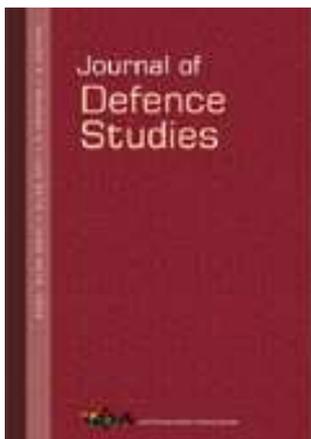


Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

No.1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
Delhi Cantonment, New Delhi-110010



Journal of Defence Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.idsa.in/journalofdefencestudies>

Indian Army's Continuity and Transformation: Through the Prism of the Battle of Dograi

Rahul K. Bhonsle

To cite this article: Rahul K. Bhonsle (2015): Indian Army's Continuity and Transformation: Through the Prism of the Battle of Dograi, Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 9, No. 3 July-September 2015, pp. 75-94

URL http://idsa.in/jds/9_3_2015_IndianArmysContinuityandTransformation.html

Please Scroll down for Article

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.idsa.in/termsfuse>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

Views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India.

Indian Army's Continuity and Transformation Through the Prism of the Battle of Dograi

*Rahul K. Bhonsle**

The continuum of change in militaries is derived from a number of factors, in which application of history plays an important part. The process of Indian Army's evolution in the plains of Western India could be charted from the lessons learnt from key episodes of the 1965 War. The Battle of Dograi was one such feat which though restricted to action by a single infantry battalion, 3 Jat, provides unique perspectives of the manner in which continuity and transformation has occurred in the Indian Army as well as how the lessons learnt can be applied effectively to current operational dilemmas, ranging from Cold Start to countering Pakistan's battlefield nuclear rocket, Nasr.

IN RETROSPECT

Can a single battle seen in retrospect, howsoever epic it may have been, as providing a telescopic view of the transformation and continuity of the Indian Army over five decades? On the one hand, this could be a historiography of changes in the Army. On the other, it could be an exercise in applied history where lessons can be drawn from a battle and its contextual relevance. From the historical point of view there are challenges to such an approach, more particularly in terms of universal application of a single event. Even for a battle that has been so exhaustively examined as Dograi in the Indo Pakistan War of 1965, the exercise may provide

* Brigadier Rahul K. Bhonsle (Retd.) is Director, Sasia Security Risks.com, a South Asian security risk and knowledge management consultancy specialising in future scenarios, military capacity building and conflict trends in South Asia.



unique insights, both in terms of aspects that bear continuity as well as those that are dynamic enough to be seen as doctrines, strategy, or tactics.

This article aims to examine the Battle of Dograi from a co-relational perspective of continuity and transformation in the Indian Army. It covers the relevance of Dograi and the two battles fought for its capture in 1965, thereby drawing lessons in the context of military continuity and transformation.

WHY DOGRAI?

The importance of Dograi as a terrain feature lay in domination of the all-important bridge on the Ichhogil Canal on the Grant Trunk (GT) Road which connected Delhi through Amritsar to Lahore. The capture of the bridge would deny the Pakistani forces any scope for launching an offensive to the east of the canal and thus would secure the GT Road axis to Amritsar (see Figure 1). Thus, the overall aim of Indian forces in this sector was to launch a limited offensive with a view to secure the Ichhogil and pose a threat to Lahore.¹ While this was achieved in the initial stage on 6 September 1965, the gains made were subsequently frittered away providing an opportunity for the Pakistani forces to recover their positions west of the Ichhogil and to enable them to counter any threat to Lahore.

The operations launched in the second phase achieved the objective partially, but at considerable cost of lives which could have been avoided.² The success of these operations were achieved by the same battalion, the 3 Jat, but under different circumstances.

The importance of the operation also lay in the strategic threat posed to Lahore on the first day of the offensive in Punjab. The subsequent pull-back exposed the lack of preparations for exploitation of the success achieved initially. Launched a second time with the same objective, 3 Jat succeeded in capturing Dograi overcoming stiff resistance. Thus, the operations by 3 Jat during the 1965 War provide twin perspectives of a successful offensive action—both of exploitation and attrition.

The success in reaching the outskirts of Lahore had larger implications in the strategic context. To avoid a tactical breach, the defence of Punjab was based on a network of canals and ditch cum bundhs by both sides. The density of troops and obstacles rendered operations in this area prohibitive. This, in turn, led to a shift of the key battle area on the Western Front from the populated Punjab to the southwest area, that is, Suratgarh and Bikaner. This being a relatively open terrain, mechanisation and manoeuvre emerged as key precepts in the 1980s.

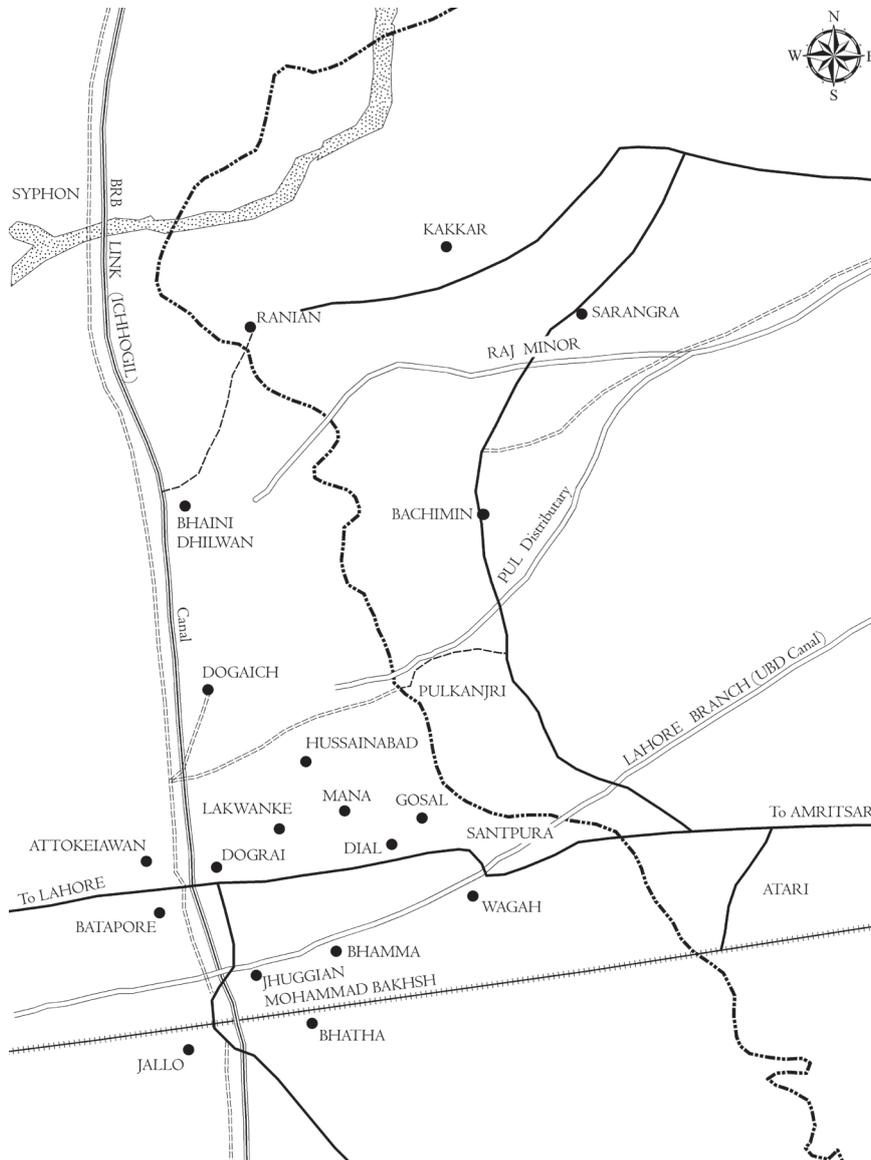


Figure 1 15 Infantry Division Sector

Source: K.C. Praval, *Indian Army After Independence*, New Delhi: Lancer, 2013, p. 339.

Dograi also has relevance to the Cold Start doctrine in the Indo-Pak context. Contemporarily, from the emerging doctrines of integrated and network centric warfare, a perspective of Dograi would denote primacy of the battalion as a unit to weave systems architecture. It is against this backdrop that a narration of the Battle of Dograi, which had two phases named Dograi One and Dograi Two, is undertaken below.

Dograi One

In 1965, Indian 11 Corps was deployed in Punjab with two divisions, the 7 Infantry Division and the 15 Infantry Division. The GT Road sector was a vital area for the corps with axes leading to Amritsar. Pakistan had developed a canal in this sector for the defence of Lahore, popularly known as the Ichhogil Canal. The task allocated to 11 Corps was thus threefold: destruction of enemy forces, advance to the Ichhogil and secure bridges on the canal, and be prepared to advance to Lahore.³ Similarly, the task assigned to 15 Infantry Division involved securing Pakistani territory up to the East Bank of the Ichhogil and capture and hold bridges astride the GT Road.⁴

This was to be achieved by the 54 Infantry Brigade of the 15 Infantry Division. The 3 Jat, which formed a part of 54 Infantry Brigade, were allotted the task of capturing Gosal Dial in the first phase of the brigade operation. This was to be followed by 15 Dogra who were to make a dash for the bridge on the Ichhogil at Dograi. The 3 Jat advanced at 0400 hours on 6 September and having surprised the enemy captured Gosal Dial, while the follow up company of 15 Dogra cleared the area from the international Border to Gosal Dial to set the stage for the battalion to launch a thrust for the capture of the bridge over the Ichhogil Canal.

The 15 Dogra advanced for the mission and linked up with 3 Jat after overcoming minor opposition enroute by about 0930 hours. At this juncture, the Commanding Officer 15 Dogra informed the Commander 54 Infantry Brigade his inability to advance further due to heavy casualties. The Commander 54 Infantry Brigade then ordered the Commanding Officer of 3 Jat, Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) Desmond E. Hayde, to take on the task of the 15 Dogra. Hayde launched his battalion without hesitation and captured the bridge on the GT Road by 1130 hours. While the Pakistani forces succeeded in blowing up the bridge, but Lt Col Hayde led two companies across the bridge on foot.

Advance elements of the battalion exploited beyond the Canal and were in the area of the Bata Shoe Factory. This was the outer limit of the

bridgehead across the Ichhogil. This was a significant success achieved by the battalion by using surprise and speed to its advantage. A lodgment across the Ichhogil created opportunities for posing a threat to Lahore having reached its outskirts. On the very first day, the Indian forces had gained immense operational advantage. By holding on to this lodgment, the campaign could have been structured around the same as Pakistan could not afford even a minor penetration of Lahore, the capital of Punjab. This was seen as a major loss of face for Pakistan's martial law administrator, Field Marshal Ayub Khan.

Given the threat posed to Lahore, Pakistan reacted to the success of 3 Jat violently. Air strikes were launched on 3 Jat resulting in loss of anti-tank weapons. Thus, when Pakistani Sherman tanks launched a counterattack on the companies west of the Bridge, these were defenceless. The 3 Jat required replenishment of munitions and reorganisation stores. A number of administrative vehicles of the battalion were destroyed due to strafing. Moreover, there was no communication with the brigade headquarters and, as a result, the success of the battalion was evidently not appreciated by the higher commanders. Thus, even as the Commanding Officer of 3 Jat requested the Brigade HQ to push forward anti-tank weapons and reorganization stores, he was ordered by the Brigade Commander to pull back. Major K.C. Praval ascribes orders of the Brigade Commander to one word, 'panic'.⁵ Possibly, the 54 Infantry Brigade and 15 Infantry division commander were as much surprised by the success of the operations as the Pakistanis.

Commenting on the situation in his book *War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict 1965*, Lieutenant General (Lt Gen) Harbaksh Singh, General Officer Commanding (GOC)-in-C Western Command during the war states:

There was an urgent need for replenishment of ammunition and reorganisation stores to secure the ground gained. This unfortunately was not forthcoming. It was a crucial moment that required the touch of determined leadership to push through urgent requirements to the unit. Every consideration should have been flung to the winds at this stage except the resolve to keep 3 JAT on their objective. Commander 54 Infantry Brigade, unfortunately, did not rise to the occasion. It is admitted that enemy air action had strafed the administrative convoy of both 15 DOGRA and 3 JAT that morning and some vehicles were destroyed. But such setbacks, inevitable in battle, should have been foreseen and alternate arrangements made to overcome them.⁶

The battalion, lacking air and artillery support, had to fall back to a firm base. In the wake of repeated air strikes by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), absence of the Indian Air Force (IAF) in the sector was galling to troops on the ground. PAF scrambled fighters given the grave threat to Lahore. While operations of the 54 Infantry Brigade were planned without air support, given the success achieved on the ground, allocation of air effort could have been considered given the flexibility in which it can be applied by shifting from the less priority sectors.⁷

The 3 Jat's success in establishing a lodgement on the Ichhogil created an ideal opportunity for strengthening the bridgehead with a view to threaten Lahore on the very first day of the breakout of war on the Western front, but this opportunity was not seized. Higher commanders choose to stick by the plan rather than adopt flexibility. Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh has been critical of the performance of the higher commanders in this stage of the operation. Commenting in the *War Despatches*, he states:

To my mind there is only one explanation for this administrative failure: lack of foresight and an absence of determined leadership to see things through, come what may: The opportunity however went begging a brilliant success was allowed to slip away unexploited.⁸

On the pull-back from the Ichhogil Canal, Harbaksh is even more critical and says,

The brigade commander had lost touch with 3 Jat since the morning (an inexcusable lapse, for he should have been treading on the heels of this epoch making thrust) and was probably unaware of the momentous success achieved by this unit. Assuming that he could neither replenish nor reinforce 3 Jat, he decided to go on the defensive in and around Gosal Dial. The 3 Jat was ordered to vacate their gains and withdraw to Gosal Dial.⁹

As is normally the case in such situations, an inevitable blame game arises. While the Brigade Commander claimed that the withdrawal was undertaken with the approval of GOC 15 Infantry Division, the latter disclaimed the same and stated that he had not issued orders for a withdrawal.¹⁰ As Harbaksh remarks, 'The fact remains however that a cheap victory had been thrown to the winds for want of aggressive and enterprising leadership.'¹¹ At this stage, having seized the initiative, maintaining the same was necessary through rapid regrouping of land and air forces, the essence of higher direction of war. Failure of the same implied that the tactical surprise achieved could not be exploited.¹²

Prasad and Thapliyal quote the *Official History* of the 1965 War as saying:

In the 15 Infantry Division sector, complete tactical surprise was achieved initially. This enabled 3 Jat to cross Ichhogil and reach Batapur in the forenoon of 6 September. But in the face of sharp Pakistani reaction and absolute lack of back-up, the Jats had to fall back (p. 151).

Adequate reconnaissance, fire support, logistics and integration between arms and services was lacking. Basic factors such as communications from the brigade to the battalion were not well established.¹³ General K.V. Krishna Rao, commenting on the operations, states that as the strategic response to Pakistani operations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was well known, adequate planning and preparations should have been carried out before hand in peace time so that the surprise achieved by 3 Jat could have been exploited.¹⁴

Dograï Two

The 3 Jat had another opportunity to capture the same objective Dograï. In the next phase of operations, 54 Infantry Brigade, now under Brigadier Niranjan Singh, MC, was once again ordered to advance upto the Ichhogil astride the GT road for which capture of Dograï was essential. By now the defences in Dograï had been strengthened by Pakistan. A battalion, less two companies, was deployed at Dograï from the 16 Punjab (Pakistan), while the two companies were astride the bridge on the Ichhogil. A tank squadron was also located at Dograï.¹⁵

The 54 Infantry Brigade undertook aggressive patrolling and domination of the no man's land during the preparatory period from 13 and 20 September. The intensity of fighting was evident with 58 killed, including three officers and four JCOs and 205 wounded, including five officers and seven JCOS.

The 3 Jat was tasked to capture Dograï in Phase 2 of the attack to be launched at 0130 hrs on 22 September.¹⁶ Reconnaissance by patrols on the night of 21 September revealed that Dograï was heavily defended with pillboxes and buildings in the built up area and fortified to cover all approaches. The Pakistani infantry battalion had two Light Machine Guns in each infantry section and, thus, fire power faced by the attackers was expected to be very heavy. The locality was also heavily mined and wired rendering the approaches dangerous. It was evident that the interim fortnight from 7 September, when 3 Jat had abandoned the positions, to

20 September had been utilised by the Pakistani forces to build up strong defences in Dograi.¹⁷

The operation involved clearance and fighting through a built up area which was divided into four sectors, with one sector each allotted to a company.¹⁸ The plan of the battalion entailed infiltration from the North, that is, from the Ichhogil Canal direction, thus achieving a degree of surprise. The attack proceeded as planned with D Company capturing the north-east portion of the town while C Company captured the north-west portion as well as the east bank of the Ichhogil Canal which was held by 18 Baluch, which interfered in the operation. Subsequent attacks by A and B Company led to some fierce fighting but the battalion secured the objective by 0530 hours on 22 September. The momentum of the attack was sustained through the night and mopping up undertaken during the day. The 3 Jat took Lt Col G.F. Golewala, Commanding Officer of 16 Punjab (Pakistan), prisoner along with others. The battalion withstood repeated counter attacks launched by the enemy including tanks.

The Jats suffered heavy casualties in the operations which included 58 killed and 157 wounded, while on the Pakistani side the toll stood at 247 dead. The leadership of the battalion excelled in the attack fighting from the front, four officers was amongst those killed while six officers were injured.

While the normal ratio in an attack operation in the plains sector is 3:1, 3 Jat attacked on a highly adverse 2:1 ratio with four companies confronting two companies of 16 Punjab (Pakistan). The success was achieved through sheer grit and determination and at the cost of heavy losses, but the resultant victory ensured that the GT Road axis was fully secured till cease fire was called.

The performance of the battalion when compared to other units in the same formation underscored the importance of effective leadership which could first seize opportunities in a fluid battle by advancing to the Ichhogil in the first battle of Dograi on 6/7 September. The same leaders then fought a heavy battle of attrition in the night of 21/22 September displaying grit and determination against heavy odds.¹⁹

Planning determination and aggressiveness in an offensive is an important attribute highlighted by the Battle of Dograi, operations of 3 Jat as well as units of the 54 Infantry Brigade and 15 Infantry Division.²⁰ In the *Official History* of the 1965 War, Dograi is mentioned as an, 'Epic', a just tribute to the valiant Battalion.²¹ Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh remarks that Dograi along with Barki and Asal Uttar were battles where good

leadership demonstrating aggressiveness and enterprise succeeded in the face of heavy odds.²² General K.V. Krishna Rao in *Prepare or Perish* lauds the battalion thus, '3 Jat under inspiring leadership of Lt Col D.E. Hayde recaptured Dograi on 22 September and held it despite repeated counter attacks by the enemy.'²³

If acknowledgement by the enemy is a criterion, Lt Col Hayde writes in the *Battle of Dograi* that the attack on 21-22 September was described by Brigadier Gulzar Ahmed, a former Director of Military Intelligence of the Pakistan Army, as that by one brigade heavily supported by armour and artillery, whereas only 3 Jat succeeded in capturing the objective.²⁴

LESSONS IN CONTINUITY

Primacy of the Battalion as a Successful Battle Entity

The infantry battalion remains the primary fighting unit in the Indian army despite the focus on larger formations such as strike corps, both in the plains and the mountains. While the corps, the pivot that is a defensive as well as a strike, forms the operational manoeuvre element, given the reorganisation of carried out post-2010, the success or otherwise of operations will be determined by performance of infantry battalions or armoured and mechanised infantry battalions and supporting units. Operations of 54 Infantry Brigade in the GT road axis demonstrated this truism given the performance of 3 Jat vis-à-vis other units. It is possible that inadequate time for preparation prevented the brigade from carrying out exercises as a formation. Similarly, during the Kargil War 1999, it was individual battalions that played a stellar role in evicting the intruders from imposing features, such as Tiger Hill and Tololing.

In the context of the ongoing transformation in the Indian Army—from integrated battle to a network centric force—the focus is apparently on systems, be it the Future Infantry Soldier as a System (FINSAS) or various components of the Tactical Command, Control, Communications and Information (Tac C3I) System. There is a possibility that significance of the traditional fighting entity, the infantry battalion, may be lost in the milieu. There would be a need for a review of the same based on lessons from history.

Battlefield Leadership

Inculcating qualities of battlefield leadership assumes importance. Battlefield leadership apart from physical courage entails a high degree of

initiative, determination, offensive spirit, and flexibility to seize fleeting opportunities. This trait is inherent but is not difficult to cultivate. Lt Col (later Brigadier) Hayde, who led from the front braving Pakistan Air Force strafing across the Ichhogil in Dograi One and mopping up in Dograi Two provided a singular example followed by the company and platoon commanders of the battalion, be it Major Yadav of C Company or Major Tyagi of A Company, or Captain Kapil Singh Thapa of D Company.²⁵ How far this quality was infused by personal example set by the Commanding Officer; how much was the role played by regimental or battalion tradition; and to what extent did the personal trait of individual officers concerned impact this, is difficult to assess. Hayde was of the view that this is one of the primary qualities that should be imbibed in officers at an early stage in the training academies, and also on induction into regiments and units.²⁶ The Kargil saga denotes the importance of cultivation of this trait and impact of leadership at the battalion level. A number of commanding officers had to be changed due to poor battlefield performance and the same units performed admirably under fresh younger and more effective commanders.

Junior Leadership – Backbone of the Indian Army

The junior leadership remains the backbone of the Indian Army. This has been proved time and again from Dograi to the Kargil War 1999. There have been instances of command failure at the higher level leading to change of command in 1965. Junior leadership has, however, stood the test of times in war. At the same time it must be stated that this is a general observation and no systematic study has been carried out on the percentage of junior leaders who performed well in a particular operation.

Significance of Training and Battle Readiness

The primary aim of a battalion even in peace time remains that of training and battle readiness. The 3 Jat first under Lt Col J.S. Mundy and later under Lt Col Hayde demonstrated that the battalion was ready for undertaking operations due to the attention paid in preparing the unit for war.

Minor Tactics

The outcome of wars will be decided by campaign strategies while that of battles by proficiency of participants in minor tactics. The 3 Jat had honed minor tactics at the platoon and company level during peace time training

and rehearsed drills during the preparatory period. This paid dividends when confronting Pakistani forces on the Ichhogil Canal during the first phase and in overcoming the densely defended built-up areas of Dograi in the second. Key tactics in the future are likely to include pillbox and bunker bursting drill, a seemingly simple yet most difficult technique, which combines physical courage of the infantry man to close in with a well-protected weapon enclosure and destroy the same using classic firepower and movement. The requirement of the same is unlikely to go away in the context of contemporary warfare, thus meriting emphasis even though the quantum of firepower that is available at the section and platoon level has gone up exponentially.

All Arms Combat Teams

The inability of 3 Jat to hold on to the gains made in the first phase of Dograi on the Ichhogil Canal and at Batapore could be attributed to lack of organised all arms combat teams to meet the challenge. This includes inadequacies in anti-tank weapons at the company and platoon level. Bereft of artillery, tanks as well as air support, the response of the unit to counter attacks launched by the Pakistani forces, once the threat of a bridgehead on the Ichhogil was appreciated, rendered the position of the battalion on the canal untenable. Learning from these lessons, the deficiency was more than made up in the second phase of the battle. The concept of all arms combat teams was not well developed in 1965 in India. While infantry tank cooperation and other limited manoeuvres were practiced, close integration of infantry, artillery and tank troops in the plains was lacking. Expectedly, these deficiencies have now been made up.

Command, Control and Communications

Command and control is exercised at the battalion level and above by communications. An important deficiency during Dograi One was lack of adequate radio communications with 3 Jat to transmit success achieved to the formation, which in turn led to a degree of alarm in the rear. Responsibility of provision of communications to the battalion, which should have been duplicated, was that of the brigade given importance of the task allocated to the unit. In the contemporary context, a scenario where a unit will be without radio communications may not be thinkable, yet the impact of electronic disruption, interference, and enemy action to create a breach in links is a distinct possibility and will have

to be catered for. Under the circumstances, given the larger quantum of resources that are likely to be available, it is the responsibility of the higher commander up the chain to ensure that he remains in communication on radio and if that is disrupted through other available means including physical contact.

Not by Grit Alone

Battlefield logistics is an important element of success. The failure of 3 Jat to hold on to the Ichhogil in Dograi One could be partially attributed to destruction of the re-organisation column comprising of anti-tank guns and munitions replenishment. Organisation of the battlefield logistics column needs particular attention with dedicated staff including officers nominated for the same. Where an operation is being coordinated at the brigade level this could be centrally co-ordinated so that loss of column of one battalion could be made up by providing resources of another exercising flexibility.

LESSONS IN TRANSFORMATION

Aim of War on the Western Front

In the event of a future conventional war on the Western Front, the aim is likely to be retention of depth to key political objectives such as Amritsar and maximum destruction of enemy war waging potential. Against general expectation, the objective is not likely to involve seizure of large cities on the other side. This was evident even in 1965, as there was reluctance on the Indian side to address large populated areas in Pakistan. Quoting General J.N. Chaudhri, Chief of the Army Staff during the 1965 War, General K.V. Krishna Rao, in his book *Prepare and Perish*, states that there was disinclination in the political leadership for capture or destruction of a major population centre as this would result in extending the cleavage between India and Pakistan and delay the scope of détente.²⁷ Thus, while planning operations in 1964, the possibility of a manoeuvre towards Lahore was discounted. How much this contributed to the thought process that led to the brigade and battalion commander to pull back from success achieved at the Ichhogil on 6/7 September, is not clear. There are some differences in the objectives and tasks allocated to XI Corps in Punjab. As per the *Official History*, three tasks were allocated to XI Corps—destruction of the Pakistani forces, advance to Ichhogil and seize the bridges, and be prepared to advance to Lahore.²⁸

In a statement in the Indian Parliament after the war, it was highlighted that there was never any intention of advancing towards Lahore to secure and seize it.

Post 1965, possibly from the experience of forays made by 3 Jat and other units of 11 Corps towards Ichhogil, and the strategic impact that the same would have on the other side resulting in a violent response, key political objectives as Lahore and Amritsar were covered with dense deployment of mines, obstacles, and troops. Lt Gen K.P. Candeth, GOC-in-C Western Command during the 1971 war, writing on the planning of operations on the Western Front in 1971 states that on the main GT Road sector astride Attari Ranian defensive posture was adopted with high density of troops and obstacles.²⁹ A similar approach was adopted by Pakistan, closely guarding Lahore. The overall priority of defence in Punjab was based on preventing an offensive along the GT Road to Amritsar. Thus, limited offensive operations undertaken in 1971 on the Western Front addressed some key pockets which led to a tactical advantage for the Indian side, such as Dera Baba Nanak and Kasowal.³⁰

With increased economic development in the Punjab state/province both in India and Pakistan, respectively, the possibility of a conventional (or even nuclear though this aspect will need greater deliberation) appears unlikely.

Key Battle Areas

Post 1965, and learning from the lessons of Dograi, the key battle areas on the Western Front have gradually shifted south-westwards. For instance, in 1971, Candeth appreciated that while the main approaches to Amritsar and Ferozepur were well guarded, there was a deficit in defences of the area South of the Satluj in the Fazilka sector where 67 Infantry Brigade was deployed. He therefore moved 163 Infantry Brigade from Ladakh to Suratgarh and 51 Para Brigade from the Sugar sector in Himachal Pradesh to Ganganagar.³¹

Over the years, the key battlefield area in the Western Sector is moving further southwards, from Fazilka in 1971, to the Ganganagar and Suratgarh belt down to the frontier areas of Bikaner. As areas astride the canal network of Rajasthan Canal and its tributaries have been developed, large townships have come up close to the border. There is reluctance on both sides—in India and in Pakistan—to address these areas mainly due to economic and thus political implications of the same on the overall Indo-Pak relations in the long term. Large-scale displacement of population

from these areas in case of hostilities and, even worse, casualties are likely to be unacceptable to both sides. Escalation could lead to exercise of the nuclear option, thus further necessitating restricting operations. This does not imply that an offensive in this sector is ruled out for the future, but remains unviable in the strategic context.

The Ditch cum Bundh

One of the key lessons that emerged from the Battle of Dograi was the need to provide depth to vital areas. Thus construction of a line of obstacles known as the ditch cum bundh or DCB was undertaken. The area between the DCBs and the International Border is also thickened up by a line of fortified border observation posts (BOPs), covering and delaying positions. These positions are considered as such only in name and are required to fight to the last man and last round in battle today.

K.C. Praval describes how the DCB emerged post 1965: 'A major difference in the scenario, as compared to 1965, was a ditch-cum-bund line that now formed India's forward defence in some sensitive areas. The defence line was a few kilometres behind the international frontier and the intervening ground was held by the BSF [Border Security Force] and covering troops.'³²

There were inherent shortcomings to such a linear deployment on a line of obstacles that could be outflanked from a vulnerable flank. Some called this the Maginot Line syndrome. Commenting on the deficit in the context of deployment on the DCB in 1971, Praval says:

While it provides a safeguard against surprise attack, this type of linear defence entails initial loss of territory unless the ground ahead of it is dominated all along from the bund. This, however, ties down troops and equipment and may not leave adequate reserves to deal with a breakthrough. Some of the losses suffered by 11 Corps were due to this inherent weakness in the system.³³

In the present scenario, it is envisaged that defences in the plains and the semi desert sector are based on linear defences and strong points. These are covered by minefields and wire obstacles to prevent penetration and cause delay and destruction. The option of fighting a battle of attrition in such a case is highly unpopular, and alternatives to achieving the objective of destruction of enemy's war waging potential through manoeuvre have emerged.

Manoeuvre and Mechanisation

The southward shift of operationally viable terrain in the Western and South Western sectors on the international border and aim of destruction of the enemy forces, also led to greater reliance on manoeuvre and, thus, mechanisation. The Indian Army website page on 'The Mechanised Infantry Regiment History' gives the following backdrop to this development.

In the Indian Context, the need to mechanise our Infantry was first felt after the 1965 war. The first tentative steps were taken in 1969, when the 1st Madras added another first to its cap becoming the first infantry unit to be equipped with APC TOPAZ. The 1st JAT LI followed soon, and by the year 1970 ten of our finest infantry units had been equipped with an array of APCs or Chariots, namely the BTR, SKOT, and TOPAZ. The 1971 war saw some of these battalions take part in action on both fronts as part of Combat Groupings with Armoured Units for the first time. To fully realise the combat potential of this dynamic arm, the need was felt to provide these battalions with integrated training and a common battle philosophy. The idea of grouping the existing battalions together under one banner with a common identity was conceived by Gen KV Krishna Rao, PVSM, in 1973 and crystallised by Gen K Sundarji, AVSM, PVSM, ADC. It was they who pursued the formal raising of the Mechanised Infantry Regiment.³⁴

Mechanisation of the Indian Army is attributed to deliberations of the Krishna Rao Committee of 1973, of which General K. Sundarji was a member. Both rose to be chiefs and thus could implement key recommendations of the report. The report remains out of public domain; however, it would be safe to presume that drawing suitable deductions from the 1965 and 1971 War with Pakistan there was a reasonable consensus that Indian Army should transform from attrition to a manoeuvre cum attrition force. This also was in consonance with the shift in the key battle theatre from Punjab to the South which facilitated manoeuvre.

There was possibly an influence of the Yom Kippur War of 1973 as well as development of mechanised warfare doctrine in the context of the NATO-Soviet Union confrontation on the European plains. The writings of Brigadier Richard Simpkin of the British Army in such monumental works as *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on 21st Century Warfare* could have influenced the thought process in the Indian Army in those years.

Evolution of mechanised divisions to, 'strike corps', and to 'pivot and strike corps', are concepts that outline transformation of the Army's war fighting strategy on the Western Front over the past two and a half decades.

Terrorism in Punjab

Given the impassability of mechanised forces in Punjab in an obstacle ridden and well developed urban terrain, Pakistan chose to opt for the strategy of 'bleeding India by a thousand cuts', exploiting the opportunity presented by the rise of elements such as Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale. From an internal political battle for supremacy in Punjab rose the bogey of Khalistan supported from across the border. A robust counterterrorism posture and socio-economic factors implied that this phase lasted less than a decade.

Dograi One and Cold Start

The Cold Start Strategy or Doctrine is perceived to be an Indian response to a possible terrorist attack from Pakistan by launching a series of battle groups on a wide front in the short window that will be available for this purpose till politics of nuclear restraint comes into play. An operation like Dograi One will be a perfect opening move for a Cold Start with exploitation of surprise and speed under a dynamic leader. The possibility of further splitting battle groups envisaged from brigade to battalion in terms of time, if not space, may be considered given the advantage of rapid mobilisation and launch. This assumes importance given Pakistan's evolution of New Concept of War Fighting (NCWF) to checkmate an Indian Cold Start.

Dograi One and Pakistan's Tactical Nuke Nasr

The development of the tactical battlefield rocket 'Nasr' by Pakistan could pose a challenge for launching operations as Dograi One, which threatens a strategic objective. Such a threat could lead to crossing of threshold of restraint and may invite launch of the nuclear-tipped Nasr by Pakistan. India thus needs to think through the nuclear escalation matrix before launching operations as Dograi One.

Would India's response in such a scenario be 'massive retaliation', as indicated by the Nuclear Doctrine and which has been discussed in some circles recently, or would there be an intermediary response? Creative options available to ensure adequate strategic payoffs without

inviting a nuclear response at the tactical level are aspects requiring careful consideration by the military as well as the nuclear decision hierarchy. In the discourse so far, very frequently, it is presumed that a pre-emptive operation on the model of Dograi One is not feasible. This may be too simplistic a presumption. Deeper deliberations may reveal that operations as Dograi One could provide options for negating employment of Nasr given that the inter se gap between own troops and Pakistani military as well as civilian locations would be limited.

Integrated Battle and Network Centric Warfare

The current and future doctrine of the Indian Army is said to be integrated battle and network centric warfare. These, when fructified, will overcome many of the shortcomings noticed in 11 Corps operations on the Western Front in 1965 and with reference to this study in Dograi. These would include integration of supporting arms at the battalion level, such as the artillery. Seamless communications and high level of situational awareness at all levels of command from the battalion to the brigade, division, and above. The 3 Jat would not be left to fend for itself as Pakistani air strikes manifested in reaction to the threat posed to Lahore on 7 September 1965. The breakdown in communication links that were seen during Dograi One resulting in a distorted picture being posed to the brigade and above would be avoidable.

At the same time, these concepts have not been tested on the battlefield with the two armies having near parity in information and communication resources, unlike the Gulf War of 1991 or Operation Iraqi Freedom 2003 in which American led coalition enjoyed exponential asymmetry vis-à-vis Iraqi forces. Hopefully, these concepts are being refined in the numerous exercises that have been undertaken by the Indian Army in recent years.

The role of IAF with reference to close air support to an infantry battalion is also relevant in this context with reference to Dograi. While PAF was scrambled to launch strikes at the battalion bridgehead on 7 September 1965, the lack of Indian response has been attributed to non-allocation of resources. The IAF doctrine at present also does not cater for intimate support given the complexity of the tactical battlefield. What flexibility can be applied in such scenarios when own troops are being strafed by the enemy air force needs consideration for an absence of own air cover is a serious issue for the morale of troops fighting with their backs to the wall on the front line.

CONCLUSION

Till date, no large-scale conventional battle on the Western Front has been as big as the 1965 war. Amongst the many battles fought on this front, Dograi stands out as a demonstration of what a single battalion can achieve, given enterprising leadership, grit and determination in the face of heavy odds under different circumstances.

The first operation by 3 Jat resulted in the collapse of Pakistani resistance in the Gosal Dial and Dograi area and seizure of lodgement across the Ichhogil. There was a failure of command at the brigade level and above which led to retraction of the battalion. An attack was launched a second time on the same objective which had been reinforced by 16 Punjab (Pakistan). Given the strategic objective and nature of operations, a number of lessons can be drawn in the contemporary context which needs deliberation and have been covered herein.

More importantly, there is a growing perception that given the nuclear threat and employment dilemmas, the possibility of a conventional war in the Indo-Pak context is low. In 1965, in the pre-nuclear era, Pakistan operated from the premise that India would not open a front in Punjab after it had launched Gibraltar Force in J&K. However, India punctured this presumption and when 3 Jat reached outskirts of Lahore, the Pakistan military was caught flat footed. In the post nuclear era, India was taken by surprise by the intrusion of Pakistani regular forces in Kargil in 1999. This proves that there is possibility of undertaking a conventional operation, the form of which can vary, and so the armed forces need to continuously visualise options that could be battle winning, if not war winning ones, by employing a combination of pivot and strike elements creatively before nuclear considerations come into play.

In 1965, 3 Jat proved that battles can be won by determined leadership, high degree of regimental motivation, and boundless energy to close in with the enemy and destroy or capture him. Developing such traits in battalions across the board will be the essence of military success in the future, for it is battalions and tank regiments that will win battles as much as superior generalship. As in Dograi, cultivating good battalions and generals seems to be the essence of victory in wars for all times.

NOTES

1. K.V. Krishna Rao, *Prepare or Perish: A Study of National Security*, New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1991, p. 145.

2. Ibid., p. 144.
3. S.N. Prasad and U.P. Thapliyal (eds), *The Indo Pakistan War of 1965: A History*, Dehradun, Natraj, 2011, p. 131.
4. Ibid., pp. 132–33.
5. K.C. Praval, *Indian Army after Independence*, New Delhi: Lancer, 2013, p. 341.
6. Harbaksh Singh, *War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict 1965*, New Delhi: Lancer, 1991, p. 90.
7. Prasad and Thapliyal, *The Indo Pakistan War of 1965*, n. 3, p. 151.
8. Singh, *War Despatches*, n. 6, p. 90.
9. Ibid., p. 91.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., pp. 124–25.
13. Krishna Rao, *Prepare or Perish*, n. 1, p. 146.
14. Ibid.
15. Prasad and Thapliyal, *The Indo Pakistan War of 1965*, n. 3, p. 147.
16. Ibid., p. 149.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 151.
20. Krishna Rao, *Prepare or Perish*, n. 1, p. 144.
21. Prasad and Thapliyal, *The Indo Pakistan War of 1965*, n. 3, p. 147.
22. Singh, *War Despatches*, n. 6, p. 124.
23. Krishna Rao, *Prepare or Perish*, n. 1, p. 132.
24. Desmond E. Hayde, *Battle of Dograi, Second Edition*, Dehradun: Natraj, 1991, p. 7.
25. Prasad and Thapliyal, *The Indo Pakistan War of 1965*, n. 3, pp. 149–51.
26. Personal correspondence of the author with Brigadier Desmond E. Hayde from 2002 to 2004.
27. Krishna Rao, *Prepare or Perish*, n. 1, p. 144.
28. Prasad and Thapliyal, *The Indo Pakistan War of 1965*, n. 3, p. 131.
29. K.P. Candeth, *The Western Front: Indo Pakistan War 1971*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1984, p. 131.
30. K.C. Praval, *Indian Army after Independence*, n. 5, p. 487.
31. Candeth, *The Western Front*, n. 29, pp. 116–17.
32. Praval, *Indian Army after Independence*, n. 5, p. 486.
33. Ibid., pp. 486–87.

34. See 'Evolution of Mech Inf', available at <http://indianarmy.nic.in/Site/FormTemplete/frmTempSimple.aspx?MnId=EGgiycFvi3oEIyXZD2nokA==&ParentID=7MMBeTWPnSWfQXZwENU4A==>, accessed on 1 May 2015.