

# Letters to the Editor

I

## 1962 – Battle of Se-La and Bomdi-La

Dear Editor,

Reference your article '*1962-Battle of Se-La and Bomdi-La*' in Oct-Dec 2011 Issue of USI Journal.

Reading the article is a professional pleasure; for the opponent's clinical execution, innovative conception of the plan and accurate reading of the Indian leadership's mind. On these aspects we seem to have misread, erred and faltered so very badly, both politically, and, even more, militarily.

In retrospect, I hope, the military leadership, at least, does not err and falter this time, should it ever come, and keep the following aspects under thorough professional examination :-

- (a) Thorough preparation through infrastructure development and mental determination; asserting this necessity strongly.
- (b) Consideration of strong artillery and air as well as air defence support in view of our lines of communication being vulnerable to interdiction; and Chinese airlift capability being restricted because of the take off height of the Tibetan plateau.
- (c) Preparation of the local population to resist, harass and for intelligence gathering / passage. Can the equivalent of Ladakh Scouts be contemplated in the Kameng, Lohit areas? The role of SSB, SFF etc?
- (d) Use of armoured forces across the border.
- (e) Building and employing counter-offensive capability, a vital part of effective defence.
- (f) Critical assessment of Chinese capabilities as displayed in 1962 : -
  - (i) The forces covered 200 km in 10 days in November-early winter, and withdrew before the passes closed.

- (ii) Outflanking troops carried 30 kg in addition to their weapons and ammunition; being self contained for 10 days; operating in mountains in early winter over 14-16000 ft.
- (iii) Their arrangements for river crossing – Tawang Chu, Kameng R, Rupa etc.
- (iv) Their engineer effort for road construction.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Lieutenant General SC Sardeshpande (Retd)*

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Dear Editor,

This is with reference to the Article ‘1962-Battle of Se-La and Bomdi-La: A View from the Other Side of the Hill’ by Major General PJS Sandhu (Retd) that appeared in the Oct-Dec 2011 issue of the USI Journal.

While complimenting the author for his thought provoking piece of writing, I would like to make certain comments which are given in the succeeding paragraphs.

I was a subaltern during the 1962 War and was present at Tawang, Nuranong (ahead of Se-La) and Bomdi-La in successive stages. It is obvious that I would then not have known anything about the higher direction of war, an acute sense of observation notwithstanding. But thirty five years later, under the auspices of General Palit’s Trust for Military Studies, I wrote a book titled ‘*When Generals Failed*’. I interviewed over 50 officers and local inhabitants (eye witnesses to the happenings) and visited and revisited the scenes of ambushes, battles and rather non-battles as in most cases our troops had scooted before the actual attacks by the Chinese.

I had also included extracts from ‘*The Snows of the Himalayas: The True History of China India War*’ by Sun Xia and Chen Zhi Bin. Both the participants had served in the PLA in the 1960s where they had heard accounts of the 1962 War from the senior field commanders and travelled over China to interview other participants including Divisional Commander Zhang Pengrian who had led the Main Attack.

However, since these accounts including the thought provoking inputs in Major General Sandhu’s article have emanated



from a totalitarian Communist country where everything is ruthlessly censored, nothing can be taken at its face value. One has to make allowances for propaganda, rhetoric and twisting of facts. The view from the other side of the hill needs to be reconciled with our side as well.

At Se-La and Dirang it was pure and simple abdication from battle and at Bomdi-La there was just one company of 1 Sikh LI when the Chinese attacked with a Regiment (equivalent to a brigade of ours) with 1 Madras on a limb and isolated.

It is interesting to note that the Chinese in their various accounts have omitted the following battles where the Indians fought most bravely.

(a) Defensive battle by 1 Sikh supported by 7 Bengal Mountain battery on 23 Oct 1962 where the forward company commanded by the Hockey Olympian Major Hari Pal Kaushik beat back repeated attacks by the Chinese allowing the Battalion as also the adhoc Brigade at Tawang to make a clean break and withdraw east of Tawang Chu to Nuranong and Se-La.

(b) The most heroic performance by 4 Garhwal supported by 2 Derajat Mountain Battery (FF) as covering troops at Nuranong when they beat back all attacks on 17 Nov 1962. The battalion was most unwisely withdrawn by the GOC who had lost his nerve; thereby opening the main gate to the Se-La defences and consequently the rout ensued.

(c) The Artillery bombardment of the Chinese caught in the open at Thembang on 18 Nov 1962 where nearly a hundred Chinese were killed including the Commander of this special force.

(d) The heroic attack put in by Lieutenant Colonel SK Avasthy and hundred odd assorted officers and men at Lyugla Lumpa on 21 Nov 1962 where all of them were killed but not before taking toll of equal number of the Chinese.

As regards the action involving 3 JAK Rifles, I happened to be at Rupa Track Junction when the Commander 48 Brigade asked Lieutenant Colonel Gurdial Singh the CO of the Battalion which had just withdrawn from Bomdi-La where they were to have put in

a pre-dawn counter attack which was called off (most likely because of no artillery support and non-arrival of 6/8 GR), to now occupy a lay back position on the adjacent feature. The CO promptly left with his Reconnaissance Group while his Dogra troops were waiting north of the road when within minutes the Chinese came rushing down from Bomdi-La side. There was a sharp hand to hand fighting and there were casualties on both sides but the Chinese being in larger numbers managed to capture the CO and many of his troops. Now Gurdial was a hardened war veteran and it is not surprising that his troops instead of running away put up a ferocious fight. It was never a case of the clash of the opposing vanguards as alluded to in the article. Incidentally Gurdial lost his son Major Devinder Pannu in 1971 at Chamb and was awarded the Vir Chakra posthumously. Bravery runs in the family.

The comparison with the Battle of Chosin Reservoir is very apt and it clearly illustrates Mao's Maxims of War; of multipronged attacks, infiltration, encirclement and envelopment and finally hot pursuit by disregarding caution when the enemy forces are in a state of disarray.

My major aim of writing this letter is to remind ourselves during this Fiftieth anniversary of this unfortunate war, of the valour and sacrifices of the known and also mostly those unknown officers and men who gave their lives for the Nation. They deserve our solemn homage. One wonders if it occurred to them as they breathed their last that they had been let down by the brass hats. This to my mind is the main Lesson of the 1962 War in Kameng Sector and we don't need to go searching for any other alibis in Henderson Brooks Report.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Brigadier DK Khullar, AVSM (Retd)*

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Dear Editor,

Kindly accept my compliments on your well-researched article on the 1962 Battle of Se-La and Bomdi-La. The article gives a fresh and interesting perspective from the Chinese side and addresses the questions and circumstances on the fall of Se-La – otherwise a highly defensible and tactically sound position. While everybody expected Se-La to be attacked (and still be held), the



significant ingress to Dhirang and Bomdi-La through Poshing-La and other routes was not expected, precisely because we did not study Chinese tactics and the previous battles like that of Chosin Reservoir, as you have aptly pointed out. We unfailingly persist with our habit.

As regards the reasons for the war, essentially the Chinese brought 'Decades of Peace' with this war, if nothing else. A brief but compelling account on the Chinese political and ideological side of the war has also been given by Henry Kissinger in his latest book '*On China*'.

*Yours Sincerely*

*Lieutenant Colonel Shailender Arya*

## II

### **Asia's Water Crisis and the New Security Risks**

Dear Editor,

In the article titled '*Asia's Water Crisis and the New Security Risks*' (USI Journal, Jan-March, 2012), Dr Brahma Chellaney has brought out the higher risks of water conflicts in Asia due to China's water policies aimed at advancing its interests without caring for the interests of its neighbours. Being the upper riparian, China has never believed in having water sharing agreements for mutual and sustainable benefits with its neighbours. Due to this attitude of China, the building of institutionalised cooperation in Asia to harness the transboundary rivers for optimum development and utilisation would be difficult.

China has every right to build dams in its territory and we cannot dispute their right to do so. But what we have to worry about is the impact of these dams on our projects and related activities since the UN Convention (1997) on international water courses is still to be ratified and the international water laws are weak to ensure the rights of downstream riparians on such rivers. Presently, except for a joint declaration made by the two countries in 2006 for exchanging hydrological data, there are no subsisting agreements between India and China on water related issues. Just sharing such information is not adequate to address our concerns.

As of now, Indian authorities do not appear to be much concerned about our neighbour's activities in upper Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo), and in the Tibetan parts of the Sutlej and Indus sub basins. According to them, Chinese authorities have assured India that the projects proposed by them would not affect the river flows downstream.

Are we to remain satisfied with such assurances knowing fully well that if China diverts the lean flows of the rivers, our hydro projects would have to be shut down and if they release heavy flows from their reservoirs during monsoon season, our areas downstream would be devastated?

The impact of Chinese reservoir operations in the Mekong basin on co-basin states like Thailand is relevant here. The indiscriminate reservoir operations and spillway gate openings releasing large flood flows affected their agricultural activities and inundated many areas causing heavy damages. Even the protests made by the Mekong River Commission were ignored by China. India too had suffered heavy losses in the recent past due to unprecedented floods from the Sutlej and from the Yarlung Tsangpo submerging our many areas.

As stressed by the author, it is therefore necessary for India to strategically plan and manage our water resources in view of Chinese reluctance to enter into water sharing agreements. We can protect our interests by constructing storages in these rivers to absorb river flow fluctuations when caused by Chinese reservoir operations. We should not allow another Mekong to repeat here.

*Yours sincerely,*

*MS Menon*

*Former Chief Engineer, Central Water Commission*

### III

## **Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East: A Significant Step Towards an Eventual Nuclear Weapons Free World**

Dear Editor,

Colonel GG Pamidi in his article on a nuclear free world in the Jan-Mar 2012 issue of USI Journal has omitted discussing one very pertinent factor - the philosophy behind weaponisation. A



fundamental point is, why did the N5 weaponise? France, Russia, and China were ravaged by the Axis powers during World War II. England was spared a land invasion but had to withstand a fierce air attack. USA was lucky in that its mainland was unaffected due to external lines of communication and only outstations like Pearl Harbour suffered. The N5 realised that conventional forces were inadequate to prevent a determined land invasion by an aggressor. Therefore, they took an oath after the war that never again in their history would they permit a repeat of this humiliation and decided to develop the "mother of all weapon systems" that would act as an ideal deterrent against an invader's intention. Thus was born the weapon of mass destruction.

This contention was proved beyond doubt during the American attack on Iraq in 2003. Just before the attack, then US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld stated at an open press conference that he was going in for a simultaneous two-pronged invasion on two members of what George Bush had termed "axis of evil" namely Iraq and North Korea, and he would deal with the third one Iran, later. Saddam Hussein did not take this threat seriously despite having been thrashed once before, resulting in his not only losing his country but his own life as well.

By contrast, North Korea's President of that time, the late Kim Jong IL too immediately announced openly that the day American troops crossed the 38th Parallel, he would retaliate with a nuclear strike on South Korea. Rumsfeld did a prompt volte face and offered to talk instead! Iran is fast on the way to having a nuclear arsenal and *Inshallah*, would stop the expected West's attack in its tracks.

No nuclear weapon holding nation that has studied military history will ever make the blunder of de-weaponising else it would land itself in the same boat as India in 1962. Hence all this talk about nuclear disarmament should not be taken seriously. The N5, unfortunately, do not want any other country to have WMD thus giving it a distinct advantage in "doing an Iraq" elsewhere.

A misconception needs to be clarified - who was responsible for Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Was it the Allies - as is generally trumpeted - or the Tokyo High Command? If Japan had surrendered

soon after Germany did in May 1945, it would have been spared the atom bomb. But Emperor Hirohito and Field Marshal Terauchi continued with the war for another three months, ignoring the Allies' suggestion to surrender. Their intemperate defiance led to Japan's horrific punishment. Japan's biggest drawback in its national psyche is its excessive ego, an ego that made it feel that it was superior to any one else in war and this feeling caused its politico-military harakiri.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Lieutenant Colonel JK Dutt (Retd)*