

Capture of Hajipir Pass, 1965: Victory on Ground, Loss at Table?

Introduction

The most decisive moves during a war sometimes happen on narrow ridges of stone, wrapped in mist. The story of Hajipir Pass in 1965 is one such moment. Sixty years ago, the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War was set in motion not by open battle but by covert infiltration.¹ Pakistan's Operation Gibraltar sent armed men across the Line of Control (LoC) into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), intending to incite rebellion and destabilise the region. The infiltration routes ran through the Pir Panjal range. Among them, Hajipir Pass, at an altitude of 8,600 feet, was the key artery. By 04 Aug 1965, infiltration was no longer a covert affair. Local villagers alerted Indian Armed Forces, firefights broke out, and it became clear that unless Hajipir was seized, infiltration would continue unchecked.

Having successfully carried out a counter-infiltration campaign, General Harbaksh Singh now pushed for three major offensives to seal J&K from further infiltration. The first was in the capture of three dominating Pakistani posts in the Kargil Sector, thereafter, in Kishanganga Tithwal Sector, where he had been a Brigade Commander in 1948, and finally, he concentrated on the strategic bulge between Uri and Poonch.² Hajipir was not just a mountain pass. It was a gateway with strategic importance. Dominated by three neighbouring hill features—Bedori on the east, Sank on the west, and Ledwali Gali to the south-west—it was considered essential to seize these posts before proceeding to the Haji Pir Pass. Bedori is situated 14 kms south-east of Uri and 04 kms south of the ceasefire line. Haji Pir Pass is about 10 kms south-west of Bedori at the heart of the Uri-Poonch axis.³ As long as the Pass was in Pakistani hands, Gibraltar's columns could keep coming.

Uri–Haji Pir: Operation Bakshi

The Haji Pir Operation was designed as a major pincer assault to seize Haji Pir Pass. The plan called for a northern thrust along the Uri-Haji Pir axis and a southern push from the Punch-Kahuta side. The objective was to cut all approach routes to the bulge.

The Northern advance was assigned to 19 Infantry Division, with 68 Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier (later Lieutenant General) ZC Bakshi. The operation was given the codenamed Operation Bakshi. The Indian pincer was to advance on the Haji Pir Pass from two sides.⁴

- **Right Arm.** Uri-Sank-Ledwali Gali-Haji Pir Pass.
- **Left Arm.** Uri-Bedori-Kuthnar Di Gali-Kiran-Haji Pir Pass.

The assault was to be conducted in three phases.⁵

- **Phase I.** 19 PUNJAB to take Ring Contour and Pathra; 1 PARA to capture Sank Ridge, Ledwali Gali, and Sawan Pathri.
- **Phase II.** 19 PUNJAB to secure Bedori and Kuthnar Di Gali; 4 RAJPUT to seize Haji Pir Pass.
- **Phase III.** Mopping up by 19 PUNJAB and 4 RAJPUT; firm bases to be held by 4 SIKH LI and 6 JAK RIFLES.⁶

The H-Hour for the attack was set for 2000 hours on 24 Aug, but delays occurred due to rains and swollen streams. Operation Bakshi began at 2150 hours on 25 Aug with Brigadier Bakshi following the western thrust. On the right, artillery shelled suspected positions at Point 9591, Sawan Pathri, and Agiwas. 1 PARA advanced towards Sank Ridge. The Pakistanis held fire until the attackers were within 45 metres, then opened with all weapons. No 3 Platoon of 'A' Company suffered heavy losses. Fighting continued until 0930 hours when the attack was called off due to heavy casualties.

A renewed assault began at 2230 hours on 26 Aug. 'B' and 'D' Companies advanced towards Point 9591 at Sank under intense fire. By 0430 hours, 'B' Company reached within 450 metres of the enemy position and, in a determined frontal Platoon charge, silenced enemy Medium Machine Guns (MMGs) and Light Machine Guns (LMGs). Pakistani troops withdrew to Sar feature. Although Sank was cleared, fire from Sar forced further action. 'D' Company captured Sar and pushed to Ledwali Gali. Meanwhile, 'B' Company secured Sawan Pathri and Agiwas, and 'C' Company cleared the southern approaches to Sank by last light.

However, the attack on the Bedori axis by 19 PUNJAB was stalled due to an unapproachable path. The only approach was from Bedori Springs in the North-East; however, this would have delayed the capture of Bedori by 36 hours. Attacks by one Company of 7 BIHAR and an attempt by 4 RAJPUT from the North on 27 Aug were also foiled.⁷

Capture of Haji Pir Pass

Sensing momentum on the Western axis, the CO 1 PARA, Lieutenant Colonel Prabhjinder Singh was granted permission to capture Haji Pir Pass at 1400 hours on 27 Aug. A small, self-contained, mixed Company Group from 'A' and 'D' Companies was formed under Major (later Lieutenant General) RS Dayal for this task. The column started descending at 1530 hours on 27 Aug, from Ledwali Gali into the Hyderabad nullah along the Spur. Two intermediate objectives, Ring Contours 1194 and 1094, one after another, were also to be captured. About 1730 hours, it started raining heavily making the going very difficult. By 1900 hours, the Company Group reached Hyderabad nullah. It was now completely dark and Major Ranjit Dayal decided to climb to the Pass.⁸ At first light on 28 Aug, Major Dayal's men reached the old Uri–Punch Road, 10 kms below Haji Pir Pass.

Here, the troops were given a much-needed rest for two hours in a very cold and bitter morning before the final assault. At 0700 hours, the column was again on the march. Moving alongside the road, it reached 700 metres short of the Pass by 0900 hours.

The men again came under fire, leaving a Platoon in contact along with the Forward Observation Officer to keep the enemy tied down. Major Dayal ordered the two Platoons to climb up on to the Spur and assault enemy from the Western side of the Pass and then roll down to eliminate the LMGs on the Pass. The enemy could not stand this daring day-light attack and withdrew in confusion to a feature to the West of the Pass. By 1000 hours on 28 Aug, 1 PARA had taken the objective.⁹ Major Dayal repulsed the expected fierce counterattack on 29 Aug, surviving a LMG burst in close-quarter-combat that pierced his web equipment but left him unscathed. On 28 Aug, after two days of climbing and fighting, the Indian flag was hoisted on Haji Pir Pass. In one stroke, the main artery of Operation Gibraltar was cut.

The capture of Haji Pir was a textbook example of a mountain offensive. Brigadier Bakshi and Major Dayal of 1 PARA received the Maha Vir Chakra for their leadership and conspicuous gallantry. 1 PARA also received the Battle Honour of Haji Pir and the Theatre Honour of J&K 1965.

Operation Faulad

While 68 Infantry Brigade was carrying out the capture of the Haji Pir Pass, 93 Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier Zora Singh had, after an initial setback, was pushing northwards to establish a link-up for lopping off the Bulge. Between Punch and Kahuta, there were many hill features which dominated the Punch-Haji Pir track. The enemy picquets located on these features had cement emplacements for MMGs and shell-proof bunkers.

All approaches to the picquets were covered by MMGs, guns, and mortars. 93 Infantry Brigade launched Operation Faulad to achieve the Punch-Haji Pir link-up by capturing these picquets. The main features of Operation Faulad, where the gallant actions were fought, were the capture of the Raja and Chand Tekri picquets, both of which were virtually impregnable. These picquets were defended by a Battalion (less Company), with 2x3.7-inch Howitzers and 2x81 mm Mortars in support. The men, equipped with automatic weapons, were entrenched in shell-proof shelters and the picquets were protected with barbed wires and mines. In short, both picquets were turned into miniature fortresses.

On the night of 05 and 06 Sep 1965, a simultaneous attack was launched on Raja and Chand Tekri picquets by 2 SIKH and 3 DOGRA, respectively. The attack was preceded by intense artillery shelling, but it had little impact on the built-up positions. As

the approach to the objectives lay along steep and slippery slopes, the assaulting troops had to crawl on all fours rather than walk. When they neared the picquets, heavy automatic fire greeted them. The Indian wavered momentarily, but inspired by bold leadership, they recovered quickly and dashed through the mines and wires. A grim hand-to-hand battle raged for over two hours before the picquets fell.¹⁰ The garrison at Raja picquet fought to the last man. The Indian side also suffered heavy casualties. During the assault on Raja Picquet on 06 Sep, Lieutenant Colonel NN Khanna, Commanding Officer 2 SIKH, led his men braving the devastating fire of the enemy. Lieutenant Colonel Khanna was decorated with the Mahavir Chakra for his exceptional courage and leadership, posthumously.¹¹

With the fall of Raja and Chand Tekri, the back of Gibraltar force was broken in this Sector. Thereafter, Indian troops faced little difficulty in mopping up and liquidating the remaining pockets of resistance in the area. The link-up was completed with the capture of Kahuta on 10 Sep 1965, and with that, the Indian security forces closed the mouth of the Bulge and sealed the Haji Pir Sector.¹² Consequently, the enemy resistance East of the Betar Nallah also ceased.

The Diplomatic Dimension: Tashkent

Operationally, the success was decisive. Infiltration routes were cut, the Uri–Poonch bulge was straightened, and Pakistan's Gibraltar plan collapsed. Yet the tactical victory did not translate into long-term strategic gains. Barely four months later, in Jan 1966, came the Tashkent Agreement. Brokered by the Soviet Union and nudged hard by the United States, the deal pushed both sides back to where they were before the war. For India, that meant handing over Haji Pir right back.¹³

For the soldier, this was a bitter pill. Blood and grit were given to secure the terrain that was then surrendered without leverage. For the diplomat, however, the calculus was different. India faced enormous international pressure to terminate hostilities and preserve global credibility as an emerging responsible power. The leadership accepted the deal, prioritising political stability and international standing over retention of tactical gains. The paradox of Haji Pir is precisely this; a textbook battlefield success neutralised by diplomatic compromise.

Conclusion

The capture of Haji Pir Pass in 1965 was bold soldiering at its best. An objective won against all odds. It later had to be given away under political pressure at Tashkent. Together, both the actions formed a dual lesson: military operations can achieve the seemingly impossible, and such achievements must be safeguarded at the diplomatic table.

For India's strategic community, Haji Pir is not just a history of past glory. It is a warning that wars are not won only in the battlefields, but they are finished on the negotiation tables. It is a cautionary study of what happens when operational brilliance and diplomatic choices intersect, and sometimes even collide on the path to national security.

This episode underscores an enduring lesson that settlements always need compromise, but those compromises should weigh not just short-term relief but long-term security implications. The return of Haji Pir arguably deprived India of a terrain advantage that could have curbed infiltration across the LoC for decades.

Endnotes

¹ SN Prasad and UP Thapliyal, *The Indian-Pakistan War of 1965: A History* (2011), Natraj Publishers and Ministry of Defence, Government of India

² Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, VrC, *War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict 1965* (1991), Lancer International, New Delhi

³ Prasad and Thapliyal, *The Indian-Pakistan War of 1965*

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Nilesh Kunwar, "Capture of Hajipir Pass: A Saga of Guts and Glory", *Indian Defence Review*, Sep 2020, accessed 10 Sep 2025 <https://indiandefencereview.com/capture-of-hajipir-pass-a-saga-of-guts-and-glory/>

⁷ Nitin A Gokhale, "1965 War: The Battle for Haji Pir", *StratNews Global*, 29 Aug 2020, accessed 08 Sep 2025 <https://stratnewsglobal.com/pakistan/1965-war-the-battle-for-haji-pir/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kunwar, "Capture of Hajipir Pass"

¹⁰ Singh, *War Despatches: Indo-Pak Conflict 1965*

¹¹ Prasad and Thapliyal, *The Indian-Pakistan War of 1965*

¹² Raj Mehta, "Militarily Won; Diplomatically Lost - the Haji Pir Saga", *CLAWS*, accessed 09 Sep 2025 https://archive.claws.co.in/images/journals_doc/1734396434_Militarilywondiplomaticallylost.pdf

¹³ Sheru Thapliyal, "Return of Haji Pir Pass in 1965 – Myth and the Reality", *Strategicstudyindia.com*, 12 Aug 2025, accessed 11 Sep 2025 <https://www.strategicstudyindia.com/2015/09/return-of-haji-pir-pass-in-1965-myth.html>

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Article uploaded on 19-09-2025

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