

Attack on Kalachara

LIEUTENANT GENERAL M HARUN-AR-RASHID, BP

ON the occasion of the Victory day, I would like to narrate an operation - "Capture of Kalachara Tea Garden" which was carried out on 3rd August 1971 in which the Freedom Fighters displayed extraordinary valor and courage.

At the time of revolt against Pakistan, 4th Battalion of the East Bengal Regiment popularly known as "Baby Tigers" was located at Brahmanbaria on the morning of 27th March 1971. The battalion was dispersed over a large area, from Jangalia at Comilla to Srimongal at Sylhet. The Pakistani authorities dispersed the battalion in the early days of March 1971 to prevent the battalion to take a unified action so that it would be easy for the Pakistani forces to deal with it piecemeal.

After the revolt I was given the command of Delta Company. Initially we took up defense around Brahmanbaria. By second week of April the Company moved to Gangasagar - Ujanishar area (south of Akhaura) to stop the advance of Pakistani troops from Comilla to Brahmanbaria. Here the Company fought the famous battle of Gangasagar where Sainik Mostofa was awarded the highest gallantry award "Bir Shrestho".

The Pakistan 53 Brigade (responsible for the area) continued their advance and by middle of May we were pushed out of the border. By beginning of June 1971 we established our base camp at Narsingarh just across Bangladesh border north of Agortala Airport. By this time strength of the company had risen to about six hundred. Our main occupation during June - July was to train the Freedom Fighters and send them to Bangladesh for specific operation. However regular forces also carried out limited operations like raids and ambushes.

During this period our action more or less remained limited to hit and run operation against fixed defences and other positions of the enemy. From the Narsingarh camp it was easy to infiltrate to Bangladesh and the great "Kalia Bill" east of Akhaura - Brahmanbaria rail line on which Pakistani forces had no control provided great flexibility to the Freedom Fighters. To prevent this the Pakistani decided to close the gap. By mid July a Pakistani Battalion (31 Panjab), located in the area, deployed two company with Battalion Headquarters at Akhaura, one company at Rajapur - Singerbil - Merashani area and another company plus at Kalachara Tea garden area. The whole deployment was supported by an artillery battery based at Akhaura which caused Mukti Bahini infiltration virtually to come to a stand still. On the other hand, the Indian authorities also imposed strict restrictions on any operations from Indian territory for fear of retaliation against Agortala airport as well as the town.

Due to series of setbacks at Gangasagar, Akhaura, Rajapur and serious shortage of logistic, the morale of the Mukti Bahini was sagging. Some people had started deserting the camps. Only training activity at camps could not keep the fighters happy. As such I felt urgent need of undertaking some operations to raise the morale of my own troops as well as shatter the confidence of the enemy located there. After initial appreciation I decided to attack "Kalachara Tea Garden" as it would reopen route of infiltration for us. We concluded through reconnaissance that a full company of Pakistan Army with additional platoon of EPCAP was located in the area supported by an artillery battery at Akhaura.

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position. Though I had about six hundred personnel in my camp I had only one company strength weapon and another platoon strength was equipped with assorted weapons from EPR, Mujahid and Ansars. However considering the situation I had no alternative but launch the attack. My main strength was the urge of rank and file to undertake some operation, which would shatter the confidence of the occupation forces in the area.

To meet up deficiencies in weapons I approached my neighboring camp commander Captain (later Major General) Golam Helal Morshed, BB for help who generously loaned me 2 - LMGs, 2 - 2" Mortars and a thousand rounds of LMG ammunition. He also agreed to establish a blocking position at Mukundapur area to block any enemy reinforcement from the north.

Three sides facing the Indian border were extensively mined with anti personnel mines, and covered with low wire entanglement and punjees. In view of these obstacles it was extremely difficult proposition to attack the position from south, east or north. Moreover, the Indian authorities also barred us from undertaking any operation from the Indian territory. Considering all these factors we had only one option i.e.

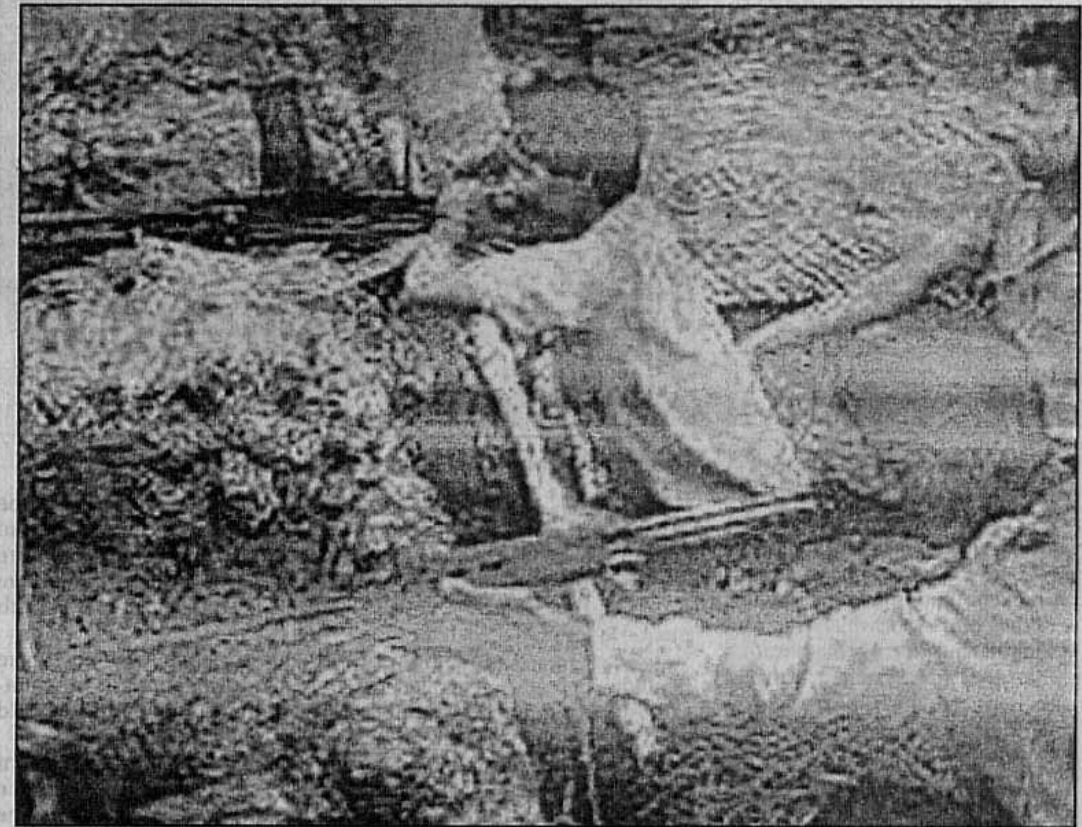
to launch the attack from the west, which is rear of the defence.

Due to the thickly vegetated tea garden area cross-country mobility was extremely restricted. The only route available was the supply route followed by the occupation forces. Still we decided to launch the attack from the west following the supply route. As we did not have any artillery/mortar support we decided to launch the attack at night during the hours of darkness. Considering the surprise factor, I decided to launch the attack on the morning of Tuesday i.e. 3rd August 1971 when the moon came up around 3:30 AM and we fixed the attack time for 3 AM. Final plan was that, one company plus platoon strength under me would launch the main attack from the west. A section strength under Havildar Halim would establish a blocking position on the home bank of the canal facing Merasani covering the railway bridge and block any reinforcement from the south. Captain Morshed was to establish another blocking position at Mukundapur to stop reinforcement from the north. We left a section under command Naib Subedar Rezaul at the base camp as reserve. This group was tasked to help either Havildar Halim's group or main attacking group in case of emergency. The local

guides proved to be extremely valuable in reaching the objective in time and without difficulty.

After briefing all the subordinate commanders I felt that every one was excited and enthusiastic about the attack and was really overwhelmed and surprised to see that no one of my men was concerned about the shortage of weapons and ammunition. Every one felt confident that the job could be done. However I was very sure that I was taking great risks but was determined to launch the attack and succeed.

As per plan around 11 PM on 2 Aug we left the base camp at Narsingarh and infiltrated inside Bangladesh through Qasimpur. Taking a long detour we reached assembly area Shejamura at around 1:45 AM which was half an hour earlier than the schedule. Soon after moving out of assembly area on way the objective we landed up in problem as we could not see the objective area through the tea plants and also we failed to locate the designated forming up place. Luckily we could hear the sound of sentry changing and some people talking on low voice. At that moment we were only 15 to 20 yards away from the objective. We instantaneously shouted "Allahu Akbar" and "Joy Bangla". Soldiers formed up in assault line on the run and in no time they



were on the objective. The defence was taken completely by surprise. They even could not call for artillery fire as the telephone line was cut off at the first instance. Some time later artillery fired few shots but on the eastern side of the objective.

Soldiers overran the whole objective area by 3:45 AM. It was quick and like peace time attack exercise and the enemy did not have time to react. However the position towards the east (left forward platoon) opened up but they failed to realise the direction of attack. As such these fires were also not very effective. However after capturing the whole area, we realised that the area needs mopping-up as most of the bunkers were still intact. By around 4:30 AM it was clear light and we could see the whole area. Lots of dead

bodies and injured were scattered around the area. Unfortunately we had to suffer some casualty during the mopping up process including my runner and wireless operator.

Never the less in spite of the confusion by about 6 AM we were firmly in control. Both the blocking position at Merashani Railway Bridge and Mukundapur had to face severe pressure but they remained in their position till the last. Havildar Halim displayed extraordinary courage in holding the reinforcement group of about two-platoon strength with only one section. The attacking group suffered four injury and two dead. Havildar Halim's group suffered two serious injuries.

By all standards the attack was a complete success. We not only captured the area, we captured lot

of weapons and ammunition including 2 MG1A3, 4 X 7.62 mm LMGs, 15 Rifles and approximately 20 thousands ammunition including 2000 grenades. As per normal military equation, attacking one company strength position with only one company plus troops is impossible, particularly with such shortage of arms and ammunitions and no indirect fire support.

More so the defensive locations were located on higher grounds then the attacking troops. In case of loosing surprise and the enemy opening up before reaching the objective could have catastrophic result on the attacking troops. The determination of all ranks and their courage played significant role in achieving the success against all odds.

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August assemblages

MAJOR QAMRUL HASSAN BHUIYAN

WHEN the Pakistani military struck on 25/26 March their strength was around 25,000 of which about 3,000 were non-combatants or could not be spared for battle due to their urgent employment elsewhere. On the other hand the Bengali force available were about 63,500.

This was a force of considerable size on which the Freedom Fighters could have very well relied. If they were organised, equipped and coordinated, this force could have faced any army twice its size with the full-hearted support of the people. But there was neither any direction to the Bengali elements of the army and the EPR nor any physical endeavor to organise them into effective fighting units. Officers of different garrisons made several covert efforts, despite heavy risks with the decision-makers in Dhaka, but all in vein. They were asked to wait for the orders but the orders never came and we were caught unprepared. In the absence of a "political military" structure the initial phase of the war proceeded on its own dynamics in the form of isolated resistance throughout the country.

By the first week of April communications amongst the revolting East Bengal battalions and the wings of EPR were being established. Soon, necessity was being felt to have a command structure to conduct and co-ordinate the operations. With this aim and with the assistance of the Indian Army and the Border Security Force (BSF) a conference was arranged at the Teliapara Tea State at Hobiganj. This was the first strategy conference of the Bangladesh Defence Forces (BDF) where senior Bangladesh Army officers, serving and retired, attended. The second and the last such conference was held in The Bangladesh Defence Forces (BDF) Headquarters at Calcutta in mid July. Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed presided over the conference.

These were the two strategy conferences during the war to formally provide higher directions. In this article an effort has been made to give a picture of these two assemblages and the evolution of the Indian support structure.

Teliapara The First Conference
By 1 April communications were developing between the revolting units the first between 4 EBR at Brahmanbaria under Maj Khaled Mosharraf and 2 EBR under Maj Kazi Mohammad Shafiullah at Kishoreganj. On 2 April information about 8 EBR at Sholashahar (Chittagong) also reached Maj Shafiullah and Maj Khaled who with their battalions were grouped at Teliapara Tea Garden in Hobiganj. The fate of 1 and 3 EBR at Jessore and Saidpur respectively were still unknown. On 4 April at Teliapara Tea Garden Manager's bungalow a meeting was arranged of the defecting officers of the rank of majors and above. Those who attended were, Col Mohammad Ataul Gani Osmani (Retd), MNA, Lt Col Mohammad Abdur Rabb (Retd), MNA, Lt Col Salaududdin Mohammad Reza, Maj Nuruzzaman (Retd), Maj Kazi Mohammad Shafiullah, Maj Khaled Mosharraf, Maj Moilul Hossain Chowdhury, Maj Shafat Jamil and Maj NurulIslam.

Teliapara conference was the first meeting of the senior army officers. It is considered as an important landmark in our Liberation War. The conference took some very important and critical decisions.

They are:
To have a political government formed by the elected representatives of the 1970 general election. It was deliberated that a political government shall help legitimise the War of Liberation or else the Pakistanis branding the revolting Bengali forces as mutineers shall have right to kill them. Political government can mobilise international support and form world opinion in favour of the Liberation War. They can arrange

for material support and munitions for war.

The War of Liberation would be conducted under a central command. Col Ataul Gani Osmani (Retd), MNA was nominated as the Commander-in-Chief. Four region commanders were appointed, Maj Ziur Rahman



Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed addressing senior officers of Bangladesh Forces on 12 July '71

was operationally responsible for Chittagong Chittagong Hill Tracts, Maj Kazi Mohammad Shafiullah for Brahmanbaria Sylhet, Maj Khaled Mosharraf for Comilla Noakhali and Maj Abu Osman Chowdhury for whole western sector (Panchagar in the north and Sakhira in the south).

An interim policy for the armed resistance was formulated.

Teliapara conference formed the nucleus of the higher organisation in our War of Liberation. Higher direction of whatever level, was provided in this conference. It gave the liberation forces an organisational concept, which was soon implemented in the form of Mukti Bahini. Formation of the government of Bangladesh in exile was to materialise hardly six days after, on 10 April at

Agartala.

On 11 April Tajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Government of Bangladesh in a radio address from All India Radio, Gauhati called upon the people of Bangladesh to mobilise their energy for the liberation struggle. In his spirited and patriotic

Abdul Jalil.

8 Theatre Road The Second Conference

A conference was called at the BDF headquarters at 8 Theatre Road, Calcutta from 12-15 July. The building was later known to be a BSF safehouse. Officers of the rank of Maj (and equivalent in the

Various aspects of the war, the problems confronting the leadership in different areas and the future course of actions were discussed in detail in those seven days of conference. In this conference significant decisions were taken. This was the last conference until the liberation on 16 December.

ence significant decisions were taken. This was the last conference until the liberation on 16 December. The existing regions were abolished and ten sectors were created. While 1-9 sectors were defined by geographical boundaries and number 10 sector was left blank. This was deliberately done to accommodate future situations, which may necessitate creation of a new sector. The sectors (1-9) were named from Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts anticlockwise. Number 11 sector was created later in mid-August in the area between number 5 and 11 sectors. The conference nominated Lt Col MA Rabb as the Chief of Staff and Gp Capt AK Khondoker as the Deputy Chief of Staff. Sector commanders were nominated and policy for opera-

tions both for Regular Forces (Niyomito Bahini) and Citizen Soldiers (Gono Bahini) were made. Decisions were taken to fill in the numbers of the existing five East Bengal Battalions and raise four more. Ultimately only three East Bengal battalions, 9, 10 and 11 could be raised. Raising of conventional army formations were also taken.

There was no radio communication between the C-in-C and his Sector Commanders and the Indians on different pleas would not provide High Frequency (HF) radio sets to Mukti Bahini. The Indians instead advised to use their HF sets held in the respective Jackpot sectors. The underlying aim of this system was to keep a control on the Mukti Bahini activities. In this conference it was decided to establish an Echelon Headquarters under the Chief of Staff Lt Col MA Rabb at Agartala from where he could exercise control on 1, 2, 3, 4 and number 5 sectors.

The Indian Support Structure
After 26 March the responsibility of handling the affairs of Mukti Bahini was given to the BSF Director General, BSF Khasru F Rustamji succeeded in convincing the PM that BSF was good enough to handle the affairs of Mukti Bahini and liberate Bangladesh. Subsequently, the BSF incursions ended with six BSF soldiers taken prisoners by the Pakistanis in Bangladesh territory in Jessore area who were later paraded in the streets of Dhaka.

On 29 April Indian Army Eastern Command was officially given the responsibility of assisting Bangladesh Forces. EASTCOM, co-located with its headquarters raised a separate establishment for the purpose. Maj Gen Onkar Singh Kalkat was deputed by Gen Sam Manekshaw to work directly with Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Aurora, the Eastern Army Commander, who was given the overall responsibility to assist the Mukti Bahini. He was replaced by Maj Gen BN Sarcar barely two

months later in August.

Six Indian sectors commonly known as Jackpot Sectors, with the primary responsibility of providing assistance to Mukti Bahini sectors in the form of logistics were set-up. Subsequently the support did not confine only to providing logistics. This assistance included almost everything: supply of arms, ammunition, ration, clothing, wireless sets, transports, tentage etc. except fighting the battles.

The Indian sector commanders in many cases also involved themselves in planning and supporting Mukti Bahini operations. This was done so in areas where there were shortage of Bangladeshi officers to organise, command and conduct operations and in places where there were no officers of the rank of majors or equivalent (areas as Mymensingh, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Sylhet). An Indian Jackpot sector supervised one or more Bangladeshi sectors.

A serving Bengali officer of the Indian army, Brig Gupta was posted as Liaison Officer to Col MAG Osmani, C-in-C, Bangladesh Forces. Routine matters and decisions on comparatively smaller matters were dealt through Brig Gupta verbally. Subjects of operational importance and policy matters in writing were addressed to EASTCOM were also channeled through the Liaison Officer.

Conclusion

In devising the strategy of War, India played a dominant role. In fact the exile Bangladesh government, Bangladesh Forces and 10 million refugees took sanctuary in India and it provided them with moral and material support. Under such circumstances there were hardly any scope and liberty for Bangladeshis to plan and act independently. In most cases we had to succumb to their dictations. Yet the Bangladesh government and Bangladesh Forces played prudently and avoided taking the Indian yoke on their neck.