

The Guerrillas of Dhaka in 1971

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**GHOSBAGH AMBUSH - TITO'S DEATH
14 DECEMBER 1971**

On the morning of December 14, Tuni, Tito, Sabu, Ifu, Zami and I were sitting with others and eating breakfast when we noticed some villagers rushing into the camp. They had seen a large army of Pakistani soldiers moving towards our camp at Jirabo.

We were not anticipating any Pakistani soldiers to attack us from that particular direction. We were very confused. Were they moving in this direction because they were aware of our camp location? The camp commander sent out two men on bicycles to find out the location of the approaching troops. Till then, the soldiers had never come this far out into the village. After talking to the informers we found out that the Pakistani soldiers were fleeing from Tangail. It appeared that they wanted to reach Dhaka via Savar through the villages. They were fleeing without knowing of our presence in that area and were actually heading straight towards our hideout. The villagers informed us that the soldiers looked panic-stricken and were trying to find a safe escape route to Dhaka.

We wanted to exploit this situation and planned to lay an ambush on the fleeing Pakistani soldiers. They were moving on foot from the north towards Ghosbagh, through cultivation fields, heading towards Savar, and a razakar was guiding them. A quick reconnaissance was carried out and we selected Ghosbagh as the ambush sight. About forty freedom fighters took part in this ambush. Among the forty who took part in the ambush were Sabu, Ashraf, Zami, Mohammad Yusuf Iqbal, Reazuddin, Zaher Ali Mia, Nuru, Ashraf (EPR), Mohammad Mainuddin, Nana (EPR), Abdul Basek, Fazlu, Abdul Gani, Sona Mia, Tito, Tuni, Bachchu Bhai and me. We had very little time and so detailed orders could not be given to us on our course of action.

The Pakistan Army was a very well trained force. Even when they were fleeing, they followed proper military tactics. The troops had two scouts leading the way on either side of the track. The scout on the left side was slightly behind the scout on the right side of the track. They had their rifles in ready position to fire at any unexpected attacks but their movement was slow as the tired soldiers dragged their feet along the way. About 75 yards behind the scouts was the point section (a group of soldiers walking in a single line horizontally spread out across about 75 yards) advancing in a linear formation with their guns ready to defend themselves. It was the point section's duty to clear the path for the main body of troops. They were moving forward with their guns poised as they followed the scouts in order to shoot any enemy they encountered. Behind them, the main body of soldiers followed. We were ordered to take up position along the track that they were following, at an angle from the track, behind a high mound. We waited patiently with our rifles aimed at the track ahead, waiting for the command to fire. As the

scouts came close, one of us opened fire before the command was given, and all hell broke loose. The two scouts were shot and one died on the spot. The soldiers in the point section opened fire at us. A group of soldiers came from the rear and took up position opposite us on the right flank. They quickly set up two heavy machine guns and three LMGs, and began firing at us incessantly. We continued firing back at the soldiers nonstop. The exchange of bullets went on for more than two and a half hours. During this time, we took turns at our position, going back to

a while. Tito and I had moved behind the protective barrier to rest and replenished ourselves with some *gur-muri* (puffed rice and molasses). All of a sudden, Tito decided to go back and fire some more rounds at the soldiers. He smiled at me and said, "I am going to fire at them some more, want to join me?" I told him that I would join him in a little while. He said, "OK!" and crawled up to his position and waited for the soldiers to fire. Very soon he got restless and wondered why they were not firing anymore. He wanted to see where they were and tried to peek past the



Ghoshbagh ambush, Shaheed Tito on the right.

PHOTO: SHAFIQUL ISLAM SWAPAN



Shaheed Golam Dastagir Tito.

PHOTO: SHAFIQUL ISLAM SWAPAN

rest and then coming back to fire some more rounds.

Meanwhile, we received news from our informers that the Indian Army was on the highway, moving towards Dhaka. They had come from Tangail using the Chandra link road to Savar. We quickly requested assistance from them but they were unable to spare any soldiers to comply with our request. They asked for our position and marked it on the map. Then they increased the number of troops on their left flank to protect their convoy. We were extremely disappointed as they turned down our request, not understanding that an army follows certain rules and never deviates from its aim. The Indian Army's aim was to capture Dhaka as soon as possible.

The heavy rounds of firing stopped after

barrier to see if they were still there. In the meanwhile, the soldiers sat quietly out of sight, hidden among the tall sugarcane plants. Tito carelessly lifted his head to look beyond and since he did not notice anybody around, he stood up. Immediately, the machine guns roared and I looked up to see Tito collapse on to the ground. I called to him, "Tito come back. What are you doing? What happened?" Then I crawled up to him and found him bleeding. He had been shot in his stomach and was writhing in pain. Tuni, Jami and one of the locally trained freedom fighters crawled in to help me carry Tito to our camp. I took out our medicine box and prepared the injection to stop the bleeding. I held him down while someone administered the injection to him. I asked

Tito to stay calm and not move as the bleeding increased each time he squirmed. Tito begged me to save him. He went on asking me desperately to stop the pain that seared through his body. He called me names and screamed at me to do something, but I was helpless as I could do nothing for him but just watch him suffer. We sent one of the men to get a doctor from Savar Dairy Farm. Tito was in terrible agony and for thirty-five minutes, I sat there watching him suffer in pain. He was bleeding profusely. He wanted to live to be able to see his motherland free from the Pakistanis. In his pain he cried out, "I want to see my country free. I want to live. Help me Towfic, please help me. I don't want to die." Even today, I can hear his voice calling out to me. I was helpless. I was unable to help my friend as he lay dying.

He had already lost both his brothers in this war and dreamed of the freedom of Bangladesh. I watched with pure anguish as Tito died in my arms. It was a huge blow for me. He had come with us from Montuli, India. Soon we became close friends since we were about the same age. I felt guilty for having failed to help my friend. His pleading cries to save him haunted me constantly. Tito was later buried at the gate of Savar Dairy Farm. I could not attend his funeral as I was extremely upset and disturbed at the thought that somehow I had failed my friend when he had needed me the most. All I could do was hold him close during his last few moments. I just sat there praying that he finds peace.

After liberation, I went to visit Tito's grave at Savar Dairy Farm. He will always remain in my heart and my memories, and I salute him for his bravery and passion. He died for a noble cause, the freedom of Bangladesh, which he was not destined to see. Soon after Tito was shot, the Pakistani soldiers began to desert their positions and attempted to escape through the surrounding villages. When the soldier who had shot Tito looked around and saw that all the others had left, he too tried to escape. But he was caught by the villagers and they killed him. Many Pakistani soldiers tried to flee across a large water body behind us. Many were caught by the villagers and the Major in charge of the troops committed suicide by shooting himself.

We collected two Heavy Machine Guns and other weapons left behind by the soldiers. The Indian Army sent a messenger asking us to hand over the machine guns. These guns were the latest weapons from China, and the Indian Army did not possess these. They tried to persuade us to hand over the two prized weapons to them, but we were adamant not to part with them. They left when they realised that we would not hand over the weapons to them under any circumstances.

**CAPTURING PAKISTANI SOLDIERS
15 December 1971**

We had killed several soldiers in the Ghosbagh ambush on December 14 and held two as prisoners. One was a Punjabi soldier and the other was a Pathan.

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