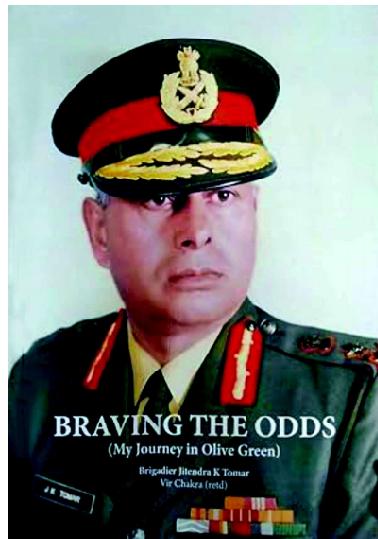


Review Article 3

Braving the Odds: My Journey in Olive Green

Brigadier Jitendra Kumar Tomar, Vir Chakra (Retd)



Introduction

Braving the Odds is a forthright and compelling military autobiography that chronicles the life and service of Brigadier Jitendra Kumar Tomar, Vir Chakra—an infantry officer whose career spans formative decades of the Indian Army and culminates in one of the fiercest defensive battles of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War during the battle of Balnoi. The book is as much a personal memoir as it is a primary historical account of leadership under fire. The book opens with a background of the Tomar Dynasty and the author's lineage, before moving on to his entry into the Indian Military Academy and his days as a Gentleman Cadet.

Formative Years and Regimental Foundations

The third and fourth chapters describe his service with the 2nd Battalion of the RAJPUTANA RIFLES, followed by his subsequent association with the 9th Battalion of the RAJPUTANA RIFLES. The

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first four chapters are basically a background to the author as these chapters trace his formative years at the Indian Military Academy, his tenure with the two Battalions of the RAJPUTANA RIFLES and his postings to high-altitude warfare in Sikkim and Nathu La, and the demanding task of re-raising 9 RAJPUTANA RIFLES. These sections are particularly valuable for readers interested in the post-1962 rebuilding of infantry units and the realities of soldiering in inhospitable terrain, and how it coincided with the military career of Brigadier Tomar.

Brigadier Tomar was born in 1941 in Hapur, Uttar Pradesh. His early life reflects the values of discipline, education, and service that later defined his career. He was commissioned into the Rajputana Rifles in Dec 1962. It was a period of profound institutional challenge happening with the Indian Army following the 1962 War with China, when it faced a rare and severe setback. Consequently, his early years in the army coincided with a phase in which the institution stood on the cusp of monumental change.

Strategic and Emotional Core: The Battle of Balnoi

The emotional and narrative core of the book is the detailed account of the Battle of Balnoi (FDL 468) on the night of 3-4 Dec 1971. The chapters on Battle of Balnoi and the Bravehearts are a guide to leadership during the war and perhaps a case study for students of military and corporate leadership.

Combat Narrative and Professional Precision

As a company commander placed under 6/11 GORKHA RIFLES, the then Major found himself defending a tactically vital post guarding the approaches to Poonch. The author's description of the battle is precise and objective, without glorifying anyone. The part dealing with communications break down, ammunition shortages, bunkers burning, and enemy assaults supported by heavy artillery are some of the realities depicted in a very meticulous manner. What distinguishes this account is not dramatisation, but professional precision—clear explanations of dispositions, fire control, and command decisions taken under extreme pressure.

Combat Narrative and Professional Precision

Tomar's leadership during the battle stands out vividly. His decision to call artillery fire dangerously close to his own position, and later to personally organise and launch a small counterattack to recapture an overrun portion of the post, reflects both tactical audacity and moral courage. The counterattack, carried out by a handful of soldiers with bayonets and grenades, decisively turned the tide. A platoon-plus held-off and defeated a battalion-level assault, making Balnoi one of the earliest and most decisive Indian successes of the 1971 War in the Mendhar sector. The award of the Vir Chakra, as cited in the Gazette of India, finds its full and convincing justification in these pages. His belief that the true heroes of Balnoi were the soldiers who fought beside him adds moral depth and humility to the narrative.

Combat Narrative and Professional Precision

Most importantly, the author presents the battle not as a solitary act of personal gallantry, one man doing it all; but as a collective achievement born of coordinated effort. The book is not narrowly focussed to an individual hero's narrative, rather highlight the interdependence of his company, supporting arms, and neighbouring units, showing how victory emerged from teamwork, shared sacrifice, and mutual trust under extreme adversity. the book frames the battle as a joint struggle, where leadership, supporting fire, and the courage of ordinary soldiers together overcame overwhelming odds.

Career Beyond Balnoi: Command, Instruction, and Staff Roles

The book like the career of Brigadier Tomar does not ends with the historic battle of Balnoi. It traces his steady rise through command and staff appointments—battalion command in Jammu and Kashmir, instructional tenures at premier army institutions, brigade command, and divisional-level responsibilities in sensitive sectors such as Jammu and Arunachal Pradesh. These chapters underline his professional breadth and his contribution towards the Indian Army, and the contains many fascinating anecdotes.

Veterans and Welfare Commitments

Brigadier Tomar's post-retirement dimension is also discussed in the book, particularly his engagement with veterans' welfare, his role in securing lifelong annuities for pre-1986 gallantry award recipients in Uttar Pradesh, reflects a lifelong commitment to those who serve.

Lighter Dimensions of Army Life

Despite being a military biography, the book does not focus on a single facet of the army such as battles, war, command, or hierarchy. It also captures the lighter side of the Indian Army, including a chapter devoted to military music. The narrative contains several lighter moments that both inform readers about other dimensions of Army life and prevent the tone from settling into a single, monotonous grim depiction of war.

Overall Assessment

Braving the Odds is an important addition to Indian military literature. It combines operational history, leadership lessons, and personal reflection without appearing artificial or superficial. The emotional aspect of the soldier is conveyed without being sentimental for students of military history, leadership practitioners, and general readers alike, the book offers an authentic window into combat command and professionalism of the Indian Army's infantry officer.

Mr Gaurav Kumar