

# Operation Vijay: The Liberation of '*Estado da India*'- Goa, Daman and Diu

Brigadier AS Cheema, VSM (Retd)®

## Introduction

**V**ijay' extolling 'Victory' is a befitting name for any military operation as it injects both hope and valour; no wonder that there have been three Operations 'Vijay' in India's recent military history. The first was the recapture of Jhangar by Brigadier Usman in 1948; the second, liberation of Goa, Daman and Diu in 1961, and lastly, Kargil operations in 1999. What distinguishes the Vijay of 1961 is the fact that this was India's first Tri-Service 'Integrated' operation where the Indian Navy was tested in battle. Many invaluable lessons from this truly unique operation entail a revisit due to the growing salience of integrated operations.

The liberation of Goa was unique in other ways also. Having been colonised by the Portuguese in 1510 and governed by Lisbon as '*Estado da India*'; Goa, Daman, Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli remained under colonial occupation for 451 years. The rhetoric of the 'Liberation' of these colonies by India reverberated shrilly in the portals of the UN; since India, despite being a third world country had taken unilateral action against a 'European' nation. Apart from severing diplomatic ties, a visibly perturbed Lisbon even offered prize money of US \$ 10,000 on the head of the Indian commander who had spearheaded the liberation, and even offered citizenship to Goans who did not wish to be ruled by the 'natives.'

## Political Background

Despite India's independence, Portugal adopted the stance that her territories were not colonies but part of 'Metropolitan Portugal' and hence beyond 'negotiation.' This charade continued till India was constrained to withdraw her diplomatic mission in June 1953. Since this failed to make a difference, she instituted visa restrictions 'from' and 'to' Goan colonies through Indian soil, paralysing trade.

---

®Brigadier AS Cheema, VSM (Retd) was commissioned into 69 Armoured Regiment on 03 Sep 1977. He was Brig IC Administration, HQ Northern Command from 01 Dec 2009 to 30 Nov 2011. He was a Senior Research Fellow at USI from Mar 2012-Nov 2013.

*Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, Vol. CXLIII, No. 594, October-December 2013.

Concurrently, armed (civil) resurrections in Dadra and Nagar Haveli were successful<sup>1</sup> and the situation in Goa had also become serious.<sup>2</sup> At this stage, the Portuguese Prime Minister asked Britain to mediate, but since she was unable to break the impasse, the matter was taken to the UN. On the other hand, Pandit Nehru clearly stated: '*Continuance of Goa under Portuguese rule was an impossibility.*' It needs to be highlighted that the decision was taken at a time when war clouds were building up for India in the north and the liberation perhaps also was intended as a signal to Peking – if this was the case, this could be called the only failure of the operation.

### Mandate to the Governor General of Estado da India

Despite the Defence Minister advising Prime Minister Salazar that the resistance in Goa would be suicidal, he gave instructions to the contrary. Governor General Vassalo e Silva was tasked to fight till the last man and hold out for eight days, by which time, he hoped international support could be mustered against India's unilateralism.<sup>3</sup> The armed forces at the disposal of the Governor General are tabulated below :—<sup>4</sup>

	Force Levels	Remarks
<b>Army</b>	3,995 combat soldiers Two Artillery Units Contingent of Female Paratroopers	Reduced from 12,000 in 1960
<b>Air</b>	Two Transport aircraft	A squadron of F-86 Sabres was erroneously reported at Dabolim
<b>Navy</b>	Naval Sloop ' <i>Afanzo de Albuquerque</i> ' Three Light Patrol Boats	Frigates <i>Bartholomeu Dias</i> , <i>Gonsalves Zarco</i> and <i>Joao de Lisboa</i> withdrawn
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	1,040 Police officers 400 Border Guards	Five Merchant Ships

### The Indian Military Build-Up

Lieutenant General JN Chaudhuri entrusted the task to Major General KP Candeth commanding 17 Infantry Division, and placed 50 Parachute Brigade under him. Air operations were delegated to Air Vice Marshal Erlic Pinto and the Navy was entrusted to create a suitable Task Force. Details of forces mustered for the operation are tabulated below:-



Army	Navy	Air Force
<b>GOA</b>	INS Vikrant (Carrier)	<b>Poona Air Base</b>
<b>17 Infantry Division</b>	INS Delhi (Cruiser)	Air Operations Centre
63 Infantry Brigade	INS Mysore (Cruiser)	16 Squadron (Canberra)
2 BIHAR	INS Rajput (Destroyer)	35 Squadron (Canberra)
3 SIKH	<b>Frigates</b>	Hunter Force (ex 17 & 37
4 SIKH LI	INS Trishul (Anti-Sub)	Squadrons)
<b>48 Infantry Brigade</b>	INS Kirpan (Anti-Sub)	<b>Santa Cruz</b>
5 GUARDS	INS Khukri (Anti-Sub)	1 Squadron (Mystere)
1 SIKH LI	INS Kuthar (Anti-Sub)	<b>Jamnagar</b>
13 KUMAON	INS Betwa (Anti-Aircraft)	Armament Training Wing
<b>50 Para Brigade</b>	INS Beas (Anti-Aircraft)	(Ourangan/Toofanis)
1 PARA	<b>Mine Sweeper</b>	Forward Air Base (for Goa)
2 PARA	INS Karwar	Sambre
2 SIKH LI	INS Kakinada	Tactical Air Centre with
<b>7 CAV less a Squadron</b>	INS Cannonore	17 Infantry Division
<b>8 CAV<sup>6</sup></b>	INS Bimilipatnam	<b>Communication Duties</b>
<b>DIU</b>		(Mix of Harvards, Otters and
20 RAJPUT	INS Dharini (Support Ship)	Mi-4 Utility Helicopters)
<b>DAMAN</b>		
1 MARATHA LI		

## Drawing of Indian Battle Plans

### The Land Offensive

Major General Candeth planned to launch simultaneous operations against all three colonies. 'D' day was set for 18 December, 1961.<sup>7</sup> The broad plan is given below :—

**Goa.** Launch a multi-pronged offensive with 50 Parachute Brigade advancing from the north, while 48 and 63 Brigades were to advance from the east. The objectives were Panjim and Mormugao. Simultaneously, a feint depicting the fictitious 20 Infantry Brigade was to simulate an advance from the south.<sup>8</sup>

**Diu.** Capture of Diu by 20 RAJPUT and a company of 4 MADRAS.

**Daman.** Capture of Daman by 1 MARTHA LI.

### The Naval Plan

The tasks assigned to the Navy were fourfold as under :—

- Establish effective control of the seaward approaches to Murmagao Bay and Aguada, Daman and Diu.
- Capture of Anjadiv Island.
- Neutralise enemy coastal batteries.

- (d) Sink or immobilise units of the Portuguese Navy in and around Goa.

In order to accomplish the above, the Navy organised four Task Forces :-

- (a) **Surface Action Group.** INS Mysore, Trishul, Betwa, Beas and Cauvery.
- (b) **Carrier Task Group.** Apart from INS Vikrant, this included INS Delhi, Kuthar, Kirpan, Khukri and Rajput.
- (c) **Mine Sweeping Group.** INS Karwar, Kakinada, Cannanore and Bimilipatan.
- (d) **Support Group.** INS Dharini.

### **The Air Plan**

Based on the overall plan, the Air Plan was kept flexible. The specific tasks assigned to the Air Force were :-

- (a) Dabolim airfield to be made unusable, though the terminals and facilities were not to be damaged.
- (b) The Wireless Station at Bambolim was to be knocked out.
- (c) Close support to the land forces.
- (d) Deny the enemy the use of Diu and Daman airfields.

### **The Portuguese Plan for Defence**

Lacking adequate forces for area defence, the Portuguese employed a strategy of Sectoral Defence. Four Battle Groups, each comprising a Motorised Reconnaissance Squadron and two Infantry Companies with detachments of Artillery and Engineers were assigned to designated sectors. These Battle Groups (*agrupamentos*) were tasked to engage, disrupt and delay the Indian columns and fall back in a coordinated manner. This was a difficult task as the Portuguese not only had problems of communications; but, also had major deficiencies in terms of mines and ammunition and against the opposition arrayed against them – it was an unviable military mission.



## Progress of Operations

### Initial Actions

Tensions escalated after the Indian Steam ship '*Sabarmati*' was fired upon from Anjadiv Island, resulting in injury to the Chief Engineer and the death of several Indian fishermen. In order to restore confidence, India commenced patrolling off Goa's coast by INS *Betwa* and *Beas* while INS *Vikrant* was deployed to prevent foreign intervention. In the meanwhile, in order to lure enemy fighter aircraft, the IAF commenced reconnaissance flights, but this did not yield results.

### The Capture of Diu

Diu was a tiny 40 sq kms island off the Gujarat coast, and at the time of Operation Vijay, there were no bridges across the creek. The island was held by approximately 500 Portuguese soldiers, supported by artillery and the Patrol Boat *Vega* which had a formidable 20 mm Oerlikon Gun. While the main defences were based in the Diu Fort, the Portuguese had covered the crossings with artillery, mortars and machine guns. On the other hand, India had the advantage of Air Support and Naval Gunfire.

The Indians decided to cross the creek exploiting darkness and launched silent attacks. Braving chest high water and muddy swamps and using improvised rafts, 20 RAJPUT and the company of 4 MADRAS attempted initial crossings but proved unsuccessful in the face of well-directed artillery and mortar fire. Air Support and Naval Gunfire, where India had an advantage could not be exploited at night resulting in a temporary stalemate, till they were brought into action.

Wing Commander Mickey Blake of the Armaments Training Wing launched air attacks at 0700 hrs and this made the enemy positions untenable, forcing him to withdraw to the fort. In the meanwhile, Air Traffic Tower at the airfield and an ammunition dump were destroyed. The patrol boat *Vega* which had been forced to take shelter, trained its Oerlikon guns on the Indian aircraft and in response was sunk by the IAF, killing her Captain. Gunfire from formidable 6 inch guns of INS *Delhi* proved effective and this took out the bravado from the Portuguese holding the fort. By the evening, it was all over and 403 prisoners were taken, including the Governor General.

## Operations at Daman

Located on the borders of Gujarat and Maharastra, Daman had an area of 72 sq km. The area was marshy and interspersed with rivers and rivulets and the town of Daman was split by the Daman Ganga River dividing the township as Nani Daman or *Damao Pequeno* and Moti Daman or *Damao Grande*. The colony had 360 soldiers and 200 policemen at the fort. In addition, the airfield was an important objective. Organised as two companies, supported by a battery of artillery, the area was defended by minefields and well sited defensive emplacements.

1 MARATHA launched operations at 0400 hrs, under the cover of darkness and planned to overrun the airfield with stealth. However, surprise was lost when the Indians stormed the Air Control Tower and both sides suffered casualties. Since surprise had been lost, the Indians opened up with their artillery and this helped in isolating the command post at Damao Grande. At 0700 hrs, the Air Force struck using Mystere fighters against enemy mortar positions and guns deployed in the fort. By the evening, the Indians had secured most of the colony, except the airfield and Damao Pequeno, where it appeared that the Portuguese planned a last ditch defence. In order to break their will to resist, the IAF launched six successive attacks, but the enemy still refused to surrender. The Indians were forced to assault the airfield and by 1100 hrs it was overrun and with this action all resistance had been overcome. The Portuguese eventually turned out to be 600 soldiers, including 24 officers. The Patrol boat 'Antares,' which had remained a mute spectator escaped in the melee.

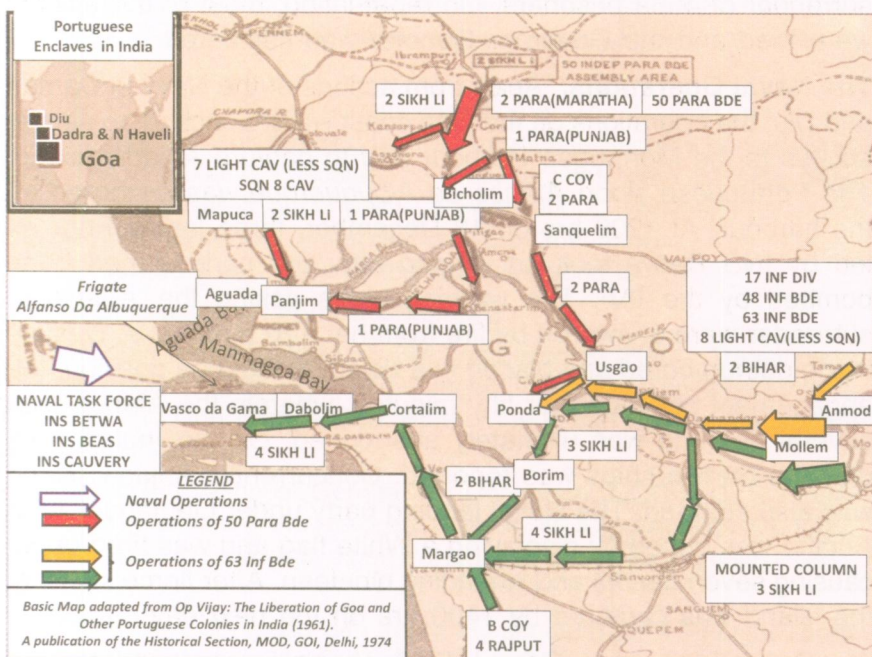
## The Liberation of Goa<sup>9</sup>

**Progress of Operations (Refer to Map).** Preliminary operations commenced on 17 December with capture of the border town Maulinguem, after a brief skirmish. Wanting to avoid escalation, the Portuguese High Command denied engagement and clearance for counter action – restricting options for their ground troops. The main offensive, synchronised with the operations of Daman and Diu, started at 0400 hrs the next day.

**50 Para Brigade: The Northern Thrust.** Brigadier Sagat Singh advanced along three columns as annotated on the Map. By 1000 hrs, initial contact had been made north of Ponda and Mapuca and



resulted in the destruction of an armoured car by an AMX tank of 8 CAV, operating under 7 CAV.<sup>10</sup> Apart from this action, there was no other major engagement as the Portuguese kept withdrawing and after crossing the river, blew up the bridge at Banastarim. Around the same time, the enemy opposite 2 PARA escaped across the Mandovi river in the face of the advancing Indians. By 2000 hrs, a cease fire offer was received by the Squadron Commander of 7 CAV. Under the circumstances, the Indians consolidated their gains. Next day, the Indians made a triumphant entry into Panjim; though, Fort Aguda still had to be physically captured.



Map : Operation 'Vijay : The Liberation of Goa,  
December, 1961

**48 and 63 Infantry Brigades: The Eastern (Yellow and Green) Thrusts.** The progress of 63 Brigade which moved in along the Yellow and Green routes was similar; and they too did not encounter organised resistance. But, the advance was slow, as the enemy following a 'scorched earth' policy, destroyed all the crossings. It was only by midday on the next morning that 4 SIKH, the reserve battalion, entered Margao and after a fierce encounter captured Verna; and by the evening, even Margao and Dabolim were secured. At this stage, the formation was joined by 4 RAJPUT,

from the south. Though planned, 48 Brigade remained in reserve and was not required to take over at any stage.

**The Surrender at Vasco da Gama.** The Portuguese had planned their last ditch stand at Vasco. Notwithstanding the order, 'to fight to the last man and raze Goa to the ground' the Governor General appreciated the futility of the orders from Lisbon. At 2030 hrs on 19 December, he offered to surrender and with this the 48 hrs operation came to a triumphant end. The cumulative casualties on the Indian side were 34 dead and 51 wounded; while there were 31 killed and 57 wounded on the Portuguese side, apart from surrender of 4669 prisoners. On repatriation, most of the officers were tried and the Governor General was cashiered.

**The Naval Operations.** Apart from actions of the Navy in Daman and Diu, the operations off the Goa coast were launched, to secure access to the Mormugao Harbour and to capture Anjadiv Island. The Portuguese sloop *Afanzo de Albuquerque* was anchored off the harbour. At 1200 hrs on 18 December, three Indian Frigates led by INS *Betwa* took on *Afanzo* after the harbour had been bombed by the IAF. The warning shots asking the *Afanzo* to surrender were answered by fire from her 120 mm Guns. Despite being outnumbered and placed in a disadvantageous position, the engagement continued for fifty minutes, wherein the *Afanzo* took several hits and was ultimately abandoned. On the Indian side, damage on two ships was reported. Concurrently, Anjadiv Island was also stormed. The Naval landing party under Lieutenant Arun Auditto was duped by displaying a White flag and was fired upon, causing seven deaths and wounding nineteen. After fierce shelling, the island was captured by 1400 hrs on the next day.

**Air Operations over Goa.** IAF *Canberras* were used to raid Dabolim Airport on 18 December to destroy the runway. However, two civil aircraft remained unscathed and were used by the Portuguese to evacuate some officials at first light, after limited repair work on the runway. Other raids were carried out to destroy the wireless station at Bambolim and on the Mormugao Harbour. Though *Vampires* were at hand to support the ground forces and a Tactical Air Centre (TAC) had been established with HQ 17 Infantry Division, however, no requests for air support were received from the formations. The synergy and cooperation displayed by the three Services in Operation 'Vijay' was of a high order, despite the hastily established command and control set-up.



## The Way Forward

Integrated operations mandate sound hierarchical structure with well defined and clear lines of command and control organisation and operational procedures. In view of India's growing multi-dimensional operational requirements, developing the capability of undertaking truly 'integrated' and not merely 'joint' operations is the need of the hour and that is the direction the Indian Armed Forces need to pursue with earnestness.

## Endnotes

1. Dadra was liberated by the United Front Activists on 21 July, 1954 and eleven days later Nagar Haveli was also liberated by local Freedom Fighters.
2. On 15 Aug, 1955, a peaceful liberation of Goa, Daman and Diu by 3000 Satyagrahis was repelled by the Portuguese Security Forces using force. The cumulative casualties in these actions were 22 shot dead while 225 were injured, out of which 38 were serious. This led to an uproar in India and the people demanded that the Government takes military/police action as it had done to liberate Hyderabad in 1948.
3. Wikipedia, Indian Annexation of Goa
4. Collated from Hiranandani GM, Vice Admiral (Retd), Transition to Triumph, Indian Navy 1965-1975, Jagan Pillarisett, The Liberation of Goa:1961 and Liberation of Goa: Role of the Indian Navy by Lieutenant Commander VS Kore.
5. The appreciation of General JN Chaudhuri, GOC-in-C, Southern Command published in the Historical Division, MOD publication: Op Vijay: the Liberation of Goa and other Portuguese Colonies in India (1961), Delhi, 1974.
6. 8 CAV was equipped with the newly acquired AMX-13 Light Tanks armed with a versatile 75 mm High Velocity Gun and it was with this that the only known 'kill' of a Portuguese Armoured Car was recorded.
7. The 'D' day had been postponed from 16 December due to intense diplomatic activities in the UN.
8. The plan was for a company of 4 RAJPUT to simulate movement of a Infantry Brigade (the fictitious 20 Infantry Brigade) along the Karwar-Goa axis to deceive the enemy.
9. Basic map and information adapted from Historical Section, MOD, GOI Publication, Op Vijay: The Liberation of Goa and Other Portuguese Colonies in India (1961), Delhi, 1974.
10. Sandhu Gurcham Singh, Major General (Retired), *The Indian Armour*, p-313, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1987.