

## Review Article 1

# 1962 : The War That Wasn't\*

**Major General PJS Sandhu (Retd)®**

The author, Mr Shiv Kunal Verma, has in the Introduction to the book explained the circumstances leading to his emotional attachment to the events of 1962 which prompted him to undertake this herculean task. Being the son of Major General Ashok Kalyan Verma of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the Rajput Regiment (2 RAJPUT) which fought at Namka Chu explains the rest.

The book is laid out in four parts (mentioned as Books) comprising 13 Chapters and is interspersed with 11 maps which make for easy understanding of various battles. The book has a number of photographs which bring to life various personalities and recreate the spirit of those times.

It is not my aim to describe here the contents of various chapters because that is well-nigh impossible. Suffice to say, the book covers a very wide canvas, starting with the geopolitical issues and then delves into happenings at politico-military, strategic, operational and down to the tactical level. Each of the major battles has been described in sufficient detail from both sides, narrating the role played by various headquarters (HQ), units, commanders and notably, even some JCOs, NCOs and ordinary soldiers who distinguished themselves by their heroic deeds, far beyond the call of duty.

That the political leadership of Independent India failed to appreciate the strategic designs of the newly emerged Communist China in Oct 1949 comes out quite clearly in the initial chapters. The book further reinforces the point (if it was needed) that India failed to see the writing on the wall which was quite clear by 1957 (completion of Aksai Chin Highway) and did not take adequate measures to safeguard territorial integrity. The civil-military disconnect which had existed since 1947 had got further

---

\*1962 : The War That Wasn't. By Shiv Kunal Verma (Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2016), pp.425, Price Rs 995.00, ISBN 978-93-82277-97-2.

®Major General PJS Sandhu (Retd) was commissioned into 8<sup>th</sup> Light Cavalry on 15 June 1965 and later commanded 47 Armoured Regiment. He retired from the Army as Chief of Staff, 1 Corps on 31 July 2003. Presently, he is working as Deputy Director and Editor at USI since 01 May 2007.

*Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, Vol. CXLVI, No. 603, January-March 2016.

accentuated by the late 1950s which impacted the senior military leadership severely and was to have disastrous consequences in the events leading up to the war and during the war itself. The book captures it all beautifully.

In Part III 'The Valley of Death', the events leading to the deployment of the Indian 7 Infantry Brigade on the Namka Chu, the paralysis of the higher command and the final battle; the outcome of which could be foreseen even by rank and file, have been described in vivid detail. The author has succeeded in bringing to life the steadfastness of the Indian soldier in battle. Sample this extract from page 162 of the book :

*"Amazingly, the command post with the three officers in it was still holding out. In Rikh's (CO 2 RAJPUT) own words: 'Captain Bhatia and I continued to engage the enemy from the doorway of the bunker. When I heard that the firing had stopped from the locality on my left, I came out of the bunker to see what had happened. As I stepped out of the bunker, a Chinese soldier who had crawled up to the side of the bunker threw a grenade at me. This grenade hit my rifle and exploded. My left jaw was broken and my lip cut open. I fell down. Lieutenant Bhup Singh rushed out of the bunker, shot the enemy soldier and pulled me back into the bunker. I got up with the support of Bhup Singh and leaning against the door started firing at the enemy closing in on the bunker. An enemy LMG burst fired into the doorway and killed my Adjutant, Captain Bhatia, and broke the top of my left shoulder. I had the pleasure of killing the Chinese who shot my adjutant. Finally, an enemy bullet hit my left elbow and broke it. Due to the loss of blood, I fell down with my left leg outside the bunker. A Chinese fired a burst into it and broke my leg below the knee. Lieutenant Bhup Singh pulled me in and covered me with a blanket.'"*

Part IV is really the heart of the book and that also explains the title. No doubt, it makes a sordid reading but it explains graphically the unfolding of events at Tezpur (HQ IV Corps) on 17-18 Nov 1962 which finally brought the curtain down on the disintegration of 4 Infantry Division with all three – the Corps Commander, the Army Commander and the COAS in attendance, and the Director of Military Operations, Brigadier Palit playing the supporting role. With the wisdom of hindsight, if one was to point out the single most important decision which could have made all

the difference to the outcome, it was the resurrection of Lieutenant General Bijji Kaul who was reinstated as GOC IV Corps on 30 Oct and Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh who had been Corps Commander from 25-29 Oct 1962 moved to take over XXXIII Corps. Even though General Thapar, COAS was opposed to this change, he could not withstand the pressure from Pandit Nehru who was keen to rehabilitate Bijji Kaul, notwithstanding the debacle of Namka Chu, loss of Tawang and Kaul having been medically unfit.

Another notable feature of the book is the part which describes in great detail the reconnaissance forays undertaken by Captains Bailey and Morsheed in 1912 and 1913 to explore and survey the entire northeast frontier. These surveys were to later form the basis for drawing of McMahon Line during the 1913-14 Shimla Conference that came to determine the border between Tibet and India. In early October 1913 while returning from Tibet, instead of taking the traditional route along Nyanjang Chu to Tawang, they crossed the main Himalayan range at Tulung La (17,320 feet) and proceeded *via* Tse La (15,650 feet) to Poshing La situated just above Dirang Dzong. This route, till then unexplored, came to be known as Bailey's Trail and was to be used by the Chinese to move a division size force in 1962 to outflank the Se La defences and interdict the road between Se La-Dirang Dzong and Dirang Dzong-Bomdi La, as also to contact Bomdi La simultaneously with their attack on Se La. This manoeuvre by the Chinese was to prove a turning point in the war.

Chapter 13 covers the war in Ladakh in about 50 pages. Though comparatively short, yet it covers the main battles that took place in the Western Sector. In this Sector, there were no large scale operations as the Chinese aim was to remove those Indian posts which they considered as encroachments across their Claim Line of 1960. As most of the Indian posts were of a platoon or section strength and not sited tactically, the force level employed by the Chinese was comparatively small. There were series of small battles which have been described in sufficient detail. Though the main strategic aim of the Chinese lay in the Western Sector, the major force level was applied in the Eastern Sector as the terrain there was more favourable for application of large forces. In the Western Sector, Chinese did not withdraw (unlike in The East) and continue to occupy the territory gained during The War.

There are a few inaccuracies and errors which occur in the narrative. Just to illustrate – Brigadier Hoshiar Singh before moving to take over 62 Infantry Brigade at Se La was the Deputy Commandant at the National Defence Academy and not the Colonel-in-Charge Administration as mentioned at page 209. Similarly, the order of battle of PLA 419 Tibetan Unit and 55 Division as mentioned at Page 259 have been mixed up. As per the Chinese sources, Tibetan Unit 419 had 154, 155 and 157 Infantry Regiments and 55 Division comprised 163, 164 and 165 Infantry Regiments. At Page 371, in the last para, the date of 20 Oct should have read 20 Nov. However, these and some other inaccuracies are innocuous and do not detract the reader from the main theme of the book.

The author through his painstaking research has done a yeoman service in bringing to light the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the events of those fateful days. He has succeeded in recreating the sense of anticipation, the tremendous physical and moral effort, the chance, the camaraderie, the strength of human spirit, the dust, din and glory of the battlefield that characterises war. *Even though the debacle that it was, the valour and bravery of the Indian soldier and its young officers comes to the fore repeatedly and quite clearly.* Equally strongly and forcefully emerges the failure of the higher military leadership and above all the inadequacies of intelligence establishment and political leadership. Coming on the heels of a USI Study “1962 – A View from the Other Side of the Hill”, Kunal’s book undoubtedly, has filled a great void that has existed in coming to terms with the events of 1962. Needless to say, the book makes a fascinating reading for a soldier and civilian alike.

## Review Article 2

### Kargil : Turning the Tide\*

Major General SV Thapliyal, SM (Retd)<sup>®</sup>

In many ways the book reminds one of the famous *Defeat into Victory* by Field Marshal Slim. From despair to elation, from no success to success and restoration of the Line of Control violated by Pakistan. All recounted in an easy style and readable narrative without resorting to heavy philosophy and blame game.

The book is divided into twelve chapters from Introduction to Epilogue. The author has given valuable insight into the Kashmir imbroglio, the prime reason for a state of 'no war no peace' between India and Pakistan and, therefore, evolution of the concept of "bleeding India by a thousand cuts" by General Zia Ul Haq by starting an insurgency in Kashmir and Punjab. The reader is reminded in the chapter 'Prelude to Kargil' that 8 Mountain Division which General Puri was commanding was deployed in a vast area in Srinagar Valley in counter-insurgency role. The author is of the view that the Kargil misadventure was undertaken by Pakistan for two reasons. Firstly, to internationalise the Kashmir issue and secondly, thinking that India was unlikely to resort to use of force to evict the intrusions made by Pakistan in Kargil sector and hence the intrusions would remain. The next chapter is on Terrain. This was necessary so that the reader could appreciate how the operations were conducted in a super high altitude area the like of which had never done been anywhere else. This chapter also answers the often asked question as to why Pakistan chose this area for surreptitious operations claimed to have been undertaken by the Mujahideen – a complete lie that was exposed as the operations progressed.

Chapter 5 gives out the Pakistani build-up and plan that was assessed only after the operations to evict the enemy started. The Pakistani intrusions from Mushkoh Valley in the West to Batalik

---

\* **Kargil : Turning the Tide.** By Mohinder Puri (New Delhi, Lancer Publishers and Distributors, 2016), pp..188, Price Rs 995.00, ISBN 9788170623120.

<sup>®</sup>**Major General SV Thapliyal, SM (Retd)** was commissioned into Regiment of Artillery on 25 December 1966. After premature retirement he completed his PhD on Sino-Indian relations and is a Fellow of Pune University in Weapons Technology. Presently, he is Vice President Business, Development, Memory Electronics Pvt Ltd.

*Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, Vol. CXLVI, No. 603, January-March 2016.

in the East came as a complete surprise to the intelligence agencies, the Army and the political leadership.

Chapter 6 gives out the details of the Indian response to the Pakistan perfidy. The author confines himself to the details of the move of 8 Mountain Division from the Valley to Dras Sector and the planning which preceded the conduct of operations in the shadow of the Government direction that the Line of Control was not to be crossed. This directive may have got us some supposed appreciation from the international community but placed severe restrictions on the freedom of conduct of operations by the commanders. The planning process rightly laid down the priority – capture of those features first which were dominating the National Highway. These features included Tololing, Hump and Point 5140. The author covers these operations in detail and combines the human element with operational details. We are reminded of the famous saying by Field Marshal Montgomery that “Before Alamein the Allies had no success and after Alamein they had no failure”. India had no success before Tololing and no failure after that. The fall of Tiger Hill and Pt 4875 was the final nail in the coffin of the enemy and the whole Nation was elated. Thereafter, the Pakistani withdrawal started, spurred on no doubt by American pressure which in a meeting with Nawaz Sharif on 04 Jul 1999, President Clinton made it clear to him that restoration of *status quo ante* must be done at the earliest. The author has also covered the operations conducted by 3 Infantry Division in the next chapter. In these operations, 70 Infantry Brigade of 3 Infantry Division excelled in Batalik Sector and drove the enemy out from all occupied areas.

Chapters eight and nine cover the operations from the point of view of infantry and the supporting arms and services; all contributed superbly to ensure victory. The contribution of artillery was great while the operations conducted by the Indian Air Force, apart from their effect, were also a great morale booster for the troops.

Two most important chapters in the book are on Principles of War and Reflections. The adherence to principles of war which brought victory were concentration of force, administration, surprise, economy of effort, offensive spirit, cooperation, selection and maintenance of aim, one added by the author is innovativeness which is the strong point of the Indian Army.

The chapter on Reflections is very interesting and educative. The author rightly concludes that the visit of our Prime Minister to Pakistan and signing of the Lahore Declaration created a sense of complacency in the political circles resulting in a complete surprise when Pakistani intrusions came to be known. However, both the political and military leadership are to be commended for their determination to restore the sanctity of the Line of Control while keeping the war confined to Kargil Sector. The author has also given his views on a possible future war and feels that nuclear capable adversaries are unlikely to venture into a conventional war transgressing international borders – a debatable point of view. Some interesting views have been expressed on the use of Air Force in Kargil like terrain and role of leaders in any future conflict. He has also given his views on miscalculations made by Pakistan; and why the Indian Government laid down the direction for not crossing the Line of Control and what it entailed? He has also cautioned the nation of being wary of Pakistan – a dangerous neighbour. His views on having a Chief of Defence Staff in our context merit attention.

This book is a valuable addition to our rather bare cupboard of books on Indian Military History Post Independence. Since the author has laid stress on tactical operations, the inclusion of this book in the syllabi of Defence Services Staff College Course, Senior Command Course and High Command Course would be valuable.