

## **Battle of Dograi: Bravest moments of India's war with Pakistan in 1965**

### **Introduction**

The Battle of Dograi is about the 17 days of warfighting on the Lahore front during the 1965 Indo-Pak War. Dograi is a strategically important village located just 12 kms from Lahore, the second largest city in Pakistan.

The Indian plan for a limited offensive in 1965 targeted the area from Dera Baba Nanak to the Sutlej River—flat, fertile plains near Amritsar, just 28 kms from the Indo-Pak border, with numerous roads and railways. Strategically, two key bridges spanned the Beas River. Pakistan fortified the area using the Bambanwala-Ravi-Bedian or Ichhogil Canal, a defensive waterway running 5 kms to 14 kms from the border, carrying water from the Marala–Ravi Link Canal to the Sutlej. Its raised western banks served as protective barriers and crossed the Grand Trunk (GT) Road near Dograi. India's objective was to threaten Lahore, split Pakistani forces between Lahore and Sialkot sectors, and destroy their war potential. The offensive aimed to secure Punjab by advancing to the Ichhogil Canal and to capture territory for use as a bargaining tool after hostilities.

### **Launching of Phase I**

Phase I of the operation was to be executed by 54 Infantry Brigade under Brigadier MS Rikh and 1 JAT under Lieutenant Colonel Balbir Singh. The Brigade included 13 PUNJAB, 3 JAT, and 15 DOGRA, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel M Chatterjee, Brigadier (then-Lieutenant Colonel) Desmond E Hayde, and Lieutenant Colonel Inderjit Singh, respectively. The plan involved a cross-country advance by 3 JAT to capture Gosal Dial as the first bound. 15 DOGRA was assigned with the task to clear the road axis, engaging opposition at Wagah, and between Wagah and Gosal Dial. A Commando Platoon of 13 PUNJAB, with one Company, was to advance along the Wagah Distributary to capture the Jallo Bridge. After 3 JAT took Gosal Dial, 15 DOGRA was to pass through and secure the East Bank of the Ichhogil Canal, including the GT Road Bridge.

### **Initial Success**

On 06 Sep, 54 Infantry Brigade and 1 JAT, supported by a squadron of Scinde Horse tanks, crossed the Indo-Pak border on the GT Road and Ichhogil Uttar axes. 3 JAT attacked and captured the objective astride Mile 14 on the Amritsar-Lahore Road by 0630 hours, also clearing village Dial. At 0700 hours, Pakistani aircraft heavily bombed 3 JAT and 15 DOGRA positions. Sabres attacked GT Road positions, including Gharendra, destroying most 'F' echelon vehicles of 54 Infantry Brigade. 3 JAT lost its Second-in-Command, five recoilless guns, and three mortars.

During the attack on Gosal Dial, 3 JAT killed 35 Pakistanis, captured two officers, 12 Other Ranks (ORs), and seized weapons and vehicles. The battalion advanced to and captured the East Bank of Ichhogil Canal, and the GT Road Bridge, crossing over at 1145 hours. 'A' and 'C' Companies were deployed near Batapore and Attoke Awan.

Pakistani counterattacks with truckloads of troops and tanks were repelled. A squadron of Pakistani Sherman tanks moved south along the west bank. Indian tanks could not cross but supported from the east. 'C' Company reached the Batapore complex, but due to lack of reinforcements and ammunition, and heavy shelling, Brigadier Rikh ordered withdrawal to Gosal Dial. 3 JAT suffered 9 losses while 43 were wounded.<sup>1</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Hayde distinguished himself by launching a lightning attack at 0500 hours, reaching Dograi by 1120 hours, and holding till ordered to withdraw. 15 DOGRA, crossing at 0400 hours, attacked Pakistani posts at the Upper Bari Doab Canal (UBDC) Bridge, capturing 20 Prisoners of War (POWs), arms, and vehicles, suffering 14 losses, with 19 wounded. Initially tasked to move to the GT Road Bridge, the plan changed after exaggerated reports of casualties, and 3 JAT was assigned the objective. 'A' Company and Commando Platoon of 13 PUNJAB advanced towards Jallo Bridge but withdrew due to shelling and air strikes. 13 PUNJAB remained at Attari awaiting contact. In the north, 1 JAT captured Ichhogil Hithar Ranger Post and Ichhogil Uttar Bridge by 0700 hours, but later withdrew to Ranian Bund due to intense shelling and air attacks. 13 ORs were killed and 29 were wounded.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Epic Battle of Dograi**

Brigadier Nirinjan Singh then replaced Brigadier Rikh as the Commander of 54 Infantry Brigade. He was ordered to plan for an advance up to the Ichhogil astride the GT Road, which involved the capture of Dograi. It was believed that the main Pakistani defences along the Ichhogil and Dograi, with a Screen Position along the general line of Jhuggian Mian Darswali-Lakhanke, were supported by armour along the Pul Distributary and astride the UBDC on the flanks.

The planning and preparations, including domination of the 'No Man's Land', were carried out between 13 Sep and 20 Sep. During this period, the Brigade suffered 58 losses, including three officers and four Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs), and 205 were wounded, including five officers and seven JCOs.<sup>3</sup>

Final orders that were issued at 1700 hours on 20 Sep provided for a two-phased attack on Dograi, as follows:

- **Phase I.** 13 PUNJAB to attack the Mile 13 area at 2359 hours on 21 Sep.

- **Phase II.** 3 JAT to attack Dograi at 0130 hours on 22 Sep.

### **Phase I; Attack by 13 PUNJAB**

On 19 Sep, 13 PUNJAB was relieved by 15 DOGRA in the Dial and Jhuggian Mian Darwali areas to prepare for an attack on the Mile 13 area from Lakhanke. The assault was planned for 2359 hours on 21 Sep, with 'D' Company on the left and 'C' Company on the right, advancing from Jhuggian. 'A' Company re-joined the battalion at 2100 hours after being relieved. Artillery and mortars were to shell the objective shortly before and after the H-hour. At 2200 hours, 'D' Company repelled a Pakistani spoiling attack, supported by Browning machine gun and mortars. Due to heavy shelling, the Indian assault was delayed and launched at 0100 hours on 22 Sep, supported by Scinde Horse tanks, brigade mortars, 15 DOGRA Bren guns, and Divisional Artillery.

Despite intense fire, 'D' and 'C' Companies pushed forward and were pinned down 180 m from Pakistani defences, but they held their ground. At first light, with tanks in support, the assault resumed, and the objective was captured by 0700 hours after the Pakistanis withdrew towards Dograi.<sup>4</sup> The action helped contain Pakistani forces on the GT Road, aiding 3 JAT's capture of Dograi. In the battle, 13 PUNJAB suffered 31 losses, including one Officer and five JCOs, and over 100 were wounded. Pakistan, on the other hand, lost 15 men, including three POWs, and several weapons including recoilless guns, Medium Machine Guns (MMGs), mortars, and small arms.

### **Phase II: Attack by 3 JAT**

On 21 Sep, 3 JAT, under Lieutenant Colonel Hayde, carried out extensive patrolling to gather intelligence on Dograi, which was to be attacked at the night. It was discovered that the Pakistanis were well-entrenched, some huddled in pill boxes and others tucked into the buildings of Dograi behind Light Machine Guns (LMGs) and rifles, with piles of ammunition and grenades at hand. With two LMGs in each Infantry Section, their automatic fire was going to spew forth from every 30 to 50 yards of front while artillery and mortar shells were going to rain down.<sup>5</sup> Further, there were mine-fields and wire entanglements. The town itself was guarded by reinforced concrete pill boxes around its three approaches.

The Forming Up Place was just 400 m short of the nearest Pakistani defences and to reach it, 3 JAT (523 men) had to negotiate the minefields in a single file. Keeping in view the Pakistani defences, the Battalion planned to attack Dograi (1100 m north to south along the Ichhogil Canal and 760 m east to west) by infiltration from the north. The build-up area was divided into four sectors and one sector was allotted to each Company as its objective. 'A' Company with secured the north-east flank of the Battalion and the Forming Up Place in the ruins area.

The Battalion started from Santpura at 2330 hours on 21 Sep and reached the firm base north of Lakhanke at 0045 hours on 22 Sep, after a march of 3700 m. After a short rest, it left the firm base at 0110 hours, for the Forming Up Place. 'D' Company, under Major Rishi Dev Vatsa, crossed the start line at 0150 hours on 22 Sep, and after fighting through the outskirts of the town and silencing a pillbox enroute, secured the north-east projection of the town against minor opposition.

'C' Company, under Major Yadav, passed through 'D' Company to secure the north-west portion of Dograi. Suddenly, they came under intense fire and got engaged in a fierce battle with a company of 18 Baluch, entrenched in pillboxes along the east bank of the Ichhogil Canal in the Akbar School area. The Company charged the Canal Bank, undaunted by the protective minefield laid by 18 Baluch. A fierce hand-to-hand battle ensued inside the defended locality and the Baluch Company was wiped out. The depth platoon of 'C' Company, which was not engaged in this attack, captured the north-west projection of the town, which was the Company's objective. Thus, the passage to Dograi from the north-west was cleared.

'B' Company under Major Sandhu cut through the centre of Dograi to secure the south-west portion of the town. It silenced a pillbox at the junction of the GT Road and Ichhogil and trounced a platoon of 3 Baluch entrenched on the eastern bank of the Canal, after a severe hand-to-hand fight.

'A' Company under Major Tyagi passed along the eastern edge of Dograi, where 'D' Company was still fighting, to the southern edge of the town. The Company silenced an MMG in a pillbox on the GT Road, and then fighting across the road, forced a troop of the Pakistani 23 Cavalry and remnants of the 16 (Pak) Punjab to surrender. It also captured some mortars. Subsequently, it came under intense automatic fire from a Company of 8 (Pak) Punjab, entrenched along a pillbox guarding the southern approach to Dograi. In a gallant charge, the pillbox was destroyed, and the defenders dislodged. In this action, Major Tyagi was mortally wounded.

## **Conclusion**

The Battalion secured the objective by 0530 hours on 22 Sep, though several pockets in Dograi remained uncleared. Houses along both sides of the GT Road at Dograi's eastern edge had been fortified. A platoon tasked with clearing them flushed out about a dozen men from a single room. Under Lieutenant Colonel Hayde's leadership, the battalion not only held its ground despite continuous shelling and frequent air and ground attacks, but also advanced. His personal courage and exceptional leadership were key to the battalion's outstanding performance. He was awarded the Mahavir Chakra for his role.

The capture of Dograi cost 3 JAT 58 lives, including four officers, and 157 were wounded, including six officers and four JCOs. The 54 Infantry Brigade's operation was a complete success, resulting in the capture of a large cache of arms, equipment, and over 108 prisoners, including a Brigade Commander. Around 300 Pakistani soldiers were reported dead.

Following the success, 3 JAT continued clearing the built-up area until the ceasefire. The Battle of Dograi is regarded as the finest ever fought by an Infantry Battalion in the 1965 India-Pakistan War.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Maj Gen Jagjit Singh, *Indian Gunners at War*, New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1994

<sup>2</sup> BC Chakravarty, "History of the Indo-Pak War, 1965", *Ministry of Defence*, Government of India, 1992, accessed on 10 Sep 2025 <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/ARMY/History/1965War/PDF/>

<sup>3</sup> Amarinder Singh and TS Shergill, *The Monsoon War: Young Officers Reminisce*, New Delhi: Lustre Press, Roli Books, 2015, pp 528

<sup>4</sup> Major KC Praval, *Indian Army After Independence*, New Delhi: Lancer International, 1990, p 465

<sup>5</sup> Desmond E Hayde, *Battle of Dograi and Batapore*, New Delhi: Natraj Publishers, 2011

**Dhanajay Shinde** has been a researcher with multiple think tanks. Presently he is at USI, where he is engaged in intense defence-related research and has contributed extensively in the form of articles to the project of recording India's post-independent military history.

**Article uploaded on 19-09-2025**

**Disclaimer** : The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisation that he/she belongs to or of the USI of India.