

BATTLES OF BELONIA BULGE

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Feni-Belonia is an enclave of Bangladesh that penetrates the Indian territory, a narrow finger-like strip about 16km-long and 4-6km wide in area. A metre gauge railway track connects Belonia Border Outpost with Feni and two semi-metal roads connect Belonia, one from Chagolnaiyya and another from Feni. The corridor was under the administrative sub-division of Feni, now Feni District, and is surrounded on three sides by Indian territory except the south. Feni town is situated at the south and at the entry point of the enclave. Dhaka-Chittagong highway and Dhaka-Chittagong railway line run through Feni township. Feni river and Muhuri river play a vital role in the topography of the area.

Strategic importance of Feni and Feni-Belonia Bulge

Feni has always been treated as the lifeline between the port city of Chittagong and the capital city of Dhaka. It was the Main Supply Route (MSR) and was considered to be a very important line of communication by the Pakistani occupation forces for movement of their forces, including arms and ammunition, from Chittagong to Dhaka and the rest of the country. Feni, therefore, was treated as a militarily and strategically vital place both by the Pakistani forces and by the freedom fighters. Pakistan also apprehended the installation of Provisional Bangladesh Government at Parshuram in the northern side of the Bulge which was contiguous to the Indian border where Pakistani army would not be able to effectively intervene.

During the nine-month-long Liberation War, Feni-Belonia Bulge had always been a fiercely hot battlefield. To take control of the Bulge, three major battles were fought where freedom fighters successfully applied their improvised tactics. The battles of Belonia Bulge are looked upon as an important chapter of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. The Second Battle of Belonia Bulge has been included in the syllabus/curriculum of Bangladesh Military Academy and many other military academies of the world.

First Battle of Belonia Bulge

With the dual aim of liberation of Feni and establishment of the headquarters of Provisional Bangladesh Government in the liberated territory of the bulge, four companies of freedom fighters under the command of Capt. Jafar Imam, popularly known as Capt. Humayun of Sector #2, covertly infiltrated the enclave from the western side in the Belonia bulge on June 1, 1971. Capt. Jafar Imam established his command post at the bank of the pond of Muktar Bari and deployed his forces at the village of Darbarpur (now under Fulgazi P.S.) covering the strategic place of Feni-Belonia road and rail line. UOTC Capt. Mujibur Rahman Khan acted as the Liaison Officer to the C.O. Capt. Shahidul Islam and his force took position in the village of Jammura and Lt. Imam-uz-Zaman established his defence line in the village of Boshikpur. Capt. Gaffar Haldar was in charge of the rear platoon stationed at Munshirhat. The freedom fighters dug trenches and bunkers and built a strong

defence line from the border village of Jammura through Darbarpur and Boshikpur up to the bank of Muhuri river. Simultaneously, the forces of Sector #1 under the command of Maj. Ziaur Rahman along with three companies of freedom fighters entered the eastern side of the bulge near Chandgazi and built their defence line from the border point up to the bank of Muhuri river and established contact with the forces of Sector #2. Maj. Zia established his headquarters near Chandgazi. Capt. Matiur Rahman and his troops took defence adjacent to the border, Lt. Mahfuzur Rahman deployed his troops in the middle and Capt. Oli Ahmed built his defence by the eastern side of Muhuri river. Thus the bulge was sealed off from Feni and rest of the country.

Pakistan army was informed of the penetration of freedom fighters and on June 4, 1971, they callously attacked the positions of freedom fighters, thinking that it was an unconventional and scattered unit. The attack was effectively foiled by the freedom fighters and caused



Participating fighters from the famous first and second Belonia battles. From left to right: FF Ghulam Mustafa, Brig. Shahidul Islam (Bir Pratik), Maj. Gen. Golam Helal, Morshed Khan (Bir Bikram), Lt. Col. Zafar Imam (Bir Bikram), Maj. Gen. Imam-uz-Zaman (Bir Bikram), Maj. Syed Mizanur Rahman and Maj. Didar Atwar Hossain

SOURCE: "JUDDHYO KORECHI, BIJOY ENECHI" BY GHULAM MUSTAFA

heavy casualties to the enemy. The enemy again attacked the defensive position of the freedom fighters, this time with a battalion on June 7, 9, and 11, under the cover of heavy artillery and mortar fire. The battles continued uninterrupted from June 4 up to June 28. But all of these attacks were successfully repulsed with a lot of courage and bravery with only a few casualties. The enemy lost more than 140 soldiers. The failure of Pakistani forces in driving out the freedom fighters from Belonia Bulge became a prestige issue for them. Hence, to eliminate the freedom fighters, President of Pakistan General Yahya Khan ordered General Abdul Hamid, the Chief of Staff of Pakistan army, to sort it out. General Hamid arrived in Feni via Colombo and Dhaka along with senior Pakistani generals and commanders. He established his headquarters at Feni Circuit House, prepared a detailed assault plan and mobilised a formidable force to face and exterminate the freedom fighters.

As per plan, after sunset on June 21, the

Pakistan army dropped a strong contingent of three commando battalions of Pakistan army at the rear of the defence line of the freedom fighters. The commandos attacked the defence line from behind.

Simultaneously, the enemy conducted a frontal attack on the entire defensive position of the freedom fighters with a brigade-strength force including tanks under the cover of intensive artillery and mortar shelling. Gunboats of Pakistan navy also attacked the freedom fighters through Muhuri river. Although it was an uneven battle, the freedom fighters valiantly faced the brigade-strength attack of the enemy with great courage and heroism. But Maj. Ziaur Rahman abandoned his defensive position in the evening after the commando attack, withdrew his troops and took shelter inside Indian territory without any information or co-ordination with Capt. Jafar Imam and his forces. Pakistani forces took the advantage and started advancing towards the north by the eastern side of the bulge without facing any resistance.

In the meantime, the Indian army

provided with enough supply of arms and ammunition, support and logistics. This battle, therefore, was a great moral victory for the freedom fighters in the early phase of our Liberation War.

Second Battle of Belonia Bulge

Capt. Jafar Imam reorganised his forces, engaged with the enemy forces, fought and liberated a small chunk of occupied land at the northwestern side of the bulge and reached the bank of Muhuri river near Shubar Bazar.

Muhuri river from India enters Bangladesh territory by the side of Belonia BOP and moves towards west and then turns to the south. Taking advantage of the location of the river, Capt. Jafar Imam deployed his forces and built a defensive line facing the enemy forces.

Thus, Muhuri river became the dividing line between the Pakistani forces and the freedom fighters. Sporadic clashes continued day and night between the enemy forces and freedom fighters without any decisive results. In the meantime, Capt. Jafar Imam was also assigned as the Rajnagar sub-sector commander covering greater Noakhali including Feni and Chaudhogram of Comilla district. Guerilla warfare against Pakistani positions intensified with constant direction and support from the sub-sector commander.

Because of the timely and orderly withdrawal from the first battle, the forces under the command of Capt. Jafar Imam remained intact while acquiring valuable combat experience. On the instruction of Lt. Col. Khaled Mosharraf, the Commander of Sector #2, Capt. Jafar Imam regrouped his forces and on October 10, 1971, raised 10 East Bengal Regiment. The nucleus of 10 East Bengal Regiment was, in fact, developed during the first Battle of the Bulge. Battalion headquarters were established at Rajnagar inside Indian territory, adjacent to the international border in the western side of Belonia town. Capt. Jafar Imam was promoted to the rank of Maj. and became the founding commanding officer (CO) of the battalion. The officers of 10 East Bengal Regiment during and immediately after its formation were:

- 1) Founding CO Maj. Jafar Imam
- 2) Alpha Company - Lt. Imam-uz-Zaman
- 3) Bravo Company - 2/Lt. Syed Mizanur Rahman
- 4) Charlie Company - 2/Lt. Didar Atwar Hossain
- 5) Adjutant of the Battalion - Lt. Mokhlesur Rahman
- 6) Staff Officer (IO) to the CO - FF Ghulam Mustafa
- 7) Quarter Master - FF Mujibuddin Chowdhury Dulal and
- 8) Battalion SM - Subedar Maj. Maizur Rahman.

Headquarter Company, including Pioneer Platoon, was under the direct command of the C.O. Maj. Jafar Imam. Pioneer Platoon of the Battalion did a splendid job by laying anti-tank and anti-personnel mines in front of the defence line during both First and Second Battles of Belonia Bulge which caused heavy casualties to the enemy forces during their advance.

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