

Victory Day SPECIAL

Operation Destination Unknown

by Habibul Alam, Bir Pratik

ENOUGH was enough, we thought the blowing up of Siddigranj Power Station would have disrupted the major part of the Dhaka's electricity. That was the third attempt that was foiled due to the fact that there were more soldiers in number than what was calculated according to the information Kazi Kamaluddin and his group had. Kazi Kamaluddin had arrived from Melaghar to Dhaka about two weeks back and came with some more recruits to destroy the power station in Siddigranj.

In the mean time Jewel came back from Siddigranj power station operation with bullet injury. He was taken overnight to our village camp in Pirulla. The next day he was brought back to 1/3 Dillu Road, one of the major shelters of Dhaka guerrillas. The house belonged to Engr. Mohammed Hafizul Alam who is my father and my folks stayed there. On arrival of Jewel in our house my sisters started taking care of him. He was forced to stay in our house for three to four nights. His three fingers were very badly hurt. Again we had seek the help of Dr Azizur Rahman to fix and provide appropriate bandage on the injured fingers of Jewel.

It seemed it was one of those jinx's that happened to Kazi and his group on that occasion. On 19th August 1971 Kazi took around ten young people in two rowboats to perform the reconnaissance job at the Siddigranj Power Station. The first rowboat consisted of Kazi, Bodi and Jewel and two others. The second was at a little distance from the first and consisted of the specially trained other persons and Rumi was one of them. The first boat came under challenge from the Pakistani army patrol boat as it went close to the Siddigranj Power Station through the river.

Kazi and Jewel had their sten guns kept under the deck of the rowboat while Bodi was holding his sten gun in his hand. When the Pakistani army on the speedboat challenged them Bodi gave no chance to anyone and opened fire on the army and finished his complete magazine. The Pakistani army on the speedboat did fire back but could not do any major damage to the freedom fighters. Bodi's fire on the army ensured immediate death of the enemy and some were drowned in the river. It was only Jewel who suffered the injury in his three fingers. While the Pakistani army retaliated the first boat could not hold and sunk. The second boat picked up the five of them that included Bodi, Kazi and Jewel also. It was then that Jewel realized he was badly injured in his three fingers.

We were pretty perturbed because of the failure in Siddigranj and not being able to complete the task given by Major Hyder. Something was going wrong somewhere and we were simply unable to trace that out. However, the actions that continued inside the Dhaka City by the freedom fighters kept the spirit of the people alive.

It was on 24th August 1971 in our hideout at Dhanmandi Road 28 while playing a game of contract bridge at night with Shawpon, Bodi and Kazi, that both Bodi and Kazi Kamaluddin got hold of me and said that we should go for some serious action inside the city by tomorrow otherwise it was becoming absolutely dull. The single actions seemed not good enough for them and moreover Kazi said that his boys were fully charged and some action ought to be mounted otherwise they may get frustrated. So in-between the card game we started discussing about the type of action that we could undertake. Ultimately taking into our account our present position and the prevailing situation of the city, it was decided that a total chaos was to be created inside the city. It was around one o'clock midnight that all of them agreed with me that there would be two groups for tomorrow's action inside the city.

We also planned to create panic in the Consulate office of the People's Republic of China in Moghlabazar and in one of the houses in Dhanmandi Road 20 where one or more diplomats of the Chinese Consulate were staying and they were guarded by sentries. It came to our notice that in front of a house on Road 18, about six to seven army and EPCAF personnel remained to guard twenty-four hours. We understood that some high ranking official of the Pakistani army, could be a brigadier, was staying in that house. Once the first group has completed its action inside Dhanmandi area it would then move towards Rajarbagh Police Lines and meet the second action group. Together we both the groups would then hit the specific targets around that place and move towards Jinnah Avenue (now Bangabandhu Avenue) to create some more panic for the army there and then come back via the University area to our destination Dhanmandi Road 28.

The responsibility of the first group fell on my shoulder and the second group's was on FF Zia. To conduct those two operations inside the city what was required from our end apart from the arms and ammunitions was two vehicles that were to be hijacked from Dhanmandi and other areas. To drive the second vehicle we

required someone, who would not panic and was good in driving. After a lengthy discussion we thought that it would be better if we could get AFM Harris, a young man from Faujdharhat Cadet College, who was of our age and pretty agile; moreover he drove pretty well. The responsibility to get hold of him fell on Kazi Kamaluddin who readily agreed to do so. At the request of Kazi Kamaluddin we decided to involve FF Rumi in our group one. That would be his first operation inside the Dhaka city after coming from Melaghar.

It was 25th August 1971, like any other day of the week. The sunshine was bright that day and humidity was at its peak. People walking in the street were sweating. Streets inside the city looked less crowded than on other days. On that day we decided to have a good lunch. And that lunch would be for the freedom fighters including those who would be going for the operation. Chullu and Shahadat Chowdhury took the responsibility to arrange the lunch and bringing all of them together. Individually and in

and a cute young child stood in front seat with his both hands holding the dashboard. Bodi stood in the middle of the road and put up his both hands as if some emergency had taken place. One or two rickshaws passed by looking at us but didn't bother to stop. The vehicle slowed and stopped in front of us.

I went around very swiftly to the driver's door and said, "Sir, we desperately need your help it is an emergency."

By that time Bodi was on the other side of the front door and pushed his head inside through the window.

The gentleman driving the vehicle, seemed to us that he was the father of that young cute child standing in the front seat said, "What is the emergency that you need my help?"

Bodi replied, "If you could please pull your car towards the left, we could explain what is it all about."

We both felt that the gentleman was on the verge of pressing his right foot on the accelerator of his car. Bodi lost no time, with a cute

and confirmed that we would link up with them in and around Rajarbagh Police Lines after we completed the cleaning up in Road 18 and Road 20.

I took the wheel of the Mazda four-door car and gave my SMG to Bodi who sat in the front seat with me. At the back seat immediately behind me Shawpon sat. On the left side of the back seat Kazi sat and Rumi was placed in between both Kazi and Shawpon. Before we moved out of the place I told Shahadat that this operation shall be known as "Operation Destination Unknown." He nodded his head in agreement and said he wait for our return and also said "be careful."

Harris told us how he and Mukhtar hijacked the vehicle. While they went out from Dhanmandi they found a Fiat-600 quite close to our hideout and the vehicle was absolutely a sitting duck. They did not think of other area anymore and walked out casually from Chullu's car and Mukhtar shoved the handgun into the driver's face. The young man was totally taken aback and Harris giving no opportunity signaled the driver of the vehicle to be "out!" Harris stepped into the driver's seat and tried to start the vehicle but it would not start at all. Both of them got panicked and furious

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Thus the "Operation Destination Unknown" started around 7 to 7.30 pm at night inside Dhaka city by 10 young freedom fighters on 25th August 1971.

At around 7.25 in the evening the Mazda with five people rolled out of the hideout. We took the same route that was taken by Bodi and myself while hijacking the vehicle. Passed the culvert on road 32 and took right turn, this

a sharp U-turn from the Satmasjit road. I said to Shawpon and Rumi to keep a watch on the road. Rumi would watch the back and Shawpon the front of the road.

The sleek and practically soundless Mazda slowly moved forward and came very close to the gate and the targets. I controlled my voice and said "Fire!"

Bodi's and Kazi's sten guns went into action immediately. Bodi aimed and fired at the stomach level of the target and Kazi fired at the chest of the targeted enemy. Before anyone near could understand anything all the soldiers fell and dropped dead on the street in front of their gate. To complete the operation it took couple of seconds only. All five of us were now happy, at least we had something to say to the second group.

The Road 18 looked deserted now. I pressed my right foot on the accelerator and zoomed out of that place. Especially Shawpon and Rumi said they needed to practice firing and in no way I should deprive them of that. I was

them, then we are all dead meats."

Finally, I said to everyone inside the car that I would only say once "Fire!" There would be no other command, it would be our joint effort to act accordingly. I made our move, slowed down the Mazda car and passed the vehicles standing in line. The two military police standing in front and checking the other vehicles shouted at the top of their voice "halt!" I said to myself that the game was on my friend, let's see who wins.

On hearing the shout to stop I switched off the headlights and switched on the right side indicator light. And then gave a false slow right turn, the reaction from the military police were immediate. They shouted and abused "bastards... Where the fucks are you trying to go... roko." The little seconds that the false indicator light of the vehicle provided that was what we required till we could come close to Road 5. The trick worked and without any hesitation I speeded up and took a sharp turn towards the Road 5

started and I had to use occasionally the wiper to see clearly the road.

However, we had to think how to disburse the weapons that had been used in the night's action. We asked Rumi whether his mother Mrs. Jahannara Imam could help us in taking the weapons from a nearby house that we knew could keep them for an hour or so. The reason was again to avoid any suspicion by the army while carrying the weapons. Rumi readily agreed and said don't worry I shall request my mother to help us out. We took the car very close to the lane where Rumi stayed. Kazi, Rumi and Bodi were dropped in one lane earlier to the lane that Rumi and his folks stayed. In the last house on that lane at the first floor where Mr. Hye stayed we left the three freedom fighters along with the weapons.

It was drizzling. Shawpon and myself both left the place to dispose of the life saver vehicle Mazda. We both thought of a place in Vooter Gall. I drove for the last time and left it inside the boundary of a house that had an arch gate. It looked to us that it belonged to one of the non-Bengalis. We both left the place quietly and quickly. By then we were nearly soaked by the rain and we both decided to go to 1, Tenamant house, one of our hideouts inside the city where Chullu stayed with his brother and his family. There we cleaned ourselves and had something to eat and then left for our destination. We both went back to Dhanmandi to our hideout and found Bodi and Shahadat Chowdhury waiting for us.

Once we were both inside the house we were told what happened with the second group. The second group became very frustrated as we the first group could not meet them according to our plan of action. The second group driving up and down the Rajarbagh Police Line got quite upset. At certain point the Fiat-600 car got overheated and they had to stop in Shahjahanpur beside a tea stall. A panic among the thin crowd could be felt by the group, when the people saw the guns in the hands of the freedom fighters. They quickly filled the radiator and left the place. They moved from Kakrail and passed Darul Kabab restaurant and saw some military officers but when they turned around from Karwan Bazar area and drove down the road again, those officers had disappeared.

It was near Science Laboratory that they wanted to take on an army jeep. Zia understood the situation and stopped them. Zia had noticed the army truck a little ahead of the jeep with its headlights off. And that was a pretty close call. Eventually they all came back in tact at our Dhanmandi hideout and waited for us. The second group heard the news from Bodi and the movie like action that took place about an hour back in Dhanmandi.

We were all satisfied with the action that we did on 25th August 1971. That was exactly five months from then when those Pakistani killed huge number of innocent civilians in Dhaka. We tried to give back the same taste of blood to the Pakistanis.

We on the next day felt relieved and sat together and started to talk about a bigger action to be undertaken by the sector-2 guerrillas inside the Dhaka City. I informed the freedom fighters present that there had been a promise made by our Sector Commander Lt Col. Khaled Musharraf. He assured if we could show good performance inside Dhaka City, he would provide us with two LMGs. Similarly, Maj. Hyder also assured me that if we could continue to hit the army with proper actions then he would also provide us with one three-inch mortar. Everyone present immediately busted out together in a shout and said, "What better performance the higher echelon expects from us then what we have done during the last two months?" Shahadat informed that he had to go back to Melaghar and report to the Sector Commander of the operations carried out during the month of August 1971.

Bodi, Shawpon, Kazi gave their reaction and said, "Then why should not Alam join Shahadat and also go to Melaghar to report and also to get fresh arms and ammunition?" That was it and it was agreed that I would be joining Shahadat and we would be leaving for Melaghar on 27th August 1971. Kazi spoke up and said, "Now that it is finalized we all know you are going with Shahadat to Melaghar. We warn you very seriously that you are not allowed to return to Dhaka without the fresh arms and ammunition as committed by the Sector Commander and Hyder Bhai."

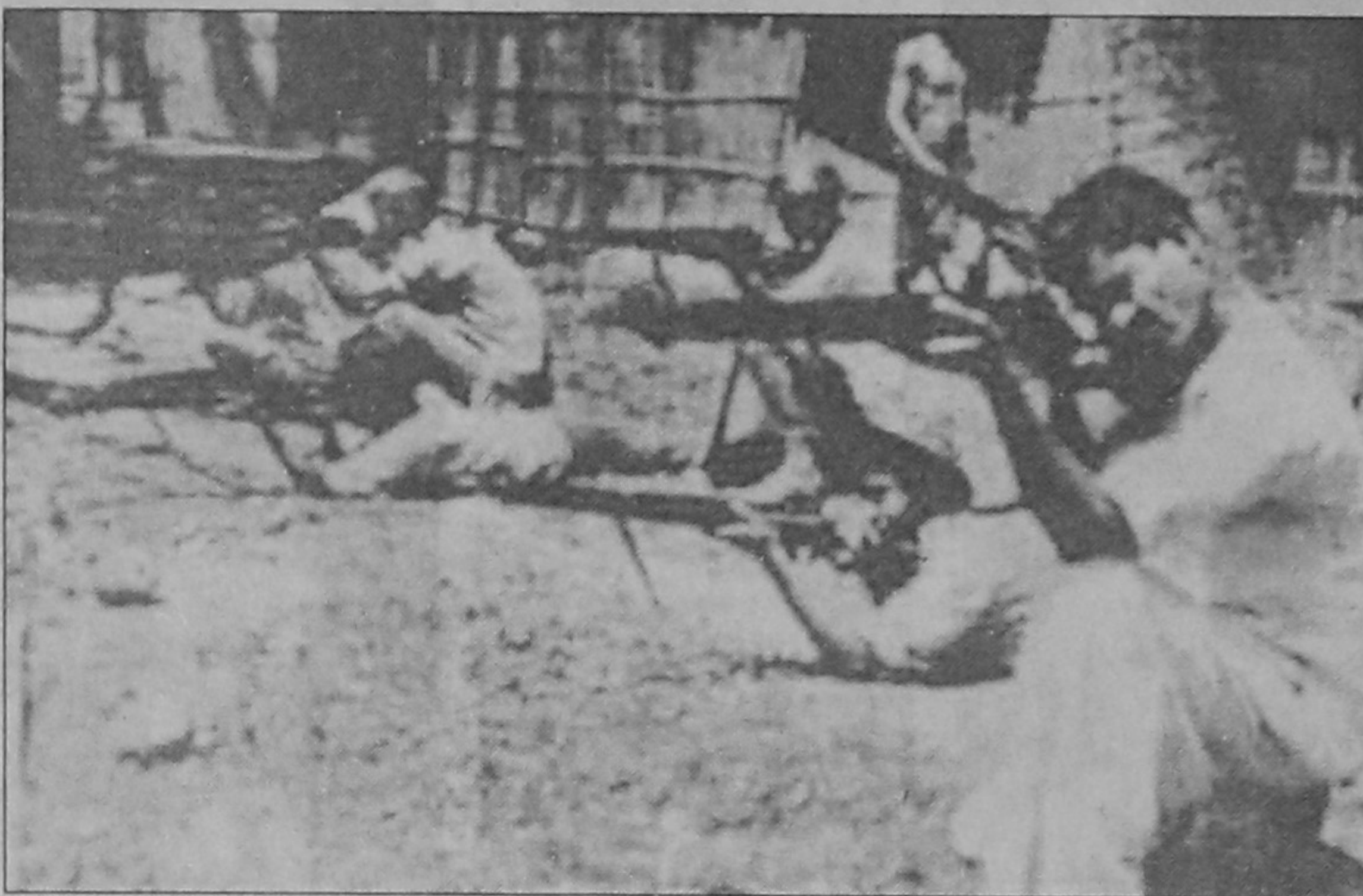
To get everyone back to the mood that we were few minutes' back, I stood up and said, "It seems you all have forgotten that our friend Syed Ashraf Haque at his house today. Why the hell we should miss it, let's go to his house in New Eskaton and make a raid."

The author is Freedom Fighter, Sector-2



Freedom fighters preparing for combat

-- photo courtesy Drik



Freedom fighters in combat

--photo courtesy Liberation War Museum

small groups of two all the freedom fighters arrived at our hideout by 1230 hours.

We finally announced that Bodi, Shawpon, Kazi Rumi and myself would be in the group one. The group two will consist of Zia, Chullu, Anu, Mukhtar and Harris. Chullu in his car would take Harris and Mukhtar to hijack a vehicle from somewhere near for the operation. Whereas Bodi and myself would be going inside Dhanmandi area to hijack another vehicle for the first group. The lunch was over by 3-3.30 pm and those of us who took responsibility to pickup the transports for the operation started to get ready. As decided Chullu, Harris and Mukhtar went out in Chullu's transport. Bodi and myself took a rickshaw from the main road and told the puller to go inside the Dhanmandi area for a long and slow ride. The rickshaw was one of those from Comilla which looked smaller than that of the Dhaka rickshaws. Nevertheless, the Comilla rickshaws were more comfortable to have a ride. Both of us were happy to sit in that rickshaw and decided to have a good smoke. The cigarettes were lit by both of us and we then put our eyes in action to locate vehicles according to our requirement. The rickshaw crossed over the culvert of Road 32 and took the left turn. We both by then thought that maybe we have to pickup a parked vehicle from one of the parking areas of the houses in Dhanmandi. We passed through the internal roads of Dhanmandi on both sides, crossed the FAO office on the left and then crossed the women's athletic complex and continued to move forward. We stopped the rickshaw at the crossing of Road 7, paid the rickshawpuller ten rupees and started walking towards Road 4 in the southern direction.

It was a very bright day and we both walked by the left side of the road in a very casual manner. By then I again brought out the Benson & Hedges cigarette packet from my trouser pocket and pulled out two sticks and gave one to Bodi. Before taking the cigarette Bodi checked under his shirt the tucked pistol and took the cigarette. By that time we came near the Circular Road 4. No vehicle was visible or at sight. The one or two vehicles that passed by we did not feel very comfortable with them and moreover the vehicles did not meet our requirement. We decided to move back towards Road 7 and again start to locate a vehicle on the side roads.

Low and behold! Near the cross section of Road 5, both of our eyes fell sharply on a white Mazda car that was coming towards our direction. We both immediately decided our plan of action. Bodi will stand on the middle of the road to block the car and I would go to the driver's door and take the possession of the vehicle. We saw a very handsome young person wearing spectacles was driving that four-door Mazda car

smile on his face he pulled out the Chinese pistol, which was tucked in his trousers. Bodi looked absolutely cool and said, "Sir, do you mind if we take your car" and pointed the pistol at the child's head. The gentleman's face turned entirely white and it seemed that all the blood from his face had drained out in few seconds. He moved the vehicle by two to three feet on the left and we also moved along with the vehicle and him on our left. He had no words in his mouth. Bodi kept the pistol pointed at the child's head and again said, "You have a very lovely child, is he yours, where are you going?"

By then I had already opened the driving seat door and took the possession of the car keys. The gentleman said, "Please do not hurt my son, what you want is the car and you can have it."

It was then Bodi asked the gentleman very politely "are you a Bengali?" "Yes," he replied in Bangla. That gave both of us a bit of relief. We then spoke in Bangla to him. Till then we were speaking to him in English. While Bodi opened the door of the other side where the child was standing and slowly put the child on the gentleman's lap, Bodi very politely requested the gentleman to step out of the car along with his son. I held the door open and the gentleman with his son walked away without any further words.

We assured him not to worry about his vehicle, that we were freedom fighters and would be using his vehicle for some specific purpose that day. He should only inform the police station over telephone about the theft of his vehicle after two hours from then and not before. We also told him that he should take very seriously what we told him. And in no way he should say anything more than that to the police otherwise he could be in problem. The very fair looking gentleman seemed to get his strength back and took the kid in his lap and moved out of the vehicle. Before moving out of the vehicle I said, "Please do not shout or speak about it to any body otherwise we shall be left with no choice but to shoot. And we the freedom fighters shall not hesitate to do so."

We got into the vehicle. I placed myself in the driving seat immediately and Bodi sat in the front seat. We could see from the rear view mirror that the gentleman took an empty passing rickshaw not looking back at all and went towards the same direction from where he was coming. It was by then nearly quarter to six o'clock in the evening and we took a round turn from Road 4 and came back to our hideout in Dhanmandi Road 28. Bodi said, "How about a cigarette now," I replied "why not" and both walked out of the car leaving the vehicle parked underneath the porch. While getting out of the vehicle I thought to check whose car was it that he hijacked. The face of the gentleman looked familiar to both of us. As usual I opened the glove compartment of



Celebrating victory

--photo courtesy Liberation War Museum

and nearly shot the young man. It was on the young man's suggestion that Harris took his foot off the accelerator as it was pressed back right against the floorboard. Harris eased up and then turned the ignition, the engine came back to life. Before leaving both of them warned the young man not to report to the police about the incident. The moment the Fiat 600 rolled out on the street, the young man screamed "Chor! Chor!" by then Harris and Mukhtar was beyond the reach and sight of the public.

While we fiddled around the Mazda car documents we found that the owner of the vehicle was Mr. Mahbub Anam who is the eldest brother of our common friend and freedom fighter Mahfuz Anam. He worked for Pakistan National Oil Company and resided in Dhanmandi. Mr. Mahbub Anam and Mahfuz Anam both are sons of Mr. Abul Mansur Ahmad. We all were happy and at the same time sad because Mr. Mahbub may not get the vehicle back.

The brightness in the western sky was no longer there. The sun kissed goodbye for the night to this part of the world. The streetlights were on in the main streets. However, in some of the internal roads in Dhanmandi the street lights were not lit and one of them was road 28. It was a blessing, and we needed that more than anything else at that moment. That was having to get inside the vehicle with our weapons and we needed the darkness. Zia and his group left as planned

time we moved towards west. We proceeded towards the southern direction leaving on our right the Abahani cricket ground and arrived at Road 20. Once we reached the Chinese diplomat's house we found that the sentries were not available. We then decided to try our luck in Road 18. The Road 20 was the only road with two lanes in whole of Dhanmandi area so the turning of the car was done very smoothly.

There on Road 18 we found seven to eight army sentries with their rifles hanging from their shoulders in a relaxed mood. Two or three were standing and the rest were sitting and were laughing out their guts. It seemed to me that the Brigadier or the big shot of the house was not at home for which those on duty were at relaxed mood.

The targets were on my right now, so I informed the rest in the car. "Okay friends there we are, we have the animals within our reach as you can see, from now on we have exactly three minutes for the operation."

I would be taking the vehicle forward and then take a sharp turn from the Satmasjit Road. On turning from Satmasjit Road the targets would be on our left. It would be the responsibility of Bodi and Kazi to open fire from the front and rear windows, once I gave the command. The car moved forward towards the target and slowed down a little so both Kazi and Bodi could have a good look of their targets from the car. The car moved forward and I took

also in the mood and said "alright here we go to Road 20 again." And this time we entered road 20 from the other lane to give Shawpon and Rumi a chance to practice firing. Still there was no sign of the sentries those who were supposed to be on duty for the Chinese diplomats. We waited and waited for some more time then at one point of time we wanted to throw one or two grenades. Then again we changed our mind. It was no longer safe to wait for more than five minutes in one place, as there was a possibility of becoming a sitting target of the enemy. I carefully drove through the Dhanmandi roads and crossed the culvert that led us to Road 7.

We drove through the residential area of Dhanmandi and came out from Road 7 on to Mirpur Road. Keeping in mind that we had a rendezvous with the second group of freedom fighters near Rajarbagh police lines, the vehicle was turned towards New Market. As we drove and came near Roads 5, we could very clearly see that the Pakistani army has already made an improvised check post. They were checking every car on the street coming from both directions. It did not take time for us to understand that the news of the action of Road 18 by the guerrillas had already reached the army control room.

The Mirpur Road was properly barricaded in front. Two trucks blocked the Mirpur road facing towards Mirpur. One CJ5-jeep was facing the two trucks. There was another jeep that was parked in front of the petrol pump on our left facing towards New Market. Only one car was allowed to pass at a time from the Mirpur side. There were four to five vehicles already lined up to be checked by the army. It was only few seconds that I was scared like hell. I realized the consequences if we were trapped. The situation was such that I could not even turn the car back. I was left with no choice but to go through the drill. Therefore, I said to the rest of our group and kept my eyes focused in front towards the enemies that we have to break through the barricade and that was our only chance to survive. Shawpon and Bodi immediately responded and said whether I was absolutely sure that I could drive through. I could see by then that two to three soldiers took lying position on the roadside with their guns and one was having a light machine gun pointed towards our direction. I replied to them that "if you Shawpon could take on the soldier lying on the ground with the light machine gun, I am confident we will be able to get away from this mess. Be very sure when I take the left turn you all will open fire from all three windows." Rumi and Kazi from behind said "Alam have you noticed that there are another two to three soldiers standing at the left side of the Road 5." Yes I have noticed, and that's Bodi and Kazi's problem to solve if you two cannot handle

on my left. I shouted "fire!" "fire!" The car nearly overran the second military police who was standing on the left side of the car. He jumped off and saved himself from the wheels of the vehicle but couldn't save himself from the firing that came out from back window of Kazi. Shawpon and Bodi did not wait even for a second they opened up fire with their automatic sub-machine guns on the soldiers on both side.

Two to three fired, empty and hot cartridges jumped out from Shawpon's sten gun and fell on my neck I jerked myself. The firing from Shawpon's gun must have nullified the soldier who lied on the ground with the light machine gun. There was no return fire from that LMG. Bodi with my Chinese sten gun continued firing and emptied his magazine. Kazi got his head out of the vehicle and was firing with the killer's instinct. We escaped a tragedy and broke the barricade of the army. The smell of the gunpowder was all over inside the vehicle. The vehicle was on Road 5 a small road that linked Mirpur Road with the Green Road. The life saving Mazda car speeded on and crossed two lampposts. Rumi blocked the function of the rearview mirror of the car because of his excitement. We told him to turn around and keep looking behind. Rumi turned and concentrated at the road left behind. We were also worried whether the army was following us.

Again the indicator on the left was shown as if the vehicle would be turning towards Green Road. The headlights were still off. The car turned right towards New Market. On the verge of turning the car Rumi screamed "Look! Look! There is a jeep... those bastards are trying to follow us."

Rumi needed no instruction, on his own he shattered the back windshield with his sten gun and opened fire on the jeep. Kazi and Shawpon both from two side of the back windows joined Rumi in support to his firing at the jeep. We were aware of Rumi's aim and he did not miss the driver. Now I could see from the rearview mirror the army jeep that tried to follow us hit the lamp post. The body of the driver partially hanged out of the driving seat window.

The Mazda car moved forward towards New Market. We could not make out how many were in the army jeep and how many were injured or killed. They all were looking back and saw the two trucks and a jeep turning left towards Green Road. We all busted out in laughter at the deception that was successfully made by us. We entered the New Elephant Road and then switched on the headlights. The broken windshield glasses were all around inside the car but nobody bothered till few minutes' back. Neither the burn from that hot empty cartridges we received from the firing of the guns were felt. Only now we all started to locate what happened inside the car. Outside by now the drizzle