by almost a rifle company and lack of adequate air, artillery support, particularly on the first day of the conflict on 06 September, could not deter Lieutenant Colonel Hayde and his troops from achieving the impossible. The capture of Batapur across the Ichhogil Canal at Dograi that day was a manifestation of Lieutenant Colonel Hayde's initiative in exploiting the chaos in the enemy's ranks, going well beyond the given task.

3 JAT was indeed fortunate during the war to be at a very purposeful interplay between its Officers, Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and men, creating strong bonds of loyalty and mutual trust, demanding from each soldier the highest measure of fidelity and performance that led the unit to succeed in spite of the seemingly insurmountable odds against it.

### Deft Battle Leadership

Lieutenant Colonel Hayde's deft battle leading skills, his exceptional ability to motivate his troops in the worst combat situations, the rare grit and perseverance of his troops and his own uncanny ability and intuition to correctly interpret and

take appropriate decisions in the fast changing events of the war, had made his unit virtually unbeatable. His able directions always paid rich dividends, propelling 3 JAT to a series of victories. The tremendous fighting potential and regimental bonhomie that was present in the Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Hayde's command had manifested in unprecedented successes even beyond the expectation of senior commanders.

Colonel Hayde later eloquently expressed thus in his battle reports and several writings about his unit's audacious officers and all ranks who ardently followed him to clinch victories, some even at the cost of their lives:-

*"Each of my Company Commanders and Officers was given a task and responsibility, way beyond the capacity of his age and service. All I could guarantee was that I would get them there (Dograi), and that I would be with them. My instructions to them were to ignore anything else that might happen, and to get on with their men on to the objective*

*allotted, destroy all enemy therein and hold on thereafter, tooth and nail. Had any one of them failed, it would have jeopardised the whole battle. They succeeded far beyond my most optimistic expectations, and no amount of praise can express the immensity of their accomplishments."*

Lieutenant General Harbakhsh Singh, Vir Chakra (VrC), Padma Vibhushan, then Western Army Commander, a General of great repute, also wrote thus, lauding in his treatise, **'War Despatches Indo- Pak Conflict 1965'** (Lancer Publications):-

*'...the battle of Dograi will go down in history as the toughest ever fought....'*

Writing about the lessons learnt in the 1965 conflict later, Major General Laxman Singh Lehl, VrC, the 1971 India - Pakistan War veteran had very aptly observed in his third book, **'Missed Opportunities'**:-

*"..During the final weeks of the war, all attempts to dominate the enemy in the whole of 1 and 11 Corps sectors failed, the sole brilliant exception was the Battle of Dograi...."*



*Pakistan Army Officer seeking permission of the Brigade Commander to take the mortal remains of over 450 Pakistani soldiers at Dograi. 23 September 1965*



*Captain R S Sandhu, 3 JAT meeting a Pakistani soldier after the war at Dograi*

Even the stiff enemy air and ground resistance, the unit being outnumbered and out-gunned, and sustaining mounting casualties (more than half of its total of 23 Officers, including the CO, 32 JCOs and 510 Other Ranks that went into the battle were either killed or wounded), could not stem 3 JAT's rapid momentum of advance and demonstrated battle achievements in Pakistan.

### Overall Casualties

The intensity of this battle can be assessed by the fact that the second Dograi victory alone had cost 3 JAT the lives of four of its brave officers and 58 men while six officers and 157 men were wounded. This added to one officer and 20 men already killed and two officers and 71 men wounded in earlier battles between 06 and 21 September. After the ceasefire and till deinduction to Kharsa in March 1966, more than half of the Battalion's officers and men (18 Officers and 505 JCOs and Other Ranks took part in the

battle), had either been killed or wounded during the operations. This clearly reflected the unit's 'do or die' spirit in achieving the much coveted victories even under adverse combat situations.

3 JAT's unusually high casualty rate which later became a subject of much discussion, appeared to have negated for a moment even the planning data in US military's manuals that state when an army's battle loss ratio exceeds 30%, the army is likely to collapse and if 87% of a country's army is destroyed, the country will no longer be able to survive. In a series of brilliant tactical successes during the operations, and in overcoming an enemy in superior strength at Dograi on 22 September, 3 JAT seemed to have defied conventional logic.

The enemy was worse off in terms of casualties and loss of war-like stores at the hands of 3 JAT on 06 and 22 September. In addition to facing a series of ignominious defeats which had now exposed their self-created myth of a false sense of combat superiority, more than 300 Pakistani soldiers lay dead on the battlefield. These bodies were later handed over after the ceasefire. Also, their defeats and surrenders had resulted in the capture of more than 120 enemy soldiers as Prisoners-of-War, including CO, 16 Punjab (Pathan) and his Battery Commander, along with a large number of warlike stores including tanks, other vehicles and a variety of munitions.

### The 'D' Factor

So, what was it that made the exceptional 3 JAT victories possible against an enemy having superior strength in formidable defences in spite of heavy casualties? Simply put, in 3 JAT, Lieutenant Colonel Hayde had defined and called it the '**D**' factor, which, consisting of several human factors, enables combat units to achieve against heavy odds. This '**D**' factor, that enhances the fighting potential of combat units, goes back to the days of organised warfare but can be defined from the quote in the War Museum of the Jat Regimental Centre at Bareilly (UP) :-

*It is that 'compound', it reads, 'Which develops out of the military way of life, when that life is lived, especially by the regimental officers, with the warmth of enthusiasm that it merits. In this, the dangers of deprivations and discomforts are shared equally by all ranks in the Unit, as are the joys and high spirits that spring up*



*when small and bigger challenges alike, are successfully met and conquered. All these are made possible because the officers aren't seen to lead, and the junior leaders are there to enthuse and persuade their men to perform in the highest traditions of the Regiment'.*

In exceptional combat units, these strong mutual bonds and trust between all ranks is developed by close training and participating in group outdoor sports and social events, irrespective of the variations in ranks, qualifications or ages of its members. During the heat of the battle, we were not wearing any ranks. These highly emotional relations between all ranks spur the unit towards a common goal with unmatched commitment, devotion and speed, even at great risk to the life of its members. This determined dedication to excel in war constitutes the unit's 'fighting spirit' or its 'D' factor', and largely leads to victory in battles.

The exceptional feats of 3 JAT on 06 and 22 September under Hayde's inspiring command were a tribute to the unit's combat prowess and his astute military leadership which garnered immense national and international praise, including by Pakistani chroniclers.

### War Memorial

The Dograi War Memorial at Khasa, located close to the North of the GT Road, stands in deep respect to the gallant heroes of Dograi.

The names of the battle casualties of 3 JAT who sacrificed their lives in the glorious victories are also now inscribed in the newly constructed National War Memorial near the India Gate at New Delhi. The Battle also finds elaborate mention in the Amritsar based Army Formations and in Punjab State War Heroes Memorial & Museum at Chheharta suburbs in Amritsar, constructed and maintained by the Punjab State

Government. Incidentally, it has been gathered from the Pakistani media that Pakistan has also raised two War Memorials; one at Batapur; and the other at Lahore, to commemorate the 'stout defence' by 3 Baluch at Batapur to save Lahore which 3 JAT had seized on 06 September. This day is celebrated by them every year as Pakistan's 'National Defence Day', when in reality there was never any Indian plan to capture Lahore. It was only to invest Lahore which 3 JAT and other Indian troops had fully achieved by threatening it from the East. A solemn concluding footnote to the citations in 3 Baluch monument at Batapur reads:-

*"In this battlefield lies the blood of many unknown heroes belonging to different units....."*

In a way, this Pakistani memorial also symbolises and corroborates 3 JAT's epic victories on 06 and 22 September.

### Awards and Citations

A grateful nation acknowledged the Battalion's and its CO's tremendous feats of valour and sacrifice by bestowing Lieutenant Colonel Hayde

and his gallant troops with a total of 37 awards which included three Maha Vir Chakras (MVCs) – including one for the CO, four Vir Chakras, seven Sena Medals, twelve Mention-in-Despatches and eleven Chief of Army Staff Commendation Cards.

The Battalion was also awarded the **Battle Honour 'Dograi'** and **Theatre Honour 'Punjab'**. However, the award of Battle Honour 'Batapur', as an additional recognition for its seizure of the Batapur shoe factory locality on 06 September, did not materialise, though Hayde's outstanding battle leadership for the action on that day was acknowledged by the award of MVC to him.

Finally, in a fitting tribute to the exploits of the battalion, it was visited in Pakistan by many senior leaders including General JN Chaudhuri, the Chief of Army Staff, Shri YB Chavan the Defence Minister and on 29 October, Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Prime Minister. In a historic '**Sainik Sammelan**' when interacting with the battalion, he coined the slogan, '**Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan**', to the applause of Jat troops.

*Colonel H K Jha (retd), an alumnus of Patna University, was commissioned into 3 JAT in December 1962. He served with the unit in the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak Wars, and also served in counter insurgency operations in Mizoram, Nagaland and in North East India. He commanded 15 JAT and superannuated in 1993. Presently settled in Rajendra Nagar, Patna, he can be contacted on +919430060292 and email: barendraj@gmail.com*



**Col HK Jha (Retd)**

# ASAL UTTAR

## DECISIVE DESTRUCTION OF PAKISTAN'S PATTONS

The Battle at Asal Uttar turned into a catastrophic failure for Pakistan, with the area becoming a veritable graveyard for the much vaunted Patton tanks. The ill-conceived assault collapsed in the face of Indian resilience, superior planning, and the indomitable courage of outgunned Indian troops.

### Backdrop

The **Battle of Asal Uttar**, one of the largest post-World War II tank battles, proved to be a pivotal moment in the 1965 Indo-Pak war. Following Pakistan's aggression in Jammu and Kashmir, India launched a limited offensive under **Operation Riddle**, deploying 11 Corps in the Lahore Sector and 1 Corps in the Sialkot Sector.

In the Lahore Sector, Pakistani defences were anchored along the Ichhogil Canal, and the Indian assessment was that advancing to and capturing the Eastern bank by 11 Corps was a viable objective. In response, a potential Pakistani counterattack was anticipated in the Khem Karan Sector. However, there was a significant intelligence gap regarding the presence and movement of Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division, the force most likely to launch a mechanized offensive into the plains of Punjab. Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division was a formidable force, destined to play a central role in any offensive.

Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division was equipped with modern American-made Patton tanks, many of which, including the M47 and M48 models supplied by the United States, still displayed their original American markings. These tanks were part of the Cold War-era military aid provided to Pakistan by the United States. The distinctive American markings on these tanks became particularly notable in the aftermath of the battle, as many Patton tanks were destroyed and left abandoned. The wrecks of these tanks were collected near Bhikhiwind in Punjab, and the site was later named '**Patton Nagar**,' or the '**Graveyard of the Pattons**.'

The Indian Army initially underestimated the division's strength and movements, which led to some initial setbacks.



*Smt Rasoolan Bibi, widow of CQMH Abdul Hamid, PVC, pays tribute at his bust*



*Map Showing area of operations and Pakistan's progress on 08 September (Credit strategicfront.org)*

However, the tide turned at Asal Uttar, where innovative tactics, superior training, and the bravery of Indian soldiers overcame the initial intelligence shortcomings.

### The Intent

The plan devised by the Pakistan Army envisaged a bold and audacious breakout along the Kasur-Khem Karan axis, with its 1 Armoured Division tasked to encircle Indian 11 Corps by capturing the vital Harike and Beas river bridges. Once isolated, Indian 11 Corps could then be annihilated at will, with Pakistani mechanized forces free to advance towards Delhi. While audacious, this plan proved foolhardy, as the Pakistani Army failed to recognize the fine line between boldness and recklessness.

Pakistan aimed to capture Khem Karan, which would then open the path for a swift advance towards the Beas River, which had two bridges, one of which Pakistan intended to capture before turning Northwards. If successful, this manoeuvre would have isolated eleven Indian Army divisions, more than half of India's effective strength at the time, in Punjab, Pathankot, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, while also opening the road to Delhi for a rapid advance-almost a leisurely one-day drive.

This vulnerability arose because India had no reserves and there were no troops stationed East of the Beas River. Had Pakistan succeeded, a fourth Battle of Panipat could have become a reality, as noted by Pakistani historian Major Agha Humayun Amin.

### Pakistan's Attack Plan and Strategy

The attack plan for this ambitious riposte envisioned two Infantry Brigades from Pakistan's 11 Infantry Division, supported by 5 Armoured Brigade ex 1

Armoured Division, establishing a bridgehead in the Mastgarh - Bhura Kohna area, through which 1 Armoured Division would break out for the battle in depth.

3 Armoured Brigade, comprising two Armoured Regiments and an Infantry Battalion in armoured personnel carriers, would advance Northeast to capture Jandiala Guru on the Grand Trunk (GT) Road, effectively cutting off Amritsar.

4 Armoured Brigade, consisting of two Armoured Regiments and a Motorized Infantry Battalion, would advance along the Kasur - Khem Karan - Valtola - Nabipur axis, securing the Harike Bridge over the Beas River and moving towards the GT Road to capture the Beas Bridges.

5 Armoured Brigade, with one armoured regiment and an infantry battalion in armoured personnel carriers, would assist 11 Infantry Division in establishing the bridgehead, then advance along the Khem Karan - Bhikhiwind axis to protect the left flank

of the offensive and isolate 7 Infantry Division.

### Situation on the Indian Side

As part of **Operation Riddle**, in the 11 Corps offensive, India's 4 Mountain Division was tasked with capturing the area East of the Ichhogil Canal from Ballanwala to Theh Pannun, Northeast of Kasur, and demolishing the bridge on the Khem Karan - Kasur axis. The division achieved early success on 06 September. However, Pakistani forces responded with an unexpectedly aggressive armoured counterattack. In response, Major General Gurbaksh Singh, General Officer Commanding 4 Mountain Division, prudently withdrew and established a defensive position North of Khem Karan. This new sector covered the Khem Karan - Patti and Khem Karan - Bhikhiwind axes, with the primary defensive line formed around Asal Uttar, Bhura Kohna and Chima Khurd.

At the time, 4 Mountain Division was under strength and trained for high



*President Dr S Radhakrishnan during a visit to Patton Nagar*





*Destroyed Pakistani Army Patton tanks littered in the fields of Punjab (Photo swarajyamag.com)*

altitude warfare, not for mobile armoured engagements in the plains. In contrast, it faced Pakistan's best-trained and most heavily equipped armoured formation, supported by an infantry division. Despite this apparent mismatch, General Gurbaksh Singh's leadership and tactical acumen would turn the tide of the war, culminating in a decisive Indian victory.

### **The Defensive Battle**

Facing Pakistan's onslaught, General Gurbaksh Singh ordered his artillery commander, Brigadier Jhanda Singh Sandhu, to deliver concentrated fire on the advancing forces, effectively slowing them down. It helped that Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division suffering from poor coordination and logistical delays, were sluggish in their advance. This delay provided critical time for 4 Mountain Division to redeploy to a new divisional defended sector. General Gurbaksh employed several innovative tactics, including the strategic flooding of fields and exploiting the dense sugarcane crops for concealment. That the Pakistani forces, despite their numerical and technological superiority, failed to breach Indian defences is a testament to the competence of his planning and the

horseshoe formation, enabling the effective encirclement and entrapment of enemy forces. The synergy of natural topography, terrain modification, and tactical foresight proved pivotal in securing India's victory.

Pakistan's planned axis of advance aligned well with the lay of the land, and no major bridging operations were anticipated. The objective was to capture Harike Bridge by 8 September and reach the Beas Bridge by the evening of 9 September. Confident of success, President Ayub Khan openly mocked the Indian Army's World War II era Sherman and Centurion tanks, claiming they would be no match for Pakistan's modern, American-supplied Patton tanks. He envisioned a swift armoured thrust that would roll into Delhi.

By morning of 8 September, elements of 4 Mountain Division had taken up defences in Asal Uttar.

9 HORSE (Deccan Horse) the integral tank regiment of 4 Mountain Division less a squadron was deployed to deal with Pakistani tank assaults. The third squadron of 9 HORSE was assigned to protect the gun areas immediately behind the divisional defended sector where one Field Regiment (25 Pounders), One Medium Regiment (5.5 inch guns), one Light Regiment (120 mm mortars) and two Mountain Composite Regiments (3.7 inch howitzers) were deployed. 2 (Independent) Armoured Brigade was placed in support of 4 Mountain Division, with its 3 CAVALRY Regiment deployed to the rear, covering the area Chima - Dibbipura while 8 CAVALRY, the second regiment, was deployed on the flanks forming a horseshoe to ambush the advancing Pakistani tanks. In all, there were three regiments of armour, one had Centurions, the second Shermans and the third AMX-13 light tanks.

On 8 September, Pakistan carried out Reconnaissance (Recce) in

extraordinary resolve of the troops under his command.

The terrain around Asal Uttar played a decisive role in shaping the outcome of the 1965 Indo-Pak War. Characterized by flat agricultural fields dominated by sugarcane cultivation, the region lent itself to defensive ingenuity. Indian forces strategically flooded the fields, transforming them into swampy quagmires that bogged down advancing Pakistani tanks. This deliberate manipulation rendered the ground muddy and slushy, severely hampering the movement of heavy armoured vehicles. The Indian Army also constructed its defensive position in a

Force designed to probe Indian positions and gather intelligence, with a Combat Group consisting of two squadrons of Chaffee (light) tanks, a squadron of Pattons and some motorised infantry. The battle action involved engaging Indian positions to assess their strength, capabilities and dispositions - the goal being to provoke a reaction that would lead to tactical information.

The Recce in Force by the Combat Group ran into a squadron of Deccan Horse concealed in the tall sugar cane fields. In the ensuing tank battle the enemy withdrew with 11 tanks lost; struck down with sniper like precision. Minor skirmishes took place throughout the day as Pakistani forces carried out probing attacks and ran over some defended localities in their attempt to enlarge the bridgehead to launch the armoured division. The day long armour assaults along with infantry had no worthwhile success while quite a few of Pakistan army tanks were destroyed or damaged. The attack continued during the night and at least five assaults were beaten back by the valiant 18 Rajputana Rifles supported by some very accurate artillery fire including guns firing in the *'direct fire'* role.

Pakistan does deserve credit for the audacious use of such a large number of tanks for a night assault on a battalion defended area which had mines laid on all important approaches. Their bravado perhaps stemmed from overconfidence in the superior weapons at their disposal or desperation to stick with an increasingly unviable operational plan which was torn to shreds by the defender. At this stage, 2 (Independent) Armoured Brigade was ordered to deal with the Pakistani tanks attempting to outflank the defended sector. Indian tanks were cleverly sited behind tall sugarcane so that the Pakistani tanks could not see them till it was too late. Brigadier

Thomas Krishnan Theogaraj, Commander of the Brigade issued strict instructions to his tank crews to wait until the Pakistani tanks had approached quite close to their hull-down positions before opening fire; the adage *'shoot them when you see the white of their eyes'* described the situation well.

On 9 September, Pakistan Air Force and Artillery tried to soften the defenders followed by renewed tank assaults. Persistent attacks achieved no success, and it was expected that having failed to overrun the defended sector, Pakistan would make a final effort to break out by attempting broader outflanking manoeuvres.

One of the most iconic episodes of the battle is of Company Quartermaster Havildar Abdul Hamid of 4 GRENADIERS. On 10 September, armed with a jeep-mounted recoilless gun, Abdul Hamid displayed extraordinary courage by taking out in rapid succession several Pakistani Patton tanks, and refusing to retreat even when under heavy enemy fire. Tragically, he was killed in action. For his heroism, he was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra, India's highest military honour.

By midday on 10 September, the Pakistani Combat Group attacking 4 GRENADIERS attempted a Northern outflanking manoeuvre, in the process running into an ambush laid by a squadron of 3 CAVALRY. As the Pakistani tanks moved forward, they were caught completely off-guard by well-camouflaged Indian tanks that opened fire with devastating effect. Simultaneously, tanks from the Deccan Horse struck from the flank as the enemy pushed Eastward. The result was a classic hammer-and-anvil action that decimated the Pakistani force.

With the Northern hook thwarted, Major General Nasir, the Pakistani 1 Armoured Division commander, attempted a broader Southern flanking manoeuvre. He deployed 4 Armoured Brigade, led by 4 Cavalry and supported by a motorized infantry battalion. But Indian forces were once again a step ahead. The Centurion tanks of 3 CAVALRY were lying in wait, while the Shermans from Deccan Horse delivered fire from the Northern flank. Selected areas had been deliberately flooded, forcing the advancing Pakistani armour into a narrow semi-circular kill zone. From three directions, Indian tanks opened devastating fire, while divisional artillery saturated the area with concentrated shelling. The Pakistani tanks, caught in a perfect ambush, were annihilated—much of 4 Cavalry Regiment was destroyed in what became a textbook execution of armoured warfare.

Major General Nasir, observing the battle from his helicopter, was visibly dismayed by the unfolding debacle. He landed and proceeded along the Khem Karan-Bhikhiwind road to personally rally his troops for one final, desperate push. In direct communication with the Brigade Commander and the Commanding Officer of 4 Cavalry, he urged them to continue the offensive at all costs. However, his radio transmissions were intercepted, and by 6:00 pm, General Nasir and his recce party came under intense artillery fire. Brigadier Shammie, the Artillery Brigade Commander of Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division was killed, and General Nasir himself was wounded. With this, the Pakistani offensive effectively collapsed.

In sum, Pakistan's 4th and 5th



Farmers wade through a field, filled with abandoned Pak Army tanks near Khem Karan  
(photo bharat-rakshak.com)

Armoured Brigades launched no fewer than five, and possibly up to eight, determined attacks during the course of battle. While the 5th Armoured Brigade initially succeeded in overrunning Khem Karan, subsequent assaults were repelled by the Indian Army with remarkable effectiveness. Indian commanders demonstrated keen battlefield acumen—flooding key areas, funnelling enemy armour into carefully prepared killing zones, and executing ambushes with precision. Indian tank crews, though operating older equipment, proved superior in manoeuvre and gunnery, their skill and training overcoming the technological advantage of Pakistani tanks. Equally vital were the Indian infantry regiments, who contributed with disciplined anti-tank fire and sharp marksmanship.

Between 8 and 10 September, Pakistan's elite 1 Armoured Division—considered the pride of its army—was decisively defeated by the Indian Army. Pakistan lost 97 tanks, including 72 of its much-vaunted Pattons. In contrast, Indian losses were minimal: only 10 tanks from

the Deccan Horse and two from 3 CAVALRY. The gallant Commanding Officer of the Deccan Horse, Lieutenant Colonel AS Vaidya, who would later become Chief of the Army Staff, was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra for his leadership. The same honour was bestowed upon Major General Gurbaksh Singh, Brigadier Theogaraj, and Lieutenant Colonel Salim Caleb, Commanding Officer of 3 CAVALRY. In what became the largest tank battle since World War II, the Indian 2 (Independent) Armoured Brigade had overcome a better-equipped but poorly coordinated adversary through ingenuity, discipline, and tactical brilliance.

### Conclusion

At the conclusion of the war, approximately 100 destroyed or damaged Pakistani tanks—many of them American-made Pattons—were recovered and collected near Bhikhiwind in Punjab. The site came to be known as '**Patton Nagar**' or the "*Graveyard of the Pattons*." These captured tanks stood as enduring symbols of India's victory in one of the largest post-World War II armoured engagements. Several of them are now preserved and displayed as war trophies in military museums and cantonments across the country.



*Major General Harvijay Singh, SM (Retd) is a third-generation soldier, and his two sons are also Army officers. An alumnus of National Defence Academy, Pune, he was commissioned in the Corps of Signals in 1981. He is a specialist trainer and has trained soldiers in military training establishments at various stages of his career. As the Chief Instructor of the Military College of Telecommunications Engineering, he was strategizing issues and training professional soldiers on Communication Networks, Cyber Security and Electronic Warfare. A prolific writer, he contributes regularly to various professional journals. He has written three books related to Military History and Leadership and is the recipient of the prestigious 'Scholar Warrior Badge'.*



**Maj Gen Harvijay Singh**





*Lieutenant Colonel Sant Singh being conferred Maha Vir Chakra by Dr S Radhakrishnan, the President*

# SANT SINGH

## THE MAN WHO WALKED UP OP HILL

The **Battle of OP HILL** in the Mendhar Sector of Jammu & Kashmir was an epic battle where 'Regimental Izzat' and the consequent valour and grit of the Indian soldiers carried the day. This is a tribute to the Commanding Officer (CO) of the unit.

The two-star General was an angry and worried man. The Hill was still with the Pakistani Army. To add salt to injury, the officer who had led the assault was dead, and his body lay where he was hit by machine gun fire. Lieutenant General Harbakhsh Singh, Army Commander Western Command, known for eating two-star Generals for his snacks, had growled, **"Get that Hill back, Amreek. Get the bloody Hill back."** Major General Amreek Singh was the General Officer Commanding, 25 Infantry Division in the 1965 war. The war had ended in the third week of September, but the Pakistani Army had surreptitiously occupied a dominating feature known as Chui Nar on the Line of Control (LC). Overlooking the Mendhar - Balnoi Road in the Rajouri Sector, Pakistanis sniped and carried out artillery fire, making daytime movement impossible.

A second attack was planned, and a young Infantry battalion, **5 SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY**, was tasked to capture the feature. General Amreek Singh was visiting the battalion before it went for the assault.

Lieutenant Colonel Sant Singh, the CO, received General Amreek Singh. Satisfied with the plans, the General gave a pep talk to the men. A rambunctious Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) had the temerity to indulge the visiting General with an assurance bordering on arrogance. He said, "तूसी परवा ना करो साब. सवेर तक अस्सी कब्जा कर लेना है ते दुशमन नू भजा देना है" (Don't you worry sir. By morning we will have the objective and send enemy packing.) The General's frayed nerves exploded, and he told the JCO, "दुश्मन कोई मिठाई ले के नहीं बैठा है वहाँ जो आप को लड्डू देगा (Enemy is not sitting there to welcome you with sweets.) The CO signalled the JCO to keep quiet, and the matter settled for the time being.

Buoyed by their earlier success, the Pakistan Army reinforced the feature with additional troops and weapons. Thickly wooded hills with murderous interlocking machine gun fire and mines laid made it a death trap. The Pakistani Army kept a vigil, waiting to unleash its fire and decimate anyone attempting.

On 02 November 1965, 500 men gave the finishing touch to their preparations. By the time the sun sank, they had their water bottles topped up, magazines filled and bayonets fixed. The troops moved stealthily for about two hours, traversing the thick jungle. It was a pitch-dark night and close to midnight when the shrill note of trumpets reverberated in the hills. Making any noise in enemy territory was against military teaching. But the Battalion seemed to be defiant and spoiling for a fight. The Pakistanis turned night into day by firing illumination rounds. Dark silhouettes of men moving through the jungle were visible. Machine guns spat fire, artillery shells exploded, sending hot metal shrapnel cutting through human flesh. For a moment, the assault seemed to be faltering. Unknown to the enemy, half the force had infiltrated behind the feature and trudged its way through a steep climb which was considered impossible to climb. The Pakistanis realised the presence of Indian troops



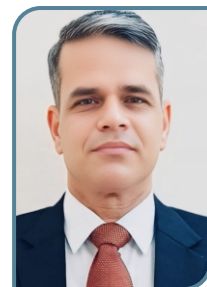
OP Hill as it is today (photo credit jagran.com)

only when they heard the battle cry of the unit. The enemy realised that a new threat had developed. For the next eight hours, men yelled, cursed, shrieked in pain, shot, threw grenades and bayoneted. By the crack of dawn, the Hill was in Indian hands. Lieutenant Colonel Sant Singh, CO, was in front, leading the assault. A success signal was sent to the Headquarters. By afternoon, Major General Amreek Singh was on the objective, congratulating the battalion. The same JCO who had faced the General's ire came to greet him. He was carrying two sacks in both his hands. He emptied the sacks, and about two dozen hand grenades and half a dozen personal weapons of Pakistani soldiers spilt out. Innocently he told the General, "मैं भाला लबया साब। कोई लड्डू नई लभे। पर तवादे वास्ते ए लड्डू लाया हौं" (I searched a great deal but could not find any sweets. But I have brought these sweets for you.) General Amreek Singh had a hearty laugh and hugged the JCO. The unit was awarded the Battle Honour "OP HILL". Lieutenant Colonel Sant Singh was decorated with the Maha Vir Chakra,

feature, which had claimed 38 brave soldiers, was connected to a dirt trail, and no vehicle could move to the feature. The finest horse from the area was brought to carry Brigadier Sant Singh to the OP HILL feature. The CO of the unit politely told Brigadier Sant Singh to mount the horse. With a smile and a twinkle in his eyes, Brigadier Sant Singh said, "OP HILL पे तो संत सिंह अपने पैरों से ही चल के जायेगा." For the next thirty minutes, the old man put a steady pace, occasionally stopping to look at the feature. He reached the top where a tricolour was flying. He looked at the flag, brought his old frame to attention and raised his right hand to salute the flag. The warrior had returned last time to pay respects to his fallen comrades. Brigadier Sant Singh passed away in 2015 at the ripe age of 94.



*Colonel Jitendra Beniwal, SM (retd), commissioned in 5 SIKH LI in June 1991 is an alumnus of Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington. He commanded his unit in the Western Sector. In a career spanning three decades, he has served as an Instructor at a Category A establishment and tenanted important staff appointments in formations. He has delivered talks on issues affecting national security at many institutions including DSSC Wellington, College of Defence Management, Army War College and College of Air Warfare. Colonel Beniwal superannuated in February 2024 and is presently employed as Security Head with Adani Green Energy Limited.*



Col Jitendra Beniwal





*A Pakistan Army jeep with a recoilless rifle on top in a defensive position. The trench is interconnected with others on the side that are partially covered with trampalines - 'Rann of Kutch' crisis 1965 (credit militaryimages.net)*

# BONDING BEYOND BORDERS

## RANN OF KUTCH 1965

In April 1965, the Pakistanis attacked in the Rann of Kutch area. An interesting episode during those tense actions as narrated to the author by his uncle, Late Captain Gandhi Mohan Bharati of 1 MAHAR is recalled hereafter.

### The Attack

Somewhere on the border in the Rann of Kutch, at about 3:00 a.m., often considered as the witching hour - the period when human beings' energies are at their lowest and when attacks have the maximum chance of success. But the Indian Army trains its soldiers well. The Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) had noticed a slight movement at the far edge of his vision. He adjusted the sight of his Medium Machine Gun and alerted his Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) - "*Sabab kuch galat lag raba hai.*" ("*Sir, something seems to be amiss.*") The JCO came to rapt attention. He peered through his binoculars and sure enough the creeping Pakistani soldiers were faintly visible. A quick nod of appreciation to the NCO manning the MMG and then the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) kicked into action.

The entire section alerted, the Verey light fired, turning night into day, Company Headquarters (HQ) informed. The glare of the Verey light flare lit up the crawling figures. The





BSF Jawan stands guard at Indo Pak border in Rann of Kutch, representational image (photo Express Archives)

harsh staccato noise of the machine gun bursts broke the absolute stillness of the early morning. The mayhem had begun. The Pakistani soldiers who were in the open tried to escape. Those who had crawled close and were in the Low Wire Entanglement did not stand a chance. It was endgame for them. The bullets cut them down where they were standing or crawling. A second flare went up. Few more bursts and the enemy abandoned the attack.

The story begins now - not a story of warriors in battle, but a strange but true tale of bravery, karma and friendship and twists of fate made possible only by war. True stories of war fascinate and will continue to fascinate the rest of the world. I heard this from my uncle who was there at Ground Zero.

### The Major's Act of Bravery

The enemy attack had petered out and the company commander had moved up to the machine gun post and was surveying the area ahead with his

binoculars. Suddenly he tensed. In the first light he saw the twitching of a hand of one of the soldiers lying in the minefield. Surprising! Surely the volume of fire at that range would have decimated the enemy and killed them all. He handed over the binoculars to the NCO next to him and pointed. After looking through the binoculars, the NCO whispered "*Sahab, Woh zinda hai.*" "*Sir, he is alive.*" The company commander nodded and said, "*He needs to be rescued*".

Without further ado, he ventured into the minefield taking one careful step at a time. The soldiers watched with bated breath as the Indian officer reached the wounded Pakistani soldier and hoisted him on to his back in the classical Fireman lift taught to all

officers during training. The slow walk back commenced, expecting to step on a mine anytime. Sometimes a good man's intention has the Almighty's grace and against all odds, the Company Commander, weak with exhaustion and stress makes it back, drops the Pakistani soldier and shouts hoarsely "*Inko MI Room le jao fauran.*" "*Take him to the Medical Inspection Room immediately*" and collapses. The Senior JCO pours a tot of rum into an enamel mug and hands it over to the Company Commander. Two quick gulps of the raw rum steadies the shot nerves. By this time it is daylight and the vultures commence their hovering over the dead.

### Two Friends Meet

Angry voices raised in argument. The wounded Pakistani soldier is lying on a make shift table in the Medical Inspection Room. The Army doctor, Captain by rank is physically blocking another Captain of the Indian Army from interrogating the wounded soldier. "*Damn it, he needs treatment. He may die.*" The other Captain, the Intelligence Officer of the Brigade replies, "*I need to know where these guys came from. I care a damn about one Pakistani soldier dying. The lesser number of these bastards the better. I care about my own men.*"

Before the war of words could escalate a steely firm voice cuts in, "*What seems to be the problem here?*" Everyone snaps to attention when they see the lanky figure of the Commanding Officer (CO), 1 Mahar Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel K Sundarji who would later rise to become the Chief of Army Staff. "*At ease*", he snaps and directs a quick look at the blood stained figure on the cot. The CO moves closer, looks at the soldier and orders the doctor, "*Attend to him*" and to the

Intelligence Officer, "Questions can wait. I take responsibility."

As the doctor moves towards the wounded soldier, the soldier stirs, laughs weakly and whispers through his wounds, in English, loud enough for all to hear, "You are Sundar, right?" Sundarji freezes, turns pale, reaches the soldier, takes his hand and asks "For God's sake, who are you and how do you know me?" The figure on the bed mutters weakly, "Damn it, can't you recognize your old friend? I am Jaldi." Shock and disbelief is writ large on Sundarji's face as he continues, "Jaldi Afridi, after all these years but how?" Afridi replies "Allah be praised. I am with my dost." The Intelligence Officer gently whispers, "Sir, do you know him?"

Sundarji wipes his brow and remarks, "Yes, we are coursemates and before Partition we trained together and were the best of friends. And that's where he got his nick name, 'Jaldi'. He was always in a hurry for everything. I know him well or rather I knew him well and his actual name is Kusbhal Khan Afridi". It was later revealed that the Pakistani officer was indeed Major Afridi from the Special Services Group leading a special mission in the Rann of Kutch.

### Friends and Enemies - A Tete-a-tete

Afridi said to Sundarji, "I want to write my dying declaration and my Will now and have it witnessed by you and your officers." Sundarji replies, "Damn it, you are tougher than a horse and you will pull through." Afridi went on, "Sundar, please for old times sake, have it done. I need to write my will and dying declaration". The will was hand written by Captain GM Bharati, 1 MAHAR, my uncle. Captain Rana, the Regimental Medical Officer of 1 MAHAR and then Captain Manjit Singh, (later Brigadier Manjit Singh, MVC of IPKF, Sri Lanka fame) were witnesses in the Will. In his Will and dying declaration, Afridi requested that the Government of Pakistan repatriate his wife and two



The vast Rann of Kutch on a full moon night (credit rannutsav.com)

daughters to India after the war and nominated Sundarji as the Godfather and Guardian. The Will was signed by Afridi and having been duly witnessed was forwarded to the Army HQ through HQ 31 Brigade.

### Epilogue

Afridi was evacuated, survived the ordeal and was repatriated after one year of treatment at the Command Hospital Pune. My attempts to find out what happened to Afridi and his family and events after the incident have yielded no results. Good friends, good soldiers separated by time and fate meet on the battlefield in the most extraordinary circumstances. The mystery of life and how it unfolds in its myriad ways especially in war, continues to fascinate

me. An unknown Major to whom Afridi owes his life; two coursemates, enemies on the battlefield but friends in and for life - A bond that transcends man made boundaries and even death. My uncle breathed his last on 10 March 23. He had earlier asked me to ensure that this story is told. I have honoured that commitment to him today.

**And how many times must a man walk down before you can call him a man?**

**And how many times must a cannonball fly before it is forever banned?**

**The answer my friend is Blowin in the wind.**

**Bob Dylan.**



*Lieutenant Colonel S V Sundar (Retd) was commissioned in 12 Mechanised Infantry (Para Mahar) in June 1980. His experience of special operations in the Siachen Glacier at extreme high altitude as part of High Risk Missions, while serving with the elite Special Frontier Force has been a highlight of his career. Apart from writing blogs and articles for newspapers / magazines and giving talks on matters military, he has authored a book, "The Wanderer's Verses" which is a poetical expression of his mystical experiences while wandering in the Himalayas. Post retirement he is an active member of "Colours of Glory", a Non-Government Organisation whose mission is to promote India's proud military heritage. Lieutenant Colonel SV Sundar can be contacted at [sundar.icwa@gmail.com](mailto:sundar.icwa@gmail.com) and 9444452410.*



**Lt Col SV Sundar (Retd)**

# PAKISTAN ARMY PERSPECTIVE

## 1965 WAR

While the narrative of 1965 as seen through Pakistan's lens is sometimes contentious, the perspectives presented in Pakistani publications serve as a crucial reference point in contemporary debates over Indo-Pak relations and regional security. In the pages of newspapers, military journals, and scholarly analyses, the war is remembered as an enduring lesson in the complexities of modern statecraft. As such, the **1965 war remains a powerful symbol**-one that embodies both the aspirations and the enduring challenges of a nation striving to assert its rightful place on the international stage. This overview of the 1965 War through Pakistan's eyes, draws on published memoirs, official military commentaries, and retrospective analyses by senior officers - highlighting their collective interpretation of the conflict.

### Contextual Backdrop

The Indo-Pak War of 1965 continues to evoke complex emotions and vigorous debate amongst Pakistanis. Apparent in the perspective presented in national publications, the war was neither a clear-cut military victory nor defeat but rather a multifaceted confrontation marked by both heroic defence and missed opportunities. The primary causes of the conflict-the unresolved Kashmir issue, perceptions of Indian aggression, and geopolitical miscalculations following the 1962 war-are inextricably linked to Pakistan's national narrative. Similarly, the twin operations of **Gibraltar** and **Grand Slam** remain subjects of detailed military analysis, representing both the audacity and the inherent risks of Pakistan's strategic approach.

Notable engagements, such as the tank battles near Chawinda and the naval action at Dwarka, have been enshrined in the annals of Pakistan's military history, celebrated for their demonstration of valour in the face of formidable odds. At the same time, the eventual ceasefire and the resultant Tashkent Agreement have prompted a dual legacy: on one hand, the **affirmation of Pakistan's defensive resolve**; on the other, a **persistent sense of frustration** at the failure to decisively settle the Kashmir question.



In the aftermath of the war, the lessons learnt have reverberated through Pakistan's military reforms and strategic doctrines. The war catalysed deep introspection regarding the balance between military ambition and political pragmatism, the management of intelligence, and the vital need for continuous modernization of defence capabilities. It also fostered a **renewed sense of national unity and identity**-a unity that remains a foundation of Pakistan's approach to external security challenges.

A book titled *Indo-Pakistan War of 1965: A Flashback*, produced by the Inter-Services Public Relations of Pakistan, is used as the official history of the war, which is a highly adapted account, omitting any mention of the **Operations Gibraltar** and **Grand Slam**, and begins with the Indian counter-offensive in the Lahore sector. In this chronicle, the Pakistan Army is claimed to have put up a "**valiant defence of the motherland**" and halted the Indian attack in its tracks. The significance of the 1965 war on Pakistan's military can be gleaned from the fact that its **Defence Day** is observed on **06 September** (date of Indian counter offensive in the Punjab sector) and **Air Force Day** on **07 September**.



### Casus Belli: The Kashmir Conundrum

A recurring theme in Pakistani writings on the 1965 conflict is the unresolved issue of Kashmir. Since the partition of British India in 1947, Kashmir has been framed not merely as a territorial dispute but as **a symbol of national honour**, religious identity, and the legitimate rights of a predominantly Muslim population. According to several Pakistani military analyses, Kashmir was “*the epicentre of Pakistan’s struggle for justice*,” arguing that the issue had been deliberately sidelined by international diplomacy following the 1947–48 war. Prominent op-eds in newspapers such as Dawn have emphasized that Pakistan’s decision to engage militarily in 1965 was rooted in the belief that **negotiations were rendered ineffective by political inertia** and what was perceived as an unwillingness on India’s part to accommodate the aspirations of Kashmiri Muslims.

Another critical element emphasized in Pakistani publications is the sense of Indian hegemonic ambition. Pakistani writers have argued that India, buoyed by its post-independence political consolidation and military modernization, was increasingly determined to assert its dominance in the region. The memory of India’s unilateral decision-making in the aftermath of Partition, coupled with policies that were seen as repressive in Kashmir, contributed to an enduring perception that India was pursuing an expansionist agenda at the expense of its smaller neighbour. As expressed in military commentaries in the Pakistan Defence Journal, Indian actions in Kashmir were considered provocative.

The **skirmishes in the Rann of Kutch** were initiated by Pakistan, possibly emboldened by the 1962 Indian debacle, which got further reinforced by the tepid Indian response to these provocations.

India’s military performance in Ladakh and NEFA had convinced Pakistan that ‘*Hindu India*’ would hardly be a match especially since, as part of the Western alliance against communism, Pakistan was bristling with US weapon systems that purportedly gave it an edge, both on land and in the air. However, General Musa Khan, Pakistan Army’s Chief of Army Staff (COAS) during the War, writes that military hardware from the United States did enhance Pakistan’s operational potential, but that assistance was limited in nature.

Pakistani military planners interpreted India’s setbacks in 1962 as indicative of **lingering strategic deficiencies**. Intelligence reports circulating in Pakistan suggested that a revival of hostilities in Kashmir could force India into a reactive posture. In various analyses published in periodicals such as *The News International*, scholars argued that Pakistan had an opportunity to challenge India’s regional primacy in 1965 before India could fully recover from the defeat of 1962.

In May 1965, Indian forces captured three posts in the Kargil Sector of Kashmir sparking a reactive urgency in Pakistan. Consequently, President Ayub of Pakistan directed the Foreign Minister and the Army Chief to take actions to resuscitate the Kashmir problem, weaken Indian resolve, and bring her to the table to negotiate **without provoking a general war**. Pakistan’s underlying assumption was that the military actions in Kashmir would remain limited to it and an all-out war was considered unlikely. As per the assessment of Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, India was not in a position to risk a general war, thus any provocation in Kashmir would remain limited to Kashmir.

In his book ‘*My Version*’, General Musa states that he informed the President regarding conditions not being suitable for an uprising in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and Pakistan should not stick its neck too far as it could lead to a general war with India. Despite the



Pakistan celebrates 06 September as Defence Day (image nation.com.pk)



*Pakistani soldiers in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa (representational image photo via RFERL)*

Army's advice, the foreign office, led by the Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was adamant on an offensive approach on Kashmir. General Musa, in his book, states that the policy makers thwarted the military assessment and advice on a matter having serious military implications because of their miscalculation of the politico-strategic situation and ambition of few individuals.

Beyond the strategic imperatives of Kashmir and regional recalibration, internal political dynamics also played a role in shaping Pakistan's perspective of the war's origins. The Pakistani establishment, comprising the military leadership and a segment of political elites, felt an urgent need to bolster national pride and demonstrate the resolve of the country's Armed Forces. Publications in Pakistan often depicted the 1965 war as a "defensive struggle" undertaken to protect the honour of a nation and its people. This narrative of defensive jihad against external aggression has continued to influence Pakistan's historical memory of the conflict.

### Military Planning and Strategy

The 1965 war was not just a battle between two States but also a test of strategic planning, operational effectiveness, and national resolve. In their later writings, Pakistani generals often emphasize that the war was fought under conditions of relative parity, where rapid mobilization and tactical ingenuity allowed a smaller force to hold its ground against a numerically superior adversary. While technically this may have been true but due to Indian security commitments on the Chinese front, the numerical ratios on the active battle grounds on the Western front during 1965 were either comparable or favouring Pakistan in the

category of platforms. **Qualitatively Pakistan had tangible advantage** by virtue of possession of relatively superior tanks and artillery. The Centurion tank which was the backbone of the Indian Army was concentrated in the Armoured Division while the vast bulk of Indian infantry divisions were equipped with the obsolete Shermans. None of this is talked about in Pakistani writings.

In early 1959, Pakistan Army leadership evolved a doctrine suited to the country's peculiar operational environment. The new doctrine called for holding ground with firepower instead of dense physical deployment. It stressed keeping the minimum essential forces for static deployment while maintaining the bulk as a strike force. **New US military equipment along with changes in doctrine gave the Pakistan Army increased firepower and mobility.** Based on the US model, the Pakistani infantry divisions shrank in size, yet fielded more firepower than the earlier British model.

The armoured divisions were equipped with the redoubtable Patton tanks and armoured personnel carriers (APCs) for the infantry to keep pace with armour. Pakistan also received modern guns for an independent artillery brigade, providing longer ranges, heavier shells, locating devices, and increased mobility. Pakistan's Air Force got **F-86 and F-104 fighter aircrafts along with radar systems.** With these modern weapons, the Pakistani military acquired a limited qualitative edge over the numerically larger Indian Army. From 1954 to 1965, Pakistan received around \$630 million in direct American grant assistance and over \$670 million in concessional sales and defence support assistance.

Pakistan's strategic objective in the 1965 War, as enunciated by President Ayub, was to **resuscitate the Kashmir problem by starting**

**an uprising in J&K** aimed at weakening Indian resolve, and bringing her to the negotiating table without provoking a general war. Pakistan's underlying assumption was that the military actions in Kashmir could remain limited and that an all-out war was unlikely. In case of a general war, the military strategy was to absorb the initial Indian offensives and subsequently transition to the offensive when the situation permitted. Consequently, the military strategy of the Pakistan Army was **defensive-offensive in the conventional spectrum**.

In order to implement this strategy, Pakistan planned to infiltrate around 7000 freedom fighters into J&K to initiate a local uprising. In case of a general war, the Army planned to deploy two armoured divisions, three infantry divisions and three independent infantry brigades in Punjab, the main theatre of operations; holding both armoured divisions in their strategic concentration areas one North of the Ravi River and one South of it, poised for counteroffensive. The areas of psychological-social importance in strength, which included Sialkot and Lahore, were to be held in strength. In Azad Kashmir (POK), Pakistan planned to adopt a defensive posture and conduct tactical offensives when opportunities arose. Likewise, the Pakistan Army planned a defensive posture in East Pakistan employing minimum forces due to minimal perceived threat. Overall, the **operational approach was in line with the policy of catalysing the Kashmir dispute through guerrilla operations, with the military strategy premised on a defensive-offensive posture**.

The Pakistani senior leadership considered their planning to be superior at the strategic level, with the initial offensive launched with an infantry division-tank brigade size force against Akhnur - deemed

adequate to cause a strategic level crisis in the Indian Army. The capture of Akhnur would have been disastrous for India as Indian offensive plans would have been disrupted, with the entire war focussed on redressing the adversity caused due to the loss of Akhnur. On the other hand the Pakistani counter offensive in Khem Karan would have bottled up three Indian Infantry divisions in the Beas-Ravi corridor, possibly forcing them to surrender. The 1965 War would have then been a **strategic Pakistani success rather than a tactical draw as it turned out to be**, if the operational and tactical execution had been competent.

The Pakistani military writings stress that the **initial intent was not to wage an all-out war but rather to inflict enough pressure on India to force a revision of the status quo over Kashmir**. In editorials from *Pakistan Today*, commentators have argued that the operations were aimed at sending a strong political message while avoiding a full-scale confrontation that could drag both nations into a protracted conflict.

As events unfolded, the strategic calculus became increasingly complex, with the war rapidly exceeding the confines of a "limited" engagement.

### Operation Gibraltar and Operation Grand Slam

**Operation Gibraltar** was conceived as a covert operation aimed at infiltrating pro-Kashmiri forces into J&K to foment a popular uprising against Indian rule. Pakistani planners believed that a swift, guerrilla-style campaign could destabilize the region and force India into negotiations. President Ayub believed that military action was the only way Pakistan could solve the Kashmir issue. Descriptions in leading Pakistani military journals recount that **Operation Gibraltar** was designed with the intent of "liberating" Kashmir through unconventional means, anticipating a **cascade of local insurgency that would complement the actions of regular Pakistani forces**.

A recurring theme in the Pakistani military writings is the emphasis on a



*Dissertation of Major Muhammad Bakar-Operation Grand Slam*





Pakistani Infantry advance with support from M4A1E6 (Sherman) tanks during the 1965 war (photo Pakistan Army commons.wikimedia.org)

(CFL) at Akhnur, which was a critical supply line for Indian forces. By seizing key communication and supply routes, Pakistan could isolate Indian forces and compel a favourable military and diplomatic outcome, while technically restricting the conflict to J&K. Detailed post-war analyses published in *The Express Tribune* have noted that the operation was emblematic of Pakistan's aggressive military doctrine of the time, which placed **heavy reliance on fast-moving armoured units and rapid exploitation of tactical breakthroughs.**

### Key Engagements

carefully calibrated defensive strategy. They argue that Pakistan's operational doctrine during the war was built around the idea of **limited warfare-a measured response intended to repel aggression without provoking an all-out conflict.** For instance, in his memoirs, General Muhammad Musa Khan noted that the strategic plan of 1965 was less about territorial conquest and more about compelling India to the negotiating table by demonstrating the resolve and capability of Pakistan's Armed Forces.

**Operation Grand Slam** in the Pakistani narrative was an outcome of Indian offensive operations in Azad Kashmir (POK) leading to capture of Bedori Bulge (Hajipir), triggering its offensive into Chhamb and Jaurian. According to General Musa and General Sher Bahadur, Pakistan launched **Operation Grand Slam**, when India captured some territory in Kashmir, and there was a real danger of Muzaffarabad falling. The main aim of this operation was ostensibly **limited to relieve the pressure against the Pakistani 12 Division deployed in Kashmir.** The plan was an armoured thrust by 12 Division against Indian forces across the Cease Fire Line

the 1965 war, both the President, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, and his handpicked Army Chief, General Musa are accused of lacking the resolution to provide strategic direction to a well-oiled machine which had the potential to inflict a severe strategic defeat on the enemy. He further states that the job of an Army Headquarters (HQ) was not just to formulate plans but to effectively supervise the execution of plans. He goes on to say that Ayub in words of a British contemporary was devoid of "operational experience" "organizational understanding" and "lacked tactical flair". Thus, Field Marshal Ayub and General Musa saw no need to have an intermediate Corps HQ to ensure the success of Pakistan Army's main attack involving a force of an infantry division and an armoured division, along with a plethora of supporting elements.

Major Amin also adds that 12 Infantry Division's organizational stretch, one of the main reasons for **Grand Slam's** failure, was another glaring case of lack of organizational insight on the part of Field Marshal Ayub and General Musa. In comparison, he says that, while the Indians had bifurcated their forces in Kashmir North and South of Pir Panjal Range right from 1948 and the early 1950s, Pakistan depended on one divisional HQ to manage a front of 400 miles in mountainous territory spanning the Himalayas, Karakoram and the Pir Panjal.

At the strategic level Major Amin comments that **both India and Pakistan got an opportunity to win decisively.** Pakistan got it twice, first at Akhnur and then at Khem Karan. India got it once at Gadgor on 8th September. **Both the sides failed.** On the Pakistani side the failure had more to do with lack of strategic insight at Akhnur, in ordering a change of divisional commander in the middle of a crucial operation. Then at Khem Karan the Pakistani failure was at the armoured division level in failing to induct all five armoured regiments on 8th or 9th

September for achieving a decisive breakthrough, due to **poor staff work and planning** at the divisional level. The situation was made worse by the absence of a Corps HQ.

From the Pakistani perspective, the Indian failure at Gadgor had more to do with **lack of drive at the brigade and divisional level** in actual execution despite having the means to achieve a breakthrough. The reading of the battle by Indian 1 Armoured Division in fearing a threat from the flanks which in reality was a tank squadron of 62 Cavalry that had lost its way came in for professional criticism. The lack of success of Indian 1 Armoured Division in the Sialkot Sector was attributed to dearth of coup d'oeil and resolution at the brigade level. Thus Major Amin posits that failure in achieving decisive outcomes by Pakistan was due to staff and planning failure, in which all from the brigade to the General HQ (GHQ) were culpable, while the Indian failure was a command failure in which the prime culprits were the armoured brigade and divisional commanders.

The **Battle of Chawinda** has been frequently discussed in Pakistani accounts. Often described as one of the largest tank battles in history, **Chawinda has been celebrated in Pakistan as a symbol of valour and military prowess**. Pakistani military analysts point to Chawinda as an example of how disciplined armoured formations, when coordinated under challenging circumstances, were able to blunt an enemy advance. Chawinda is dissected round-by-round, with numerous citations emphasizing the bravery of Pakistani tank crews and the effective use of terrain for ambushes and defensive posturing.

Another prominent operation widely discussed was the **engagement around Kasur**, where Pakistani forces, facing

incipient Indian manoeuvres intended to break through into Pakistan's heartland, managed to stem the tide. Retired Pakistani military officers acknowledge that the fighting around Kasur underscored the **unpredictability of the war**, with both sides experiencing tactical wins and losses. They vividly recount how Pakistani troops, utilizing well-conceived defensive lines, repelled Indian attempts to exploit the element of surprise, thereby averting a dire strategic outcome.

Pakistani articles also highlight effective use of offensive forces by the Pakistan Army through **two counter offensives**; the first against Akhnur after the failure of **Operation Gibraltar** and capture of Haji Pir Pass by India, to generate a pull on Indian forces operating in Kashmir; the second in Punjab to threaten Amritsar, a city of social-psychological importance consequent to the Indian 1 Corps offensive in Sialkot sector.

However, in sum, Major Amin writes that 1965 was **a failure of offence and triumph of defence**. Except in **Grand Slam** where the initial overwhelming superiority enabled Pakistan to achieve a breakthrough, on both sides defence triumphed as an operation of war. Both the armies were more used to defence because of the British colonial military experience. The attackers failed at Gadgor, Chawinda, Asal Uttar and Valtoha. **Both the armies lacked the dynamism to conduct successful attack operation**, a far more complex form of war and totally outside the pre-1947 experience.

### The Ceasefire and the Tashkent Agreement

After nearly 17 days of fierce engagements, both India and Pakistan

found themselves at an impasse. International diplomatic pressure, particularly from the erstwhile Soviet Union and the United Nations, eventually led to a ceasefire on 22 September 1965. From the Pakistani perspective-as chronicled in numerous op-eds in Dawn and retrospective interviews in *The Express Tribune*-the **ceasefire was seen not as a defeat but rather as a necessary measure in the face of international realities**. Pakistani leadership contended that although the military objectives in Kashmir had not been realized, the ability to maintain defensive positions against a '*numerically and technologically superior*' adversary was a testament to the resilience of the nation's Armed Forces.

Following the ceasefire, the Tashkent Agreement signed in January 1966, required both nations to withdraw to pre-war positions, **essentially rendering the conflict "a draw" in military terms**. The Agreement was met with mixed reviews in Pakistan. Critics argued that while Tashkent helped avoid further escalation, it failed to address the root causes of the conflict-most notably, the Kashmir issue-and left Pakistan's strategic ambitions unfulfilled.

### Military and Psychological Outcomes

Within Pakistan, the conclusion of the war was imbued with a nuanced mix of pride, introspection, and the cautious optimism of national resilience. Military commentaries published in the *Pakistan Army Journal* stressed that the conflict, despite its strategic ambiguities, had **proven that Pakistan could hold its own in a modern, mechanized war**. The valour exhibited by Pakistani soldiers in



*Soldiers in a defensive position during the 1965 War (credit dawn.com)*

battles such as Chawinda and Kasur was widely celebrated, and subsequent military training programmes were reportedly reoriented to incorporate the hard-earned lessons from 1965.

Opinion pieces in mainstream newspapers reflected on the heavy toll the conflict took—not only in terms of casualties but also on the national psyche. Intellectuals and retired officers alike debated whether the war had achieved its desired political objectives or whether it had inadvertently **entrenched a cycle of conflict in the subcontinent**. Such reflections contributed to a broader discourse in Pakistan regarding the limits and opportunities of military intervention in pursuit of national interests. The war underscored the critical need to balance limited warfare with the potential for escalation into full-scale conflict. Retrospective studies in *Pakistan Defence Journal* argue that the 1965 war served as a wake-up call, prompting a **thorough reassessment of operational doctrine, inter-service coordination, and the management of intelligence**.

### Aftermath and Lessons Learnt

**Shifts in Geopolitics.** In the post-war era, one of the most enduring discussions in Pakistani publications pertains to how the conflict affected regional geopolitics. The 1965 war, despite its ostensibly inconclusive military outcome, is credited with altering the strategic landscape of South Asia. Authors in *Pakistan Today* have argued that the war redefined the balance of power, influencing alliances and shaping the future trajectory of Indo-Pak relations. The **strengthening of ties with China**—a development that many Pakistani publications herald as one of the silver linings of the conflict—is often cited as a direct consequence of Pakistan's need

to counterbalance a resurgent India.

**Economic and Social Implications.** Beyond the strategic and military dimensions, the legacy of the 1965 war had significant social and economic ramifications within Pakistan. The conflict forced the nation to divert scarce resources towards defence spending, which in turn **affected economic development** and social welfare programmes. The financial strain experienced during and after the war had long-term implications for Pakistan's developmental trajectory. However, alternatively many commentators also point out that the rally-around-the-flag effect during the war helped in cementing a sense of national unity and resolve that would eventually contribute to subsequent economic and social initiatives.

**Institutional Reforms and Military Doctrine.** Another major lesson emphasised by Pakistani authors was the need for institutional reforms within the military. In the wake of the 1965 conflict, a series of studies published in defence journals called for improved inter-service coordination, better communication networks, and more robust training regimens for modern warfare. These calls for reform were not merely technical; they represented a broader ideological shift in Pakistan's approach to national security. Retired officers interviewed in *The Express Tribune* often recalled that the war prompted a **reassessment of both strategy and tactics**, leading to doctrinal changes that would later prove pivotal in subsequent conflicts.

**Public Discourse, National Identity, and the Legacy of Valour.** The cultural and psychological aftermath of the war is perhaps one of the most deeply felt aspects in Pakistan. Over the decades, the 1965 conflict has been mythologized in Pakistani literature, cinema, and



commemorative events. Patriotic narratives—often featuring accounts of heroic last stands, daring manoeuvres, and personal sacrifices—are a staple of public discourse. In annual commemorations and state-sponsored publications, the war is portrayed as a symbol of Pakistan's resolve to defend its sovereignty against overwhelming odds. Such narratives **influence how subsequent generations interpret the events of 1965.**

**Dichotomy of Successes and Missed Opportunities.** A recurring motif in the post-war debate is the dichotomy between tactical successes on the battlefield and the ultimate failure to achieve strategic objectives. Many Pakistani analysts agree that while the military demonstrated remarkable courage and operational acumen, the overarching political goals—most notably, a definitive resolution on the Kashmir issue—remained elusive. Editorials in *Dawn* and analytical essays in military periodicals alike have lamented that the cost of the conflict, both in human lives and in geopolitical opportunity, was too high given the limited strategic gains that eventually emerged. This introspection has fuelled debates on whether a **more restrained approach might have yielded better results.**

**Strategic Implications for Future Conflicts.** The lessons drawn from the 1965 war have profoundly influenced Pakistan's strategic thinking in the decades that followed. In academic circles and policy think-tanks, discussions have centred on how the conflict reaffirmed the necessity of maintaining robust defence capabilities while also exploring innovative forms of warfare that could offset India's numerical superiority. The **evolution of Pakistan's missile programmes, investment in modern armoured technologies, and the reorientation of military academies** towards contemporary doctrines are

frequently justified by invoking the lessons of 1965. Military strategists have argued that the war underscored the need for a flexible and adaptive approach—a doctrine that would guide Pakistani defence policy in later crises.

### Conclusion

When considered as a whole, Pakistani accounts of the 1965 war have a **surprising balance in the self-assessment.** While there is an undeniable sense of pride in the performance of the Armed Forces, there is also an awareness of the limitations and areas where they fell short. Through their memoirs, essays, and public commentaries, Generals like Muhammad Musa Khan and Mirza Aslam Beg—and their peers—have shaped not only the historical narrative of the 1965 conflict but also the strategic thinking that guides the Pakistan Army today.

Interestingly, one of the reasons for the less than satisfactory performance of both armies in the 1965 war in Pakistani writings, has been attributed to the failure or inability to develop a

doctrine of decisive warfare, a colonial legacy. The Indian Army of pre-1947 was an internal security machine designed for defence while the main forces of the empire's allies came into action on other decisive fronts. The focus of both sides in the 1965 war was to have tactical concepts, however no doctrine integrating tactics with operational strategy and national strategy existed to give coherence to the whole business of warfighting.

### Bibliography

- Major (Retd) A. H. Amin, India-Pakistan 1965 War: Confrontations Lead to Collective Blunders.*  
*Major Muhammad Abu Bakar, A Case Study of 1965 Pakistan – India War.*  
*General (Retd) Mohammad Musa, My Version: India – Pakistan War, 1965.*  
*Shaukat Raza, The Pakistan Army War 1965.*  
*Chat GPT AI compilation of Articles and Writings from Pakistani Periodicals and Newspapers.*  
*Shiv Kunal Verma, 1965 A Western Sunrise.*  
*Wikipedia*



*Major General Ravi Murugan, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), an alumnus of National Defence Academy, Pune was commissioned into the 8th Battalion, The Brigade of Guards in June 1987. He has a Master's Degree in Science from Madras University as also an M Phil from Osmania University. In his 37 years of service, he has fulfilled multiple challenging roles across diverse operational areas.*

*After command of his battalion, the officer commanded an Independent Armoured Brigade and subsequently, a Counter Insurgency Force in J&K. He was also the Defence & Military Attaché in the Embassy of India, Washington DC between June 2016 and July 2019. He has been the Additional Director General Military Operations (B) in Army Headquarters and commanded the Karnataka and Kerala Sub Area before retirement. He is presently in an advisory role with multiple companies.*



**Maj Gen Ravi Murugan**

# ONE VS FOUR

## ALFRED COOKE'S EPIC AIR COMBAT

The story of Flight Lieutenant Alfred Cooke's air combat remained untold for many years. While the stories of the Keelors and the Gnats and Halwara Hunters were told with great pride over the years, the story of a similarly epic air battle conducted by Flight Lieutenant Alfred Cooke and his wingman Flying Officer S C Mamgain, was surprisingly forgotten over the years.

On 6th September 1965, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) declared war and in the late afternoon and evening, attacked several Indian Air Force (IAF) bases in the West. In the East, the air war started on 7th September. September 7th, 1965 started on a gloomy note for Kalaikunda. Early that morning, six F-86 Sabres, airborne from some PAF airbase in East Pakistan attacked Kalaikunda and wrought considerable damage, destroying four Vampires and two Canberras on the ground. The raiders returned to their base unchallenged.

At around 10.30 am, the radar officer at 55 Signal Unit (SU) in Kalaikunda, Squadron Leader 'Mama' Sahni briefly picked up a blip on his scope near Port Canning. He immediately alerted the OC Flying Kalaikunda, Wing Commander Dicky Law of the possibility of a repeat multi-aircraft air raid on Kalaikunda.



*Illustration depicting Flight Lieutenant Alfred Cooke shooting down the Sabre of Flying Officer Afzal Khan, 07 September 1965 (credit theprint.in)*

The blip that was picked up by 55 SU was a formation of four Sabres, probably airborne from Tejgaon, which was winging its way swiftly to Kalaikunda, maintaining low level to avoid detection. Law looked up his roster and noted that two Hunter aircraft operating from Dum Dum (Kolkata) were on Combat Air Patrol (CAP) 60 miles North of Kalaikunda at 20000 feet. Flight Lieutenant Alfred Cooke and Flying Officer SC Mamgain of No.14 Squadron (The Bulls) were on CAP, providing Air Defence (AD) to Dum-Dum and Barrackpore. Law ordered Sahni to call this section back to Kalaikunda immediately to intercept the incoming raid.

Cooke, a lanky 6' 3" youngster, universally regarded as the squadron's top AD pilot, had grown up dreaming of being a fighter pilot as he watched Hurricanes, Spitfires, P-51 Mustangs and P-38 Lightnings tangling in practice air combat near his childhood home of Agra. Now, with 600 hours of Hunter flying under his belt, including gruelling training in low-level air combat with 'Piloo' Kacker, the moment of truth for Cooke had arrived. 'Piloo' had constantly defied IAF regulations to put Cooke through his paces in low level combat. Cooke summarised his training thus: *"I was taught the right way by Piloo – learn by the book, and then when you are done, throw the book away."* He had no inkling how soon his training would be put to the test!

Even as his mentor and dear friend 'Piloo' was bailing out over Sargodha, the situation was building up towards putting his low level combat training to use. The stage was set for one of the greatest air battles in the history of air combat in the subcontinent.

Earlier in the day, while on Operational Readiness Platform (ORP) in a tent at Dum-Dum, the pair had received a scramble order and had taken off. Under

the control of 411 SU at Rampur Hat, Cooke and Mamgain were vectored to an area about 80 miles North of Dum-Dum at 25000 feet. The formation orbited for some time without any contact or engagement with the enemy, and was returning to Dum Dum.

A little later, the pair was given another scramble by 411 SU and directed to approximately the same area as before. After about 15 minutes on station, the SU controller informed Cooke that Kalaikunda was under attack again and asked if they had enough fuel to engage them. Cooke confirmed that they had enough fuel and immediately asked for the vector. They were approximately 120 nautical miles away and were given a heading for Kalaikunda. Cooke put the formation in a shallow dive towards Kalaikunda, accelerating to 0.9 Mach (500 knots) planning to arrive 10 kms short of Kalaikunda at 500 feet, aiming to keep any and all Sabres in front and above. As they descended below 10000 feet, they

lost radio contact with 411 SU nor could they establish radio contact with Kalaikunda.

As planned, the pair reached 10 km short of Kalaikunda at a speed of about 500 knots at a height of 500 feet. They made visual contact with the Sabres, and were treated to a chilling sight: three PAF Sabres were in a classic front gun racecourse pattern of attack on the Western side of the airbase over the runway, while the fourth kept top cover on the Eastern side of the base, over the ATC. Cooke's response was immediate and perhaps a bit audacious, as he called out to Mamgain, *"Look at those #@^&! Let's get them. I'm taking the three this side – you break and take on the ones on the other side. Good luck!"* As Cooke was to note later, this was not in accordance with tactics, as normally the wingman would have stayed glued to the leader's tail. But Cooke, seeing the three Sabres on the Western side had thought there were three on the Eastern side as well. Under the circumstances, he decided the best



Flight Lieutenant Alfred Cooke standing in front of Hunter aircraft (credit bharat-rakshak.com)





Flight Lieutenant Alfred Cooke with Flying Officer SC Mamgain (on the left).

thing to do was to take a chance, split up and take on three Sabres each: a remarkable decision.

The Sabre formation comprised Flight Lieutenant Haleem as Leader, with Flight Lieutenant Basheer as his wingman. Flight Lieutenants Tariq Habeeb Khan and Afzal Khan formed the second pair in the formation. Though the Sabres were operating on the extreme limit of their endurance, they outnumbered the Hunters two to one. One Sabre was in its strafing run as Cooke and Mamgain pounced. Cooke recalls, *"I went straight for the Sabre who was in a dive for front gun attack. There was another one just turning to dive for his attack- this guy warned the Sabre in the dive that I was coming for him and he abandoned his front gun attack and pulled out of the dive and did a hard right turn. I was closing in very fast. Got my gunsight on him momentarily and fired a short burst (1 / 4 sec) as he pulled away from me and I overshot his line of flight. I lost sight momentarily and when I made visual contact again I got behind the Sabre. He jettisoned his drop tanks and I did the same. I was terrified when I saw how easily he*

*were going exactly as per the Book and I knew verse + chapter what they were doing. When his speed dropped off, he would dive to build up speed and then start fighting again – pulling out of the dive at tree top height (50 feet or less) with me following, hoping that I would "mush" into the ground. I got my gunsight on him when we were very low and took a shot at him. I started firing at a range of 600 yards and I could see that he was below tree-line height. I did not realize that I was that low and that my wing tip was actually hitting the scrub. I stopped firing to get away from the ground and saw his aircraft explode into a ball of flame and I could not avoid flying through the fireball and debris."* Cooke's baptism by fire had just begun but Piloo's training had already paid off. As confirmed later, the PAF pilot was Afzal Khan and his Sabre crashed on the IIT campus on a farmer's hut killing two civilians.

Meanwhile Mamgain went after the two Sabres trying to sneak in one more attack on the ground targets. The Sabres had already finished one attacking run when Mamgain arrived on the scene. The two Sabres immediately turned and engaged Mamgain. In the dogfight that followed, Mamgain hit one of the Sabres.

### The Second

After the first engagement, Cooke immediately latched onto the tail of a second Sabre, which had attempted to get behind him, and fired at it, damaging it severely. Large bits of the Sabre's wings were torn off as Cooke's bullets repeatedly found their mark. We return to Cooke's own words as he chased his second opponent: *"On recovering from this, a quick look around and I saw another Sabre behind me. I took violent evasive manoeuvres and during the criss-cross scissors we would cross very close to each other. I got into an*

*could out-turn me. They employed the classic scissors manoeuvres – Turn – Reverse – Turn. The wider turning aircraft would land up in front. I did notice that his speed would drop off very quickly and that he had to dive towards the ground to build up speed again. At this stage of the dogfight I made sure that I was always above him and tried to stay behind him. I made use of the better thrust/ weight ratio of the Hunter to achieve this. I noticed that his leading edge slats would open when turning and this would increase his rate of turn but he would sacrifice his speed in so doing. When I saw this, my mind went back to the classroom when I was a cadet learning about the Principles of Flight – how slats increase the stalling angle and give you more lift. However, with it comes increased drag and unless you have increased power to overcome the drag – speed will drop off. I knew then that these guys*



Alfred Cooke (in white shirt) with 14 Squadron officers who had invited him 58 years after the war in 2023. His daughter is to his left.

advantageous position behind him and started firing while he was trying to get away from me by diving and turning towards the ground; all this action took place between ground level and about 4000 feet. While firing at him I noticed that he steepened his bank and dive even more and something at the back of my mind warned me that he was being warned by another Sabre who could be behind me. I kept on firing and closing in rapidly on him and I could see pieces of his aircraft disintegrating. I stopped firing, as I was so close (100 yards) that if I did not break away I would collide with him."

The Sabre damaged by Cooke disengaged to escape and head back to base. This was most certainly the Sabre flown by Flight Lieutenant Tariq Habib Khan, which, while managing to make it back to base, could never take to the air again and was described as "written off due to lack of spares" in PAF accounts.

### The Third and the Fourth

Other Sabres were around – including the one that Cooke had suspected of being on his tail:

"On recovering from this, I immediately pulled upward to the right and saw another Sabre behind me. I out-maneuvred him and got behind as he pulled up in a vertical climb and then winged-over to go into a vertical dive, with me following and firing at him all the time. In the vertical dive I kept firing at him as he pulled out of the dive and pulled away from me. I was mesmerised and so full of adrenaline that it took me some time to realise that I would be flying into the ground unless I pulled out of the dive myself. I pulled back on the joystick with my finger on the trigger and got out of the dive with guns still firing until I had expended my ammunition."

One down, two chased off. But another Sabre lurked and in fact, Cooke's No. 2, Mamgain, was in danger of getting shot down by that Sabre before Cooke intervened:

"I was very shaken at this stage and I turned back towards the airfield to get my bearings and equilibrium back. It was then that I noticed my No. 2, Mamgain, over the airfield doing a leisurely turn at about 1500 feet with a Sabre about 1500 yards behind him and closing

in fast. I ordered him to "break port" and then came up to take on this Sabre also."

Cooke would have been fully justified in disengaging from combat at that point, as he had no ammunition left. But Cooke being Cooke, he persisted and chased this Sabre anyway, armed with little more than film in his gun camera. He stuck to the Sabre's tail as the PAF pilot made some desperate moves in an effort to try and get away from Cooke. He says, "This guy tried to shake me off by doing loops and barrel rolls right over the airfield. I got behind him to firing range and tried to take a shot but there was no ammo – I closed in even more and tried another shot, but again, no luck – no ammo. While I was behind him during this aerobatic display, I called up No. 2 to come and take over and shoot this b\*^\$#ard down – I got no answer and thought the worst – that Mamgain may have been shot down- I called up again on radio pleading with any other Hunter who could be airborne to come and take over and shoot him out of the sky. It was at this stage that I noticed grey puffs of smoke appearing in front of me



Flight Lieutenant Alfred Cooke (right) with Air Marshal Arjan Singh, the Air Chief in the centre (credit bbarat-rakshak.com)

*and all around me and I realised that the Ack Ack was firing at me as well."*

The unnerved Pakistani pilot finally disengaged, climbing to height and heading back to East Pakistan. Cooke chased him all the way to the border, whereupon he finally called it a day and started to head for Dum-Dum. But his adventures had not yet ended. Once Cooke was away from the not-so-friendly AA fire, he looked around and noticed that he had sustained damage to his portside wingtip and saw the pitot tube bent upwards about 70 degrees. This meant that Cooke had no Air Speed Indicator (ASI). Gun camera film analysis would reveal that this had happened on one of his close approaches to the ground – most likely when he was shooting at Afzal Khan's Sabre.

By this stage, Cooke was up to about 10000 feet and had established radio contact with 411 SU. Cooke reported the dogfight and told 411 SU that he was very low on fuel, had no ASI and asked to get Hunters airborne from Dum-Dum to shepherd him in and cover his landing. 411 SU had no joy trying to contact the 14 Squadron detachment at Dum-Dum. In

starvation. He had landed in the nick of time. Quite an action filled day!

The ground crew ran over and Corporal Bhasin asked Cooke to jump out of the cockpit, as there was no ladder with them. Cooke jumped and the burly Bhasin caught him like a baby. Cooke slumped, his overalls soaked in sweat. The airmen were perturbed to find that Cooke had no drop tanks and that his gun ports were blackened. The stern Flight Sergeant was even more concerned because Cooke had damage to his left wingtip and there were branches and leaves stuck there. He said, "Sir, I'll have to tell the CO that you have been flying low!"

### The De-Brief

Soon thereafter, the Commanding Officer, Wing Commander DA La Fontaine tried to get some details of the engagement from Cooke; however, the adrenalin of combat had temporarily wiped out Cooke's recollection of any details of the fight. Later in the evening, after the squadron pilots had seen the gun film, a startled La Fontaine was moved to say: "It was frightening, bits and pieces of the Sabre were flying off and the trees were scraping the wing tips." In conversation with Cooke, La Fontaine remarked, "Alfred, you fired at four different Sabres!" "I don't know sir!" was Cooke's honest reply, "I just can't remember!"

Cooke returned to Kalaikunda later that night, spent and exhausted. He would be able to reconstruct the battle with amazing detail once he had recovered from the intense adrenalin rush. The dogfight had felt like a blur – not just of emotions but of visual impressions as well. Cooke went into a turn, there was a Sabre in front of him; he fired and broke away "to avoid the trees", another Sabre came up in front of him, and, "I fired again". More trees; break away, fire at the Sabre again and so on. It had been fought at frighteningly low-level and often at dangerously close range. It had seen one pilot, Cooke, take on four

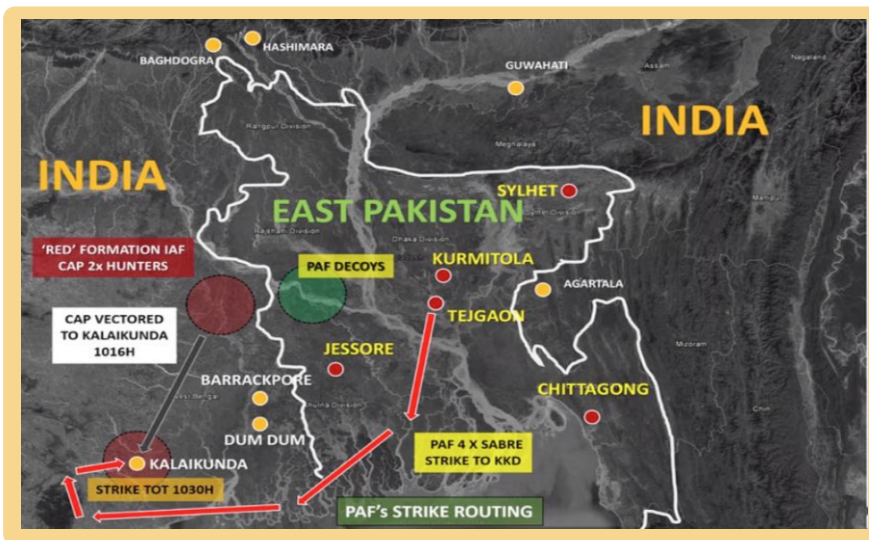


different Sabres and fight them in contrasting styles; he fired at four different Sabres and hit three of them. His mastery of the Hunter and his knowledge of how to best exploit its strengths against a formidable adversary like the Sabre had seen him emerge triumphant.

There are conflicting reports about the actual number of Sabres shot down. Dicky Law, the OC Flying, who watched the entire air combat, reported seeing two Sabres go down: one in the immediate vicinity of the airfield and another that flew some distance away from the town.

Mamgain's gun camera evidence was inconclusive but, keeping in mind Dicky Law's report of two Sabres being downed, was given the credit for a Sabre kill. The PAF only admitted the loss of one Sabre – that of Afzal Khan's. Years later, the PAF was to admit the loss of another Sabre, that returned too badly damaged to be recovered, apparently written off after returning from this raid due to 'lack of spares'. Flight Lieutenant Tariq Habib Khan, who suffered a drop tank hang up just before the combat, was flying this Sabre: the one recorded in Cooke's film. If the report is to be believed, Cooke had two kills that day.

Fortunately for the PAF pilots, and unfortunately for Cooke, the Hunter he flew that day (BA 250) was loaded with ball ammo rather than High Explosive ammo. Tariq Habib Khan's Sabre would have met a more spectacular end than just being 'written off due to lack of spares' had that been the case. The ball ammo probably saved the third Sabre from going down, since it was the recipient of only a short burst or two. In the annals of air combat, Cooke's battle ranks as a classic. Later, in its official history, the PAF would claim that nine Hunters took on the attacking Sabres. The PAF versions are a backhanded compliment to the Indian pilots, as Cooke



Map of area depicting the Air combat over Kalaikunda on 07 September 1965 (credit theprint.in)

would comment years later, on finding this particular story: "I thought, wow, what a compliment, thanks very much – did it feel like there were nine Hunters in the sky?"

**Post Script:** Flight Lieutenant Alfred Cooke and Flying Officer S C Mamgain were both awarded the Vir Chakra for their courageous action over

Kalaikunda on that day. Cooke left the IAF in 1967 and settled down in Australia.

*(The original article by the author was hosted on Bharat-Rakshak.com. This abridged version has been reproduced with their consent.)*



Samir Chopra is a philosophical counsellor and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York. His academic interests include pragmatism, existentialism, Buddhism, critical theory, Nietzsche, the philosophical and legal foundations of Artificial Intelligence, philosophy of law, and the politics and ethics of technology.



**Samir Chopra**

# THE 'EIGHT PURSOOTS'

## IN INDIA-PAKISTAN WAR-1965

Today, the Indian Air Force (IAF) doctrine pegs Battlefield Air Strikes (BAS) as part of the Land-Air Operations under the overall umbrella of Counter Surface Force Operations (CSFO). But, in the 60s, these were part of the air support operations with BAS being termed as Close Air Support (CAS)

operations. Steeped as the Army was in its thinking that military operations were principally an Army affair and that other services could only operate on the fringe, at best in a support role, the Army deliberately gave joint planning a go-by during the months between the Rann of Kutch skirmishes in April and the commencement of the Indo-Pak War in August-September 1965.

In a critical assessment carried out after the war, Air Chief Marshal PC Lal, who was then Vice Chief of Air Staff, lamented on how the Army carried '*a big-brother attitude towards the Air Force which led to it being treated with a certain amount of indulgence, but prevented it being accepted as a vital and equal partner in war. Matters were further complicated by the belief that if the IAF took part in the fighting, then the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) would do likewise, thus increasing the likelihood of a general war instead of a localised conflict in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K).*'



Ravi River siphon was attacked and the Headworks of Ichhogil Canal (circled in red) were destroyed



The IAF was thus not used when Pakistan launched **Operation Gibraltar** in early August to liberate the Kashmir Valley. However, when Pakistan launched **Operation Grand Slam** on 1 September 1965, and Akhnur was threatened, the IAF was called upon to halt the enemy advance. While the response was immediate, it came more as an ad-hoc reaction than as a result of a well-conceived joint plan.

Even though bases in Punjab had been alerted on the instruction of then Air Chief, Air Marshal Arjan Singh, it was more in the form of a muted alert by the time it trickled down to the field, rather than an urgent call to prepare for an all-out air war. That it was, by and large, business as usual was evident from the fact that on 27 August, Flying Officer Philip Rajkumar from No. 1 Squadron (Tigers) and I, then a Flight Lieutenant serving in No. 8 Squadron (**Eight Pursoots**), both squadrons based at No. 8 Wing, Adampur, were packed off for a two-aircraft ferry from 5 BRD (Sulur), where the IAF Mystères were stored. The ferry itself turned out to be quite an unforgettable experience with as many as three 'Packet' support aircraft falling by the side, one by one, due to unserviceabilities. However, learning that the IAF had gone into action on 1 September, while we were still stuck at Nagpur during homeward transit, prompted a snake climb procedure through monsoon clouds to beat the stormy weather and make it to Kanpur on 2 September. Next day, we were safely back at base by mid-morning, and by evening of the same day, action had begun for the **Eight Pursoots** and me, with the launch of an overhead armed combat air patrol (CAP).

Mystère IV A was, incidentally, an underpowered aircraft, a problem that

was most manifest on take-off roll, when a loaded aircraft took almost the entire length of a 9000-foot runway to get airborne. However, once airborne and at tactical speeds, the aircraft would handle quite well. Nonetheless, Mystère was considered to be more of a ground attack aircraft compared with the more powerful Hunter which was presumed to be more versatile. Notwithstanding that, Mystères were used in practically all the roles during the 1965 operations. Out of the 12 operational missions flown during the war, my log book, apart from the classic seven CSF missions, also reads one counter air mission and as many as five Air Defence (AD) missions in the form of armed patrols.

To relieve the pressure in the Chhamb - Jaurian sector, and to divert Pakistani forces from the vulnerable Jammu-Srinagar highway, it was decided to enlarge the area of conflict by opening up new fronts across the International Border (IB). However, once again, there was no real joint planning done for the planned offensives into Pakistani

territory. On the Army side, according to Air Chief Marshal Lal: *'The notion persisted that it would fight on its own, with the Air Force providing an occasional bonus.'* And the IAF thought of fighting mainly an air war against the PAF and some strategic targets, while giving relatively lower priority to support the Army. Both services drew up separate plans with no joint consultations worth the name. But, this was to change soon.

On entering Pakistan, the Army found that it could not fight entirely on its own, as the PAF was constantly harassing it. It needed AD and tactical support, but no detailed arrangement had been made for either. The Ground Liaison Officer (GLO) section at No. 8 Wing was very rudimentary, and the same must have been the case with other bases too. The intelligence updates were invariably sketchy and unreliable. There was extreme shortage of Forward Air Controllers (FAC) in the field, which meant most BAS sorties were flown without real-time guidance from the FACs and the targets engaged



IAF pilots at Adampur Airbase during 1965 War





1965 PAF wartime map of Sargodha Airfield area, Chhota Sargodha and Bhagatnawala airfields are also marked to the left and right of Sargodha Main

beyond the 'bomb lines' given during the pre-sortie briefings by the GLOs. That cases of fratricide reported during the war were relatively few was mostly attributable to luck than anything else. The Indian ground offensive was launched on 6 September and even before the day was out, an SOS for a BAS mission was received at No. 8 Wing. The first mission was flown by **Eight Pursoots** in the evening hours against the Pakistani armour in Dera Baba Nanak (DBN) area. This being the first such mission remains etched in my memory.

#### **Mission in DBN Area: 6 September, Near Dusk Time**

It was a four-aircraft mission, which, due to non-availability of the Commanding Officer, was being led by the senior flight commander Squadron Leader MS 'Mickey' Jatar, as Black 1. I was his Wingman as Black 2. Squadron Leader PC Chopra was Deputy Leader and Black 3, while Flight Lieutenant Vinod Patney was his Wingman as Black 4.

After a hurried briefing at Base Ops,

Chopey and Pat became Black 1 and 2, while I fanned out as Black 3, without a wingman.

The rest of the outbound leg was uneventful (or was it?) till we reached the IP (Initial Point) in dead silence and the throttles were advanced to accelerate to 420 knots for the final run in to the target. All aircraft were armed with two integral guns and with two rocket pods with each pod carrying 19x68 mm Sneb rockets. A feature of these pods was that they fired all rockets in a single salvo, thus unleashing thirty-eight rockets with their Hollow Charge warheads in one go against the intended target - a massive punch indeed, which no armour of the time could withstand. Another peculiarity of the Sneb pod was that it carried a nose shield in the form of a nosecone of reinforced plastic to protect the otherwise protruding rocket heads as also reduce drag during flight. These nosecones were hardened to withstand speeds in excess of 450 knots. But, inexplicably, on this particular day, and only in my case, they decided to behave differently.

As I registered the IAS going past 380 knots, I suddenly heard a big thud followed by a massive yaw to the left. As I looked at the port wing, I found the shreds of the torn nosecone with the flat exposed disc of the pod presenting a big airbrake-like surface to the airflow. I quickly used the rudder trimmer - almost for the entire length of its travel, to fly the aircraft straight. By now, I had started to lag behind a bit as the other two aircraft were accelerating unhindered. To compound matters, when I had nearly brought the aircraft under control, I heard another sickening thud with the aircraft uncontrollably yawing to the right this time. Not again, I thought, but my worst fears came true when I looked to the right and found the nosecone of the starboard pod too, shattered to bits.

as time was of great essence, we dashed back to the flight complex, collected our flying gear and proceeded to the aircraft, parked in open blast pens scattered around the loop taxi track. Start-up was on pre-briefed time, under complete Radio Telephony (R/T) silence, as was the taxi out to the Vital Actions point close to Runway 31. At the pre-determined time, the Lead moved out, followed by others, to line up on the runway in a close-knit finger-four formation.

Soon after we lifted off, Mickey, in the lead aircraft, noticed his fire warning light coming on. The R/T silence was broken - **'Fire warning. Aborting mission; Chopey, you have the Lead'**, he commanded. With that,

Undo the rudder trim, the brain ordered, which I did quickly to bring the aircraft under control. There was no other damage to the aircraft and it was flying straight, except that even at full throttle, I was unable to accelerate past 390 knots. R/T silence was mandatory except under the gravest of circumstances, so I remained silent while straining my eyes to keep the other two in sight with increasing distance between us.

Fortunately, by now we were already in the target area and I saw the lead element pulling up for attack as they made contact with their respective targets. By the time their rockets exploded, I was also pulling up, picking up the enemy armour on the ground. Luckily, when I pressed the firing button, there were no more lurking surprises and the R/Ps homed on flawlessly to their target. Another peculiarity of the Snob Operating pod was that after the last rocket left its tube, the entire pod would also get jettisoned automatically. I felt this, when suddenly relieved of the undesirable airbrakes, the aircraft literally leapt forward under the full power that it had been operating on, all along since the pod mishap.

Catching up with the lead element was no longer a problem now, and the return leg was indeed uneventful, with a near-dusk recovery at Adampur. Mission successful. The Authorisation Book read 'DCO' - Duty Carried Out.

### Counter Air Strike Sargodha Complex

In retaliation to the 6 September daylight attacks by the PAF against IAF airfields in Punjab, with the one against Pathankot being the most successful, on 7 September, IAF carried out early morning attacks against PAF's Sargodha complex. Sargodha complex comprised three airfields. Sargodha Main was located near Sargodha town, and the two satellite airfields were Bhagtanwala to the East and Chhota Sargodha to the West, each located about 20

km from the main airfield. In all, the IAF launched about 33 missions, out of which No. 1 and No. 8 squadrons carried out 12 (3x4-aircraft formations against Sargodha Main) and 8 (2x4-aircraft formations against Bhagtanwala), respectively. The Tigers led by Squadron Leader Handa failed to reach the target (Sargodha Main) in the first attempt but the next attempt, later in the day, turned out to be more successful.

I was once again part of the four-aircraft Black formation with Mickey in the overall lead of the eight-aircraft strike against Bhagtanwala airfield. Pre-dawn take-offs had caused a certain amount of confusion amongst the Tigers, with Squadron Leader AB Devayya having taken off in between the last section, even though he was a ground standby. *(He reportedly flew alone to Sargodha and was engaged by a PAF F-104, but in the melee, they shot each other down. Twenty-three years later, Devayya was awarded a posthumous MVC when PAF admitted the incident).* But our take-offs which

followed the Tigers went off smoothly, as did the grouping thereafter. The only glitch was the excited reporting on R/T by the second formation - which was trailing us in visual contact - of bogeys with alarmingly increasing numbers, which actually were puffs of bursting ack-ack shells (taking the shape of Sabre aircraft, thanks to some creative imagination on somebody's part) let loose by our own AD gunners, as we neared the radar unit near Amritsar on our way out.

There was a stern 'Shut up' call from Mickey on R/T which stopped further R/T. We were flying at about 300 feet AGL. A few minutes later, I actually spotted a Sabre at a height of around 5000 feet, crossing us from left to right. But as he did not spot the strike formation in the early morning haze, on the leader's instructions, the formation carried on for its primary target. The rest of the outbound leg was uneventful. However, disappointment awaited us as we went into attack over



Pakistan's-F-86F-Sabre



*Mysteres being armed with T-10 air to ground rocket projectiles*

Bhagtanwala, as what appeared to be real aircraft largely turned out to be decoys on closer scrutiny.

A flawless mission was thus wasted because of poor intelligence of the actual deployment of PAF's aircraft. One wonders what would have happened if we had also gone to Main Sargodha which would have meant a concentrated twenty-aircraft strike, and the combined haul of enemy aircraft destroyed on ground would have been a befitting reply to the PAF's attack on Pathankot a day earlier. I also rued the wasted chance of not being detached to take on the Sabre I had spotted earlier on during the sortie.

### **Battlefield Air Strikes (BAS)**

After the 7 September strikes against enemy airfields, daylight counter air missions were generally discontinued and the emphasis shifted towards providing support to the Army in its offensive operations across the IB. **Eight Pursuits** followed suit. My log book recorded BAS missions against enemy targets in areas ranging from Chhamb, Kasur, Sialkot and

Burki near Lahore with the Indian Army's push towards the historical city. These missions were generally flown against the enemy's gun positions and armour. However, due to great shortage of ground FACs, these missions tended to turn into search and strike sorties beyond the GLOs' briefed '**Bomb Lines**'. However, Black 1 & 2 (Mickey and I) also flew a memorable interdiction sortie which is worth recounting here.

During its advance towards Lahore, the Army apprehended that Pakistan might try to flood Ichhogil Canal (Pakistan's first major defence obstacle) to prevent Indian Army formations from crossing it. To obviate this possibility, it was decided to destroy the

'barrage' over River Ravi, which presumably controlled the water flow in the Southern portion of the canal. Initially, these sorties were undertaken by No.1 Squadron pilots. However, 2 two-aircraft missions launched one after another failed to locate the said 'barrage' over the river. The task then fell into the lap of No. 8 Squadron, with an undercurrent of suspicion about the navigation abilities of the 'boys' from the Tiger Squadron.

Mickey decided to fly the mission himself with me as his wingman to solve the mystery of the missing barrage. After meticulous navigation planning, we took off on a near perfect day for a mid-morning strike against the vital target. We reached our intended target without any problem. The Ravi lay below us in all its splendour, but there was no sign of a barrage within miles of the location given to us during the Intelligence Briefing. A barrage, however, is a huge target, not an artillery gun or a tank that can be camouflaged under a net or in sarkanda grass. Baffled by its absence, but equally determined to solve the mystery, Mickey decided to follow the river till the offending target was located. A sharp turn Eastwards and we were heading towards our side of the border. On reaching the IB, we did a high-g manoeuvre and started to fly low over the riverbed, going Westwards, with our eyes peeled for any object that even remotely resembled a barrage. Close to five minutes of flying brought us to the outskirts of Lahore city with its famous Ravi bridges visible as large as life. But the elusive barrage was nowhere on the horizon.

This couldn't be happening to us, was the thought going through our collective minds. We turned back again and this time decided to follow the Ichhogil canal to resolve the mystery. In a short while, we



spotted the canal embracing both Northern and Southern banks of the river, but there was not even a line drawn across the width of the river, leave alone a chunky barrage.

And then, suddenly, it hit us. Instead of a barrage, there was obviously an underground siphon running below the riverbed, with the water flow being regulated by the Head Works located at both ends. The mystery finally solved, laden as we were with 2x1000 lb. bombs each, we dropped them on the mouth of the canal head works on the Northern end, in shallow glide attacks. There were big splashes of water as the bombs found their mark.

On return to the base we debriefed the GLO, to the amusement of the Station Commander and Officer i/c Flying, both eagerly waiting to hear the results of the mission. We had no system of BDA (Battle Damage Assessment) at that time, but this much was certain that the Ichhogil canal was not found to be flooded during the ground offensive in the Army's advance towards Lahore. But the incident exposed the fragility of our intelligence gathering and analysis systems.

To sum up, lack of joint planning in the initial stages and a very weak set-up by the Army for air support meant that available Air Force resources were not utilised to the fullest. Lack of intelligence and lack of awareness of the ground situation among the GLOs compounded the problem. Air crew literally waited in the squadrons, hoping for more missions to come by which either didn't, or came only in trickles. As Air Chief PC Lal summed up, *'I must confess that the air war became a somewhat hit-and-miss affair that depended heavily on finding targets of opportunity for its success. The aircrew performed magnificently, doing all that was expected of them and more; had there been a coherent joint war plan, we would have derived*

*much fuller benefit from their courage and sacrifice.'*

### Random Thoughts

PAF's successful attacks against Pathankot in Punjab and Kalaikunda, where the rudimentary AD provided by the Army AD guns had proved to be totally inadequate, necessitated a great number of CAP missions being flown during daylight hours over our bases, even though both sides had largely discontinued daylight fighter attacks against each other's airfields. On the other hand, lack of proper protection to the parked aircraft at our bases, coupled with effective night bombing attacks by PAF Canberras led to instances of safe night parking at the comparatively rearward bases such as Ambala and Palam. I recall twice going for night parking, once to Palam and the second time to Ambala.

At Adampur, PAF Canberras were particularly lucky in getting a brand new MiG-21, parked on Operational

Readiness Platform, and on another occasion, two Mystères near the R&SS hangar. In the latter case, the PAF Canberra crews were singularly lucky in hitting the Reserve BPI which went up in flames high enough to light up the entire airfield. With the entire airfield almost bathed in floodlight, the PAF pilot came in with his guns blazing against Mystères. Incidentally, the Mystères were loaded with rockets which started to take off in different directions in the fiery mess. One of the rockets found its way into my room through the open window - the room that I shared with Flight Lieutenant A.K. Brahmwar (Brahms). By this time, we were both in one of the freshly dug trenches, just outside the bachelors' quarters. To our enormous relief, the R/P didn't explode. Incidentally, our own Canberras too caused havoc against the enemy, writing off a large number of aircrew in the Officers' Mess, during a night bombing raid against the Peshawar airfield of the PAF.



No 8 Squadron painted lightning runes along with the Squadron logo (photo credit Mobit Jayal)



*Mystere IV A aircraft taking off on an operational mission*

Another scare was the report that Pakistan had airdropped a large number of commandos in close vicinity of Pathankot, Adampur and Halwara airfields. Adampur came up with an ingenious plan to combat this menace by launching sorties to strafe the culprits in their suspected hideouts in the tall *sarkanda* grass, not only outside the perimeter fencing but also against some inaccessible spots within the airfield. However, nothing much came out of these sorties, with most of the intruders having been apprehended by the people from surrounding villages. Almost twenty days into air operations and not certain when the war would end, it was decided that a week's rest be given to each squadron in rotation, by sending them for R&R outside the war zone. I don't recall why it happened but somehow, **Eight Pursuits** was the first one to merit the so-called break. There were massive protests, especially from the youngsters, but orders were orders, and the squadron aircraft flew out to Allahabad on 18 September. But the R&R location turned out to be a vacated prison camp, with hardly any facilities even for day-to-

day living. Luckily, no other squadron had to go through the ordeal as the ceasefire came into being on 22-23 September.

War was over by the time we came back to home base on 28 September.

**Postscript.** It may be of interest to note that all four members of the 'Black' formation (names mentioned in the text) were awarded Vir Chakras (VrC) for bravery during the 1965 operations.

The author also got a Bar to Vir Chakra during the 1971 Indo-Pak War.



*Air Marshal V.K. 'Jimmy' Bhatia, PVSM, AVSM, VrC & Bar (retd) was commissioned into the fighter stream of the IAF on 26 May 1962. In 1965 Indo-Pakistan War, he flew 18 operational missions on Mystere IVA aircraft. On 8 September 1965, he took a heavy toll of enemy armour and artillery unmindful of heavy anti-aircraft fire. His attack on Ichhogil Canal Headworks went a long way in foiling Pakistan plans to flood the canal to thwart advance of the Indian Army. During Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, he flew 16 operational missions on Sukhoi Su-7 aircraft, most of them deep inside enemy territory. For his bravery and courage during these missions, he was conferred with Bar to Vir Chakra joining the rare breed of Indian air warriors in this category. The Air Officer is a graduate of Defence Services Staff College, Wellington and Royal College of Defence Studies, UK. He has commanded a fighter squadron and two operational air bases. The Air Officer has the rare distinction of commanding three operational commands viz., Central, South-Western and Western. He maintained his operational flying status right through his career. Air Marshal VK Bhatia superannuated in 2002 after more than 40 years of distinguished service.*



**Air Marshal  
VK 'Jimmy' Bhatia**



No 16 Squadron logo



Map showing radar coverage of PAF's Badin FPS-6 radar (centre), overall region is in lower image, with blow up area indicated

# STRIKE ON THE BADIN RADAR

By No 16 (Cobra) Squadron

The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) had established a Sector Operations Centre at Badin in Sindh. Equipped with the highly effective FPS-6 radar, with an impressive detection range of 350 km, Badin played a pivotal role in tracking aerial movements towards critical airbases in Gujarat and Rajasthan, thereby controlling fighter operations with precision and effectiveness. The radar was proving to be a veritable pain in the neck for the IAF and had to be silenced. And the task fell to 16 Squadron Indian Air Force (IAF), operating the Canberra aircraft.

This story of Number 16 Squadron IAF in the 1965 Indo-Pak war unfolds on 7th September 1965 when two Canberra bombers of the squadron hit Chittagong Airfield in East Pakistan under a very low overcast and in very inclement monsoon weather. The war with Pakistan had escalated. It had seemingly “marked the beginning of a new phase of war” when Pakistan’s President Ayub Khan formally declared war on India.

Comprising of both Bomber and Interdictor variants of the Canberra aircraft, No. 16 Squadron was based in Kalaikunda near Kharagpur in West Bengal. As I joined the Squadron only on 30 June 1966, in Gorakhpur, it was possible to perceive, only from a distance about the nature of its successes, experiences and its travails since 7 September 1965. As a Flying Officer, junior-most amongst the aircrew, any determination more than mere nuances was neither feasible nor possible in the company of regimented veterans of Canberra operations during UN operations in Congo, who spoke less but did much more, stoically. These were men of valour and light hearted exteriors. But even in that silence, the fading memories of the Badin Raid occasionally surfaced from my seniors in the portals of the Officers’ Mess bar. The Badin Raid remained with me since then.





*Left. Illustration of Canberras of 16 Squadron attacking the PAF Radar complex at Badin 21 September 1965 (credit LAF) Right. Wing Commander Peter Maynard Wilson*

The experiences of the squadron on 7th September were phenomenally eventful. On return from Chittagong, as the crews of the mission were being debriefed, PAF F-86s struck Kalaikunda Base and in copy book attacks, destroyed both these Canberra aircraft and several Vampire aircraft parked on the tarmac. They were to return again and carry out attacks, but this time, they were engaged by IAF Hunters.

Earlier, sometime in the wee hours of 7th morning, 11 aircraft of the squadron had taken off to move to Gorakhpur, as ordered by higher HQ. The aircraft encountered severe weather enroute but managed to land at Gorakhpur, with varying extent of damage. Gorakhpur was just a concrete strip and nothing else. This nomadic existence continued till the war lasted, during which they moved from airfield to airfield and proceeded to conduct bombing missions to Sargodha, Chak Jhumra among crucial targets.

Western Air Command was very carefully monitoring the rising level of intimidating air activity in the hostile air space in the Sindh region of Pakistan. They were aware that the PAF had received along with fighter aircraft, sophisticated radars from the

USA. One of these radars encased in two tower mounted domes was located at Badin, near Karachi. This radar, apart from assisting the PAF fighters in intercepting hostile intruders was also capable of strategic interference in the adjoining Indian air space. It was a clear danger and with a view to neutralise this source of threat, a photo reconnaissance Canberra of No 106 Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron had photographed this target on 18 September 1965. Squadron Leader JM Nath and Flight Lieutenant GK Garud were the crews on this mission.

The decision to disable the Badin radar was truly hastened with the most provocative action by a PAF Sabre jet on

19 September 1965 when it shot down an Indian-registered civilian twin-engine light Beechcraft Aircraft well within Indian Air Space. The shooting down killed the Chief Minister of Gujarat, his wife, three members of his staff, a journalist and two crew. Clearly, the directions had come from the radar controller at Badin. Notably, Captain Engineer, the pilot of the Beechcraft was an erstwhile pilot of the IAF and a brother of the former IAF Chief, Air Marshal Aspy Merwan Engineer, DFC (Chief of Air Staff from December 1, 1960 to July 31, 1964).

No time was lost in ordering the mission to hit the Badin radar and the task was assigned to the Commanding Officer of 16 Squadron, Wing Commander Peter Wilson (Pete). Material published since then indicates some discussion at the highest level about the modalities of this mission, but the plans drawn by Pete Wilson were accepted in toto. He definitely did not want a fighter escort because that would have been a dead giveaway. He had wanted a surprise raid, firstly by four Canberra Bombers on the target between 7.45 a.m. and 8 a.m. to suppress all opposition as staff was seemingly changing at the radar station. A fifth Canberra interdictor armed with rockets and guns was to act as a decoy and make an overt approach at about 20000 feet and divert attention, and thereafter return. He was also to act as a standby to the main Canberra Interdictor, the sixth aircraft, to be flown by Pete Wilson with Squadron Leader O Shankaran as the navigator. This interdictor was to be armed with rockets and guns, approach the target from the South-West and come in last to strike at the Eastern dome, believed to house the azimuth radar. They were separated by about 120 yards and aligned approximately at about 070/250 degrees orientation.

The mission team had arrived at Agra, the launching base on the evening of September 20, 1965. On September 21, Squadron Leader

HB Singh (Echbee) with Flight Lieutenant GN Bhaskar (Bosco) was the first bomber crew and their aircraft was armed with two 4000 lb bombs with incendiary fuses set at 3000 feet. The second bomber crew was Squadron Leader PPS Madan (Cookie) with Flight Lieutenant S Karkare and their aircraft was also armed like the first one. The third was Squadron Leader RS Rajput (Kaddu) with Flight Lieutenant BV Pathak (Choohi) with six 1000 lb. bombs and the fourth was Flight Lieutenant RG Khot with Flight Lieutenant GS Negi with a bomber armed like the third. They were to take off in this order with a two to three minutes planned separation and proceed at about 20000 feet initially, then descend to about 500 feet or lower, accelerating to 360 knots (650 kmph) at the "Initial Point", pull up to the bombing height of 10000 feet above ground level (AGL) and release bombs. The fifth aircraft was flown by Squadron Leader SP Khanna (Tak) with Flying Officer KM Joy (Kutty) which was to act as the decoy as described. There was one more aircraft kept on ground, armed like the bombers, as stand by to be flown by Flight Lieutenant Ashok Bakshi (Joe) and Flying Officer BS Sidhu.

The anatomy of the raid actually however differed in its occurrence. Whilst, both Echbee/Bosco and Cookie/Karkare groups dropped their four 4000 lb. bombs as per plan, the third bomber flown by Kaddu/Choohee was to release his bombs later. Kaddu revealed to me that unwittingly, Choohee had forgotten to ask him to increase his speed and as a result he saw Khot/Negi bomber overtaking him and further on starting his bombing run he could not see the targets. He then dived to absolute low levels and saw the targets in the distance. He first overflew the targets at high speed at low level and in a climbing right hand turn arrived over the targets in an Easterly direction and then dropped the

bombs from 7500 feet AGL as the aircraft passed between the two domes. It was at that time he noticed the Pete/Shankaran Canberra turning right. Khot/Negi had released their bombs as planned in a copy book bombing run.

About the crucial rocket attack, as per Shankaran's description to me, when they were in the middle of their planned turn from the IP towards their targets, Pete levelled out early noticing smoke in the distance and thus arrived at 30 feet AGL with the targets on the right and was thus able to successfully hit one dome with rockets.

An aftermath of a strike mission always leaves the mission actors in doubts whilst the true damage assessment takes time to emerge. Therefore, Badin raid was no different and Squadron was gearing up to hit Badin Radar again but with the ceasefire declaration on the September 23, 1965, they put their arms down.

However, revelations of the success kept coming as times passed. An ex-officer of PAF ran into Joe Bakshi in a Singapore restaurant years later and admitted to being in Badin on that day and being totally in shock with the blast

and incendiary effect of 4000 lb. bombs and that life had come to a stop. A PAF report goes on to report the fatality of one of their men as a sequel to the rocket attack. And we learnt later that not only the radar had to be replaced and relocated but the domes were also gone.

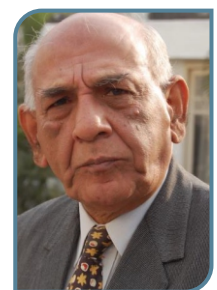
Wing Commander Peter Maynard Wilson, the Mission Leader and the Commanding Officer was awarded the Vir Chakra for the mission.

**Post Script:** This combination of high and low altitude attack by the bomb- and rocket-carrying aircraft got through the defences, and Badin Signal & Radar Unit bore the brunt of the attack. This raid was a tactical surprise for the Pakistanis. It has been confirmed that the Badin unit went out of commission afterwards, mainly because their radar tower too had been knocked down.

*(This article of the author was first published in SALUTE magazine and has been reproduced with his kind consent).*



*Air Commodore Prashant Dikshit, VM is a distinguished war veteran who was awarded Vayu Sena Medal (Gallantry) during the 1971 war. An alumnus of the National Defence College, New Delhi with an MA in Defence Science from Allahabad University, he was the editor of SALUTE for eight years. He commanded Air Force Station Begumpet, Secunderabad as a Group Captain and Air Force Station, New Delhi as an Air Commodore. He writes on strategic issues, and is a life member of the United Services Institution, New Delhi. He is also a member of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis in New Delhi.*



**Air Commodore  
Prashant Dikshit**



# AIR COMBAT IN JET ERA

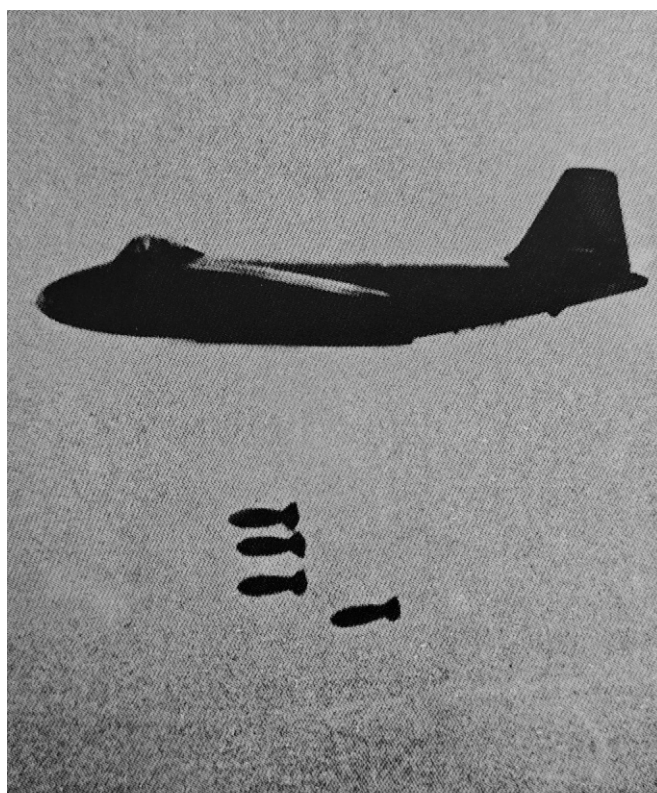
## THE 1965 INDO-PAK WAR

Six decades have flown past since India's war with Pakistan in 1965. In the 'aid-era' between 1954 and 1965, the US provided Pakistan extensive military assistance worth \$ 619 million which enabled Pakistan to modernise and expand its Air Force and Navy. The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) received six squadrons of modern jet aircraft including F-104, B-57, F-86 and C-130; the Navy also received twelve ships, and the ports of Karachi and Chittagong were also modernised.<sup>1</sup> The aid to Pakistan was able to transform its military into a modern well-equipped force on the lines of the US, as vast numbers of its personnel were also given training by the US military. The adroit politico-diplomatic handling by Pakistan bridged its military deficiencies, and successfully built a credible conventional military deterrent capability against India.

The principal lesson India learnt from the 1962 war was that planning and procurement of equipment had to be synchronised with recruitment and training.<sup>2</sup> India also stepped up its defence expenditure to Rs 5000 crores in its 1964 Five-Year Defence Plan. An important aspect of the Plan was the special attention given towards strengthening of the Indian Air Force (IAF). It included build up and maintenance of a 45

<sup>1</sup> Group Captain Khalid Iqbal, Pakistan AF, *The United States-Pakistan Security Relationship*, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a177769.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> SS Khera, *India's Defence Problem*, Orient Longmans Ltd., New Delhi, 1968, p.55-57



(Top) The backbone of IAF's night strike - the Canberra on a bombing run.  
(Bottom) Gnat pilots scrambling for a mission.



squadron Air Force, consisting of fighters, fighter-bombers, bombers, reconnaissance aircraft, transport aircraft and helicopters along with appropriate weapons. It also included surface to air guided weapon complexes, high powered static radars, runways and support infrastructure for aircraft operations, tropo-communication systems and airborne electronic devices.<sup>3</sup> The lesson of the necessity of a strong Air Force was clear to the Government after the 1962 debacle, but the plan had yet to kick in and show results before the war commenced in 1965.

The US refused the sale of F 104 Starfighters to India while supplying the same to Pakistan. The MiG 21 deal was finalised with the Soviet Union and twelve aircraft had just been received as also some transport and helicopter aircraft, but nowhere near the extent of US support to Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> Simply put, a post-independence India, struggling geo-politically with its non-alignment posture, became a victim of the prevalent Cold War politics, and was unable to strengthen its military or the Air Force at the pace warranted post the 1962 debacle.

### Rann of Kutch – Operation Desert Hawk

The first phase was in the Rann of Kutch where by April 1965 a few skirmishes had started off, which was soon followed by an Indian post being overrun by Pakistani armour. The evidence was gathered by

young Flying Officer U Barbara, who flew his *Photo Reconnaissance Vampire* aircraft of 101 Squadron at 50 feet over the tanks and brought back photographs. This incursion also went on to prove that US made equipment was being used contrary to the legal bindings of the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement between USA and Pakistan, and a protest by India led to the subsequent US appointed inquiry team to conclude that Indians had mistaken Jeeps for tanks! Curiously the PAF Air Chief, Air Marshal Asghar Khan reached out to Air Marshal Arjan Singh, the IAF Air Chief, in an apparent effort to keep air power out of the ground clashes of the first phase.<sup>5</sup> Arjan Singh's biography records extract from his note to the Defence Minister (DM) – 'He (Asghar) suggested that the Fighter and Bomber aircraft of both Air Forces should not fly within ten miles of the border as claimed by both sides. I responded to this suggestion. I told him that our Helicopters and Transport aircraft will be used right up to the positions of our troops for supply and other purposes. We, therefore, felt that this restriction

would not apply to Helicopters and light Transport aircraft. All this may be an indication that Pakistan is not eager to escalate fighting in the Khanjarkot area.'<sup>6</sup> The skirmishes ended with the cease fire which came into effect from July 01, 1965, with restoration of a status quo as of January 01, 1965.

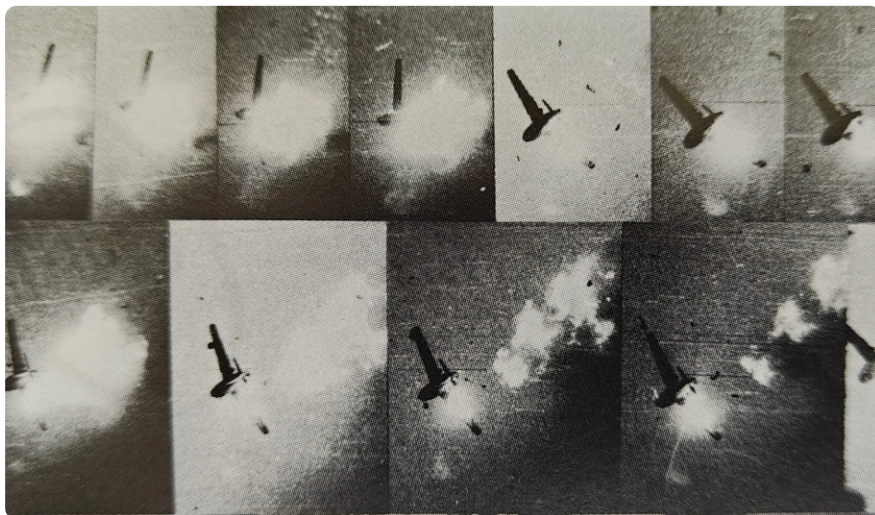
Air power it appears was again eschewed as an offensive option, to keep the 'ground situation' from escalating. Arjan Singh has recorded in his Diary. 'The PAF was more prepared in the West compared to the East, and it would be a tough fight. The IAF had an edge over the PAF, better reserves, more POL and weapons.' Arjan Singh confirmed to the Prime Minister without hesitation that the IAF would come out better and recommended that a full attack be resorted to with the advantage of surprise in order to inflict serious damage and remove the PAF menace. He also briefed that Chinese air attack was unlikely and even if the PLA did, the IAF should not be used against the Chinese in case the fighting was with Pakistan. On the PM's concern if the

<sup>3</sup> N 12, Khera, p.57-58

<sup>4</sup> Air Chief Marshal PC Lal, *My Years with the IAF*, Edited by Ela Lal, Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, p.123

<sup>5</sup> PVS Jagan Mohan and Samir Chopra, *The Indo Pakistan Air War of 1965*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2009, p.62

<sup>6</sup> *The Icon, Marshal of the Indian Air Force, An Authorised Biography by Air Commodore 6Jasjit Singh, AVSM, VrC VM (Retd)*, KW Publishers, 2011, p. 145



Gun camera film of a PAF Sabre being shot down by an IAF Hunter over Halwara



Flying Officer Dara Chinoy (standing in flying overalls in centre), who had bailed out from his 'on fire' Mystere fighter aircraft during the 1965 War, escaped to India (credit bharat-rakshak.com)

cities of Kolkata, Delhi and other towns would be bombed, Arjan explained that while PAF did not have the resources for large scale bombing, sporadic attempts could not be stopped. If it did bomb cities, then Kolkata would not get more than a dozen bombs and Delhi 3-4 dozen. Arjan Singh records that the PM was 'somewhat heartened that the bombing of the towns would not be intensive.'<sup>7</sup> It is instructive to note that the overwhelming concern of bombing of cities in case of offensive use of air power was still predominant in the minds of politicians, and even in 1965, this concern was to result in IAF's late entry and restraints on its offensive air power employment.

### Kashmir – Operation Gibraltar

The second thrust was **Operation Gibraltar**, using the tactic of launching *Mujahids* into the Kashmir valley to trigger a revolt, as it lends to plausible deniability when it came to the international audience.<sup>8</sup> **Operation Gibraltar** failed due

to the swift response of the Indian Army and the fact that the local population assisted in the capture of infiltrators who did not speak the local dialect.

The IAF Mi-4 helicopters flew 79 offensive sorties in armed helicopter role against the infiltrators, carried out hundreds of sorties across the state, air lifted 92000 kg of load and ammunition, and undertook 198 casualty evacuation sorties, all in support of the Indian Army. The PAF Chief, Air Marshal Nur Khan himself flew in a C 130 Hercules aircraft over Bandipura in Kashmir on 23rd August, which the PAF today proudly proclaims as the first operational sortie of **Operation Gibraltar**, on a night supply drop mission. Due to the existing UN restrictions, neither radars

nor fighter aircraft could be positioned by India in the Valley, making it impossible to detect and intercept enemy covert missions.

### The Main War – Operation Grand Slam

The main invasion as Pakistan's Operation Grand Slam occurred on September 01, 1965, when a Pakistani armour thrust attacked the vulnerable Chhamb at 0930 hours. General JN Chaudhuri, the Army Chief rushed to Delhi for a meeting with the DM and the Air Chief at 1645 hours asking for the use of air. Based on the gravity of the situation and on advice of the two Chiefs, the DM gave a go ahead at around 1650 hours. Within a mere 29 minutes the first aircraft was airborne, and the offensive air support that followed comprised of 26 strike sorties being undertaken before night set in. According to PVR Rao, the Defence Secretary who was present, the Air Chief had pointed out that in '*attacks launched without adequate preparation, losses must be accepted and that pilots may make mistakes between friend and foe*'.<sup>9</sup> The prescient Arjan who had anticipated losses considering the low light conditions, absence of any Forward Air Controller (FAC) to guide the strikes, the physical proximity of the two forces, nevertheless, launched the missions immediately in support of the beleaguered Army because it was imperative. The IAF

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.152-154

<sup>8</sup> BC Chakravorty, D Phil, Chief Editor SN Prasad, D Phil, *History of the 1965 war*, History Division, MOD, GOI New Delhi, 199, p.36-36

<sup>9</sup> N 18, Jasjit, p.181-184

lost four Vampire aircraft that evening to enemy Combat Air Patrol (CAP) missions by F 86 Sabres and F 104 Starfighters, as well as some fratricide due to the above-mentioned conditions. The losses stole the narrative from the fact that there were three 4-aircraft Vampire formations which were followed by four 4-aircraft Mystere formations in the attack, 'in all, 26 aircraft, actually delivering the attacks before night settled in,'<sup>10</sup> carrying out multiple attacks against the enemy. The persistent strikes paid off and delayed the Pakistani armour thrust from capturing Akhnur. The credit ironically came from the enemy!

According to Brigadier Amjad Ali Khan Chaudhry the 'armour and infantry were in the open and vulnerable to air attack',<sup>11</sup> while General Musa stated that there was no point in taking Akhnur despite having reached eight km short. He recognised that capture would not be possible because of extensive IAF operations in the sector.<sup>12</sup> The losses of the first day were made up two days later on September 03, as Flight Lieutenants Keelor and Pathania each shot down a Sidewinder missile armed Sabre in their tiny Gnats armed only with guns.

### The David and Goliath Myth

Its smaller size has been used effectively to its advantage by the PAF in its

history and accounts of some western writers, to build the image of a heroic 'David' fighting against a much larger IAF 'Goliath,' and emerging victorious. PAF's 1965 narrative is bolstered by somewhat over enthusiastic and unrealistic claims 'the IAF planes came in waves, and with a numerical edge of 5:1, the Indians took a well calculated risk.'<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt the IAF was larger in size but the 5:1 it was not. While there are minor differences depending upon the source, the reliably estimated figures are that Pakistan had nine fighter and two bomber squadrons of modern platforms. The IAF with 26 fighter and four bomber squadrons was certainly numerically larger, but, of these, six squadrons were of Vampires, and three of Ouragons (Toofanis) were old platforms nearing obsolescence. The balance of its mainstay squadrons had to be divided to cater for both the fronts and Kashmir. According to Tiwary, the IAF had 466 combat aircraft and the PAF 203. Of these, the IAF had 176 aircraft deployed in the East, and 290 fighters on

the West (including older platforms), against the 187 fighters of the PAF on the West.<sup>14</sup> Thus instead of the claimed IAF to PAF ratio of 5:1, the actual combat ratio was 1.55:1.

According to Hussain and Qureshi 'the IAF planes came in waves' while attempting to highlight its small size, actually indicates the persistence of IAF offensive missions and negates PAF claims of air superiority. Also, the phrase – 'the Indians took a calculated risk' actually highlights the courage of Indian pilots, who flew to the limits of tactical radius of action (ROA) and combat endurance. As per PAF history – 'By the end of the fourth day of the war, the IAF had lost heavily in aircrafts and pilots, and the PAF had achieved the impossible – air supremacy all over Pakistan.'<sup>15</sup> Factually, out of its total 59 losses, the IAF lost 35 aircraft on ground to air raids, an unacceptably large number due to the absence of blast protected pens and poor dispersal.<sup>16</sup> Attrition is always measured in terms of the proportion of the quantum of air effort and the

<sup>10</sup> Air Cmde Jasjit Singh, *Defence from the Skies*, KW Publishers, Second Edition, 2013, p.125

<sup>11</sup> N 18, Jasjit, p.186-190

<sup>12</sup> Gen Muhammad Musa (Retd), *My Version: India Pakistan War 1965*, ABC Publishing House New Delhi, 1983

<sup>13</sup> Syed Shabbir Hussain and Squadron leader M Tariq Qureshi, *History of Pakistan Air Force, 1947-1982*, PAF Press Masroor, Karachi, 1982

<sup>14</sup> Air Vice Marshal AK Tiwary, VSM, *Indian Air Force in Wars*, Lancers New Delhi, 2012, p.118

<sup>15</sup> N 25, Hussain and Qureshi

<sup>16</sup> BC Chakravorty, D Phil, Chief Editor SN Prasad, D Phil, *History of the 1965 war*, History Division, MOD, GOI New Delhi, 1992, p.170



Flight Lieutenant S V Ratnaparkhi in front of Mystere aircraft (credit bbarat-rakshak.com)





Four PAF North American F-86F Sabres returning to base during the 1965 War  
(photo commons.wikimedia.org)

losses. Pakistan lost 43 aircraft in the 2364 sorties flown, and therefore had an attrition rate of 1.82%. India on the other hand lost 59 aircraft in the 3937 sorties flown and therefore had an attrition rate of 1.50%. Jasjit Singh cites that PAF rate of loss was nearly three times in air-air engagements, losing 1.78 aircraft every 100 sorties, compared to .66 aircraft lost by the IAF. Therefore, despite the superior technologically advanced inventory, and the claimed superiority of PAF pilots in training and motivation, the IAF pilots demonstrably displayed better air combat performance.<sup>17</sup>

### The PAF Air Superiority Myth

The PAF's widely claimed air supremacy needs a closer look. One fourth of the PAF fighters were capable of carrying missiles, which clearly put the gun armed Indian fighters at a serious disadvantage. PAF was capable of night CAP by F 104s, but the fact did not deter bombing operations by IAF Canberras, by day or night. As per the unpublished

official history of 1965 war, of a total of 3937 sorties flown by the IAF, 1568 were fighter-bomber and bomber sorties towards offensive missions. 1352 CAP sorties were flown over IAF bases, and the balance 1017 missions are simply recorded as fighter sorties.<sup>18</sup>

These fighter sorties could not have all been CAP missions, and therefore if a conservative estimate of 400 fighter sorties (roughly 40 per cent) of the above total were flown towards ground attack, the total offensive effort goes up to 1968 sorties. These were all towards close support and interdiction in direct and indirect support of the Army, and their ground campaign. A majority of these ground attack missions involved multiple pass attacks, while all cases of counter air missions were at the

extremes of the IAF fighter radius of action. Thus, in both cases, it significantly increased the vulnerability of the IAF aircrew who faced the 1303 CAP sorties flown by the PAF, which amounts to 55 per cent of its total of 2368 sorties flown.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the nearly 2000 IAF offensive missions executed with evident combat persistence, and a total of just 15 air combat losses,<sup>20</sup> would not have been possible if the PAF had actually gained air supremacy as claimed. In Chhamb and Khem Karan, where the two major Pakistani armour thrusts were launched, they did not have any PAF air support. The IAF on the other hand played an active role in stopping the armour at Akhnur, as it had a favourable air situation in the region, evident from the larger number of IAF air operations undertaken in the area. While IAF flew a much higher number of offensive missions, generated much higher sortie rates, sustained lesser attrition rates and better air combat loss rates, it never claimed air superiority, unlike the PAF. This is endorsed by Tony Mason who wrote – *In the war between India and Pakistan air superiority was never contested.*<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, Defence from the Skies, KW Publishers, New Delhi, 2013, p.250-260*

<sup>18</sup> N 28, Chakravorty, p.269

<sup>19</sup> Sobia Nissar, PAF and Three Wars, <http://www.defencejournal.com/2001/september/wars.htm>, accessed on May 22, 2021

<sup>20</sup> PVS Jagan Mohan and Samir Chopra, *The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2009, Appendix B

<sup>21</sup> *Air Vice Marshal Tony Mason, Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal, Brassey's, London, 1994, p.64*

## A Strategy of Restraint

The broad strategy followed for the employment of the IAF by the Government was: it would be employed in support of the Army; IAF would not attack PAF airfields. In case of a PAF attack, IAF would retaliate to degrade their operational capabilities. Air operations were undertaken under these restrictive guidelines with Arjan pushing for their lift partially / or completely.<sup>22</sup> Yet again, air power was tied down, a restriction the IAF would pay for dearly on September 6, when PAF carried out air strikes over five air bases and two radar units. The IAF admitted to losing two MiGs, six Mysteres, one Packet, one Gnat and damage to three more fighters. Though these were grievous losses, it was lucky to have the capacity to absorb it and continue to step up its fight.

Given the flexibility and mobility of air power, one wonders as to why the IAF held back almost half its numbers against a possible Chinese attack? Also, when the PAF attacked Kalaikunda air base on the 7th with large IAF losses on ground, why were attacks on PAF air fields in the East not cleared? On the face of it, there was no logical reason for holding back since the IAF's offensive intent was made clear by the Air Chief to the DM. However, it was political restraint that placed an embargo on the IAF's offensive operations which were stopped on September 7, despite PAF strikes on three occasions. Verbal instructions from the DM were followed by formal orders by the Defence Secretary

that 'no offensive action was to be taken in East Pakistan', primarily to avoid giving the Chinese an excuse to get involved.<sup>23</sup> The concerns of the civil population to the possibility of facing bombing also had to be mitigated to the extent possible.

According to Jasjit, there were several reasons for the IAF's different strategy than air base attacks. First was the higher direction that direct attacks should only be undertaken in retaliation and the weight of the Air Force should be devoted to support the land battle. Second was due to the possibility of high attrition and unsustainable losses in striking air bases defended with anti-aircraft guns and combat air patrols. The third was that favourable air superiority over the battlefield was crucial; and therefore, the priority was to force the PAF on the defensive as far back from the battle zone as possible. Despite some with contrarian views, the fact was the air strategy succeeded. The IAF demonstrably committed half its air effort towards supporting the land battle, succeeded in pushing back the PAF to depth bases, proved more effective in operational employment, and with its larger inventory was able to prevail over the enemy having planned for a long duration war and conserving its assets.<sup>24</sup>

## Absence of Jointness

IAF's support to the Army was a more robust contribution, but it was definitely underutilised, primarily due to nascent joint structures. There appears to have been a structural issue in the Army's war-fighting strategy, given it did not include air power in its scheme of things. Despite the swift response to the call for air support on the evening of the first of September, on September 06, the Army's 15 Division was launched on the

offensive at daylight, along the major highway to Lahore without informing the IAF. The PAF attack on the Division is recorded by Major Praval – *'Pakistani aircraft appeared over GT Road at around 7 am and strafed Indian columns on the move. By 10 am there were two more strikes. The strafing was heavy; a large number of vehicles were damaged or destroyed and there were casualties among the troops. This was their first taste of aerial bombing and the result was large scale confusion. Most of the damage was due to disregard of simple precaution of dispersal.'*<sup>25</sup>

The significant aspect is that, contrary to the Army's common refrain of inadequate air effort, the IAF flew 1400 out of 3937 sorties for close support of ground forces. As per the History of the 1965 War published by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the IAF destroyed 123 tanks, 56 guns, 281 vehicles, 64 railway wagons 8 locomotives and 2 bulk petroleum installations, and damaged 20 tanks, 3 guns and 27 vehicles.<sup>26</sup> Ironically Air Marshal PC Lal who was the Vice Chief during the war records, *"We had Advance HQ of the Western Army Command, but further extension of this into the Corps and down to the level of Brigades, where FACs operated, was not established. The tentacles did not operate. The result was Army's demands for air support came directly to the Advance HQs, where Army and AF officers were unable to sort the important from the unimportant, or assign priorities for different demands."* The Army appears not to have invested adequately in the IAF to its advantage in its warfighting and operational plans given the absence of any joint training.

## The Final Analysis

The IAF had its own challenges pre-1965, as a significant part of its

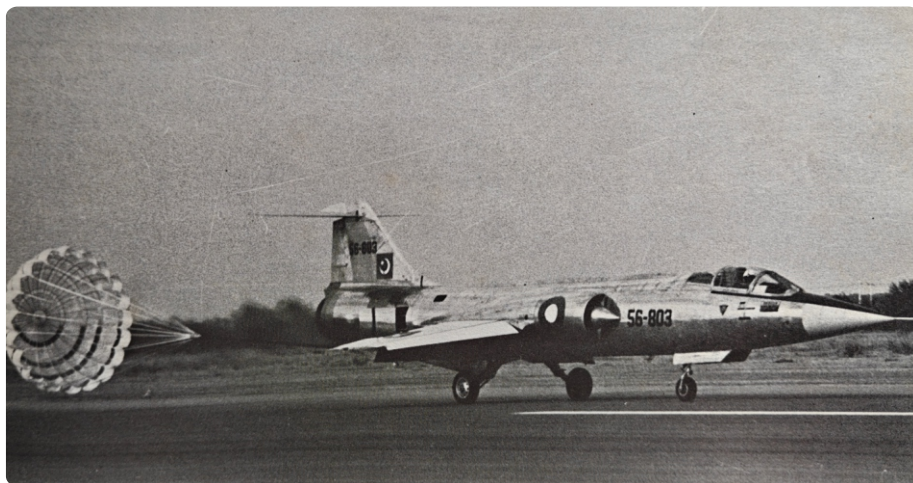
<sup>22</sup> N 18, Jasjit, p.170

<sup>23</sup> N 18, Jasjit, p.212

<sup>24</sup> N 18, Jasjit, pp. 207-8

<sup>25</sup> Maj KC Praval, *Indian Army After Independence, Lancer International, New Delhi, 1987, p.360*

<sup>26</sup> N 28, Chakravorty, p. 269



PAF's missile armed Starfighter

inventory was vintage, and its newest fighters, the MiG 21s were not yet fully operational. Despite getting two opportunities for being blooded in combat, the K 13 Air to Air missiles failed to hit the targets after successful launches from the MiGs.<sup>27</sup> The Gnat gained its reputation as a **'Sabre Killer'** based on gun kills with their 30 mm Aden cannons, which were prone to jamming in combat. The concept of FACs and Air Control Tentacles to facilitate air support was still finding its feet in battle. Consequently, close support missions were undersubscribed and incorrectly utilised, with many wasteful search and strike missions. Strike aircraft were armed and ready at neighbouring air bases to the Army's Battle Areas but were not utilised effectively. If IAF had been given a free hand in striking the PAF air fields from the beginning as suggested by Arjan Singh, the war outcomes may have been different.<sup>28</sup>

Considering that it was the first jet war in South Asia, where air power was utilised offensively, the outcome of effects produced were somewhat lower.

The Army did not take the IAF along in its planning, let alone consider its utilisation, much like their counterparts across the border. There was inadequate joint planning and *'Both the Army and the Air Force had their sights on their respective objectives, and cooperation between them was incidental, rather than well-planned'*.<sup>29</sup>

The ghost of bombing of cities remained on the minds of the political leadership and restricted the role of air power. Given the Pakistani overtures and engagement with Beijing in the years leading up to the war, the China threat resulted in a significant portion of IAF's inventory being tied down to the comparatively benign Eastern

front. The inadequate counter air operations were possibly a lost opportunity in what could have been a crushing defeat of the PAF, as the IAF had much greater capacity to absorb losses and would have certainly prevailed.

Despite the superior technologically advanced inventory of the PAF, IAF pilots displayed better air combat performance, combat persistence and combat flexibility.<sup>30</sup> Their enormous courage in repeatedly undertaking missions in older platforms, at the limits of their platform capabilities, deep inside hostile enemy territory is an under sung legacy. Among the many instances of display of bravery in the face of the enemy, which cannot all be covered, two incidents deserve a mention. The first was shooting down of F 104 Starfighter by Squadron Leader AB Devayya in his much older Mystere fighter over PAF's Sargodha air base against all odds, even after his aircraft was hit.<sup>31</sup> He did not return from the mission. The second was that of young Flight Lieutenant Alfred Cooke who engaged four Sabres single-handedly in his Hunter aircraft over Kalaikunda, and shot down two fighters.<sup>32</sup> Though the IAF achieved a higher sortie generation rate of 1.24%

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.249

<sup>28</sup> Sajjad S Haider, *Flight of the Falcon*, Vanguard Books Pvt Ltd Lahore. 2010

<sup>29</sup> N 20, Chakravorty, p.272

<sup>30</sup> N 18, Jasjit, p.250-260

<sup>31</sup> John Fricker, *Battle for Pakistan, The Air War of 1965*, Ian Allan Ltd., London, 1979, p. 112

<sup>32</sup> *Op Cit*, Mohan and Chopra, 182-192



compared to 0.94% of the PAF,<sup>33</sup> and flew much more than the adversary, the air effort was lower than what the IAF could have generated. The IAF was also found wanting in its AD radar cover and passive air defence measures, a fact highlighted by the large number of aircraft lost on ground due to enemy air raids.

The results of the air war can be summarised in the following facts - The claimed air superiority by Pakistan was clearly incorrect and undoubtedly propaganda; the IAF actually flew much more, inflicted greater losses, both in ground support to the army and in air combat, contrary to the PAF's overstated claims. The next is that while the IAF - 'aircrew performed magnificently, doing all that was expected of them and even more,'<sup>34</sup> the absence of a clear-cut operational air power employment doctrine forced the IAF to learn on the job. And finally, there was the lack of the necessary jointness between the IAF and the Army in warfighting.

The war while largely perceived as one of an indecisive military outcome, had its silver linings. According to the MOD, 'it was a clear victory for India' for the said reasons. 'The Indian war aim was to preserve the status quo in Jammu & Kashmir and to foil a Pakistani attempt to grab it. These limited and defensive aims were fully achieved. India opted deliberately for a short and as limited a conflict as possible. A cease fire was accepted when India was still capable of continuing the fight, and when the enemy was showing signs of total exhaustion.' The Indian Government and the military leadership - 'refrained from humbling Pakistan in the belief that this moderation would lead to less bitterness and more friendly relations.'<sup>35</sup> A



The Defence Minister YB Chavan along with the IAF Chief Air Marshal Arjan Singh examine a PAF F-86 Sabre in a forward airbase

futility which was to be proven in the 1971 war six years later.

In the final reckoning, the war was a boon in disguise as it restored not only the confidence and morale of the military in its war fighting abilities, but also the faith of the nation in its military, especially after the debacle of 1962. But most importantly, the 22-day war was an immense learning curve, from the

military mistakes made and the invaluable lessons learnt, including for the IAF. **It was also the first time the Air Force was blooded in action in air combat in a jet era war, against a skilled adversary, and despite constraints in its full-fledged engagement, played an immense role in the final war outcome, and in defence of the nation.**



Air Marshal (Dr) Diptendu Choudhury, PVSM, AVSM, VM, VSM (Retd), an alumnus of the Royal College of Defence Studies, UK has a Masters from King's College, London. An experienced fighter pilot who has commanded several combat units, he has held various appointments handling air operations at tactical, operational and strategic levels. He was involved in policy formulation and strategy development for the IAF and led the IAF in three international air exercises, viz., with the USA, France and the UAE. He was the Commandant of the National Defence College, New Delhi prior to his superannuation. He is an avid scholar, writer and speaker on air power, strategy, national and international security matters. He has authored the book **"Indian Air Power: Contemporary and Future Dynamics"**.



Air Marshal  
D Choudhury

<sup>33</sup> N 18, Jasjit, p. 256

<sup>34</sup> N 28, Chakeravorty, p. 273

<sup>35</sup> N 28, Chakeravorty, p. xxxv

# STRIKING M.V RUEN'S "JOLLY ROGER" FLAG

INS KOLKATA'S  
COUNTER - PIRACY MISSION  
IN MARCH 2024

This is a slightly abridged version of the article carried as the lead essay in the Indian Naval Despatch, Vol.5, No.2, March 2025 with the permission of the IN Despatch Foundation.

The author was the Officer in Tactical Command at sea as the Commanding Officer of the destroyer, INS Kolkata.

*"Indian warship, if you come any closer, we will shoot the hostages."* This was the message from what was now a pirate ship almost with a **"Jolly Roger"** flag. MV Ruen had 35 armed Somali pirates who held 17 hostages onboard. It was 15 March 2024, about 200 nautical miles (nm) East of Somalia, in the Arabian Sea. The warship being addressed, standing resolutely at 400 yards, was *INS Kolkata*.

Just four days earlier, on 11 March 2024, *Kolkata* was 450 nm to the West, in the Gulf of Aden, off the port of Djibouti. The ship had completed a two-month deployment under **Operation Sankalp** and **Operation PoG (Patrol Off Gulf of Aden)** in an area of very high drone and missile attacks by Houthi rebels, and had successfully rendered lifesaving and fire-fighting assistance to multiple merchant ships. The ship had just shaped course for Mumbai, and the crew was looking forward to a long overdue reunion with loved ones.

Before a relaxed mood could set in, information was received of a pirate mother-boat operating off the East coast of Somalia. *INS Tarkash* deployed in Western Arabian Sea, was redeployed to the area to locate this boat, but the search area's



*MV Ruen's transom targeted (Photo Courtesy Indian Navy)*

vastness necessitated additional naval assets. Onboard *Kolkata*, a quick time-space-fuel calculation was done and the *Kolkata's* readiness was signalled to Western Naval Command Headquarters (HQ) in Mumbai, which promptly directed her to join the search.

On 14 March, *Kolkata* received further information; the hijacked merchant vessel *MV Ruen* had also been detected off the East coast of Somalia. *Kolkata* had been involved in an incident with *Ruen* three months prior, during a previous deployment in the Gulf of Aden, when *Ruen* was hijacked. At the same time, *Kolkata* had been directed towards the fishing dhow suspected of having been used by the pirates for the hijacking. Inspection of the dhow had revealed no piracy tell-tales such as weapons, ladders or skiffs. Now, *MV Ruen*, a 45500-tonne vessel owned by a Bulgarian firm and flying a Maltese flag, was heading East into the Arabian Sea with pirates on board. However, *MV Ruen* was now a pirate mothership, intended for launching further attacks, posing a greater threat to maritime security. *Kolkata* adjusted its course to intercept *Ruen*.

Just past midnight on 14 March, *Kolkata* detected a non-AIS (Automatic Identification System) contact, positively identified as *Ruen* using infrared cameras. *Ruen* was approximately 260 nm East of the Somali coast. *Kolkata* closed in, identified herself, and ordered *Ruen* to stop. Instead of complying, however, the pirates reversed course towards Somalia and responded on the radio, **"this is not an Indian ship, these are not Indian waters, there are no Indians onboard, so we do not take orders from you."** The pirates' arrogance suggested they were experienced and well-trained, believing they controlled the situation. Given the darkness, uncertainty about the crew's status, the number and location of pirates, and the possibility of facing seasoned pirates, *Kolkata* did not take immediate direct action. The ship obtained *Ruen's* layout and crew list from the Maritime Operations Centre (MOC) in Mumbai. The embarked Marine Commandos (MARCOs) were briefed, sea boats were checked, and weapons and sensors were prepared.

At first light on 15 March, *Kolkata* positioned herself within 400 yards of *Ruen*. Fourteen pirates carrying rifles were observed, showing no fear of the warship lurking close by. The Maltese flag had been removed from *Ruen*, which had significant implications under international law. According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a vessel without a national flag is considered **"without nationality"** and is subject to the jurisdiction of any state vessel. Furthermore, under UNCLOS, *Ruen's* status had legally transformed into that of a **"pirate ship,"** making it liable to action by *Kolkata*.

To ascertain the condition of *Ruen's* crew, the pirates were ordered to bring them to the upper decks. In response, the

pirates produced only the ship's erstwhile (Bulgarian) Master, who stated that all 17 crew members were safe but held hostage. To further assess the situation, *Kolkata* launched her spotter drone. In a sudden, brazen hostile act, the pirates opened fire on the drone and shot it down. They were immediately warned on radio that they had committed a hostile act. The pirates responded aggressively, demanding that *Kolkata* move away. It became evident that the pirates would not be deterred by the mere presence of a warship or standard radio warnings. The situation demanded alternative actions to counter the pirates, neutralize the threat, ensure the safety of the hostages, and adhere to international law.

A situation report (SITREP) was sent to MOC, Mumbai, where a comprehensive legal and tactical review was undertaken, encompassing UNCLOS, UN resolutions on anti-piracy, and other international and

national laws, including the Navy Act 1957, Regulations for the Navy (Regs IN), and the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act 2022. It was concluded that *Ruen* was located beyond Somalia's territorial sea and was not flying any flag. Therefore, it was legally classified as a **"pirate ship"** that posed a danger to international shipping. This was a critical distinction from *Ruen's* previous encounter with the Indian Navy three months earlier, when it was flying Malta's flag as a **"hijacked ship."** This time, *Kolkata* had a broader mandate to act.

Armed with clear directives, *Kolkata* fired warning shots with her 76 mm gun across the bows and stern of *Ruen*. This startled the pirates, who took shelter and ceased radio communication. The next option considered was an opposed boarding operation by the Marine Commandos (MARCOs) supported by ship's boarding team. However, higher authorities deemed this tactically



Hostages at Gun Point paraded on deck of MV *Ruen* by pirates (photo credit Indian Navy)





*Pirates handed over to Mumbai Police (credit Indian Navy)*

unviable due to the pirates' numerical superiority, demonstrated competence with weapons, and their advantageous position. Instead, *Kolkata* was directed to undertake calibrated stand-off actions to coerce and immobilize *Ruen*, preventing it from proceeding towards Somali territorial waters.

By the forenoon of 15 March, *Kolkata* was directed to stop *Ruen* using force, while ensuring the safety of the hostages. Recalling the example of INS *Godavari* and INS *Betwa's* interdiction of *MV Progress Light* in 1988 (Operation Cactus) off Maldives, *Kolkata* adopted a deliberate, sequential, step-wise and escalatory approach, with tactical pauses to assess the effect and exert psychological pressure.

The initial step involved targeting *Ruen's* GPS antennae and navigation radars with precision sniper fire. While the radars and GPS antennae were damaged, *Ruen* maintained its course. The next step involved firing high-explosive anti-submarine warfare (HE ASW) rockets astern of *Ruen*, targeting the steering and

sternly, warning of severe consequences for harming any hostage.

By the afternoon of 15 March, it was assessed that the presence of hostages significantly favoured the pirates. All firing at *Ruen* was paused, but psychological pressure was maintained by aiming underwater rockets near the ship. This situation was communicated to MOC, along with a suggestion to adopt a wait-and-watch approach. However, orders from higher authorities were unequivocal; *MV Ruen* had to be stopped to prevent continued hijacking and protect maritime security.

The MOC had analysed that recent drone attacks on merchant vessels in the Red Sea, showed that drones impacting the transom resulted in loss of steerage. Consequently, *Kolkata* was directed to fire high-explosive (HE) shells at *Ruen's* transom. This tactic proved successful, damaging *Ruen's* steering and bringing the ship to a halt.

On the night of March 15/16, the pirates directed the crew to undertake temporary repairs to the steering system, partially restoring it by midnight. *Ruen* resumed its course towards Somalia, albeit with unsteady manual steering. The pirates warned that hostages were in the steering compartment, and the former Master requested that the transom not be fired upon. These developments raised doubts at MOC about potential collusion between the pirates and crew, which was considered as a factor to neutralize the pirates' leverage. *Kolkata* explored new options, deciding to target *Ruen's* funnel again with "point detonation" ammunition to shock the pirates into surrendering. The pirates were warned to stop the ship. This proved effective, and *Ruen* stopped. The sustained escalatory actions over the preceding 24 hours had taken their toll.

propeller. The underwater explosions startled the pirates, but the ship's speed remained unchanged. Subsequently, *Kolkata* targeted *Ruen's* funnel, intending to obstruct the engine's exhaust and intake. Although the funnel sustained damage, the desired impact on the engines was not achieved. Finally, the anchor system was targeted. While the capstan was damaged, the anchor stayed in its position. *Kolkata's* actions increased unease among the pirates, evidenced by their chatter on handheld transceivers. However, the pirate leader instructed the bridge crew to continue towards Somalia. Some hostages were brought to the bridge wing under guard. The pirates threatened to shoot the crew if *Kolkata* did not back off. *Kolkata* responded

By the morning of 16 March, *Kolkata* pressed its psychological advantage, offering the pirates safe passage to the Somali coast in their skiffs, if they surrendered. The pirates were slow to respond, needing to communicate with their handlers ashore. They declined, expressing fear of traveling in their skiffs, indicating a lack of seamanship skills. For insurance against further firing from *Kolkata*, the pirates positioned *MV Ruen's* crew as human shields and counter-offered to proceed to Somali territorial sea, with *Kolkata* personnel boarding thereafter to verify the hostages' safety. This proposal was rejected. Allowing *Ruen* into Somali waters would alter the legal situation with no guarantee of the crew's release. It would also allow the pirates to control the situation. However, *Kolkata* used the time to increase psychological pressure and requested proof of life for the hostages. The pirates complied, shifting from arrogance to compliance. Despite this, a stalemate had been reached. The pirates refused to leave *Ruen* and *Kolkata* was preventing them from reaching their destination. The sea current was drifting both ships towards Somalia, and *Ruen* likely had sufficient supplies for a prolonged duration.

On the forenoon of 16 March, the Bulgarian firm that owned *Ruen*, which had previously been unsuccessful in ransom negotiations with the pirates, contacted Indian Naval HQ, requesting a cessation of firing. The firm was informed that *Ruen* was now legally a **pirate ship** without nationality, posing a threat to shipping, and the Indian Navy would take necessary action.

With time running out, *Kolkata* and higher commanders formulated a dual-pronged approach, deploying additional naval assets and obtaining clearance for armed action.

INS *Subhadra* was diverted to the scene, and Marine Commandos (MARCOs) based in Mumbai were ordered to board an IAF C-17 aircraft for aerial insertion. Simultaneously, the pirates' leverage-the hostages-was targeted. The pirates were informed that *Ruen* was a pirate ship without nationality and that the crew, having operated with the pirates for three months, would be considered complicit, not hostages. This triggered panic on *Ruen*. The former Master protested, but it was clear that the pirates relied on the crew. Their reluctance to leave in skiffs, refusal of safe passage, and the crew's continued presence presented an opportunity for combining persuasion and coercion. The Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) directed that the pirates not be allowed to get ashore. The threat posed by *Ruen* was to be neutralized before nightfall on March 16, with additional forces being deployed.

By noon on March 16, INS *Subhadra* arrived. The pirates were informed that their proposal to proceed to Somali waters had been rejected. It was reiterated to *Ruen* that she was considered a pirate ship that would not be allowed to proceed any further, and everyone onboard was being considered as a composite pirate group. They were further informed that *Kolkata* had been given orders to sink *Ruen*. This caused further panic onboard *Ruen*. The former Master protested that the crew was not complicit. *Kolkata* stated that while the objective was to save lives, new orders had to be followed, but offered time for discussion and surrender, portraying *Kolkata* as the "good cop." The pirates were assured of a fair trial. However, the pirates refused to back down, stating they were prepared to go down with the ship.

Meanwhile, the IAF C-17 carrying the MARCO team was enroute. *Kolkata* received approval to escalate force, with the message: **"The pirates must surrender, or the ship will be sunk"**. *Kolkata* commenced firing single shots at *Ruen's* side, warning: *"You can surrender now, or you can surrender after the ship sinks."* The pirates attempted to use the hostages as human shields. The target points were chosen to maximize the impact of escalation. The firing by *Kolkata* had the desired effect. The former Master reported that the pirates were divided, with one group willing to surrender, and the other, led by a determined pirate leader, resisting.

With the MARCOs enroute, *Kolkata* established a drop zone. With no surrender, *Kolkata* issued a final warning and resumed firing. The damage to *Ruen* raised pirates' fear, and their cohesion disintegrated. One pirate was wounded, and the ship's hull was breached. The pirate leader was also struck by shrapnel. The pirates' morale collapsed. Around 1720 hours, with 90 minutes before sunset, the C-17 arrived, and the MARCOs began their insertion by Combat Free Fall. The sight of 22 parachutes, combined with the sustained pressure, direct action, and the incapacitation of their leader, led to the pirates' swift capitulation. They beseeched, *"please, please... give us a few moments to surrender."*

*Kolkata* ceased firing and prepared for boarding *Ruen*, in a simultaneous process of apprehending the pirates and securing the hostages, while also recovering the MARCO combat free fallers from the water. This brought to an end the 44-hour saga of the anti-piracy operation. The pirates were taken into custody, and the ship and crew were secured. *Ruen* was taken over



*Seaworthiness of MV Ruen being restored*

by the Indian Navy. In a manner of speaking, the black **Jolly Roger**, said to be flown by pirate ships of yore no longer flew on *Ruen*!

However, the mission was not yet over. Orders were received from MOC to repair the damaged *Ruen* and make her seaworthy. Technical personnel from *Kolkata* and engineers from *Ruen* embarked the ship. After eight hours of sustained efforts, they were able to restore steering and propulsion.

In the meanwhile, orders were also received to debrief the *Ruen* crew and interrogate the pirates individually. The *Ruen* crew were allowed to call home using INMARSAT, to convey to their families that they were safe. The legal status of *Ruen* was checked against the applicable laws of piracy, prize and salvage. It was decided, however, to restore the crew and ship to their owners. The *Ruen*'s firm was contacted and asked for their readiness to accept the ship in its 'as-is' condition with the damage incurred in the anti-piracy actions. They gratefully accepted this offer

through an email and additionally requested for *Ruen*'s safe escort to Salalah. *Ruen* was then handed back to her Master and crew, who hoisted the Maltese flag and sailed her to Salalah under escort of *Subhadra*, while *Kolkata* took the 35 pirates under custody to Mumbai, where they were handed over to the Mumbai police for prosecution under India's new Maritime Anti-Piracy Act 2022.

The bold, assertive and decisive action by the Indian Navy garnered international acclaim and dealt a major blow to the recently resurgent piracy off Somalia. The President and Foreign Minister of Bulgaria tweeted their gratitude to the Indian Navy for the successful and safe rescue of *MV Ruen*, which was duly acknowledged by the

Prime Minister and External Affairs Minister of India.

"Operation Ruen" carries many lessons for operational and tactical naval commanders and staff. A narrative like this could be an essential foundation for further study, analysis and discussions.

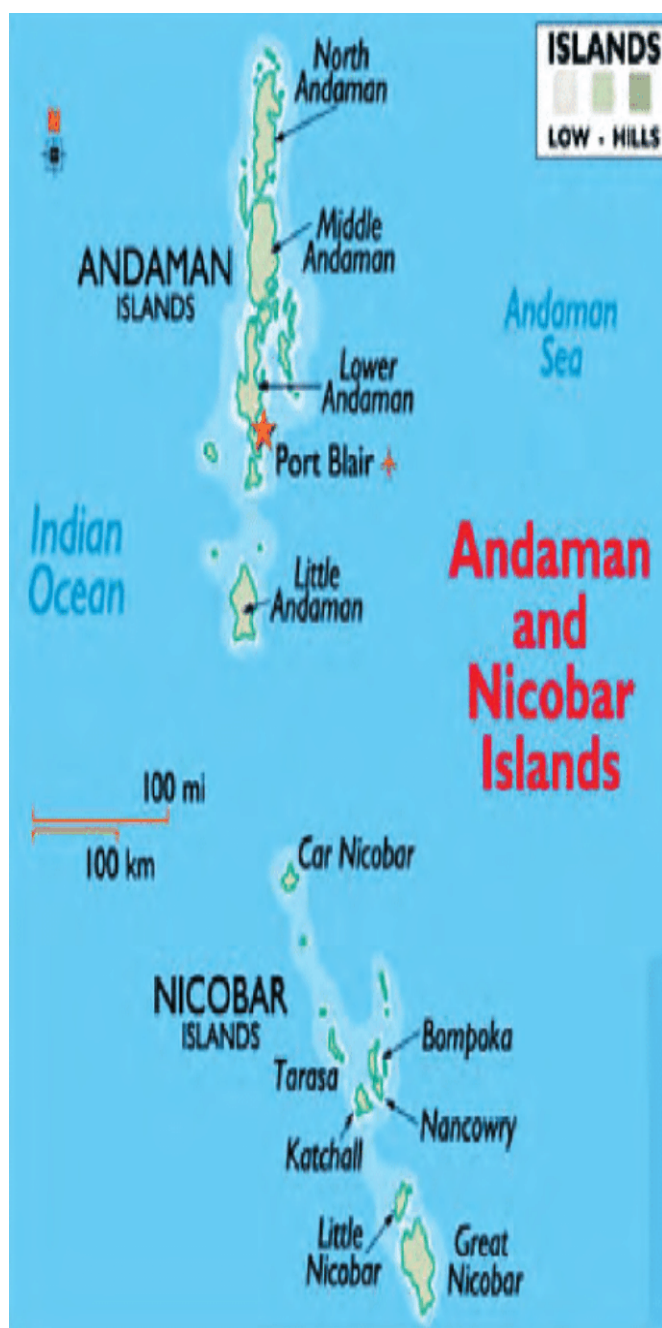


*Captain (IN) Sharad Sinsunwal, SC, an alumnus of the Naval Academy is a specialist in Navigation and Direction. He has spent more than 15 years at sea on frontline warships, tenantry various operational roles. These have included Executive Officer of a Frigate and Commanding Officer of a Corvette and a Destroyer. The officer is a graduate of the UK Staff College, where he was awarded the 'Andover Prize' for best dissertation, and earned an MA with Distinction from King's College, London. He was also the Naval Attaché at the Embassy of India, Beijing. He speaks Hindi, English, Chinese and Russian.*



**Capt (IN)**  
**Sharad Sinsunwal**





# ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

## GUARDIANS OF INDIA'S OCEAN

What can small pieces of land in the middle of an ocean offer to any nation? This approach is an extension of a larger continental ideology, which has the potential to contribute to decay in great economies and empires. Although itself a maritime empire, Britain's "Raj" on the Indian subcontinent and its sense of insecurity could also be attributed to the continental cocoon engulfing Delhi till the early 20th century. In recent decades, India has overcome this landlocked mindset. Ergo, instead of territorial expansion, control of any suitably located territory, especially Islands, provides a state with Reach, enabling control of trade routes, security of national shipping, a platform for humanitarian missions, and to spread influence across the oceans; in other words, the means to be a responsible and engaged global player. Therefore, strategically located sovereign island territories such as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) are a means for expansion of influence, prosperity and enhance security.

### Historical Significance of Island Territories

In pre-medieval and medieval times, marine navigation was mostly limited to coastal zones; however, a few daring adventurers ventured into uncharted oceans. These state-sponsored expeditions were cognisant of the importance of island domination, bestowing upon the modern avatars of these states significant island territories across the globe through conquest, colonisation and what is called "trade and flag" working together. While the means may have evolved, this ancient measure for expansion of influence using the maritime domain remains relevant. In fact, this approach is

even more applicable today, wherein a distant island territory overlooking trade routes and straits, provides the diplomatic strength and military means to be able to exert national influence.

The British, French, Portuguese and Japanese in the past and the Americans and Chinese, even today, rely on the control of a network of island territories to enable regional footholds. A case in point is the lease of Diego Garcia Island by the UK to the USA. Located within the strategically located Chagos Archipelago, Diego Garcia provides the Americans a base to secure and advance what it perceives as its own interests in the



*Sri Vijaya Puram, earlier called Port Blair (photo credit Andaman and Nicobar Tourism)*

Indian Ocean region (IOR). The Naval Support Facility at Diego Garcia has enabled the US ensure these.

Similarly, the French Navy has also ensured their presence in the IOR through basing forces at Réunion Island, Mayotte, Comoros, as well as Antarctic territories. This, in addition to political signalling and security of trade, enhances the French Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) significantly. Also, the basing of assets at these Island territories and the Republic of Djibouti, enables France to share maritime borders with Indian Ocean littorals, justifying their military presence to secure sovereignty of the French territories, material and maritime areas.

Sadly, a lack of optimal exploitation of the strategic potential of island territories has been a historical shortfall of Asian Empires. But, today China through its fiscal muscle, “string of pearls” and domination in parts of Asia and Africa, is unwinding its continental mindset. The most obvious example of this is what it is attempting in the South China Sea (SCS). There is, therefore, no denying the

importance of island territories to significantly boost national power, either as sovereign territories or through security partnerships as is the case with US presence in Bahrain or Chinese presence in Djibouti and Sri Lanka. India’s Western archipelago of Lakshadweep provides a modest boost to tourism, economic potential and surveillance of the Central Arabian Sea. Notably, the Eastern archipelago of Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) offers India a strategic vantage point in the Eastern IOR.

### Strategic Significance of the ANI

Being strategically located at the mouth of the Malacca Strait, ANI historically witnessed the passage of

various maritime powers desirous of establishing their dominance in the region, such as Danish and British explorers and the Japanese, who represented the Eastern fulcrum of the Axis powers in World War II. European colonisation marked a significant chapter in the ANI’s history, primarily focused on securing of trade routes and establishing operational support enroute to Singapore. The 1931 census of the ANI by M.C.C Bonington highlights the use of Nicobar Islands by the Cholas in 11th Century as a key factor in their conquest of littoral kingdoms near the Malacca Strait. However, the discovery of oil in the Middle East, pivotal economic transformation of Malacca nation states, and near concomitant rise of two Asian powers (India and China), has rendered the ANI even more significant today.

The ANI landscape is, geologically, a part of the landmass of South-East Asia and shows a distinct topography, with 572 islands spread over 700 km, extending from Landfall Island in the North to Indira Point in the South, projecting the sovereign reach of India up to 1200 km from the mainland. These islands also overlook the Preparis Channel, 6° Degree channel, 10° Degree channel and Duncan’s Passage, in addition to the Malacca Strait. All these sea-passages are important trade routes for any shipping destined from the West to the East or vice versa. Further, located only 35 km from Myanmar’s Coco Islands, and 150 km from Indonesia’s Banda Aceh, the ANI forms a natural surveillance arc from Cape Negrais to Sumatra.

Raising of the FORTRESS Command under FORTAN in the 1970s soon after declaration of the ANI as a Union Territory, enhanced the importance accorded by the Government to this island territory. The key highlights of ANI’s development now include transformation



*Galathea Bay Port in Great Nicobar Island (credit vajiramandravi.com)*

of the FORTRESS Command into India's first Joint Services' Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) in 2001, followed by dedicated impetus through the Island Development Agency over the last decade. Since these islands provide India a commanding geo-strategic presence in the Bay of Bengal and access to South and Southeast Asia, a focused development plan is expected to enhance our geopolitical leverage in the IOR.

### China and the ANI

Chinese policy in the SCS is driven by their desire to assert control over all land and seas, perceived to be dominated by ancient Chinese kingdoms. While these claims are being contested by SCS littorals, there is no historic reference of persistent Chinese maritime ventures into the Indian Ocean. This is different from other great powers such as the US, France and Britain, who have long maintained territorial, economic and naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

China's forays in the IOR to secure its economic and strategic interests are naturally expected. Investments and presence of China in the IOR has seen

unprecedented growth over the past 15 years. Besides development of ports, deployment of Research/ Scientific vessels and permanent presence of military warships under the aegis of anti-piracy deployments, China's influence in regional politics has started affecting the diplomatic policies of India across the IOR. The influence of China in Maldives, African nations and Seychelles is affecting the fabric of regional maritime partnerships. Further, arms sales, aggressive military diplomacy, cultivation of special political relations with IOR littorals, and magnanimous supply of real-estate developmental funds by China aims to challenge India's preferred partner status in the IOR. Development of dual-use multiple ports by China in the IOR can only be countered by regular deployments in the IOR and stringent access monitoring at the Malacca Strait staged through the ANI, so as to respond appropriately and in time to any anticipated Chinese military build-up in the region.

The Andaman Sea is no exception to China's attempt at normalisation of

Chinese presence in the Bay of Bengal. Chinese vessels, though challenged, frequently foray into the Andaman Sea as APEF and Research vessels, to measure India's response to its maritime activities. China's economic and strategic engagement with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia in the Eastern Indian Ocean has also enhanced significantly. Therefore, India's development of ANI, creation of the ANC, and constant engagement with Andaman Sea littorals has progressively emerged as a cornerstone of India's regional maritime engagement in the Eastern IOR.

### Leveraging the ANI

As India's strategic asset in the Far East, the ANI have tremendous capacity to assist New Delhi to engage in the Indo-Pacific and assert a diplomatically viable Act East policy. The ANI also provides a launch-pad to the Indian Navy to monitor high density maritime traffic in the Malacca Strait, and in the seas further to the East. India will further augment the already significant number of naval and coast





*Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Indo-Pacific viewed from Landward (Credit Rhodes Cartography)*

guard ships on these Islands, in addition to the existing amphibious brigade and air assets. With the joint air stations at Sri Vijaya Puram, Diglipur, Car Nicobar and Campbell Bay at the forefront of air operations and surveillance, the Indian Armed Forces in the ANI have established a balanced posture and area monitoring mechanisms to further exacerbate China's so-called '**Malacca Dilemma**'.

Until now, the balance between environmental preservation, tribal welfare, national security and economic development was skewed in favour of isolating these islands due to strategic and cultural considerations. The economic potential of the ANI had remained largely untapped. Apart from being recognised as a paradise for tourists, with unmatched beauty and sun-kissed sea-scape, the recent revision of India's coastline from 7,516.6 km to 11,098.81 km has significantly enhanced the Maritime Zones of India, including the EEZ. Of this, nearly 1/3rd

of the coastline belongs to the ANI (3,083.50 km), thus also securing over 1/3rd of India's EEZ. With around 6, 60,000 km<sup>2</sup> of EEZ rich in under-exploited sea resources, this region has unmatched potential to contributing to India's blue economy.

Another major project which is pivotal to establishing ANI as a trade fulcrum in the region is the development of the strategically located International Container Transshipment Port (ICTP) at Galathea Bay in the Great Nicobar Island. Located only 40 nm from the exit of the Malacca Strait, the ICTP at Galathea Bay, manifested under Maritime India Vision 2030 and *Amrit Kaal* Vision 2047, will leverage its location, natural deep water harbour and capacity for transshipment of cargo

from nearby ports, to India's economic advantage. The project is expected to generate forex savings, attract Foreign Direct Investment, boost economic activity at other Indian ports and most significantly, reduce India's dependency on the ports of Colombo, Singapore, and Klang, which presently handle more than 85% of Indian cargo to and from the Eastern approaches to the IOR.

This project will also have the potential to boost tourism at the Great Nicobar Biosphere reserve, which hosts a wide spectrum of ecosystems within tropical evergreen forests and coastal mountain ranges. Being cognisant of the economic potential of ANI, the Government constituted the Island Development Agency to develop the archipelago's infrastructure. This was further empowered by NITI Aayog projects to construct an international seaport, airport, container transshipment terminal, township, and power plant on the Nicobar Islands. Importantly, located 1200 km from mainland India, transport and digital connectivity to the Islands is the bedrock of economic prosperity. Recent completion of the framework for the Chennai-ANI submarine cable, digitally connecting these islands with our mainland, has laid the foundation for future growth.

While the envisaged investment and development on these islands adds significant military and economic value to the nation, and enables signalling against Chinese ingress into the IOR, there is an equally important burden to sustain the ethnic and environmental exclusivity, and cultural heritage of the ANI. The ANI are home to diverse and isolated tribal communities such as the Great Andamanese, Onges,

Jarawas, Sentinelese and the Shompens. They constitute remarkable and culturally significant highlights of the Islands. Unlike the British occupation of Diego Garcia in the 1960s, where over 2000 Chagossians were re-located against their will, India has taken significant steps towards preserving these unique ethnicities and the cultural heritage of the Islands.

Some measures which may be considered in future are engaging the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) partners at Sri Vijaya Puram (formerly Port Blair). Similarly, enabling OTR (Operational Turnaround) facilities to friendly navies and undertaking Coordinated Patrols (CORPATs) with regional navies will also significantly promote greater regional order and cooperation. Surveillance of Chinese warships, deep sea fishing fleet and research vessels along the choke points is essential, and the ANI provides distinct advantages in facilitating this. It is imperative to develop underwater domain awareness in the region. These measures will assert India's sovereignty and territorial integrity not only in the Eastern IOR, but also in the region as a whole. It can also potentially transform the Government's "Act East" policy into an Indo-Pacific economic, strategic and cultural collaboration under MAHASAGAR.

### Rising Tide in the ANI

If we momentarily set aside the common map representation of the world centred on the Greenwich Meridian, and take a view centred on the Indian peninsula, we realise that the ANI, overseeing a majority of global trade routes, including that of crude oil, is central to the growth of most major global economies. Viewing ANI as an intersection of the Indian Ocean, SCS and Pacific

Ocean provides a very different, more realistic representation of the ANI as the strategic fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific construct. Accordingly, regional and extra-regional partnerships with several countries need to be progressed and leveraged to India's as well as the region's benefit leveraging ANI's strategic geography, and India's balanced diplomacy and political stability.

Eminent naval strategist Sardar K M Panikkar highlighted in India and the Indian Ocean (1945) that active control of the Indian Ocean and defence of the Indian coastline is possible only by having islands as advanced bases, and that the ANI is admirably placed to secure control of the Bay of Bengal. This

futuristic outlook was not given due importance due to our post-independence Westward focus. With the rise of China and its recent maritime behaviour in SCS, developments in Bangladesh and instability in Myanmar have brought the spotlight back on the ANI. In Shakespeare's eponymous Julius Caesar, Brutus states "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the journey of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries". The ANI is presently at the crossroads of geo-strategic shifts to the East, and history will judge us harshly if we do not develop these vital islands to realise their full potential for India.



*Commodore Prashant Handu is an alumnus of the Indian Naval Academy (Goa), US Naval War College and the Royal College of Defence Studies. He is a gunnery specialist and holds an MSc from Madras University and an MA from King's College, London. He has commanded four ships, including INS Kolkata, during which he was awarded NM (Gallantry), and has tenanted various staff and operational assignments. His areas of interest include strategic behaviour of nation-states, application of cognitive heuristics to IR and nautical antiquity.*



**Commodore  
Prashant Handu**

*Commander Abhishek Jain is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Pune and the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. He is a gunnery specialist and has MSc degrees from Madras and Cochin Universities. He has commanded three ships and has tenanted various staff and operational assignments. His areas of interest include organisational policies affecting maritime constructs.*



**Commander  
Abhishek Jain**

# LIEUTENANT COLONEL ARDESHIR BURZORJI TARAPORE PARAM VIR CHAKRA (POSTHUMOUS)

No account of the 1965 war will be complete without recording the valour of Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore, PVC (Posthumous), who led Poona Horse in battle and destroyed several Pakistani Tanks. Tarapore is the highest ranked Officer to be awarded the Param Vir Chakra. A tribute.



*Bust of Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore, PVC at Param Yodha Sthal, National War Memorial, New Delhi*

## Family Background and Childhood

The family chronicles say that Lieutenant Colonel Ardeshir Burzorji Tarapore was born on 18 August 1923 in Mumbai. Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore belonged to the family of a great warrior, Ratanjiba who served in the army of Shivaji. Ratanjiba was given the charge of one hundred villages as an acknowledgement of his gallantry, loyalty and services. One of the villages was named Tarapore and since then it became the title of the family. Ardeshir Tarapore's father Burzorji worked with the Customs Department of the erstwhile Hyderabad State and was an erudite scholar of Persian as well as Urdu.

Ardeshir was the second of three children, with an older sister and a younger brother. At the age of seven, Ardeshir Tarapore who was lovingly called Adi joined the Sardar Dastur Boys Boarding School, Pune and completed his matriculation in 1940. Though he was not an exceptional student academically, he was a gifted sportsperson and distinguished himself in athletics, boxing, swimming, tennis and cricket.

## Early Army Career

After his matriculation, Adi was commissioned in the Hyderabad State Army and joined the Officers' Training School at Golconda. On 01 January 1942, he was commissioned into 7th Hyderabad Infantry, but he wanted to serve in an armoured regiment.

An opportunity to realize his dream came his way when his battalion was being inspected by Major General EI-Edroos, the Commander-in-Chief of the State Forces. Adi's

company was carrying out routine training at that time, at the grenade throwing range. One of the Sepoys, a fresh entrant, momentarily panicked and failed to lob the grenade correctly, resulting in the grenade falling into the throwing bay. The young Lieutenant Adi immediately jumped into the throwing bay and picking up the grenade, threw it away to safety. However, the grenade burst as it left his hand, and he was injured in his chest. Major General EI-Edroos who was present there was deeply impressed and personally congratulated him for his courage and presence of mind. Adi availed this opportunity to request him for a transfer to the armoured regiment of the State Forces. General EI-Edroos accepted his request and he was transferred to the 1st Hyderabad Imperial Service Lancers.

During World War II, he and other soldiers were sent to the Middle East on posting. At that time the regiment was commanded by a British officer. The Commanding Officer (CO) was rude in behaviour and often commented adversely on the fighting capabilities of Indian soldiers. On one occasion, he even insulted the Nizam, by using derogatory language. Ardeshir who was present took exception to it and told his CO. "You have insulted my country and my king- and I do not mean George VI" This incident created quite a flurry - the regiment was kept in isolation and all the ammunition was withdrawn. The matter was finally sorted out after a personal visit by General EI Edroos to General Montgomery.

After the merger of Hyderabad State with the Union of India, Ardeshir was selected to serve in the Indian Army. His date of commission was revised to 01 January 1945 and he was posted to the **Poona Horse**.



### Service with The Poona Horse

Poona Horse was then in Chattha, Jammu. Initially he was on probation of two years and would be absorbed only if found fit. As stated by 2nd Lieutenant Shivraj Singh in his words *"One fine day when the officers were sipping beer/ nimbu pani under the shady mango tree outside the mess hutment, a well-built young officer of medium height walked in with the regimental 2iC and was introduced as Captain Ardesbir B Tarapore Ex- Hyderabad Lancers. He appeared somewhat shy and reticent, but did not feel inferior or apologetic in any manner."*

Initially his first fitness report from B Squadron Commander was lukewarm however, after he was posted to A Squadron, he took to the Squadron like fish takes to water. Being a good sportsman he became popular with the men. Adi soon earned a suitable fitness report which got him a permanent commission in the **Poona Horse**.

Adi had a well cultivated sense of humour. He idolised Napoleon. He read about him extensively, often quoted him and even kept a bust of Napoleon on his desk. Later, he was sent to England to do an Automotive course on Centurion Tank. He was promoted to Major on 1 January 1958, and to Lieutenant Colonel on 10 June 1965.

Adi got married to Perin and the couple had a son, Xerxes, and daughter Zarine. Besides being an officer par excellence, Ardesbir Tarapore was a family man and a good human being. He eventually became the CO of **'The Poona Horse'** and led the regiment during the 1965 war against Pakistan.

### The Battle of Chawinda and Phillora: 11 to 16 September 1965

After Pakistan launched their **"Operation Grand Slam"**, the war with Pakistan was declared on 01 September 1965. As part of the retaliatory action plan, the Army chalked out a strategy to capture

Chawinda and Phillora in Sialkot sector. The area of Chawinda was occupied by two regiments of Pakistani armour and infantry. On 11 September, **Poona Horse** under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore planned a surprise attack on Phillora from the rear. As the regiment was moving forward between Phillora and Chawinda, it was counter attacked by enemy armour from Wazirali. Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore held his ground and gallantly attacked Phillora with one of his squadrons and supported by an infantry battalion. An intense battle was fought between the two sides which resulted in the destruction of 13 Patton tanks. The enemy left Chawinda and Phillora was captured. Ardesbir Tarapore fought brilliantly but was seriously injured in the battle. Undeterred he planned attacks to capture Wazirali, Jasoran and Butur-Dograndi.

On 13/14 September 1965, Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore though still wounded launched an attack by **Poona Horse** and 9 Garhwal Rifles. Wazirali was captured on 14 September and Tarapore pressed on with his attack on enemy forces hiding in the areas of Butur and Dograndi. Once again in a

daring attack Colonel Tarapore destroyed six enemy tanks and captured Jasoran along with 9 Dogra and Butur & Dograndi along with 8 Garhwal Rifles by 16 September. Though his own tank was hit several times, he maintained his pivots at both these places, supporting the infantry attacking Chawinda from the rear. Inspired by his leadership, the regiment attacked the enemy armour and destroyed approximately sixty Pakistani tanks, suffering only nine tank casualties. Unfortunately, an enemy shell set his tank ablaze engulfing him in flames. Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore was **'Killed in Action'** on the battle field leading from the front like a true military leader. He was a true hero of the Indian Army, exemplifying extraordinary bravery, leadership, exceptional courage, and strategic brilliance.

Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore was posthumously awarded the nation's highest gallantry award, **"Param Vir Chakra"** for his outstanding courage, leadership, indomitable spirit, and supreme sacrifice. **Undoubtedly a gallant and valiant warrior and leader of the Indian Army!**



*Brigadier Brijendra Singh (Retd), a third generation Cavalry officer was commissioned into POONA HORSE in April 1971 and fought in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war with the regiment. He was wounded during an air attack on 14 December. An alumnus of the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, he has commanded an armoured regiment and an infantry brigade. He has held various command, instructional and staff appointments during his over 33 years of army service. Post retirement, he worked in a public sector bank for six years and in the corporate environment for eight years. He resides in Gurugram (Haryana).*



**Brigadier  
Brijendra Singh (Retd)**

# MEMOIRS OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL GUL HASSAN KHAN, PAKISTAN ARMY

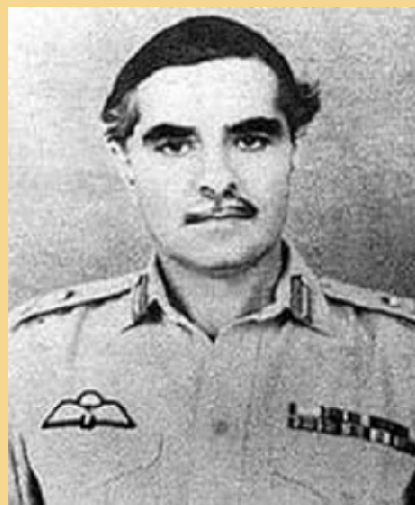
1965: A VIEW FROM  
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL

## BOOK REVIEW

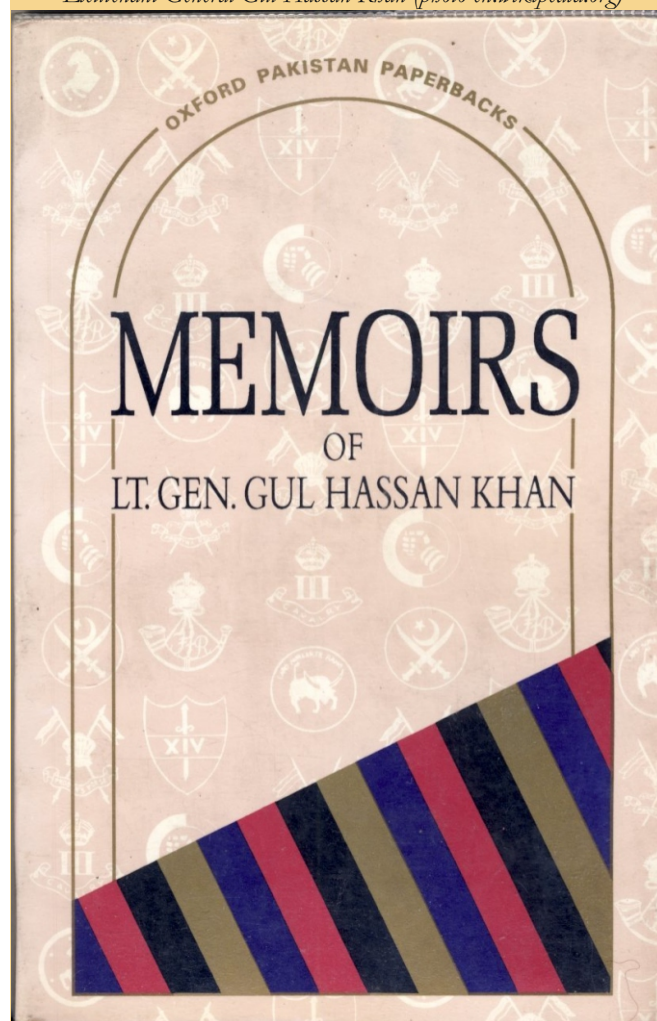
Brigadier Gul Hassan Khan was Pakistan Army's Director Military Operations (DMO) during the India-Pakistan 1965 War. He had been in the chair for the preceding four years, so was privy both to the preparations during the run up and the conduct of operations. His Memoirs, that cover his professional career, carry his observations of the 1965 War. Since the Memoirs are of a forthright officer and written in a straight forward manner, his account of the War, from the unique vantage of a DMO, can be taken as reasonably fair. This article presents Gul Hassan's version of the 1965 War.

## About the Book

The book's treatment of the 1965 War is reminiscent of Palit's *War in High Himalayas*, since General D K Palit was the Indian DMO during India's China War of 1962. Whereas Palit's is an entire book with his side of the story, Gul Hassan devotes only a portion of his book to 1965, with another substantial section covering his role in the 1971 War as Chief of General Staff (CGS), having both operations and intelligence directorates under him.



*Lieutenant General Gul Hassan Khan (photo en.wikipedia.org)*



Besides Gul Hassan proving to be an engaging author, one with a keen sense of humour, his book is 'unputdownable' also because of his sketch of the Pakistan Army in its formative years and attaining maturity on the anvil of successive wars with India. Not self-exculpatory, but being more a scathing critique of the army, the book is a valid source on understanding India's long-time foe.

#### About the Author

Gul Hassan got to being DMO by sheer dint of professional capability. A product of the Prince of Wales Royal Military College, Dehra Dun, he was commissioned into the Infantry from the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun during the Second World War. The highlight of his war years was in action he witnessed when temporarily with a Rajput battalion deployed in the vicinity of the famous Tennis Court at Kohima. Later, more substantially, his appointment as aide to 'Bill' Slim during his impressionable years of service had a lasting influence on his military life. He observed at first-hand what leadership is and generalship at the operational level is all about. Later, after Partition, as aide to Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah, he imbibed an abiding sense of probity and secularism.

Transferred to the Armoured Corps, he joined the Probyn's Horse. Pakistan was a member of SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organisation) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation), an American-led anti-Soviet pact, and professional growth of officers of Hassan's generation benefited by the exposure to United States training and hardware. Hassan did a tank course in USA and gained an understanding of mechanized warfare that stood him in good stead as a tank regiment and independent armoured brigade group commander. This background placed him well to take over as DMO in January 1961.

#### The Pre-War Years

On his very first meeting with his boss, General Yahya Khan, the CGS, (later of 1971 infamy) Gul Hassan was given the task of revamping the war plans in light of changes in the capabilities of both sides, India and Pakistan, and terrain changes from canal building. With its American connection deepening by late fifties, Pakistan had adopted the New Concept of Defence, involving greater frontages held by firepower, releasing manpower for raising additional formations, such as the raising of 11 Division for the Kasur sector. Equipped with two light machine guns, a section in defensive role could now hold a wider frontage. The drawback was that frontages were lightly held, which was problematic in face of the higher numbers India could bring to bear in attack.

The revised plans were eventually approved by President Ayub Khan, who though heading the country, also kept tabs on the military side. In essence the plans involved creation and tasking of a

counter offensive capability, such as an additional, 6 Armoured Division, being raised. As it turned out, India was not able to keep track of this formation with telling results on the outcome in the Sialkot sector. Even so, there was a shortfall of two divisions and a Corps Headquarters (HQ), for which sanction for new raisings was proceeded with but neither materialized by the time of war outbreak.

The reserves created were earmarked for operations respectively in the corridors to North and South of the Ravi River. Gul Hassan was a proponent of an early start to offensive operations. To him, the weaker side compensated by seizing the initiative and keeping the stronger side – India – off-balance. To the Army Chief, General Musa, this was against the government policy of not initiating a war. A compromise was arrived at in that instead of an offensive, an early counter offensive would be launched on initiation of operations by India.

Even as the plans were upgraded,



*Lieutenant General Gul Hassan Khan, the last C-in-C of the Pakistan Army at his farewell reception*





*Gul Hassan laying a wreath at the grave of Sawar Muhammad Hussain (1972) (credit en.wikipedia.org)*

the DMO kept abreast of developments heralding the war. Emerging from its defeat by China in 1962, India was expanding its military. The growth of the Indian Air Force was seen as particularly threatening. Alongside, political activity with changing the status quo in Kashmir was ongoing, eventually leading to the unrest in Kashmir in late 1963 over the episode of the Holy relic at Hazratbal. Alerted to an opportunity, Pakistan stepped up to stoke it.

The Pakistan Army trained and launched volunteers into Kashmir. The aim, conjured up by the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto-led foreign ministry was to 'defreeze' the Kashmir issue with application of 'pressure'. A Kashmir Cell was set up with the Foreign Secretary chairing it. Since the Indian Army got the better of the irregulars sent in, a concerted plan was drawn up for guerrilla activity by the 'Azad Kashmir' deployed 12 Division, **Operation Gibraltar**. **Operation Grand Slam** was prepared, yet again by 12 Division, to be launched as a contingency in support of

posts in the Kargil sector to Indian action soon thereafter. The two sides mobilized during the incident and remained watchful thereafter.

### The War Through the DMO's Eyes

The irregulars were making no progress in Kashmir, not having received the support from the locals as they were led to believe. **Operation Gibraltar** was readied hastily in May after the Kutch crisis had subsided, and launched in August with little preparation. Some troops of the reserve division, 7 Division, now being commanded by General Yahya Khan, were also sucked in. The DMO was not involved in its intricacies, but with India gaining the upper hand, prospects of launch of **Operation Grand Slam** heightened. Just as India took Haji Pir and Bedori and linked up Uri and Poonch, the DMO supported the bid of 12 Division for the urgent launch of **Grand Slam** to snap Indian communication lines at Akhnur. However, dithering at the higher level – that of General Sher Bahadur, CGS, Army Chief Musa and President Ayub Khan – delayed that launch to 1 September. Though it got off to a rapid start, it bogged down midway with a change in command between the commanders of 12 Division, the charismatic and innovative General Akhtar Malik, and 7 Division's General Yahya Khan, an inexplicable pause from which the thrust was not allowed to recover by the Indian Army firming in.

On 4 September, getting early warning of the Indian preparation for operations across the entire front, the DMO alerted all formations. After the Kutch engagement, there had been a disengagement, and troops had been permitted some leave. But by 6 September, most

**Operation Gibraltar**. To the DMO, such support could only be in the form of the military crossing the Ceasefire Line, which could only provoke an Indian response, including trans-border. However, the Foreign Ministry was convinced that the operations would be restricted to Kashmir, leading to Pakistan adopting the policy: 'Do not provoke. Do not escalate.'

Alongside, the Kutch incident broke out at the other end of the border in early 1965. Hassan records being unimpressed by Tikka Khan – later famous as the Butcher of Dhaka – whose 8 Division was not only slovenly in mobilizing from Quetta but also did not exploit success after its attack. Even so, the Kutch outcome encouraged the Pakistan Army, though it lost some



*Major General Gul Hassan with the staff of HQs, 1st Armoured Division, in 1967. Standing on his right is then Lieutenant Colonel Zia-ul-Haq (credit The Friday Times)*

formations were at battle stations when India crossed the border in the plains sector. Though cautioned, 10 Division, opposite Lahore, had not quite deployed fully. Even so, forward zone elements bought them enough time to avoid a critical situation developing. This complacency perhaps explains how 3 JAT got a foothold across the Bambanwala-Ravi-Bedian (BRB) canal, popularly known as the Ichhogil Canal in India. Later, Pakistan's 10 Division launched a counter attack with limited forces, but could not fully retrieve the area lost up to the border.

Alerted to the outbreak of operations in the Sialkot - Shakargarh Sector by the confused beginning of fighting in Jassar sub-sector, the DMO was not overly concerned when India's 1 Armoured Division made its appearance in the sector on 8 September. In anticipation, Pakistanis had placed its 6 Armoured Division in the area, which gave battle in a defensive role. Though some penetration was achieved by the Indians, the fierce battles around

Chawinda ensured no dent in the main defences in Sialkot Sector. Much further South, the Pakistanis had a brigade each at Sulaimanki and lower Sindh, whose performance was relatively independent of intimate oversight by the General Headquarters; thus, with greater operational leeway, the two were more successful.

The highlight of 1965 War was the Pakistani counter offensive by its 1 Armoured Division from Kasur. The aim was to seal off the Beas - Sutlej corridor by, maximally, seizing the bridge at Beas, or, minimally, to force the Indian thrust towards Lahore to recoil by threatening its rear along the Barki axis. Alongside, it would thwart any outflanking move by India from the South of Lahore. The plans for the counter offensive had been made earlier, with the DMO urging the 11 Division and 1 Armoured Division commanders to coordinate their respective roles. 11 Division was to establish a bridgehead

across Rohi Nallah for the Armoured Division to breakout across it. It was in the execution of the operation that the Pakistanis faulted, with the major tactical error being the withdrawal by night to laager, on two successive nights, by the Armoured Division's leading elements of 5 Armoured Brigade. This allowed time to India to seal off that thrust line, where Havildar Abdul Hameed is credited for his immortal deed. On the operation fizzling out, some elements of the Armoured Division were moved to Sialkot Sector under a new commander - one for the first time from the Armoured Corps - for a counter attack, but were not in a fit enough condition to be launched before the ceasefire came into effect.

### The DMO's Reflections

Gul Hassan reflects on both counter offensives failing. **Grand Slam** failed due to the delay in its launch,



*Gul Hassan's simple and direct style appealed to the soldiers under his command (credit thefridaytimes.com 10-Apr-2020)*

which should have coincided with the capture of Hajipir, and the untimely change-over of command just after the initial phase. The operations of 1 Armoured Division were under a constraint of limited Armoured and infantry availability. 7 Infantry Division, that was the infantry component of the reserve with 1 Armoured Division for the Ravi - Sulej corridor, had already been sucked into the two operations in Kashmir. Also, 11 Division was not able to spare infantry, though with the offensive across its frontage, it was secure enough to have spared some. This showed up the shortage of a Corps HQ, that had been bid for but not provisioned timely. It was only set up in the following year. The DMO blames the higher military leadership, General Musa, for not pressing the case with the Government, which in the event, was also led by a military man, General Ayub Khan. Apparently, Musa pointed to a

elements room enough to replenish forward. A natural crossing downstream was not exploited but a new bridge was launched when the only crossing was damaged by a tank. However, Gul Hassan's major grouse is in the leadership of 1 Armoured Division. He is categorical that the first three commanders not being cavalymen, they lacked mechanized expertise and a bent for *auftragstaktik* and therefore could not impart a manoeuvre culture to their command. The incumbent commander, though having commanded an armoured brigade, was not capacitated enough to merit the appointment.

Gul Hassan's dissecting of the shortcomings of the Pakistan Army has instructive value universally, and on that count must make for a mandatory reading at war colleges. While it is true that the Pakistan Army has professionalized much since then, the snapshot he provides of it in the sixties is valid for any army anywhere that departs from professional standards and roles.

He rightly begins at the top. Since Ayub Khan was forced to shepherd the country after politicians and bureaucrats proved self-centred, he placed tractable generals in key positions in the Army. Consequently, the army leadership lost its professionalism. A direct result was decline in training standards, with tactical exercises without troops finding favour since it is easier to push large bodies of troops across a map or sand model. A divide opened up between the senior and junior leadership and groupism made an appearance. The staff was increasingly demanding of units, while reports and returns up the chain

poor economy as an excuse against pressing for the filling up the gap.

Though history has it that the showing of both armies was credible and the War itself was a draw of sorts, the DMO is unsparing in his criticism of the Pakistani showing. True for both armies is gallantry at lower levels. However, structural, organizational and cultural factors need an accounting.

Gul Hassan, inter-alia, dwells on lack of felicity in Armoured warfare. The leading Armoured brigade commander of 1 Armoured Division was a cavalry officer, and had been an instructor at Quetta Staff College. Gul Hassan speculates that had he placed himself right behind the leading elements for intimate control, the break out could not have been stanchied. The bridgehead itself was in a rather clustered space, not allowing logistics



were unwarrantedly rosy, especially - and tragically as it turned out - on state of equipment. The security apparatus got a ballast at the cost of trust, to the extent that the outbreak of the War caught the Air Force by surprise! Most significantly, the institution of the Commanding Officer, the most important link in the command chain, stood devalued.

Incidentally, such traits were not markedly different from that of the Indian Army, in light of the relegation of the military in the national consciousness through the fifties. Recall also that the glut of vacancies in higher ranks had resulted in speedier promotions into higher ranks, with some not even having commanded battalions. However, the 1962 War was a timely wake up call, making the Government and the army, quickly pull up their socks. So, when War broke out, the Indian Army had an opportunity to exorcise 1962.

### The Aftermath

The following year Gul Hassan went on to command 1 Armoured Division, turning it into a cracking formation. He was then back to the General HQ, this time as CGS, an appointment in which he witnessed the run up to the 1971 War and the disaster there – though playing no part in the atrocity crimes that occurred. As CGS, he was a vociferous advocate of the defence of East Pakistan lying in the West and for a speedy offensive to undercut Indian operations in the East before it had time to revert to the West. As CGS, he had pushed for the Eastern Command under Niazi – who he likens to an over promoted company commander – to concentrate early for the defence of Dhaka, knowing fully well that a late withdrawal would not be possible in light of Indian outflanking thrusts and the insurgency peaking. However, as is well known, Niazi held the

periphery and strong points, intending to prevent loss of a portion of East Pakistan on which the Bangladeshi flag could be hoisted. As a result, he lost the whole. For his part, Yahya's procrastination over an offensive in the West squarely led to the colossal defeat.

At the bottom of the defeat was not so much the Pakistani Army, but the dismal state of politics in Pakistan, personified by Bhutto. Having spent some time with the Qaid-e-Azam, Gul Hassan was aware of the gulf that existed in the standards of political leadership set by Jinnah and the political reality in Pakistan. He saw the role and culpability of Bhutto in goading Ayub into the 1965 War; in bringing about a political impasse in early 1971; and, finally, how post '71 War, Bhutto tried to degrade the Pakistan Army. Having been elevated by Bhutto to Army Chief after the 1971 War, Gul Hassan was unable to stomach the shenanigans

of Bhutto. He was forced to resign, but was compensated with an ambassadorship in Europe.

Gul Hassan did not get to have a combat command experience, though he appears to have a yen for command. An interesting counter-factual is if he had been in command of 1 Armoured Division, what might have been the showing of the division in battle. Another could well be, if he had been in command in Dhaka, what might have been the outcome in '71.

Personalities matter. For that reason, it is important that higher military leadership is chosen well. We need look no further than Field Marshal Manekshaw for evidence. **The major takeaway from the book then is that military leaders must stay apolitical to stay professional and the political class must enable this.** Not doing so is a sure recipe for a drubbing as Pakistan has found to its great cost in 1965 and more so in 1971.



*Colonel Ali Ahmed (Retd) was commissioned into the MARATHA LI in 1987. After premature retirement as a Colonel in 2008, he joined academia; later serving over eight years as a UN official in South Sudan, Kosovo and Abyei. His doctorates in International Politics are from Jawaharlal Nebru University, New Delhi (2012) and Cambridge University (2019). He is currently an independent strategic analyst, with his writings at <https://alibhd66.substack.com/>.*



Colonel Ali Ahmed (Retd)

# LIFE IN 1965 AND TODAY

## FROM CHARPOYS TO CAPPUCCINOS

India in the 60s was a nation coming out of social inequity, large scale poverty and deprivation, with industrial growth slowly edging up. Life had simple necessities, with hardly any luxury or wealth to flaunt. Dr. Renuka takes us back in time, while looking at the present.

As we are speaking on the Indo Pak 1965 War in this issue, my thoughts wandered to the era of the mid-sixties. One recollects the lifestyle then through movies of that time, listening to and remembering stories and *gupshup* of mom, aunts and *gama* (*naanima*) or even just glancing at old albums.

Imagine a time when the world was in black and white, with the first hint of colour just about emerging. Welcome to 1960s India, a decade of simplicity, tradition, and a touch of glamour. Life was a different kind of poetry, with handwritten letters and transistor radios. Fast forward to today, and we find ourselves in a whirlwind of technology, global connectivity, and a constant quest for wellness. But how did life in the '60s differ from our present? **Let's embark on a light-hearted journey through time, exploring aspects such as health, environment, lifestyle, fashion, and human resilience.**

### Haldi Vs HIIT Workouts

Today, we swipe through life with apps and consult Google before our mothers or doctors. In the '60s, the family doctor was almost a family member. The doctor was usually a 'he', but fortunately things had changed by the time Yours Truly attended medical school. The doctor made house calls, carried a worn leather bag, and often doubled as your therapist, ENT specialist, and paediatrician, and could tell simply by palpating the wrist for the pulse rate, if you were pregnant or not!



Most health woes were addressed at home first, with a kitchen full of traditional remedies passed down through generations. A pinch of turmeric for wounds, a spoonful of honey or tulsi for a sore throat, a warm cup of ginger tea for colds, and a glass of jeera water for stomach aches. The concept of a balanced diet was simple, I guess - "*eat what you grow, and grow what you eat*". People enjoyed and valued fresh, seasonal produce.

Vaccines existed, but they weren't a trending topic. The polio drops campaign was just taking shape. Most importantly, physical activity wasn't scheduled, it was life. You walked to the market, washed clothes by hand, ground the masalas on the family *silpatta* and took the stairs by default.

Fast forward to today, and health has become both a quantified obsession and a multi-billion-dollar industry. We count steps, calories, macros, and sometimes our blessings. Yoga and Ayurveda have become global phenomena as well as photo opportunities, not to miss the reels and posts for Instagram.

We have fitness trackers that monitor our steps, heart rate, and even our sleep patterns. Superfoods like quinoa and chia seeds have replaced traditional staples, and the quest for the perfect body has led to an explosion of gyms, wellness centres, and diet plans.

There is the added advantage of medical progress. Diagnostics are easier and much more accurate, ailments such as heart diseases and cancer have better treatment options in

place, and surgical advancements have ensured lesser invasive procedures and better quality of life. There is a huge leap in science, technology and medicine. Mortality and morbidity have definitely decreased dramatically.

### Doordarshan Vs Doom Scrolling

In the '60s, the Indian lifestyle was a blend of joint family dynamics, frugal living, and cultural rituals. Time moved at the pace of a bullock cart. Morning began with All India Radio, newspapers were read cover to cover, and conversations lingered over breakfast. The concept of *'weekend getaways'* was unheard of; vacations meant visiting relatives in nearby towns or enjoying a day at the local *mela*. Letters took a week to arrive, which meant no texting. There were numerous reasons to celebrate, from birthdays to mango season. There was no instant gratification.

People met at the park or the local market. Neighbours knew every family member's name, and sometimes even their whole ration card history. Entertainment was playing carrom, or watching the rare movie at the local theatre with wooden seats and piping hot samosas.

Now, we live in a 5G, double-speed world where mornings begin with doom scrolling. We've gone from snail mail to instant messaging and Zoom fatigue. Households are smaller, lifestyles flashier, and attention spans shorter than a Reels video. From predictable, slow living, we have moved to high-speed, high-choice, but often high-stress routines.

Technology has made life more convenient but also more hectic. Online shopping, food delivery apps, and instant messaging have transformed lives, often leaving little time for genuine human connection.

For us, going on vacation meant sharing a room or sleeping on the open

terrace with a bunch of country cousins giggling and chatting into the night, creating joyful memories and lasting relationships. Today, so many people converging in one room would be seen as an *'invasion of privacy'*.

Of course, technology has brought people across borders closer today. Gone are the days when one had to wait for a letter to hear from a loved one. Using one of the many video call apps in existence enables one to hear and see their loved ones across continents instantly!

Despite the conveniences though, I do believe that many still long for the slower pace of the past. There's a resurgence of interest in slow living, mindfulness, and spending quality time with loved ones, reminiscent of the '60s.

### Khadi Vs Couture

The '60s was the golden era of Indian elegance, a time when minimalism wasn't a trend, it was just life. Women wore *sarees* in classic fabrics like

cottons, silks and chiffrons, accessorised with small handle handbags gently swaying at the wrist, not to forget massive beehive hairdos or perhaps just two simple plaits with jasmine flowers. Men stuck to well-pressed shirts and trousers, or *kurtas* and Nehru jackets for occasions. Timeless and graceful Bollywood icons like Sadhana and Waheeda Rehman set fashion trends that were emulated across the country.

Makeup was homegrown: *multani mitti* for pimples, gram flour (*besan*) for glowing skin, and hair washed with *reetha* and *shikakai*. If you had Boroline in your house, you were prepared for any beauty emergency.

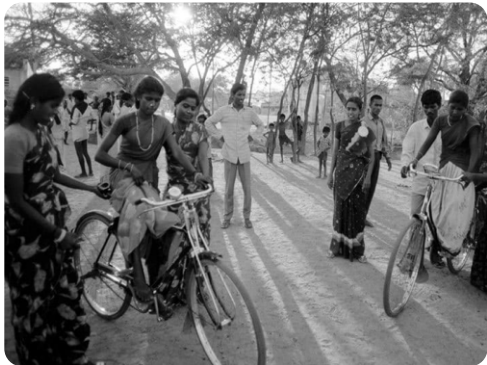
Now, fashion is a blend of East and West, tradition and trend. We shop from apps and influencers. Everyone has a skincare routine that is 7 steps long. Trends change rapidly, influenced by international designers, social media influencers, and celebrity culture.

Kohl has been replaced by



*Shashi Kapoor and Asha Parekh as pictured in the song 'Ni Sultana Re', Film Pyar Ka Mousam*





*Cycles were the common method of travel five to six decades ago, before scooters and motorcycles.*

waterproof eyeliner, as natural beauty therapies ironically involve a lot more effort. Beauty parlours have become salons, and weddings have makeup artists who require mood boards. However, there is a growing movement towards sustainable fashion and mindful beauty. People are embracing handloom textiles, supporting local artisans, and reviving traditional crafts, echoing the fashion sensibilities of the '60s.

Also, one needs to concede that we cannot be as blasé about beauty as our parents and grandparents. Today, with UV penetration and pollution, leaving home without a good sunscreen or a good moisturising routine might really be detrimental to one's health and well-being. It is important to be mindful about what is applied on skin, labels to be read and definitely to make informed choices.

### **Stoicism Vs Self-Care Sundays**

Mental health wasn't a phrase you heard in everyday conversation in the '60s. You had a bad day? You

were told to "go take a nap" or "eat something sweet." Emotional resilience existed, but it wasn't labelled. It was built through shared experiences and collective strength. Community bonds and family support played big roles in navigating life's ups and downs. Problems were discussed in hushed tones or behind closed doors, and professional help? Unheard of. Today, it's okay to not be okay, and this perhaps is one of the things that has changed for the better.

Mental health is openly discussed. Therapy is encouraged. Burnout is a recognized condition. Despite the advancements, the essence of mental resilience remains the same: the ability to adapt, persevere, and find strength in adversity. The '60s taught us the value of community and simplicity, lessons that are being rediscovered in today's fast-paced world.

But this openness has come with a paradox, there's more anxiety, more digital noise, and more loneliness in a hyper-connected world. While we speak more about emotions, we sometimes feel them more intensely because we're expected to "optimize" our lives. From silent resilience, we've achieved spoken acceptance, with more resources but also have developed more emotional complexity.

Life in the 1960s India had a charm of its own, marked by warmth, human connection, and unhurried routines. Today, we enjoy the fruits of progress, global reach, convenience, and awareness. Yet, amidst this revolution, there's a growing nostalgia for the simplicity of the past,

So, perhaps the ideal life isn't about choosing one era over the other. Maybe it's about blending the charm of the 1960s with the choices of today. Seeking a balance between modern science and ancient knowledge. Keep the wisdom of your grandmother's *nuskhas*, wear that heirloom saree once in a while, but enjoy your oat milk latte too. While you enjoy that cuppa coffee in solitude, don't forget to call your elders just to reconnect yourself with your past. It's therapy, trust me!

Here's to celebrating a life that remembers the past, enjoys the present, and gracefully dances into the future-whether in a khadi kurta or yoga pants.



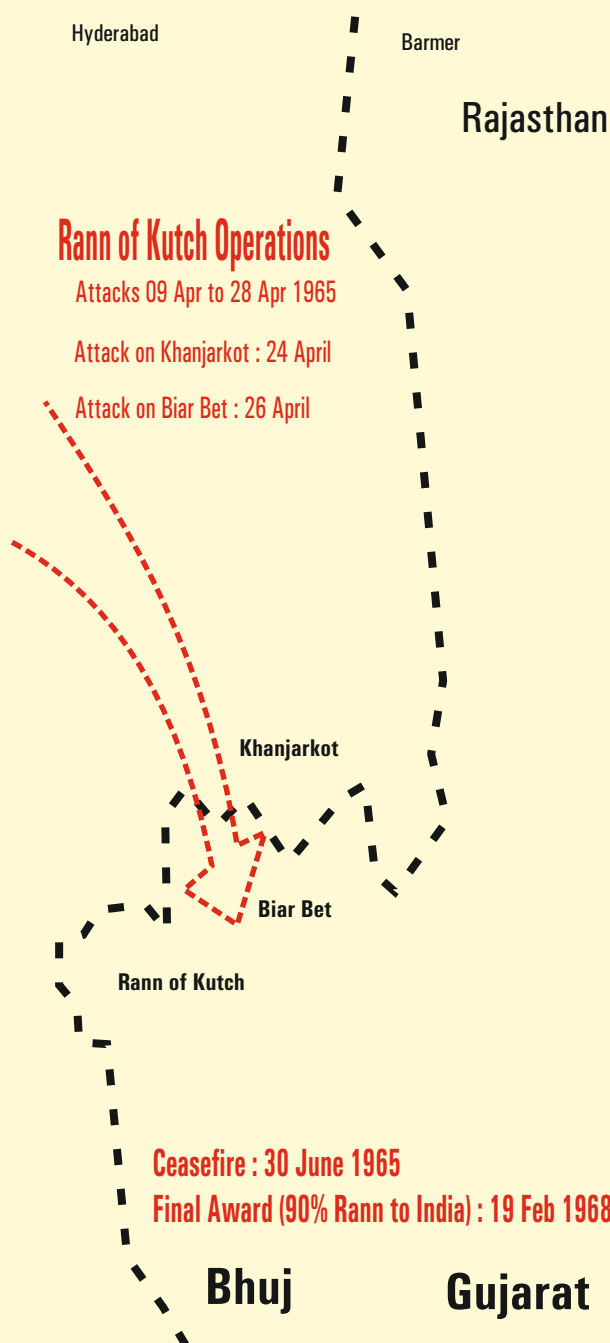
*Dr Renuka David, MBBS, PGD (MCH), USA-PhD (HC) is the Managing Director of Radiant Medical Services and an alumnus of the Coimbatore Medical College. She has been a frontier doctor, working extensively with women and young adults in urban, rural and tribal India. She has also been a contract doctor with the Indian Army for three years. Dr Renuka dons many avatars as an entrepreneur, doctor, professional speaker, television show host, TEDx speaker and wellness expert. She is the Founder-Curator of the immensely successful Radiant Wellness Conclave.*

*For medical queries, please email: ask@drrenukadavid.com*



**Dr.Renuka David**

## The Conflict in Kutch 1965



Source : BC Chakravorty & D Phil, History of Indo-Pak War 1965, History Div, MoD, 1992

# IMPACT OF 1965 WAR ON INDIA - PAKISTAN AFFAIRS

Pakistan never accepted that it started the 1965 war, nor did it accept that **Operation Gibraltar** for instigating an uprising - revolt in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and **Operation Grand Slam** to sever the road connectivity to Kashmir failed miserably. The military defeats in the battlefields at Sialkot, Lahore and Khem Karan, were explained as victories in defensive battles against a larger India and commemorated as **Defence Day** in Pakistan. A delusional Pakistan therefore failed to draw lessons from the irrationality in their geopolitical outlook, inferiority of their military strategy and the dilapidating nature of their all pervasive anti-India Kashmir obsession. Pakistan continues to struggle with these grave infirmities till today.

*The reaction and response of the two delegates (Indian and Pakistan) to the event (Tashkent declaration of 10 January 1966) was written clearly on their faces. The Indians were jubilant and smiling, while the Pakistanis, almost without exception, were sullen and despondent. If the reaction of the two sides was any indication, it appeared that the Tashkent declaration was for Pakistan a statement of surrender.'*

*Air Marshal Asghar Khan,  
former Commander in Chief, Pakistan Air Force*

## Military Operations by Pakistan in 1965

Assessing a weakened India post the 1962 China-India war and convinced of their superiority with freshly acquired US weapons, Pakistan started military operations against India in April 1965. The Pakistan Army, equipped with US made Patton tanks initially attacked an Indian police post near the boundary

<sup>1</sup> Air Marshal Asghar Khan, former Commander in Chief, Pakistan Airforce, *The First Round Indo Pakistan War 1965*, Vikas Publishing, 1st Edition 1979, p 121



generate public uprising and the intruders were captured or killed. In retaliation, India captured the vital Haji Pir pass and Tithwal heights across the Cease Fire Line (CFL). In panic, because of the threat to Muzaffarabad, Pakistan launched a major attack in the Chhamb sector and advanced towards Akhnoor on 01 September. This **Operation named Grand Slam** to cut off Poonch and Rajouri and then sever the Jammu-Srinagar highway, failed as well.<sup>3</sup>

India's riposte operations advanced towards Lahore on 06 September and towards Sialkot on 07 September. While the thrust towards Sialkot slowed down, the Lahore offensive reached upto Batapore and Burki on the outskirts of Lahore. Such was the state of military desperation and political panic after India's riposte that

between Pakistan's Sindh province and India's Kutch area and later in April, launched a major operation employing an infantry division and two armoured regiments in the Kanjarkot area. Thereafter in end April Pakistan assaulted the Indian position at Biar Bet<sup>2</sup>, which was well within the Indian borders. Biar Bet was handed back to India under a UK mediated peace agreement and later, the UN mandated Indo-Pakistan Western Boundary (Rann of Kutch) award of 19 February 1968 upheld India's claim to majority of the disputed areas in Kutch. It awarded 90% of the Rann to India. After the assault on Biar Bet however, Pakistan nurtured the illusion of victory in the Rann which perhaps emboldened it for the subsequent misadventure in J&K after a few months.

In August 1965, Pakistan sent an army of regulars masquerading as irregulars - freedom fighters, to trigger an uprising in J&K. This **Operation Gibraltar** failed to

surviving intact after the war was celebrated in Pakistan as **Defence Day**. At this critical stage, Pakistan launched another desperate attack on India through the Khem Karan sector employing its last reserves built around an armoured division. This was halted at Asal Uttar where almost 100 Pakistani tanks were destroyed and which in effect annihilated Pakistan Army's offensive capability and brought the war to a close<sup>4</sup>. Pakistan accepted ceasefire immediately thereafter on 22 September 1965.

The politico-military situation emerging in the warring countries after a war is a good measure of success or failure. In Pakistan, ZA Bhutto, the real architect of the war resigned after the Tashkent Agreement and the Ayub presidency was fatally weakened leading to his ouster in 1969. It also marked a new phase in East Pakistan's demand for autonomy which eventually led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971<sup>5</sup>. Pakistan's Chief of Air Force during the 1965 war, Air Marshal Nur Khan observed in an interview on 6 September 2005, that "they

<sup>2</sup> BC Chakravorty & D Phil, *History of the Indo-Pakistan War 1965*, History Division, MoD, GoI, 1992

<sup>3</sup> SN Prasad UP Thapliyal, *The Indian-Pakistan War of 1965: A History 2011*, Natraj Publishers and Ministry of Defence, Government of India

<sup>4</sup> Lt Gen Harbaksb Singh, Vrc, *War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict 1965*, 1991, Lancer Int, New, Delhi

<sup>5</sup> Manoj Joshi, *Looking back at the 1965 War, with a more objective eye*, Observer Research Foundation, 08 September 2015.



(Pakistan's Politico-Army hierarchy) misled the nation with a big lie that India rather than Pakistan had provoked the war and that we were the victims of Indian aggression". He further stated that, "it was an unnecessary war". Militarily nothing could be achieved and all objectives remained elusive.<sup>6</sup>

### Pakistan's Geopolitical and Military Outlook in 1965

Pakistan's lofty military plans and ambitious geopolitical objectives of 1965, against a much larger India, can be attributed in some measure to medieval and extreme Islamic beliefs existing in the country. Islamic ideology dictates Pakistan's worldview and its military's ambitions.<sup>7</sup> The everlasting quest for trans-national identity, pivotal role in the Islamic world, and gradual interning of non-state actors (terrorists) in Pakistan military, can all be traced to the relentless yearning for a more radical form of Islam.<sup>8</sup>

In great measure, Pakistan's politico-military outlook since 1947 has been a function of its all-pervasive and deeply rooted anti-India sentiments. Emanating from a flawed two nation theory,

convoluted historical beliefs anchored in trans-national religious concepts, the Pakistan polity nurtured and encouraged belief in Muslim Pakistan's superiority over 'Hindu' India. Religious nationalism at the core of Pakistan's politico-social outlook became more stringent.<sup>9</sup> Despite a common heritage and ethnicity, deliberate effort was made to distinguish Pakistan's culture from that of India. Belief in Central Asian or Arab descendancy started acquiring prominence. Such fantastic beliefs in large measure yielded the flawed and irrational politico-military outlook of 1965.<sup>10</sup>

Pakistan's historical-religious beliefs were often at conflict with rational decision making based on ground realities. Pakistan was therefore very convinced of prospects of victory in their planned uprising under 'Gibraltar'. Belief in the inferiority of the Indian forces and their incapability to cross the International Boundary (IB) prevented Pakistan from securing Lahore in strength. Notion of success in the Kutch conflict despite little gains, also contributed to Pakistan Army's arrogance at the start of war in J&K. Self assumed leadership of the Muslim world made them mistakenly believe that the entire Muslim world will stand in their support. Assuming the active support of USA and China in the conflict was also based on a mistaken assumption of importance of Pakistan in the geopolitical arena. All these fanciful notions in some measure contributed to Pakistan's 1965 misadventure and defective military plans.

On their misplaced claim over J&K and India's failure to conduct Plebiscite, Pakistan arguments are largely based on UNSC Resolution No 47 of 21 April

1948. This resolution mandates Pakistan to "secure the withdrawal from the state of J&K of tribesmen and Pakistani nationals", as the first step of the three step process and prior to partial withdrawal of Indian troops and Plebiscite. Pakistan never withdrew from the state and consequently the second step of partial withdrawal by Indian troops and the third step of Plebiscite could not be held<sup>11</sup>. It is Pakistan which is in defiance to the UN Resolution and not India.

### Impact of the War on Pakistan

While the damaging impact of 1971 war is generally known, the impact of 1965 war, which was equally devastating on Pakistan, has been cleverly veiled. This war shamed the Pakistan Army in its very first venture against an adversary. The tall-arrogant stature of a Pakistani (Muslim) soldier in Pakistan's public perception was shattered at the hands of unassuming Indian (Hindu) soldiers. Pakistan Army could never muster courage thereafter to take on the Indian Army directly. While the 1971 war was forced on Pakistan Army due to atrocities in the then East Pakistan, Pakistan Army has had to resort to proxy war employing Islamic extremists and terrorists against India in J&K, Kargil, etc.

The 1965 war brought particular shame to the Pakistan Army because the misinformation campaign on Pakistan radio and newspapers had indicated that their country was winning till the very end of the war. Once the euphoria of victory created by the official propaganda died down, people realized that Ayub Khan and the military leadership had failed the nation<sup>12</sup>. That Pakistan could not achieve any of its objectives and lost

<sup>6</sup> Tariq Aqil, *Gibraltar, Grand Slam & the 1965 War: Bane or Boon?* The Friday Times, 31 August 2022

<sup>7</sup> Robert B. Oakley with Franz-Stefan Gady, *Radicalization by Choice: ISI and the Pakistani Army*, Strategic Forum, No. 247 October 2009

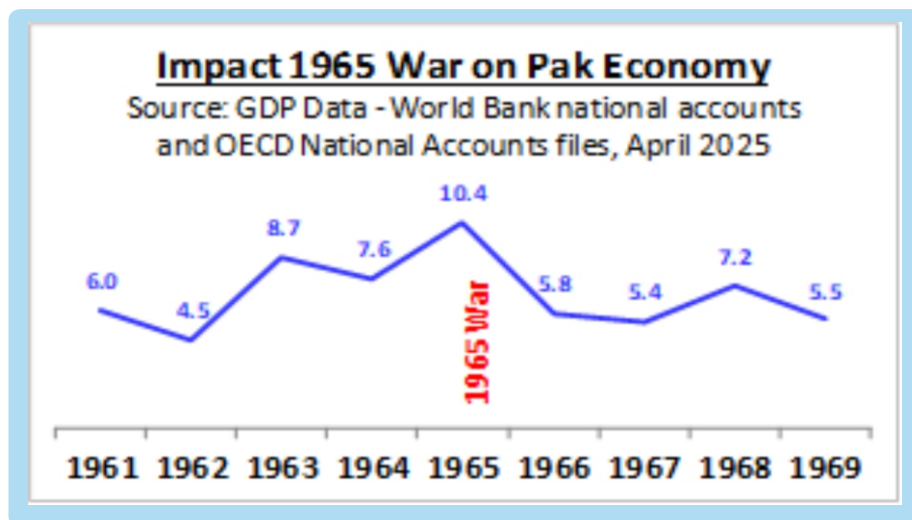
<sup>8</sup> Kapil Kaul, *Growth of radical Islam in Pakistan*, SAGE Publications, 2002

<sup>9</sup> *Pakistan Army and Terrorism; an unboly alliance, Study Paper*, European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS), Amsterdam, August 2017

<sup>10</sup> Shantanu Dayal, *limits to Pakistan China collusivity and way ahead for India in the emerging milien*, doctorate paper, Meerut University 2024

<sup>11</sup> UNSC resolution 47 (1948) [on restoration of peace & order and plebiscite in the State of Jammu and Kashmir of 21 Apr 1948, United Nations Digital Library.

<sup>12</sup> Fair, C. Christine, *Fighting to the end : the Pakistan Army's way of war*, 2014, New York : Oxford University Press, p15



vast territories, has had a deep impact on the Pakistan's public as well as the military psyche, making them more strident and radical in belief.

When the war ended, it was obvious that India was in a position to severely damage, if not physically capture Lahore, which was virtually defenceless. In addition, India also controlled the strategically important Haji Pir bulge in Kashmir. Lieutenant General Mahmud Ahmed's account of the 1965 war, which Pakistan General Headquarters approved for publication in 2002, describes it as a watershed in the balance of power in South Asia. After 1965, the Indian military power grew significantly while Pakistan's strength declined. 1971 war after six years proved decisively the acute asymmetry which had ensued between the two Armies after 1965.

The most far-reaching impact of this war was on the economy of Pakistan. The 1965 war put an end to the very impressive economic growth in Pakistan in early 1960s. Between 1964 and 1966, Pakistan's defence spending rose from 4.82% to 9.86% of GDP, further straining

development and economy. By 1971 defence spending shot up to 55.66% of federal government expenditure. Resultantly, economic growth of Pakistan came to a near standstill leading to rampant unemployment and price hike. The present day economic crisis in Pakistan can be explained to the economic downfall which started after the 1965 war. In effect, Pakistan had to pay a crippling economic price for this war.<sup>13</sup>

The 1965 war remained confined to the India-Pakistan borders on the West; specifically in J&K and Pakistan Punjab, also termed Pakistan's 'core'. Pakistan could spare little military capability for East Pakistan throughout 1965.

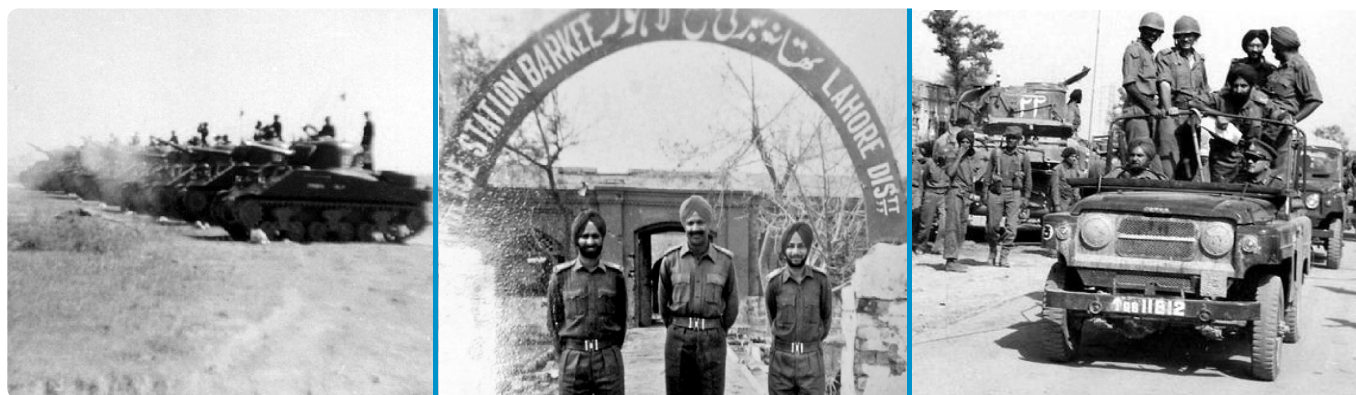
Pakistan reportedly believed that the defence of the East lies in the West. This obsession with Pakistan's 'core' was not lost on the Bengali citizens of East Pakistan. It encouraged independence sentiments and also popularized their six point demand including the demand for a separate military. 1965 war therefore was yet another catalyst for the independence movement in Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup>

Prior to 1965, while relations between India and Pakistan were not entirely friendly, routine transactions between the two countries remained cordial. There were regular interchange of ideas and views and the public at large was not so antagonistic. The 1965 war changed this dramatically. A deep distrust grew between the two countries. Enhanced adversarial environment in the sub continent gave rise to increased militarisation in both countries. While India did purchase foreign arms, it was largely self dependent for most of its needs. Pakistan on the other hand was increasingly dependent on US and later China for defence technology and weaponry. The militarization and nuclearisation has resulted in the Indian sub continent acquiring notoriety as one of the most militarized regions in the world.

The 1965 war increased the superpower involvement in the sub continent with a distinct bias of the West towards Pakistan. Consequently, there was an obvious deterioration of India-West relations, particularly with the US. Much later, post Afghanistan and discovery of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, the US and the world

<sup>13</sup> Tariq Aqil, *Gibraltar, Grand Slam & the 1965 War: Bane or Boon?* *The Friday Times*, 31 August 2022

<sup>14</sup> Fair, C. Christine, *Fighting to the end: the Pakistan Army's way of war*, 2014, New York: Oxford University Press, p150



(Left) Tanks of Indian Army on the move during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War (credit warhistoryonline.com). (Centre) Indian soldiers at Police Station Barkee, Lahore District. (Right) General J N Chaudhuri, Army Chief being taken around Dograi

recognised the deceitful nature of Pakistan's geopolitics. Pakistan has gradually become isolated in the world affairs and its articulations have lost credibility. Thereafter, Pakistan has been gravitating unabashedly towards China.

While Pakistan had created Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency in 1947, India's external intelligence was under Intelligence Bureau, which is perhaps the oldest (since 1887) existing intelligence organisation in the world. Inadequacies of India's external intelligence were exposed when nearly 7000 Pakistani intruders entered J&K in August 1965. This intelligence failure prompted the establishment of Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW) in 1968. This war also exposed the inadequacy in Indian State Armed Police to cope with armed aggression by a foreign adversary. Border Security Force (BSF) was accordingly created after the war on 01 December 1965 as a unified central agency with the mandate of guarding India's IB.

### What did India (not) Learn from 1965 War

Pakistan was the unprovoked and the deceitful aggressor in 1965. While the

Tashkent Agreement did manage to restore territorial status quo existing prior to 05 August 1965 (when Pakistani intruders entered J&K surreptitiously), it did not call out Pakistan's aggression, nor did it articulate any measure to avoid needless wars in future. No retribution was mandated against the aggressor Pakistan for the deaths and destruction in the war. **No costs were imposed on the aggressor which in effect put the invader (Pakistan) on the same pedestal as the defender (India). This fatal flaw in the Agreement and weakness in India's politico-diplomatic approach continues to beleaguer India till today.**

While Pakistan had failed in its war objectives and had lost the vital Haji Pir pass as well as prime territories adjoining Lahore and Sialkot, it could still sway the narrative in its favour wherein the 1965 war was perceived a stalemate by most international views and accepted as a victory in Pakistan (**Defence Day**). By India, however, there was no attempt at forcefully portraying the truth in the public domain except for routine radio broadcasts and the usual newsprint stories. **Lacking a coherent**

**perception policy and narrative focus, India's side of the story has generally remained unheard and unrecognized in India and the world at large.**

After the 1965 War, India occupied approx 1920 sq km of Pakistan territory, while Pakistan occupied only around 550 sq km of Indian territory. India's victories were in Sialkot, Lahore and Haji Pir (Kashmir) areas, which were prime and vital Pakistani territories, whereas Pakistan had occupied un-useable desert lands in Rajasthan of peripheral value and a small enclave in Chhamb on the borders of J&K. **In the absence of any retribution measure, a fair settlement was an absolute minimum essentiality. Instead, India rewarded the aggressor by relinquishing the vital territorial gains in Pakistan. This self-punishing approach continued to fester India's approach (repeated in Shimla Agreement in 1972) in dealings with its Western neighbour for the next six decades till the retributions post Pulwama in 2019 and Pahalgam in 2025.**

The war in 1965 and its conclusion





Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri with then Pakistan President Ayub Khan and then Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin at Tashkent, January 1966.

via the Tashkent Agreement also assured continued instability in India-Pakistan affairs. As explained above, it equated the aggressor with the victim thereby encouraging further aggression. It brought two unequal neighbours on the same plank. India with its open, secular, economically growing credentials started getting hyphenated with a closed, Islamic, inward looking and economically poor Pakistan. Pakistan's role in helping the Western powers in Afghanistan did not contribute to the peace in South Asia. This further bolstered Pakistan's constricted outlook and Kashmir obsession, which continues to manifest as proxy war by Pakistan till today. **While the 1965 War created India-Pakistan hyphenation has been significantly eroded, Pakistan's obsession with Kashmir requires more serious battering and vanquishing.**

### Conclusion

At the core of Pakistan's geopolitics lies their military belief system with a

pronounced India obsession. Defeat in all conventional wars has intensified India fixation and forced Pakistan into the strategy of proxy warfare, terrorism, low intensity conflict, etc. Despite repeated defeats Pakistan continues to expect that the world and India would yield to their demands on J&K. This belief system started with concessions granted in 1947-48 and was further reinforced in 1965 when their illegal and irrational demands were not thwarted despite defeat. Legal and function irrationality of their demands notwithstanding, their obsession with Kashmir and expectations from India has continued to grow with every defeat. For them, **accepting the finality of Jammu and Kashmir's Accession to India is**

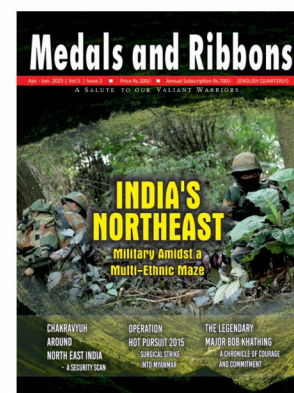
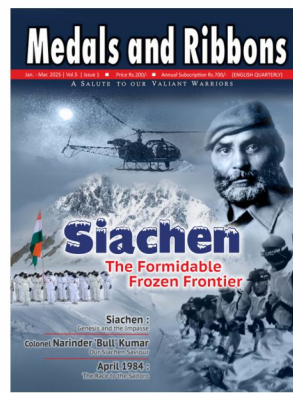
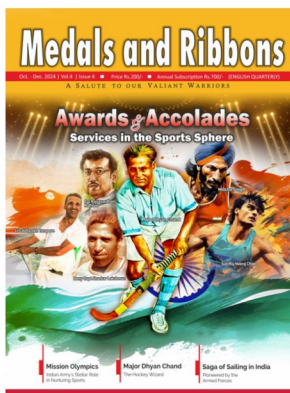
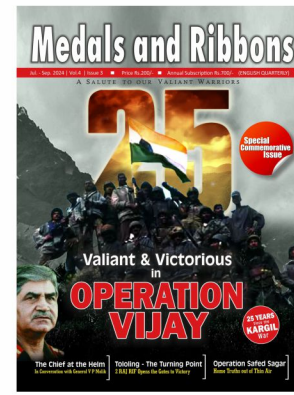
**accepting the irrelevancy of two nation theory and futility of the Islamic state of Pakistan. The incorrigibility of Pakistan's warped belief system must be understood and measures taken to annihilate it totally and fatally.**



*Lieutenant General (Dr) Shantanu Dayal, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (retd), an alumnus of National Defence Academy, Pune was commissioned in the Garhwal Rifles in 1984. He has participated in all major operations undertaken by the Indian Army till 2022, when he superannuated as the Deputy Chief of the Army Staff. He commanded a Corps on the Northern Borders during the Galwan crisis and a division on the Line of Control after the surgical strikes. After a brief stint as Chairman Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission, he is now working as an Advisor in the defence industry sector.*



**Lt Gen  
(Dr) Shantanu Dayal**



## EASY TO SUBSCRIBE

Just transfer the subscription amount electronically to Radiant Content Creations Pvt Ltd, Account number 602605501255, ICICI Bank, T. Nagar, Chennai, IFSC Code ICIC0006026. Subscription rates are Rs 200/- for one issue, Rs 700/- for 4 issues and Rs 2000/- for 12 issues. And let us know the transaction details and your address for despatch of the magazines - email to [info@medalsandribbons.com](mailto:info@medalsandribbons.com) with cc to [chiefeditor@medalsandribbons.com](mailto:chiefeditor@medalsandribbons.com)

## ARTICLES FOR PUBLICATION

Readers interested in contributing articles/poems/cartoons/humour/anecdotes for publication may kindly email to [chiefeditor@medalsandribbons.com](mailto:chiefeditor@medalsandribbons.com). Some of the authors of content selected for publication will be suitably remunerated, between Rs 1000/- to Rs 5000/-, depending on the length and content value. The decision of the Editor would be final in this respect.

...

The views expressed in this magazine are those of individual authors, and not necessarily of the Editorial Team or management. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without permission from the Editor.

Any queries related to the magazine may be raised on [www.medalsandribbons.com](http://www.medalsandribbons.com) or may be mailed to [info@medalsandribbons.com](mailto:info@medalsandribbons.com)

Visit us at [www.medalsandribbons.com](http://www.medalsandribbons.com) Follow us [f](https://www.facebook.com/medalsandribbons) [i](https://www.instagram.com/medalsandribbons) [y](https://www.youtube.com/medalsandribbons)

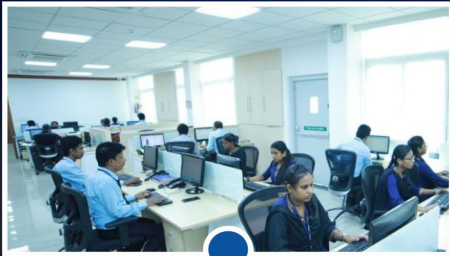




# RADIANT

GROUP OF COMPANIES

**Varied Business Interests - One Mission.... Redefining Excellence**



**RADIANT CASH MANAGEMENT  
SERVICES LTD**



**RADIANT  
PROTECTION FORCE PVT LTD**



**RADIANT  
BUSINESS SOLUTIONS PVT LTD**



**RADIANT  
MEDICAL SERVICES PVT LTD**



**RADIANT's  
CSR INITIATIVES**



**RADIANT CONTENT CREATIONS  
PRIVATE LIMITED**

**Regd. Office :** No.28, Vijayaragava Road, T.Nagar, Chennai - 600017  
Ph: 044 28155448 / 6448 / 7448. Fax: 044 28153512

**Corporate Office :** No.4/3, Raju Nagar, 1st Street, Okkiyam Thuraipakkam,  
Chennai - 600096. Ph: 044 4904 4904

**[www.radiantgroups.com](http://www.radiantgroups.com)**