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An Infantry Combat Leader's Memoir of the 1965 War

*M.A. Zaki**

The article is a recall of the 1965 War by an infantry company commander in the war. It attempts to bring out how the war was conducted at the tactical level. Charlie Company, commanded by the author, was involved in several skirmishes, company and battalion level attacks as part of 19 Maratha Light Infantry. The unit was part of 7 Infantry Division and fought on the Punjab front. The article covers the run up to the war and the battles, bringing out the human element and tactical level aspects of conflict, some of which continue to be relevant 50 years on. It is a worm's eye view of war, with an emphasis on combat leadership.

THE MAKING OF A COMBAT LEADER

When the 100-year-old state forces battalion, Rajaram Rifles Kolhapur, merged with Indian Army on 4 June 1949 at Lucknow, it was renamed 19 Maratha Light Infantry (Kolhapur) (19 Maratha). Soon thereafter, the unit earned its spurs providing assistance to the Government of Nepal on its request to the Indian government for the arrest of Dr Kunwar Indrajeet Singh. Indrajeet Singh, the first medical doctor from Nepal and land distribution campaigner, was a critic of Nepal's treaty with India and of the rule by the Ranas.

I was introduced to such tidbits of unit history as part of regimentation in the unit when I joined it after commissioning from the Indian Military

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Academy (IMA) in December 1955. I had opted for the Marathas, hoping to join the Maratha parachute battalion, 2 Para (3 Maratha). A paratroops optee had to, on commission, first join the parent regiment of the Para battalion before probation. I had chosen the Marathas, inspired by the feat of Naik Yashwant Ghadge, posthumous Victoria Cross winner from the Italian campaign of World War II. While at Joint Services Wing (JSW), my Maratha coursemates M.R. Gode and A.A. Wagh would affectionately call me 'Tanaji Malusare'. Finding out more about Tanaji of Sinhgarh fame, I learnt of his exploits that led to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's acclaim, *Garh ala, Sinh gela* (The fort is with us; but the Lion is no more!). Thus I chanced upon tales of Yashwant Ghadge, inspiring me to join the Marathas. When in the unit, I applied for probation, but unknown to me, my commanding officer (CO) did not forward my application. On posting out, he told me that he had withheld the application.

In my initial service in Rajasthan and Delhi, I got to know more of the martial qualities of the Marathas, fabled troops from the mountain fastnesses of the Deccan and followers of the legendary Chhatrapati. Family lore had it that our Uzbek forefathers had come to Deccan when Moghuls needed forces to tackle the Marathas in the Deccan. It is a tribute to the assimilative character of India that three centuries and 10 generations on, in independent India, I had the honour of serving with the Marathas.

During the tenure in Rajasthan, I was detailed to site Rajasthan Armed Constabulary platoons along the border from Bamno ki Dhani, north of Rann of Kutch, northwards till Munabao and Gadra Road. To my surprise, there was a village, Chandni ke Paar, that was half in India and half in Pakistan. In another incident, I led a company to apprehend dacoits who had holed out in a cave on the northern slopes of Mount Abu hills. Such adventurous experiences were a great launch into service life.

Soon after, the unit moved for its field tenure of three years in counter-insurgency operations to the Naga Hills (1958–60). As a young captain, I picked up the nuances of leadership at the tactical level against the versatile and hardened Naga hostiles, an honourable foe. As the roving company commander, I managed to be with all companies, relieving company commanders proceeding on leave. The unique grounding shaped me as a leader by providing early exposure to leading troop and command responsibilities. One long-range patrol that we did lasted 38 days, sustained by three air drops, on the slopes of Mount Japvo, the

highest feature in Nagaland. The leadership takeaway was, 'On the front, lead from the front'. In 1961, the unit moved to Calcutta for a well earned rest.

Selected as Aide to our first President, Babu Rajendra Prasad, I missed this tenure. I was serving on personal staff of the President, Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, when, in 1962, the unit was flown from Calcutta to Tezpur. As part of the hastily organised defence in face of the Chinese onslaught, it moved to Bomdi La, and thereafter to Dirang, forming part of 48 Infantry Brigade taking up defences. The Rashtrapati did not accept my request made during the war to return to the unit; but instead directed that I convey the content of the daily military operations briefings of the war to him. He finally acceded to his son, the historian, Dr S. Gopal, interceding on my behalf. As a result, I could rejoin the unit only when it reached Ranchi to recoup after its withdrawal to Udalguri in an organised retreat. The brigade then moved to Ambala and thereafter to Yol to form part of the 7 'Golden Arrow' Infantry Division, famous for its role in the Burma campaign.

The purpose of this lengthy introduction is to highlight that creating combat leaders is a complex and time-consuming process, involving both nature and nurture. The initial grooming is often in cadet training schools—in my case, the illustrious Prince of Wales' Royal Indian Military College that I had joined pre-Independence—followed by a tough regimen in two academies and then, finally, moulding as a young officer in the unit. Whereas today professionalism instilled with greater attention and mass production, almost on an assembly line basis, of junior leaders from several different academies and intake streams could lead to dilution in emphasis on combat leadership traits and moral qualities. Individuated attention in training and mentoring in units are ways to build junior leaders. Increasing the scope of responsibility at the junior level may be a challenge today in face of incessant expansion of the officer corps and upgradation of ranks. Whereas human material is indeed more aware today and technology has changed the character of war, the nature of the fighting man, and of war, has not changed. Therefore, the age-old warrior ethic must continue to be nurtured since, ultimately, war is about combat and combat is about blood and gore.

BETWEEN THE WARS

At the battalion's peace tenure at Ambala and Yol, comprehensive, practical and realistic training was a priority. The army deployed training as the

instrument for bouncing back from the reverse of 1962. The expansion resulting from the war also necessitated a greater training effort. From our experience in Nagaland and the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), we stressed physical fitness. Battle efficiency tests of 2 and 10 mile runs were regularly held. Rifle companies alternated on the obstacle course daily. The month's activities usually rounded up with a long route march.

Skill-at-arms competitions were routinely organised every quarter and culminated in field firing. The exercises on the range were practical and realistic. Rifle companies were made to assault the target area while firing on the move. This live firing and 'fire-and-move' training proved useful battle inoculation. The yearly round of sports competitions in peace stations helped build cohesion and competitive spirit in primary groups and sub-units. Promotion cadres were the highlight of the professional training cycles in cantonments. Regularly held and rigorous, the reward was for merit and effort. On the administrative day, typically Saturday, company commanders assembled their respective company for an informal discussion on minor tactics. All ranks participated in what turned out to be lively discussions, developing an ability to think about operations of war in the junior leadership.

War clouds gathered on the horizon with the events in far away Kutch in April 1965. The army was partially mobilised in Operation Ablaze in case the localised conflict escalated. During the deployment at Patti in Punjab, practical training was carried out so that troops got to know their areas and were made fully aware of the developing situation. We were mentally and physically hardened to accept any challenge that could arise in short order. As a result of the deployment and extensive reconnaissance, the area between Khalra and Khem Karan was well known to troops. In July, after a summer expecting war outbreak, we returned to barracks when the situation stabilised in Kutch.

However, in August, we learnt, largely through radio news bulletins, that Pakistani infiltrators were active in Srinagar Valley. In reaction, the army captured the launch pads of the infiltrators across the ceasefire line (CFL) in the Haji Pir sector in late August. This prompted the Pakistanis to launch a full-scale attack from the Sialkot salient for the capture of Akhnoor on 1 September 1965. They hoped that India, forced on the back foot by threatened lines of communications in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), would restrict its response to only J&K, as it had done in 1947–48. But with J&K being an integral part of India, any attack on it could only be taken as an attack on India. Therefore, the government decided

on opening up the Punjab front, for which the army was pre-prepared with its war plans finalised on 9 August. Since we were committed to a policy of peace, the offensive plan was predicated on Pakistan taking the initiative by commencing offensive operations. Pakistan duly obliged by its offensive into Chhamb.

On 3 September, the government gave the 'go ahead', with the D-Day being 7 September. The Army Headquarters (HQ) directive required the Western Command to ensure that security of the international boundary in Punjab and Rajasthan, even while launching limited offensives into Pakistan with a view to gaining territory and keeping the lines of communications open to J&K. The Army Commander, Lieutenant General (Lt Gen) Harbaksh Singh's concept of operations was that after blunting Pakistan's offensive and stabilising the overall situation, his Command would launch a limited offensive with the aim of capturing Pakistan's territory east of the Ravi river, and following up with capture of Lahore if possible. XI Corps, responsible for the plains sector, consequently was tasked to destroy any enemy that might enter Punjab and Ganganagar sector in Rajasthan; advance to Ichhogil Canal along the axis Grand Trunk Road, Bhikhiwind–Khalra and Bhikhiwind–Khem Karan, and posture as to capture Lahore on orders in subsequent phases. Thus, after stabilising the counter-infiltration situation in J&K, the Command undertook to react to Pakistani pressure in Chhamb by limited offensives across the front with D-Day preponed to 6 September. H-Hour was postponed by an hour to 0500 hours.

COMPANY COMMAND IN WAR

During Operation Ablaze, the war game of XI Corps had been conducted at Amritsar and plans had been finalised. Thereupon procedures had been streamlined and all down to unit level had been acquainted with possible tasks and objectives. This allowed initial surprise to be achieved when the proverbial 'balloon went up'. I was on a Land–Air Warfare course, so I could only join up with the unit on 8 September, missing the outbreak of hostilities.

The First Round: Initial Objectives

Scrambling in good order out of cantonments close to the border, the HQ 7 Infantry Division concentrated at Narla by 5 September (refer Figure 1), with 48 Infantry Brigade at area Sidhwan–Mughal Chak. The other units of 48 Infantry Brigade were 5 Guards and 6/8 Gorkha Rifles (GR).

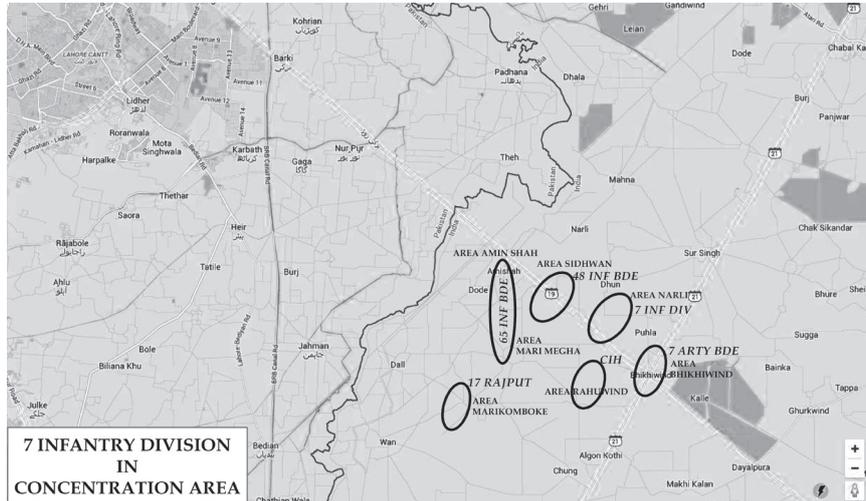


Figure 1 Divisional Deployment in Concentration Area

Source: Author.

The brigade was to gain the line of Hudiara Drain and, if possible, capture the bridge across it intact. In addition to capture of territory, capturing the bridge was to deny tank crossings as also enable our own tanks to get across when needed.

Attack on Hudiara

On 6 September, operations commenced at 0445 hours. In the first hour, troops of 4 Sikh and 6/8 GR had, in preliminary operations, captured Theh Marja and Rakh Hardit Singh as well as the post at Ghawindi Barrier. Thereupon, 48 Infantry Brigade Group commenced advance into Pakistan astride the road Khalra–Barki, with 6/8 GR leading the advance. 6/8 GR's leading company was engaged by the enemy holding Hudiara and Nurpur with heavy artillery, mortar and medium machine gun (MMG) fire. By early forenoon, Hudiara was captured. It was not possible to capture Hudiara Drain position as the dispositions of the enemy were a company each at Hudiara Drain and Nurpur.

The brigade tasked 5 Guards to capture Nurpur company locality of the enemy. The 5 Guards commenced advance in the afternoon and by the evening, it had succeeded in cutting the enemy off by an outflanking move. The enemy, fearing capture, blew up the bridge on Hudiara Drain and withdrew to Barka Kalan and Barka Khurd. Dusk found 48 Infantry Brigade firmed in with 5 Guards and 19 Maratha across the Drain,

and 6/8 GR to the east of Hudiara Drain. The 7 Infantry divisional engineers commenced constructing a causeway and Bailey bridge on Hudiara Drain.

The 7 Infantry Division tasked 65 Infantry Brigade to capture Barki with Central India Horse (CIH) less one squadron. Barki's importance was due to the fact that there was a bridge over the Ichhogil Canal and its capture would threaten Lahore from the south-east. Advancing troops moved upto Barka Kalan and Barka Khurd for preparations for capture of Barki. The 48 Infantry Brigade that was across the Drain was ordered back to clear the enemy from own side of Hudiara Drain.

On 9 September, as 5 Guards and 6/8 GR moved to capture Jhaman, 19 Maratha was ordered to clear Hudiara village of enemy snipers. I was back with C Company; lucky not to have missed out on any action since 19 Maratha had, in the opening moves, been held in reserve. We moved to Hudiara village at 0630 hours and commenced the task. At 1100 hours, a liaison officer came from the 48 Brigade HQ and informed the company to move back to the battalion as enemy tanks were sighted moving towards the village. Along with C Company was a company of the Punjab Armed Police moving to the firm base. When we moved back, the Brigade Defence and Employment Company turned their light machine guns (LMGs) and other weapons towards us, mistaking the Punjab Police in khaki uniforms as enemy troops. The alert logistics staff officer at the Brigade HQs, Major S.P.S. Shrikant, MVC, averted a 'blue-on-blue' fratricide by quickly ordering the troops not to fire. Further, it turned out later that the tanks sighted were not those of the enemy but of our own CIH!

After 65 Infantry Brigade's capture of Barki by 4 Sikh, that battalion was earmarked for a special task, the capture of Khem Karan. The 19 Maratha was ordered to relieve 4 Sikh at Barki and was placed under command of 65 Infantry Brigade. On 12 September, forward elements of C Company reached Barki at 1700 hours, with the unit fetching up soon thereafter. While the process of taking over the defences was underway, at 2300 hours, we were ordered to fall back to Barka Kalan and Barka Khurd. The unit remained deployed here for a brief period, the proverbial lull prior to the storm of action to follow (refer Figure 2). Pakistani troops that had remained in forward areas during the stand-off in summer had been quick to react across the front, and in a counter-offensive towards our south in Khem Karan had created a criticality.

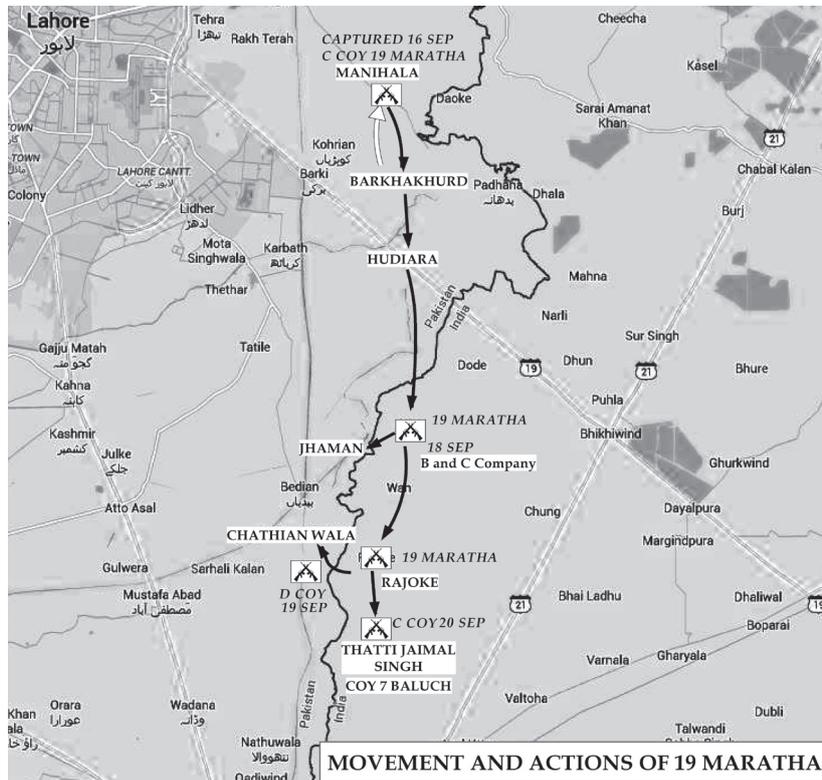


Figure 2 Movement and Actions of 19 Maratha

Source: Author.

Attack on Manhiala

On 16 September, at 1430 hours, 65 Infantry Brigade tasked 19 Maratha to send a company group to Manhiala, almost on the inter-formation boundary of 7 and 15 Infantry Divisions, and capture it. C Company was tasked for this. The briefing had it that, at best, with a detachment of the enemy holding Manhiala, mopping up was all it would take. For this task, Section 81mm Mortars, Section MMGs and two recoilless (RCL) gun detachments were grouped with C Company. Tiger C Company bid for Lieutenant (Lt) Bikram Singh to go with the company as company second-in-command (2iC), since the company had been given an independent task almost 10 kilometres (km) from defended area. The company had to march almost 10 km and, by that evening, attack and capture the objective.

When C Company reached Manhiala, it came under artillery and mortar fire from the Ichhogil defences. About 1,500 yards away from the village was a troop of tanks of CIH under Major J.K. Dutt. In its direct support, C Company had a field battery of 66 Field Regiment. On preliminary reconnaissance, the village turned out to be a large one. The company put in an unconventional attack by having all three platoons up to represent a larger frontage simulating a two-company attack. The ruse worked and the enemy, apprehending a two-company attack, vacated it. By 0200 hours on 17 September 1965, the village was cleared and the company firmed in towards its north-west in a guava grove. The remainder battalion arrived from Barka Kalan only after dawn.

Attack on Jhaman

At 1000 hours, the battalion was ordered to move almost 25 km southwards and be prepared to attack Jhaman on 18 September 1965. For this task, it reverted once again to 48 Infantry Brigade. Brigadier Piara Singh, VrC, MC, who had just taken over command of the 48 Infantry Brigade, ordered 19 Maratha to capture the area north-west of Jhaman by launching a battalion attack. Jhaman provided depth to Ichhogil Canal and had to be cleared for our forward zone to extend up to the enemy's forward obstacle. The aim was to capture the bridge on Ichhogil Canal on the capture of Jhaman. Two attacks so far had failed, the first by 5 Guards and the second by 5 Guards along with 6/8 GR. It appeared that the enemy had strengthened the bridge location.

This was the third attack with 6/8 GR to the south-west of 19 Maratha. H-Hour for the attack was 1530 hours. The distance of the forming up place (FUP) from the village was 1,500 yards. The Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) S.D. Parab, ordered a two-company attack with C Company as the left assault company. The company objective was the built-up area to the north-west of the village. Bravo Company, under Lt Vasant Chavan, was to its right (refer Figure 3).

The Brigadier, on his rounds of the FUP, met Tiger C Company leading his troops into the FUP. The Forward Observation Officer (FOO) alongside the Tiger C Company was Captain Ravikant of 66 Field Regiment. After introductions, since the Brigadier was newly in command of the brigade, he urged the importance of Jhaman and its capture. Tiger C Company reassured him, saying, 'The time now is 1500 hours. H-Hour is at 1530 hours and the objective will be captured by 1700 hours.' Even though the advancing columns were subjected to

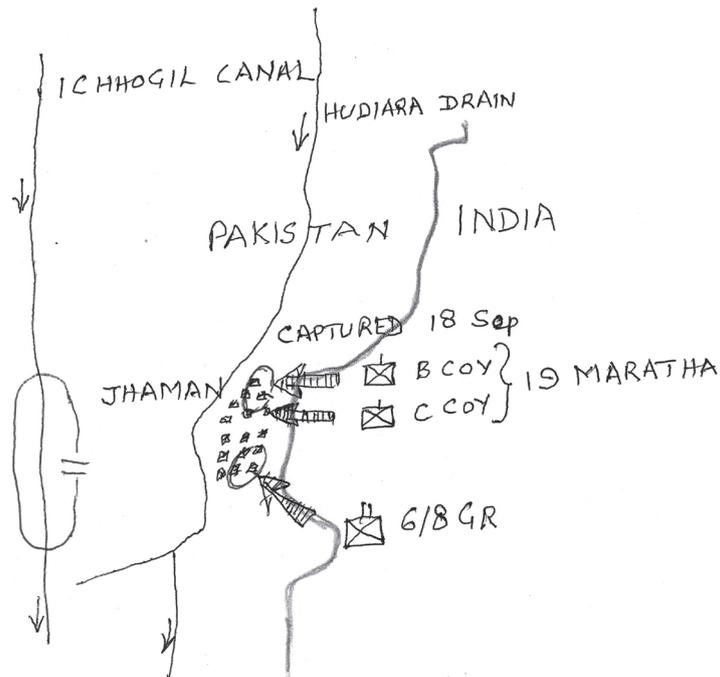


Figure 3 Attack on Jhaman

Source: Drawn by Author.

heavy artillery, mortar and MMG fire from the Ichhogil defences, the attack was successful. C Company captured 13 prisoners.

The Second Round: Task Force

For its next task immediately thereafter, 19 Maratha was ordered to hand over to 6/8 GR and move out of Jhaman. It was to concentrate south of Rajoke. Close by, tanks of 7 Cavalry (CAV) were in harbour along the Hudiara Drain, preparing to advance the next morning. At 2200 hours, Tiger C Company was sent for to join the Brigade 'O' (Orders) Group. He reported to the Brigade Commander who had, along with him, his 'Orders' Group comprising COs of 19 Maratha and 7 CAV and squadron commander of 7 CAV, Major Nanavati.

The 'O' Group was preparing for securing the right flank of 4 Mountain Division further to the south, which had been under pressure during the battles of Khem Karan and Asal Uttar earlier. For the purpose, the brigade was designated as a Task Force comprising of 19 Maratha and

7 CAV less one squadron, under the command of Brigadier Piara Singh, VrC, MC. Its offensive action on the enemy that had in gressed into 4 Mountain Division sector was to enable 4 Mountain Division's second attempt at throwing the enemy back.

The Brigade Commander, in his briefing, tasked Tiger C Company to be the Vanguard Commander and grouped a squadron of 7 CAV with the vanguard company. The objective, Thatti Jaimal Singh, was appreciated to be held by a section. The village on Indian territory had been captured by the enemy during its offensive to take Khem Karan. The area up to Dholan further to the south, again strongly held by the enemy, was then to be cleared.¹

The advance was to commence at 0615 hours on 19 September. During coordination between infantry and armour, the squadron commander of 7 CAV, Major Nanavati, inquired as to how the troops would cross Ruhi Nala enroute. Tiger C Company replied that troops would wade across. Since the radio sets in the tanks were Russian and the infantry did not have compatible radio sets, Senior Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO), Subedar Dadu Patil, with Radio Set 31 was deputed to ride atop the squadron commander's tank for inter-communications in the thick of battle.

Attack on Chathanwala

Even as C Company secured the start point, orders were received to stay put and to move only on orders of the battalion. Brigadier Piara Singh decided that a company of 19 Maratha and a squadron of 7 CAV would attack Chathanwala. Delta Company, under Captain Vijay Kumar, and a squadron of 7 CAV, led by Major Man Mohan Chopra, attacked at 1000 hours on 19 September. Though a quick attack, it was a hurried affair with insufficient time for battle drills, including recce and briefing for the junior leaders and troops. As it turned out, the enemy was in strength, more than had been appreciated, and enemy tanks were positioned in hull down position in the defences. The advance to the objective was under constant direct and indirect fire. Captain Vijay Kumar was wounded, along with 29 Other Ranks (ORs). His company 2iC, Subedar K.B. Sawlekar, and two ORs were killed. Three PT 76 tanks bogged down and their recovery under intense fire was a challenge. A platoon of B Company, under Second Lt F.A. Khan, provided cover by fire, while 7 CAV personnel engaged in the tricky recovery. Squadron commander, Major Chopra, was wounded and later succumbed to his injuries.

Attack on Thatti Jaimal Singh

On 20 September, the advance of C Company commenced at 0615 hours. Second Lt K.S. Chhokar, a newly commissioned officer of 66 Field Regiment, joined the company as FOO. Soon after crossing Ruhi Nala, the company came under fire from the right, western flank. At 0730 hours, the point platoon, under Naib Subedar Hariba Barge, was engaged by the enemy entrenched about 200 yards away. The Tiger C Company, who was with the point platoon, carried out a quick appreciation. To attack frontally appeared suicidal, so he moved the company into the sugar cane fields further to the right. While in adhoc FUP, the gallant platoon leader, Naib Subedar Hanumant Barge, was hit on the right leg by an LMG burst. Tiger C Company ordered Company Havildar Major (CHM) Krishna Sawant to take over the platoon under enemy fire. Forming up the platoons, with Sawant's on the right and the platoon of Subedar Vasudev Dalvi, another hardy soldier, on the left, C Company squared off against the objective (refer Figure 4).

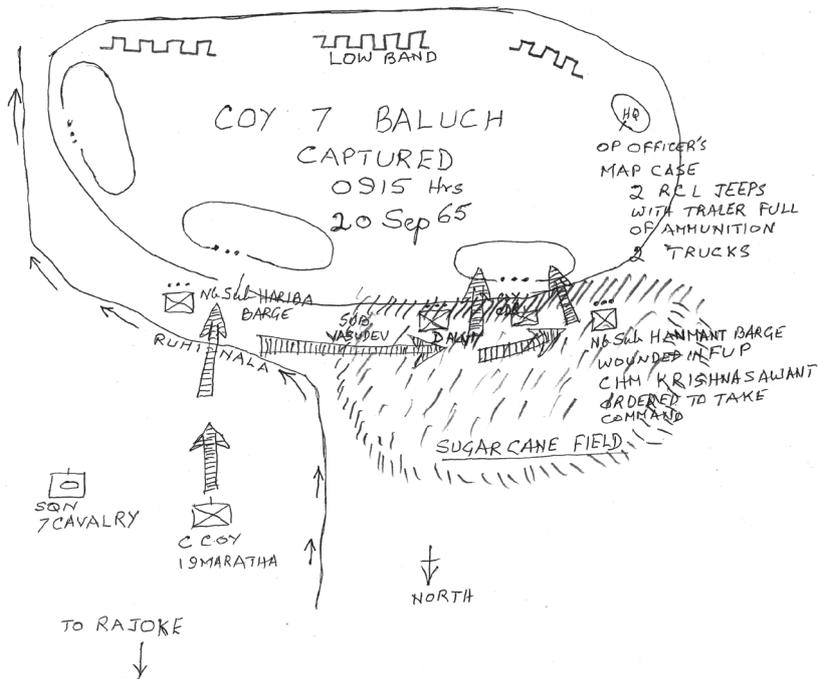


Figure 4 Attack on Thatti Jaimal Singh

Source: Author.

As the assaulting troops emerged from the sugar cane field, they appeared on the enemy's flank, surprising the enemy platoon and company HQ. The FOO, Second Lt K.S. Chhokar, brought down artillery fire on the enemy even as his gunner carrying the radio set got injured. Tiger C Company provided a replacement from among the Marathas to carry the set. Since the radio set was not receiving messages, it was evidently damaged. Tiger C Company told the FOO to continue sending messages and if that brought down artillery fire, the set was functional. Providentially, the outgoing messages worked and artillery support continued.

The enemy artillery was equally busy, subjecting the assaulting company to repeated crunches. The company drew mortar and tank fire from nearby Dholan. Suddenly, Subedar Vasudev Dalvi—leading the left assault platoon—shouted, 'Sahib, *phure baga bunker aahey!*' (Sahib, look to your front, bunker ahead!). Simultaneously, Tiger C Company was in two leaps on the bunker, even as his radio operator, Lance Naik Baban Timkre, was hit by the LMG fire from the bunker. The bunker was neutralised by CHM Krishna Sawant. In the succeeding hand-to-hand fighting, the enemy's company HQ was captured with war booty, including an observation post (OP) officer's marked map, two RCL jeeps with a trailer and two trucks full of ammunition. Seventeen enemy soldiers lay dead.

By an improvised flanking attack, the C Company had taken the enemy from the rear. Disoriented, the enemy ran away towards Sanktra to the south. By 0915 hours, Thatti Jaimal Singh was captured by C Company. The success signal was given and follow-up troops were called forward. At 0920 hours, as the company was reorganising, Tiger C Company was wounded in tank fire from Dholan. Alongside, the company was subjected to concentrated artillery, tank and mortar fire. It turned out that the enemy's air OP was directing fire with an intention of softening the objective for a counter-attack. The company held on, with Tiger C Company refusing evacuation till follow-up troops arrived at the captured position. However, since there was no response from the Battalion HQ, it appeared that the radio link was not working. Tiger C Company used the artillery channel through Second Lt Chhokar's radio link to the gun position to apprise the brigade of developments. Finally, A Company, under Lt Bikram Singh, came up and deployed to the right of C Company on a *bundh*. Only then did Tiger C Company walk back to the regimental aid post. Thereafter, while being evacuated to Patti, enroute at Rajoke, he briefed the Brigade Commander about the action.

In an innovative tactical action, C Company had captured a company position of 7 Baluch, a unique feat in any war, and at a comparatively meagre price of only five killed: one radio operator, Timkre; one MMG gunner, Manohar Kalgutkar; and three ORs.

The Third Round: Beating Back Counter-attacks

The Marathas, having lost over a company in casualties in various actions, were reinforced by B Company of 17 Rajput under Major V.D. Gupte coming under command from 20 September. The captured position was held with C Company on the left, A Company on the right and with the remainder two companies and the additional company of 17 Rajput deployed in depth. The first counter-attack came in early evening at 1600 hours that very day. Though supported by tanks, it was beaten back despite intense shelling and tank fire. The second wave to retake the position commenced immediately thereafter at 1700 hours, but was also repulsed. Punishing artillery fire went on intermittently throughout the night of 20/21 September, in order to soften up the defences for another round of three counter-attacks the following day. The shelling and counter-attacks resulted in a large number of casualties and damage to two tanks of 7 CAV. Three enemy tanks were accounted for by own RCL fire. The enemy's final effort on 22 September, with prospects of a ceasefire on the cards, was also foiled by the 'Fighting Nineteenth'.

CONCLUSION

The ceasefire found the Marathas with three officers, one JCO and 29 ORs killed in action and three officers, six JCOs and 105 ORs wounded. All company commanders were either killed or wounded, while over a company worth of troops were casualty. The unit's movements from north to south and vice versa, and putting in four attacks within a span of five days, are testimony of its cohesion, training levels and fighting spirit. The unit operated under three superior headquarters, finally ending up under the famous 4 Infantry Division, though then under cloud owing to its loss of Khem Karan. The battalion's haul of glory from the war included four Vir Chakras, five Sena Medals, and five Mentions-in-Despatches.

But justice would only be done to the memory of its martyrs in case the 'lessons learnt' are internalised. The 1999 Kargil War suggests that these remain relevant though a half century has passed. No plan outlasts the first bullet fired. Operations usually pan out as the situation develops, requiring considerable mental agility of commanders at all levels. Since

troops have to respond to changing orders, they have to be physically and mentally robust. Sub-unit cohesion requires being of the highest order with the horizontal and vertical bonding sustaining all troops and their leaders.

No attack should be mounted in haste as such actions result in avoidable casualties. Enemy strength should be realistically appreciated so that lives are not squandered. This implies that commanders should have sufficient time for recce and briefing of their command. Even if technology is replacing patrolling—the physical part of this battle procedure and drill—it is better to ensure a graduated acclimatisation to the sights, sounds and smells of battle. Rushing troops into battle is akin to going into a game without warming up. Supporting arms must be integrated into units being supported in exercises and made available to the attacking infantry units well before operations. Follow-up troops should be available to strengthen captured objectives early and on call, especially since the Pakistan Army is noted for vigour in counter-attacks. Finally, prominent among those to credit for C Company's showing in action must be the non-combatant enrolees who brought forward hot food from the unit B-echelon under CQMH Vithal Jadhav, at places under fire. That 'an army marches on its stomach' is well said indeed!

A war seldom ends with the ceasefire alone. Its legacy remains. Bonds forged last a lifetime. Alongside me in the Military Hospital (MH) in Ambala were both my leading platoon commanders, Subedars Vasudev Dalvi and Naib Subedar Hanumant Barge. Though my third platoon commander Hariba Barge had also been wounded, he was not with us there. When we three were together, with a twinkle in his eye, Naib Subedar Barge tongue-in-cheek reminded that though in his promotion cadre I had tested him on detailed verbal orders, in battle, all the orders he received from his company commander when the company dashed into the sugarcane field to deploy for the attack were, 'Mere *piche* move' (Follow me)!

At Southern Command MH Pune, I met CHM Krishna Sawant and Naik Shripat Patil, an assault section commander. Even though Krishna's right hand was amputated, he was in high spirits. Shripat was getting used to his artificial lower limb. Krishna went on to operate a kiosk outside Victory cinema hall in Pune, while Shripat's was opposite Sassoon Hospital. Their lives are a lesson in courage of a very different order. Soldiers are inspired by their predecessors through cultural transmission at occasions such as Thatti Jaimal Singh Day celebrated by the unit

and Sinhgarh Day observed by the regiment, attended by widows and veterans. I met my wartime CO, Lt Col (later Brigadier) Parab, during one such regimental reunion.

Martyrs leave behind widows and children to be cared for and supported by families and communities. Their heroic efforts must be supplemented by institutions, civil society, state governments and the Ministry of Defence. Immediately after sick leave, I met the widow of Subedar Sawlekar, killed in the Chathanwala attack, at Belgaum. Her daughter was a clerk in a company at Pune and her son was studying. When in Karwar once, I had an opportunity of meeting the widow of Sepoy Manohar Kalgutkar, widowed within a year of marriage. Kalgutkar, C Company MMG gunner, lost his life at Thatti Jaimal Singh. She had adopted a son.

The demands of combat leadership are exceptional in kind and degree. Coping is made possible by being selfless and dedicated. While to be professionally sound and mentally robust is vital, moral qualities of fairness and uprightness are equally so. When in danger, troops instinctively follow leaders because they have faith and confidence in them. Their faith comes from the moral qualities they sense in warrior leaders. Confidence comes when troops see their leaders transparently in peace at training and in war leading from the front. While troops, in general, are highly disciplined and god-fearing, the Marathas I was fortunate to serve with were additionally highly motivated, god fearing, and responsive to command. Ratification of the President's commission in the minds of such fighting men can only be through selfless service and fearless leadership.

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NOTE

1. The official history erroneously informs that Dholan was captured (B.C. Chakravarty, *History of the Indo-Pak War 1965*, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 1992 (unpublished), available at <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/ARMY/History/1965War/PDF/>, accessed on 5 March 2015, p. 167). Instead, it continued to remain in enemy hands.