

Kargil War in Retrospect: The Battle of Point 5590 and Captain Haneef Uddin's Supreme Sacrifice

India and Pakistan witnessed one of the most tragic transfers of population. The tension between these two nations was born out of the territorial divide that took place on communal grounds during Partition. Since then, the tussle for territory between India and Pakistan has seen more than seven decades of bloodshed. The history of violence and political unrest in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has been a testament to the number of lives it has claimed to prove who has the rightful claim on Kashmir.

The Kargil War of 1999 came as a betrayal by Pakistan after nearly a decade of peace and cordiality. Despite losing three wars against India, Pakistan's fake optimism of being a superior military power didn't wither[i]. And in an attempt to occupy Kashmir by strength, armed personnel of Pakistan's army infiltrated the Line of Control (LoC) in May 1999. The first information of the intrusion was given by a local shepherd in the Kargil Sector. It was a breach of the Tashkent agreement signed by India and Pakistan in 1966. Despite India's belief in a peaceful resolution of conflict, India had to choose the route of fighting a full-fledged war in 1999 to protect its territorial integrity.[ii]

The War lasted for a span of approximately two months in which the tri-services emerged victorious on 26 July 1999. But, as it is often said that the 'Wars come at a cost,' the Kargil war didn't just come as an economic drain to India, it also cost us a number of lives of our gallant Indian soldiers. This was the war in which India lost the largest number of its young commanding officers.

The battles fought during the Kargil war are examples of High-Altitude warfare in which Indian soldiers set a new benchmark as regards valor and sacrifice. It has been twenty-four years since the War and since then the Param Vir Chakra awardee like Captain Vikram Batra has become a household name and gained immense popularity in [popular] culture. This article brings to you an unsung hero of Kargil who not only ensured the capture of the objective but also made it his objective to save his men from impending death. Captain Haneef Uddin was one of the gallant warriors of [the] Indian Army who fought beyond the call of duty and made the supreme sacrifice in the battleground of Karchan Glacier during the Kargil War.

Captain Haneef Uddin and his Sacrifice that Outlives Him

Captain Haneef Uddin was born on 23 August 1974 in Delhi to a Hindu mother, Mrs. Hema Aziz, and a Muslim father, Mr. Aziz Uddin. [His mother and father both being artists, a classical singer and a drama practitioner respectively, worked for the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Since their jobs demanded them to tour across the country and perform for soldiers posted in border areas, Captain Haneef Uddin lived with his grandmother in Old Delhi during his formative years. It was only after the demise of his father at the age of eight that he started living with his mother. He was an exceptional student in his school and college. Captain Haneef Uddin was a

man who had many feathers in his hat[;] he had a mesmerizing voice and was also popular as a computer genius among his peers. Interestingly, while completing his graduation in science at the Shivaji College, University of Delhi, he was also crowned as Mr. Shivaji.

Despite having an offer of a lucrative career in computers, he was determined to join the Indian Army. In conversation with author Mrs. Rachna Rawat Bisht, Mrs. Hema Aziz smiles nostalgically as she recalls how overjoyed he was when she asked him to choose his dream[iii]. He cleared his Service Selection Board (SSB) interview and joined the Indian Military Academy in 1996. He was commissioned into the Army Service Corps (ASC) on 07 June 1997. When the Kargil War broke out, he was attached to 11 RAJPUTANA RIFLES deployed at the Siachen Glacier.

Captain Haneef Uddin and his Company were just back from their four-month-long tenure at the Siachen Glacier. Normally when a unit comes back from Siachen deployment, they are given a rest period, but the Kargil War had changed circumstances then. Captain Haneef Uddin and his Company were at the Siachen Base Camp when 12 JAT reported an enemy intrusion in Sub-Sector West's Turtuk Sector.

Due to intense clashes in the Batalik Sector between Indian troops and Pakistani intruders, 11 RAJPUTANA RIFLES, which was in the process of de-inducting, was quickly moved through Tutuk-Lungpa to occupy defenses on the LOC at Point 5500 and adjacent areas. The entire area was dotted with deadly crevasses, and the last point of communication was a small Post Zangpal, which was six kms before the Karchen Glacier. By 22 May 1999, Colonel Anil Bhatia, Commanding Officer of 11 RAJ RIF, had ensured that the battalion had firmed in, and no further intrusion could take place.

On the night of 06-07 June 1999, in an attempt to identify the enemy positions along Point 5590, Captain Haneef Uddin volunteered to patrol Karchen Glacier. Accompanied by Naib Subedar Mangej Singh, he led a special mission patrol consisting of one Junior Commissioned Officer and twelve other ranks. Advancing through sub-zero temperatures along the sharp razor edge from the south-westerly direction, the patrol reached as near as 200 meters to the enemy positions. The enemy spotted the approached patrol and launched indiscriminate fire upon them. Captain Haneef Uddin and two other ranks bore the brunt of enemy fire. Acting upon his instincts, Captain Haneef Uddin, with the sole intention of safeguarding his men from the enemy fire and providing them a passage to extricate, took position and started firing to pin down the enemy. Despite being grievously injured and bleeding profusely, this valiant officer chose to save the lives of his team over his own.

In the fierce firefight, Captain Haneef Uddin received multiple gunshot wounds, yet he didn't move an inch till his team reached a safer location. The officer, however, succumbed to his injuries while fighting on the icy heights of Point 5590. Inspired by the sacrifice of their young officer, his team established a foothold on the mountain and held it against all odds.

Due to incessant enemy fire, it was only forty-three days later on 18 July 1999 that the Indian Army was able to extricate the frozen bodies of their fallen heroes, one of them being Captain

Haneef Uddin. For the display of exemplary leadership and gallantry beyond the call of duty, Captain Haneef Uddin was awarded the Vir Chakra posthumously.

When General Ved Prakash Malik, then Chief of the Army Staff, informed Mrs. Hema Aziz about the possible delay in recovering the body of her brave son, she politely said, 'I wouldn't want a son of another mother to die to extricate the body of my dead son, but when the war ends, I want to visit the place where my son took his last breath.' Captain Haneef Uddin was a brave son of a brave mother; he lives forever in the memories of everyone who ever knew him. In honor of his sacrifice, the Sub-Sector West was renamed as the Haneef Sub-Sector, and it is where the Indian Army defies death every day.

Conclusion

A celebrated poet, Amir Khushrov, was once awestruck by the beauty of Kashmir and called it 'paradise on earth' in his writings; today it still remains immensely beautiful, but Pakistan's hunger for its annexation has only caused atrocities and violence in the paradise. Captain Haneef Uddin and many valiant soldiers India has lost during the Wars with Pakistan influenced India's strategy to tackle Pakistan as a hostile neighbor. The Kargil war was a clear indication that Pakistan has opted to be a rogue state, leaving no space for bilateral negotiation. In fact, it was only after the Kargil War India chose not to indulge in any talks with Pakistan with regards to Kashmir even at the United Nations.

Since then, Pakistan has attempted to hamper the economy of Jammu and Kashmir by introducing fake Indian Currency and has also been allegedly fueling insurgency in the region. To keep the terror at bay and protect the locals, approximately 1.3 Lakh armed personnel are deployed in Jammu and Kashmir, and nearly 5,000 (1990-2017)[iv] security personnel have lost their lives to militancy. Furthermore, in December 2001, Pakistan orchestrated a terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament, followed by another terrorist attack on Mumbai City in 2008. Despite signing a number of peace treaties and holding peace talks, the deceitful behavior of Pakistan and a series of terrorist attacks on India have only implied that the hope of peace has diminished away in the context of Indo-Pak relations.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir holds strategic importance to India since the Himalayan Range provides a natural barrier against the hostile neighbors, making it an asset for India's national security. In order to establish peace and make an international declaration on the national identity of Kashmir, the Government of India abolished Article 370 in 2019 and changed its status to a Union Territory. Hence, today the question is not about who has the rightful claim on Kashmir, but the question of the hour is when Pakistan is evacuating the illegally occupied Kashmir, also known as Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

[i] Basru, M. Rajesh, "India-Pakistan Relations: Between War and Peace", In India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect, ed. Sumit Ganguly (New Delhi: Oxford Press, 2009). 11-32.

[ii] YM Bammi, Kargil 1999: The impregnable conquered. (New Delhi: Natraj Publishers, 2020), 3-37.

[iii] Rachna Rawat, Bisht Kargil: Untold Stories From the War. (Gurugram: Ebury Press by Penguin Random House, 2019), 41-65

[iv] Jayant Jacob, and Aurangzeb Naqshbandi, “41,000 deaths in 27 years: The anatomy of Kashmir militancy in numbers,” Hindustan Times, 25 September 2017 (Accessed on 31 July 2013)

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/the-anatomy-of-kashmir-militancy-in-numbers/story-UncrzPTGhN22Uf1HHe64JJ.html>

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