

# Fifty Years after India's First Airborne Operation at Poongli Bridge, Tangail: What we know of its Planning?

(Part 1)

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## Abstract

*The objective of this article is to try and uncover what we know about the planning process of the airborne operation at Poongli Bridge, along with its execution, to achieve the desired objectives. This was the first classic parachute operation mounted by the Indian Army since Independence and in its success we need to know what went into its making: with the starting step being the planning stage. This article first looks at the different accounts of the 1971 war by various authors, specifically relating to the chosen area of interest, including as many possible key participants and other critical observers and researchers. Based on these, one could apply logical analysis and counterfactual arguments to identify the most likely scenario(s) to arrive at what may have been the case. Once we have some idea of the key planning factors and evolution sequence, we could also briefly correlate our understanding with the initial execution of the plans as they were put into motion.<sup>1</sup> This preliminary study will, hopefully, lay the foundation for a more informed debate on certain highlights and issues that this article will bring up. This article is in two parts and Part 2 shall be covered in the next issue of USI Journal.*

## Introduction

The execution of the airborne operation at Poongli Bridge in the vicinity of Tangail, (referred to at places simply as the airborne

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operation at Tangail, in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), on 11 December 1971 is considered the golden chapter in the history of the Indian Army and, especially, the Parachute Regiment. A generation of young officers has grown up reading about it and wondered if those days are now truly past when such operations could be planned, mounted, and successfully executed. To appreciate this realistically in situational context, we need to first understand what went into the making of the successful airborne operation and ask critical questions about its planning, execution, and effectiveness. Thereafter, we can more methodically review the lessons learnt and what they tell us about the future to come. This article collates what we today know about the planning of this operation on the basis of publicly available information that we have been able to access (and the one acquired during the course of the writer's service in the Parachute Regiment and the Para Brigade) and draw out some key points for consideration and critical analysis. The underlying purpose is to apply an analytical lens and invite further deliberations and debates to extract useful learning for the future since an army that does not learn from its past operational experiences (and, additionally, those of others) will only do so at great cost to itself when faced with exigencies ahead.

### **The Airborne Operation**

To set the context, let's briefly see how this operation unfolded. After the war in the east had begun on 03 December 1971, the thrust by 101 Communication Zone Area (101 CZA) in Northern Sector commenced consisting of 95 Mountain Brigade, (Mtn Bde, and Bde for Brigade) and F-J Sector (an ad-hoc Infantry Bde level force).<sup>2</sup> Of the four major thrusts along the four sectors in the Eastern Command Theatre, it was the weakest as compared to the others which were all Corps-sized offensives. The initial move of 101 CZA was slow against enemy resistance, with its associated logistic problems and resource constraints. By 10 December, 101 CZA's advance was held up along the Jamalpur-Mymensingh line (see Figure 1<sup>3</sup>). However, two things were to happen shortly. One, Pakistan's Brigadier Abdul Qadir Khan, Commander of 93 Pakistan Infantry Brigade, overseeing the defence in this sector, was asked to fall back to Kalaiar (south of Tangail) on 10 December.<sup>4</sup> So, both garrisons of Jamalpur and Mymensingh were evacuated on night 10-11 December. At the same time, in a pre-planned

operation, 2 Para Battalion (hereafter, Bn) Group was para-dropped north of Tangail at 1650 hours on 11 December to occupy the Poongli Bridge and a nearby ferry over the Lohaganj River in order to cut-off the retreating enemy forces (see Figure 2). It was sheer coincidence that 11 December was chosen for this drop quite in advance.<sup>5</sup> This task was successfully accomplished and 1 Maratha LI of 95 Mtn Bde linked up with 2 Para Bn Group by 1700 hours on 12 December thus, speeding up 101 CZA's advance towards Dacca, leaving only very hastily organised Pakistan resistance enroute.

### **Review of Accounts covering planning of proposed Airborne Operations (on the Eastern Front)**

In this part, I first summarise the findings from relevant literature by the various institutions, key participants and other observers/authors, roughly organised in a hierarchical order, i.e., from the Army HQ downwards to the operational formations, to help us trace how the planning for the airborne operation, including its need and possible payoffs, played out.

### **Official History of the 1971 India Pakistan War**

Dr SN Prasad, a respected military historian, was called back from retirement in 1983, to helm this project for the Ministry of Defence.<sup>6</sup> The first draft was completed before the target date in 1985 and this version was finally put out for 'limited circulation for official use' in June 1992. As Prasad mentions in the Preface to this effort, the historical record is based on "studying the secondary or published sources and some 5000 files of the Government, and after interviewing 66 of the important participants in the war".<sup>7</sup>

Prasad states that "HQ Eastern Command developed its war plans based on a series of war games and joint planning in the period leading up to the war, culminating into four major thrust lines "directed at nodal points and communication centres rather than important towns" (p. 503). For purpose of getting an overall perspective, sector-wise allocation of forces was approximately as under (p. 499 and following pages):

- **2 Corps in South-Western Sector**, consisting of 4 Mtn Div and 9 Inf Div; 50 Para Bde less Para Bn (6-10 Dec. only); 45 Cav less Sqn and a Sqn 63 Cav; other supporting elements;

- **33 Corps in North-Western Sector**, consisting of 20 Mtn Div, 6 Mtn Div (limited use—9 Mtn Bde) and 71 Mtn Bde; 63 Cav less Sqn and a regiment PT-76 tanks; other supporting elements;
- **4 Corps in South-Eastern Sector**, consisting of 8 Mtn Div, 23 Mtn Div and 57 Mtn Div; two Sqn tanks; other supporting elements; and
- **101 CZA in Northern Sector**, consisting of 95 Mtn Bde and F-J Sector (ad-hoc Bde level equivalence)

It was envisaged that, “101 CZA with 95 Mtn Bde Gp of four battalions, 2 Para (Bn) Group, followed by 167 Mtn Bde, would advance to Dhaka from the North.” (p. 504) He briefly summarises the airborne asset allocation and planning as follows: “It was appreciated that the most important area for the main drop was Tangail in order to ensure the early capture of Dhaka. Second priority was given for two-coy drops to assist in securing Magura if necessary. Due to the limited availability of Mi-4 helicopters, all these helicopters were allocated to 4 Corps to enable them to ferry troops as required” (p. 504).

The para drop operation to secure Poongli Bridge, north of Tangail, was planned for D+7 (p. 573). During its advance on this axis, despite successive delays imposed on the advance of 95 Mtn Bde, it had captured Jamalpur to (north of Tangail) by 0730 hours on 11 Dec. (p. 578). The same day, 2 Para Bn Group was dropped near Poongli Bridge by 1650 hours for its operations. Here, Prasad’s account does not go very much into the process of selection of the airborne objectives other than a brief reference to the airborne asset allocation and utilisation plan resulting from the discussions at HQ Eastern Command. There is also no mention of whether any discussion went into modification of the initial plans once the operations of the formations were underway.

**Lieutenant General JFR Jacob, the then Chief of Staff, Eastern Command (in the rank of Major General)**

Among the direct participants in these operations, we have written accounts by Lieutenant General JFR Jacob, then Major General and Chief of Staff, Eastern Command that specifically refer to the selection of objectives and employment of the airborne assets with the Eastern Command.



Lieutenant General JFR Jacob writes in his book "Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation"<sup>8</sup>, first published in 1977, that having received early warning, he had made a draft plan by end of May 1971 (p. 60). Providing details of the next steps (though, the datelines are not very clear here), he talks of being assured of resources to achieve their objectives, which included "a battalion group of 50 Parachute Brigade" (p. 61), which he allocated to their envisaged tasks "to drop at Tangail" (p. 63). For crossing of the river Meghna, while discussing the South-Eastern sector's plans, he mentions as the existing landing crafts were unsuitable due to their draught, we shifted our attention to the possibility of obtaining additional helicopters" (p. 62) (a point that subsequently contributed significantly to the course of war in 4 Corps zone, but that's another story).

Jacob also writes in his book "An Odyssey in War and Peace"<sup>9</sup>, (first published in 2011), that "The operation order for the drop was prepared in mid-October by Air Vice-Marshal Charan Das Guru Devasher, Brigadier Mathew Thomas then commanding 50 Para Brigade, and me. We planned the drop to take place on D plus 7 and the link up within twenty-four hours" (p. 86). He goes on to state that "I had earlier briefed the GOC 101 CZA in Fort William on the details of the plan. He was optimistic and told me he would capture Dacca by D plus 10. I sent him a demi-official letter detailing the outline plan as Manekshaw was yet to agree to the employment of brigades from the Chinese border". (p. 86) Though 101 CZA initially only had a brigade of four battalions under it, the plan was to place two more brigades to be relieved from the Chinese border under it, in addition to the battalion under Brigadier Sant Singh (F-J Sector) to support Mukti Bahini operations (p. 86). Lieutenant General Jacob also mentions that the plan was jointly formalised in consultation with Major General IS Gill, who was the Director General of Military Operations at the Army HQs then<sup>10</sup>. It is understandable that Maj. Gen. IS Gill, who was also the Colonel of the Parachute Regiment at that time, must have been keen to give his battalions a chance to contribute to the writing of the nation's history.

Elaborating on why specifically Tangail, Jacob writes, "We planned to drop a battalion group at Tangail, selecting Tangail as a safe drop because it was held by Tiger Siddiqui with his force of 20,000. Tangail afforded a suitable jumping off area for the

attack on Dacca and was also suitably located for a link up by forces from the north". (p. 86)

As to the pertinent question about options considered, Lieutenant General Jacob further writes, "Gill, on receiving the order for the airdrop, asked me to consider the airfield at Kurmitola in Dacca rather than Tangail, and Brig. Mathew Thomas also agreed with his view. I told Gill to remember Crete and the very heavy losses suffered by the Germans. Kurmitola was well defended with air defence batteries. [...] stressing that we could not link up with Kurmitola but could at Tangail. In the inter-service operation order issued, Gill included Kurmitola as an alternative. Later Gill said, "Jake, you were right about Tangail and I was wrong about Kurmitola". (p. 88).

**Lieutenant General IS Gill, then Offg DMO (in the rank of Major General)**

Lieutenant General IS Gill, who as Major General was Director of Military Training at that time, was moved to the Directorate of Military Operations as 'Officiating Director' (Offg DMO) at the end of August 1971, in which capacity he served through the 1971 operations. He was personally very reticent about writing his autobiography after his retirement, saying, "What have I done? What's so special about any of it?".<sup>11</sup> So, while there is no personal written account available of his experiences during the 1971 war, we have his biography written by Subbiah Muthiah, first published in 2008<sup>12</sup>, which includes a number of relevant details for our purpose.<sup>13</sup>

Major General Gill as the Offg DMO, appears to have played a key role in the employment of the airborne forces in the Eastern Command as his name appears repeatedly in various other accounts referenced for this analysis. However, Gill sets the record straight in a letter written after his retirement to Major General Tej Pathak, (who had asked him a question relating to his then Division's role in the 1971 war), that the operation instructions had already been issued by the Army HQ and operation plans of the Commands made and discussed with the Chief of the Army Staff, before he took over as the Offg DMO; hence, he did not have as much say in "certain aspects which appeared to me to be defective" (p. 190). But he had "strong convictions on the usefulness of Special Services Operations in successful conduct of war, based

on his experience in Greece" (p. 183). A paper presented by him to Chiefs of Staff Committee in April 1971 led to the training and employment of Mukti Bahini (though not quite as envisaged by him). The other was the employment of airborne and heliborne forces where he certainly seems to have shared his advice on their employment, which is also confirmed by other key participants. On this, Muthiah writes that when Tangail was being identified as an ideal drop-zone during the planning, Gill "had wanted the drop further ahead, at the erstwhile airfield of Kurmitola on the outskirts of Dacca (now Dhaka), but the Air Force considered it too risky. Inder believed, a drop in Kurmitola, coordinated with pushes by the two divisions of 4 Corps that had moved within striking distance of Dacca in the east, would have brought the war to an end by 12 or 13 December. But Tangail proved good enough".<sup>14</sup> (p. 188)

In the only public comment made by Gill on his role in the 1971 war, at the release of Vice Admiral MK Roy's book in Chennai, he said, "Based on the agreement of the Chiefs of Staff to co-operate with each other for the common good, joint planning of operations proceeded in 1971. My work in this direction was mainly with the Air Force — related to air support for army operations and the conduct of airborne operations, both in the East and the West". (p. 189) Perhaps, it is just Gill being himself — giving credit where due, not interfering in others' tasks but supporting them all the while. In any case, he would have had too much going all around him to micro-manage such aspects once the ball got rolling.

Finally, to make two brief mentions here about what is missing from the big picture relating to Major General Gill's role as the Offg DMO. One was his habit of writing "neatly handwritten slips in a large, clear hand, distributed to all sections every morning" in the DMO, which presumably set the tone for the day.<sup>15</sup> Whether these notes exist anywhere today is not known; they would indeed provide an excellent authentic record of how he thought through what was happening on the operational front in those critical days. Next is, reference to a detailed 'After-Action Report' of the 1971 conflict which he supervised after the war, of which "he prepared 'a brilliant summary', every word his own", which, as Muthiah writes, "is not available to even military personnel" and where certainly all his efforts to get to it failed as well (p. 202).

**Regimental History: “India’s Paratroopers: A History of The Parachute Regiment of India”**

Major KC Praval was commissioned to write the history of the Parachute Regiment by the then Colonel of the Regiment, Major General IS Gill (later Lieutenant General) in January 1970. It was first published in 1974.<sup>16</sup> So, it is fortuitous that this historical record was already being assiduously compiled by Praval<sup>17</sup>, when the 1971 war began. Therefore, it is natural to expect that the parachute operations therein would be carefully documented to preserve as a record for future generations.

Praval’s coverage of the Poongli airborne operation is more an account of its execution by 2 Para. He gives an overview of the prevailing scenario and then moves to operations undertaken by 50 Para Brigade and 2 Para Bn Group. He states that, “To cater for the contingency of war over Bangladesh, plans for several airborne operations had been under consideration. As the campaign proceeded, it became obvious that only two of them would yield worthwhile results. A portion of the brigade was therefore released for ground operations under II Corps”.(p. 288) Subsequently, the airborne task envisaged for two companies of 8 Para was cancelled and the companies reverted back to the battalion (p. 290).

Coming to 2 Para Bn Group, he writes that “[...] a number of airborne operations had been planned as part of the campaign in Bangladesh but the Tangail operation had the highest priority, and it was the only one carried out” (p. 291). He adds that “early in November, a Joint Coordinating HQ had been set up at Calcutta to coordinate the execution of the airborne operation and the Air Transport Force Commander Group Captain Gurdip Singh was involved with the Commander Para Brigade in the conduct of a series of war games to fine-tune the operational execution”.(p. 291-2) He then describes the conduct of the operation, mentioning that the time of the drop was advanced to 4 pm to make it a day-drop in view of India’s complete supremacy in the air.

**Lieutenant General Mathew Thomas, then Commander, 50 (I) Para Brigade**

In what was the preparatory period leading up to the 1971 War, Brigadier (later Lieutenant General Mathew Thomas took over command of 50 Para Brigade from Brigadier TS Oberoi in August

1971. It was he who would have had a ring-side view of the planning process. Till very recently, there was no independent published version of the events leading up to the airborne assault on Tangail, put out by him that I had come across, even though his assent can be counted upon with regard to Praval's account and the account of the operation contained in the history of 2 Para which he edited<sup>18</sup> and was published in 2002. Therein, he has written an introductory note to this airborne operation's planning and followed that up with Praval's account published earlier (referred above), agreeing with that narration as being a faithful account close to factual reality. As to the planning process, he indicated that "In the conceptual and planning stages several airborne operations had been considered. But as the campaign proceeded, it was appreciated that out of these only two would yield appreciable results." (p. 466; possibly, Tangail and Kurmitola, though not clearly mentioned here). As only 2 Para's airborne task was finally chosen for execution, the Bn HQ and two Company Groups of 8 Para reverted back to the Para Brigade for ground operations. He also points to the critical role of Major General IS Gill, at the Army HQ, in pushing for the employment of airborne forces for effect (p. 469).

Fortunately, he is currently working on his personal memoirs, covering his time in the services, and there is new material in the online blog that is publicly accessible<sup>19</sup>; hopefully, we will see it in print in the near future.<sup>20</sup> In it, he provides clear timelines which more or less match Jacob's account given above, other than the one-on-one meeting with Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, which Jacob does not refer to, as where the Tangail idea sprang up.

Lieutenant General Thomas mentions of a one-on-one meeting with the GOC-in-C Eastern Command, Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora in September 1971, where he discussed the possible airborne objectives, before narrowing down on the area in the vicinity of Tangail to help speed up the advance towards the final battle for Dacca. This was keeping in mind the time-frame when the Air Force could make sufficient air resources available. He also mentions the other objective that was considered, Kurmitola:

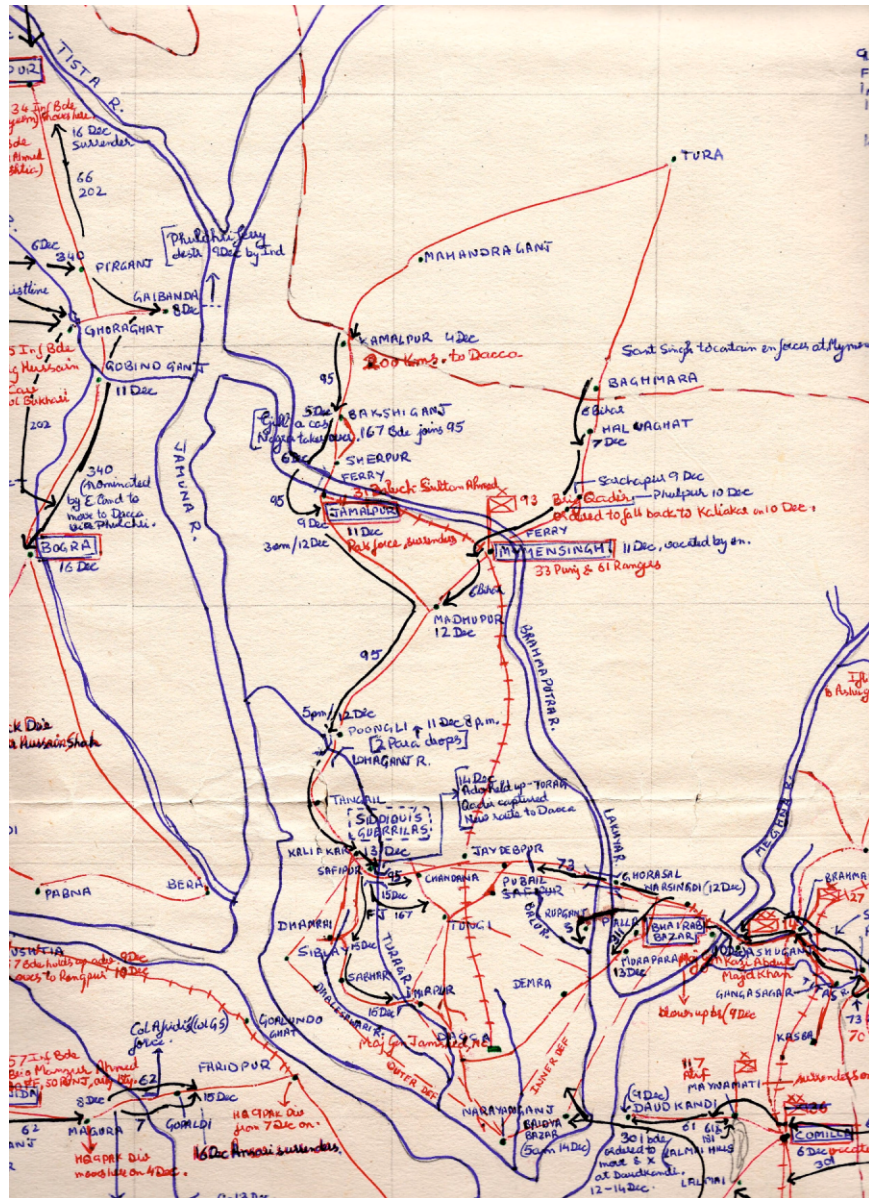
"The question of a 'Coup de Main' such as the capture of Kurmitola airfield (Dacca) by an Airborne Assault Operation

and, thereafter fly in the rest of the Brigade in the air transported role, to assist in the battle for Dacca, was also considered. A major air effort would be required for this latter task and such an operation could only be executed towards the closing stages of the war to hasten the end, especially, if world opinion and UN Security Council pressure was mounting for a ceasefire, particularly if Dacca was threatened and ripe for the taking.” (p. 11)

Thomas was later called to the Army and Air HQs in the third week of October 1971, to discuss and coordinate the planned airborne operations, during which he also met with the Offg DMO and discussed the same. On the question of the availability of the required air effort, it emerged that the following was possible:

“It transpired at this discussion that up to D plus 3, the IAF would be committed solely in the gaining of air superiority. Therefore, any Airborne Operation would only be feasible D plus 5 onwards as between D plus 3 and D plus 5, the transport aircraft that were needed for paratrooping and heavy drop would have to be moved from base airfields to interim airfields and only thereafter to mounting airfields. ... [A] Task Force of a Tac HQ and two Rifle Company Groups could be mounted in an Airborne Operation on D plus 5. The lift of an entire Parachute Battalion Group would only be possible on D plus 7 while the lift of a Parachute Battalion Group for an Airborne Assault Operation and the subsequent fly-in of the remainder Brigade in the Air-Transported mode would only be feasible on or after D plus 14.” (p. 14)

He also adds that on 20 November 1971, he visited HQ 101 CZA to discuss with the GOC, Major General GS Gill, the ground operational plans once 2 Para Bn Gp completed its airborne assault operation and came under command of 95 Mtn Bde, commanded by Brigadier HS Kler. (p. 20-21). With the ruling out of employment of the remainder Para Brigade in an air-transported mode, 50 Para Bde, less the earmarked airborne force, was released for ground operations under 2 Corps, where the brigade moved for their allocated tasks.



**Figure 1 : Sketch-map of Area of Operations: Tura-Jamalpur-Mymensingh to Tangail to Dacca**





**Figure 2 : Area of Paradrup at Tangail**

(Sketch overlaid on contemporary Google map of the general area)



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> My interest in this study was aroused as I worked on writing an account of the participation in the Poongli bridge airborne operation by two young officers of the 2 Para Battalion Group, Capt. TC Bhardwaj, who was the Pathfinder group commander and Capt. KR Nair, who was the reserve pathfinder group commander; this was in addition to their other roles upon landing at the drop-zone. Some of these initial observations came up there and I got interested in developing this line of thought further. Account under reference now published as follows: Lt. Col. RS Bangari, Col. TC Bhardwaj and Col. KR Nair, *Spearhead into Tangail: An Account of the Pathfinders and their Subsequent Operations*, in Sqn. Ldr. RTS Chhina (Ed.), *Battle Tales: Soldiers' Recollections of the 1971 War*: Chapter 2; Vij Publishers, New Delhi, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> I am laying out the larger picture of the operations in this sector very briefly, as much is required for us to follow-up here. This can be traced in the maps and sketches enclosed with the review article for better understanding of the situation. More details are readily available in the references that are listed in this paper going forward or any other authentic account of the 1971 India Pakistan war in the Eastern sector.

Note that, broadly, the eastern front war of 1971 was conducted in four main geographical sectors as per the lay of the ground and waterways: the South-Western sector; the North-Western sector; the Northern sector; and the Eastern sector. Some more details are given in the following sections.

<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 is an extract from a larger map of Indian Army's operations undertaken in East Pakistan (1971) prepared by the author in the mid-1980s while preparing to take the Part B exam; it is based primarily on Maj Gen DK Palit's *The Lightning Campaign: The Indo-Pakistan War, 1971*, (Thomson Press, 1972). Figure 2 shows the area of the paradrop operation at Tangail, overlaid on contemporary Google map.

In addition, one can also explore the following links to Google maps of the area of operation as described alongside each, for those interested in relating the places named in this account on more current maps/terrain.

a) <https://goo.gl/maps/sarTRemYiqu> : Link to general area of operation from the Indian border to the north, showing Tura, Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Tangail and Dacca.

b) <https://goo.gl/maps/UJZQAHKtsRWnhZtN6> : Link to the area of the 2 Para battalion group paradrop operation at Tangail.

<sup>4</sup> S Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1998, Third Impression, Lancer Publishers, 2000, p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> Lt Gen JFR Jacob writes in *Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1977/2018 (13<sup>th</sup> reprint) that while issuing out the Operation Instruction for the air drop, “even at that early date we spelt out that the para drop would occur on D plus 7 and the link up within twenty-four hours. Subsequent events were to prove the accuracy of this time frame.” (p. 77)

<sup>6</sup> SN Prasad, *Official History of the 1971 India Pakistan War*, Preface, v. Available online, e.g., at [https://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll\\_india/1971War3593.html?navinfo=96318](https://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_india/1971War3593.html?navinfo=96318); accessed August-October 2020; April-May 2022. Full official citation: History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India: *History of the 1971 India Pakistan War*, ed. SN Prasad et al., New Delhi, 1992.

(This has now been published in 2019, as: SN Prasad and UP Thapliyal (Eds.), *The India-Pakistan War of 1971: A History*, Natraj Publishers, Dehradun, 2014/2019. However, the print version is currently not available and hence has not been referenced. Hence, some corrections from the draft referenced here are likely, though the broader picture is not likely to vary much.)

<sup>7</sup> Prasad et al, op. cit., Preface, v.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Lt Gen JFR Jacob, *An Odyssey in War and Peace*, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob, 1977/2018, op. cit., p. 88; Lt. Gen. J F R Jacob, *Liberation of Bangladesh*, dated 1 September 2007, available at <http://jacoblectures.blogspot.com/2007/09/liberation-of-bangladesh.html>, accessed May-December 2018, Sept.-Oct. 2020.

<sup>11</sup> S Muthiah, *Born to Dare: The Life of Lt Gen Inderjit Singh Gill PVSM*, MC, Viking, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2008, Author’s Note.

<sup>12</sup> S Muthiah, *Born to Dare: The Life of Lt Gen. Inderjit Singh Gill PVSM*, MC. Muthiah was a journalist, later turned historical-cum-heritage writer based in Chennai.

<sup>13</sup> Muthiah had become close friends with Gill after he settled down in Chennai upon his retirement in 1979 and got to know him well over time to draw him to share many anecdotes of his service life. While he may have begun work on this book when Gill was still alive, major part of the research for the book appears to have been done after Gill passed away, including permission from the Army HQ to access Gill’s service records, etc.

<sup>14</sup> It is not clear from Muthiah's account where this statement comes from. Is it a recollection that Gill shared with him during one of their conversations or does it come from Lt Gen Jacob's Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation, first published in 1997?

<sup>15</sup> Also, referred to by Lt Gen Satish Nambiar in his account, With the Jangi Paltan in the 1971 War for the Liberation of Bangladesh, in Sqn Ldr RTS Chhina (Ed.), Battle Tales: Soldiers' Recollections of the 1971 War, 2022, pp. 61-86.

<sup>16</sup> KC Praval, *India's Paratroopers*, Thomson Press, New Delhi, 1974.

<sup>17</sup> Praval writes about the challenges he faced in compiling this account, where he almost drew a blank even at the Ministry of Defence Historical Section, Delhi to begin. He eventually tracked down British officers from the pre-Independence era who shared with him detailed notes, maps and photographs to piece together the early history of India's paratroop forces during the World War II, covering the retreat in Burma and later the heroic stand of the paratroopers at Ukhrul's Sheldon's Corner-Shangshak and Imphal in 1944 (refer chapters 5-7).

<sup>18</sup> Lt Gen Mathew Thomas, *The Glory and the Price: The History of 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment (Maratha)*, Kartikeya Publications, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Lt Gen Mathew Thomas, *The Planning and Conduct of Airborne Operations in the Indo-Pak War of 1971 Part 2: The Air Assault Op at Tangail (East Pakistan)—11 December 1971*, accessed on 4 Sept. 2020 at <https://httpijump4joy.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>20</sup> This has subsequently happened. The chapter from his online blog that I have referred to in this review article is finally in print: Lt Gen Mathew Thomas, *The Planning and Conduct of the Air Assault Op at Tangail – 11 December 1971*, in Sqn Ldr RTS Chhina (Ed.), *Battle Tales: Soldiers' Recollections of the 1971 War*, 2022. Page numbers referred hereafter while quoting Thomas refer to the 2022 publication here as there is no pagination in the draft at the blog.