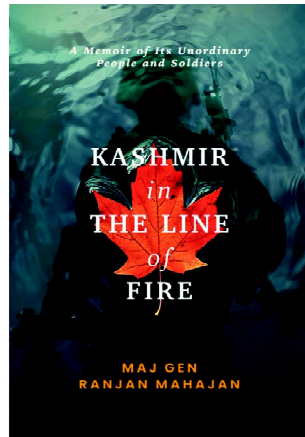


**Kashmir in the Line of Fire** by Major General Ranjan Mahajan, JGS Enterprises Pvt. Ltd, Chandigarh, Pages: 152, Price: ₹ 594.00, ISBN 978-93-49042-44-5



Amongst the many books on the operations of the military in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), this volume by Major General Ranjan Mahajan stands out for a variety of reasons. Foremost amongst them is the fact that it covers the resolute action of India's infantry in the most difficult of all military operations—the conduct of anti-terrorist operations. Whereas in regular operations the enemy and his location are easily identifiable, terrorists who move like ghosts and often mingle with the local population offer the defender no such advantage. The dilemma of an infantry unit commander conducting cordon and search operations in a volatile state like J&K must, therefore, be seen from its proper perspective. Bereft of any strategic jargon, the author, a die-hard and decorated infantry soldier, gets to the nub of anti-terrorist operations. Covered in six parts, the book traces the gamut of the escalating crisis of terrorism over the years. Towards the end, the author brings out the latest response of the Indian state culminating in Operation Sindoor.

The author has traced the evolution of terrorism in the state, meticulously interspersed with details of his five tenures in J&K to give us a compelling and authentic account. As befits a leader who is in complete sync with his officers and men, General Mahajan's narrative is replete with praise for his subordinates. To achieve his objective, which is the elimination of terrorists, the author creates a unique camaraderie amongst his officers, Junior Commissioned Officers, and men, so that they go the extra mile in the rugged terrain and extreme climate. In the difficult terrain of J&K, where India's effort to administer the governance of the state is hindered by Pakistan's perfidious actions of creating terrorist cells and infiltrating terrorists, the author gives graphic details of unit and sub-unit actions traversing rugged snowy terrain to liquidate terrorists. The author describes in detail the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandit community when Sopore was the hotbed of terrorists, the suspension of the Amarnath Yatra in 1990, and its

subsequent reopening in 1995. It is noteworthy that by creating an ambient atmosphere wherever his unit operated, the officers were able to establish excellent rapport with civilians, including shopkeepers to obtain useful information about terrorists.

The author's detailed narrative of his five tenures also highlights how he was constantly focused on his profession and honing his skills, which gave him the idea of creating a 'Ghatak' platoon later at the brigade level. The author has recorded full details of the minor tactics in cordon and search operations, their dates, timings, blocking of escape routes, splitting of quick reaction teams, and subunit communications including field signaling. This attention to detail percolates throughout his narrative and is a major reason for his success in anti-terrorist operations. The author has rightly praised his team of officers and men in the highest terms, and with good reason. His detailed narration of the brave actions of Lance Naik Nazir Ahmad Wani, AC, for example, highlight the ethos of the Indian Army in giving unstinted praise where it is due. The author also humbly acknowledges the guidance of his superiors. His understanding of human nature and easy accessibility to men in uniform and civilians alike have been instrumental in his success in this most difficult of military operations. Written in an easy language, this volume makes a useful contribution to understanding anti-terrorist operations, the importance of battle drills, field craft and overall, the handling of a unit in adverse operational conditions.

**Major General Ashok Joshi, VSM (Retd)**