

The Hero of Tiger Hill: Autobiography of a Param Vir

by Hony Capt Yogendra Singh Yadav,
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India has fought five wars since Independence, four with Pakistan in 1947-48, 1965, 1971, and 1999, and one with China in 1962. The Kargil War or Operation Vijay was fought in 1999. In 1998, both India and Pakistan became nuclear power, and this escalated the security concerns of both the countries. Taking initiative, the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited Lahore in February 1999 for peaceful resolution of all pending issues. Pakistan apparently reciprocated but it later turned out to be a ruse. When Lahore Declaration was being signed by the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, the Pakistan Army launched 'Operation Badr' to occupy the posts overlooking Srinagar-Leh Highway in Kargil, vacated by Indian Army during winters. The aim was to cut off the link between Kashmir and Ladakh, and compel India to seek a settlement of the Kashmir dispute.

By the first week of May, the Indian Army learnt about the infiltration of Pakistanis over the heights of Kargil sector. The Army launched 'Operation

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Vijay' to throw out the infiltrators from the occupied posts. The Indian Air Force also launched Operation Safed Sagar on 26 June 1999 to support the Army to flush out the infiltrators. Indian Navy also deployed its fleets to meet any contingency. The Kargil War came to an end on 26 July 1999 with the eviction of Pakistan Army after suffering heavy casualties. During these Operations, four Indian soldiers were awarded the Param Vir Chakra (PVC), the highest gallantry award, for their valour.

The Hero of Tiger Hill: Autobiography of a Param Vir is the autobiography of Grenadier (later Honorary Captain) Yogendra Singh Yadav, one of the four PVC winners of Kargil War, 1999. The book narrates the story of an ordinary village boy, who with indomitable courage, and devotion to duty turned himself into a national hero. The book is divided into three parts, first 'Formative Years', second, 'From a Civilian to a Soldier', and third, 'Kargil War'. Each part comprises some ten to fourteen chapters totalling to thirty seven. The book includes citations of gallantry award winners of 18 Grenadiers Regiment, to which Captain Yadav belonged, and some attractive photographs of the warrior.

Captain Yogendra Singh Yadav was born in a family of soldiers in western Uttar Pradesh. His father had served in Kumaon Regiment and fought the 1965 and 1971 wars. From childhood Yogendra had been listening to the stories of guts and valour of Indian soldiers from his veteran father. After matriculation, he also planned to follow in the footsteps of his father and join the Army. Generally, by the time a village boy enters his teens, the discipline and hard work of village life makes him physically tough. The preparation for soldiering thus begins at a very tender age in the villages. So it was with Yogendra. He was average in studies but strong in determination and confidence. He prepared well and got through the selection process, and was enrolled in the Grenadiers, one of the most decorated regiments of the Indian Army.

Yogendra joined Grenadiers Regimental Centre Jabalpur for training in December 1996. He found the atmosphere at the training very inspiring. The stories of courage of CHM Abdul Hamid, the hero of the India-Pakistan War of 1965, and Major Hoshiar Singh, the hero of 1971 War both Grenadiers, thrilled him. The jeep used by CHM Hamid displayed at the Centre, and the Parade Ground named after Major Hoshiar Singh always reminded him of the bravery and ethos of the Regiment. Yadav graphically describes the life at training centre learning of various drills, handling of weapons, war tactics, and discipline which prepared one for life as a soldier. The bond of camaraderie instilled in the recruits prepared them to lay down their lives for

fellow soldiers and the country in different situations of war. After successful training, Yogendra was posted to 18 Grenadiers Regiment.

The 18 Grenadiers was then engaged in anti-terrorist operations in Kashmir. Yogendra soon started learning nuances of soldiering and took part in some anti-terrorist operations. Meanwhile, his marriage was celebrated on 5 May 1999 at his village. After marriage when Yogendra reported at transit camp in Jammu, he was told that War had broken out with Pakistan in Kargil sector, and that his Battalion had been deployed there. He reported at the unit, which was then preparing for operations on Tololing mountain in the Drass sector. Yogendra was placed with a team which was assigned the task of reinforcing the attacking platoons with ammunitions, rations, etc. His team would start from Base Camp at 5.00 am in the morning, climb up mountain with heavy load of ammunitions, etc., and reach the destination at around 2.30 in the night, braving heavy artillery and gun firings in extremely cold weather conditions. Lack of oxygen at high altitude was also a matter of concern. This went on continuously for 22 days. Impressed with his devotion to duty, Yogendra was selected as a member of attacking platoon during operations at Tiger Hill.

Yogendra writes that during the night before the attack, all soldiers of the attacking team wrote letters to their families as these could be their last communication. Next day they moved to foothill area. The Tiger Hill position was located at a height and enemy there could monitor any Indian action during the day time. The team, therefore, waited for the night in order to deny positional advantage to enemy. During the night, the team with 25 kg weight on the back of each person, started climbing up the steep mountains. Heavy baggage and scarcity of oxygen necessitated a short rest after every 50 steps. By the time, they reached near the objective, day broke out. The men took shelter behind the rocks, had some biscuits and shakarparas, and waited for the night in order to proceed further unnoticed by the enemy. A support company was also moving along the attacking platoon. During the night when the men reached near the main peak, they were totally exhausted. They waited for some rest. Another dawn appeared soon. Now a steep rock confronted them. The team threw rope which stuck somewhere in the rock and enabled them to climb up. Yogendra who was first to climb, scanned the area, and asked the others to follow. Soon the enemy noticed the movements and started firing. By this time only seven men of the team had climbed up the rope. The movement of rest of the soldiers was stalled by heavy enemy fire.

All the seven soldiers treaded further in the mountains and saw two enemy bunkers manned by some 150 Pakistanis on top of a large plain area. Noticing that the Indian Army had reached the top, the Pakistanis started fire indiscriminately. It was a dreadful sight. Yogendra writes that when death is the only option fear vanishes. The team attacked the first bunker, captured it, and took shelter behind the boulders. The enemy increased the intensity of fire from various hidden locations. The team then decided to stop firing and wait for the next move of the enemy. The enemy then got the impression that all attackers have been killed, and came out in the open. The Indian attacking team opened fire on them and took a heavy toll. However, this exposed their location, and enemy attacked them from all sides with machine guns, automatic weapons, and hand grenades. The team members became targets of the enemy fire one after another.

Yogendra was also hit by the shrapnel of two grenades, piercing his leg, and making a deep wound under his eye. He felt that his leg had been severed, and the left eye has lost sight. His whole body was soaked with blood, and his nose started bleeding heavily. Mustering courage, he uprighted himself, dragged his body near a rock and set his back against a rock. Meanwhile, he had lost a lot of blood. Now his team was left with only three soldiers while the enemy was not less than thirty. The enemy surrounded them from three sides and attacked. Meanwhile, one of Yogendra's seniors was hit in the head by an enemy bullet and he died instantly. The other was hit by a bullet in the chest and made the supreme sacrifice. The bodies of soldiers on both sides lay scattered all around in the area.

Now enemy started combing the area to ensure that no Indian was left alive. They shot at the dead and also fired at Yogendra which hit his right leg and left hand. Later, a bullet fired by a Pakistani at Yogendra's chest to ensure his death was deflected by a coin in his pocket. Despite intolerable pain, he lay there as dead. Convinced that no Indian was alive, the Pakistani soldiers started collecting weapons of dead Indian soldiers. When a Pak soldier picked up the AK-47 of Yogendra, the latter took out a hand grenade from his own pocket, removed the pin, and threw it on the retreating soldier. The grenade burst created a chaos among relaxed enemy soldiers. Yogendra dragged himself up to the fallen enemy, picked up his gun and started firing. He killed four of the enemy soldiers. In confusion enemy thought that Indian reinforcement had arrived and ran to save their lives. Yogendra tucked his dangling arm in his belt and started dragging his body towards Indian position. Rolling down towards own position, when he reached near a nullah, he was struck in a rock and saw some Indian soldiers nearby. He shouted for help which

was immediately rendered. Meanwhile, Yogendra who had started drifting in and out of consciousness was taken to the rear and given the first aid. He informed the Commanding Officer about the situation at the hill top with complete details. The gallantry displayed by his team and Yogendra helped the Indian Army to launch a successful attack on Tiger Hill and hoist the National Flag there.

Yogendra soon lost consciousness. When he regained it after three days, he found himself in Military Hospital Srinagar and was informed that Tiger Hill has been captured by the Indian Army. He was shifted to Base Hospital New Delhi where he recovered from his wounds in 16 months. In August 1999, Yogendra Singh Yadav was conferred with the highest gallantry award, the Param Vir Chakra for his exceptional bravery in the face of enemy. Chapter 35 of this book covers details of action at Tiger Hill.

Subsequently, Yogendra passed his Higher Secondary, Graduation and B.Ed. examination. This helped him in public speaking. He has been invited by various institutions including IITs, IIMs, Sainik Schools, etc., to share his views. His talks inspire the young generation. Yogendra superannuated from the Army in December 2021 as Honorary Captain.

Notably, there are a few surviving gallantry award winners of the Indian Armed Forces, who have chronicled their experiences of the War. This book is thus a unique work, and a welcome addition to the books on Indian military history. It is written in a lucid style and presents a graphic narration by a brave soldier. It would surely prove inspiring to the younger generation and instil in them a patriotic fervour. Such autobiographies by the brave soldiers and also military leaders should perhaps be written in more numbers.