

BATTLE OF DOGRAI

Introduction

The battle of Dograi is about the seventeen days' fighting on the Lahore front during the 1965 Indo-Pak War. Dograi is a strategically important village located just 12 km 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. This region, near Amritsar and just 28 km from the Indo-Pak border, was a flat, fertile plain with numerous roads and railways. Strategically, two key bridges spanned the Beas River.

Pakistan fortified the area with the Bambanwala-Ravi-Bedian (BRB) Link Canal, also known as the Ichhogil Canal, which served as a defensive waterway. Running 5 to 14 km from the border, it carried water from the Marala Ravi Link Canal to the Sutlej, with fortified banks. The canal crossed the GT Road near Dograi and included defensive features like raised western banks, acting as a protective barrier in the region.

The objective of the retaliatory Indian plan was to threaten Lahore, drive a wedge between the Pakistani forces deployed in the Lahore and Sialkot sectors and destroy their war potential. The offensive was to serve the dual purpose of ensuring the security of Punjab by advancing the Indian defence line to the Ichhogil Canal and to capture some Pakistani territory to serve as a bargaining lever in the political parleys, on the conclusion of hostilities.

Launching of Phase I

Phase I of the operation was to be carried out by 54 Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier MS Rikh and 1 JAT commanded by Lt Col Balbir Singh. The Brigade had on its orbit 13 PUNJAB, 3 JAT, and 15 DOGRA commanded by Lt Col M Chatterjee, Brigadier (then Lt Col) Desmond E. Hayde and Lt Col Inderjit Singh respectively.

The plan of 54 Infantry Brigade provided for a cross-country advance by 3 JAT and the capture of Gosal Dial as the first bound. 15 DOGRA was to clear the road axis by overcoming opposition at Wagah and between Wagah and Gosal Dial. A Commando Platoon of 13 PUNJAB, supported by one Company, was to advance simultaneously along the Wagah Distributary in a bid to capture the Jallo Bridge. After the capture of Gosal Dial by 3 JAT, 15 DOGRA were to pass through and secure the East Bank of the Ichhogil Canal, including the GT Road Bridge.

Initial Success

54 Infantry Brigade and 1 JAT supported by a Squadron of tanks of Scinde Horse crossed the Indo-Pak border on 6 September, on the GT road axis and on the Ichhogil Uttar axis, respectively. 3 JAT attacked the objective astride mile 14 on the Amritsar-Lahore road and captured it by 0630 hrs. Village Dial was also cleared.

At 0700 hours, Pakistani aircraft carried out intense rocketing and bombing of 3 JAT and 15 DOGRA positions. Later, Pakistani Sabres attacked several positions on the GT road, including

Gharenda, where the Division's Command Post and the reserves were located. The air attacks were pressed home with determination and many ammunition trucks were set ablaze.

Almost the entire 'F' echelon vehicles of 54 Infantry Brigade were destroyed. 3 JAT lost its Second-in-Command, besides five RCL guns and three Mortars with carriers.

During the attack on Gosal Dial, 3 JAT killed thirty five Pakistanis and captured two Officers and twelve other ranks, along with two RCL guns, three mounted jeeps, three trucks and forty five other weapons. The Battalion was then ordered to advance towards the Ichhogil Canal. The East Bank of the Canal, about 1300 m to the North of GT road, was assaulted and captured. The JATs also captured the vital GT Road Bridge over the Canal. Although the bridge had been demolished, the JATs managed to scamper over the surviving portions of macadam and masonry to reach the other side. A and C Companies with the CO's party crossed over at 1145 hours. One Company was deployed to the South of the road towards Batapore and the other to the North of the GT road towards the village Attoke Awan.

The Pakistanis reacted immediately. They rushed to attack 3 JAT with two truck-loads of soldiers, but were caught unaware and most of them were killed by C Company while alighting. They attacked again with three tanks and one hundred troops, but withdrew after suffering heavy casualties. Meanwhile, one Squadron of Pakistani Sherman tanks advanced Southwards along the West Bank of the Canal. The JATs were not prepared to face the tanks in such large numbers, to the East Bank.

However, after the arrival of a Troop of tanks of Scinde Horse under Lieutenant (later Major) Brijendra Singh 14 Horse, A and C companies and Commanding Officer's party again crossed over to the West Bank. Since the Indian tanks could not cross Ichhogil they provided fire support from the East Bank. Meanwhile, 'C' Company managed to reach as far West as the Batapore complex. The JATs held on to their gains despite intense shelling by the Pakistanis.

But in the absence of reinforcements and anti-tank weapons, they could not hold their ground for long. By the afternoon they had expended most of their ammunition. There was also no hope of any air or artillery support. Unable to replenish or reinforce the JATs, the Brigade Commander Brigadier MS Rikh ordered them to withdraw to the firm base of 15 DOGRA at Gosal Dial. During the action, 3 JAT suffered nine killed and forty-three wounded.

In this battle Brigadier (then Lieutenant Colonel) Desmond Hayde, Commanding Officer 3 JAT distinguished himself. He launched a lightning attack on well-prepared and strongly defended Pakistani positions at 0500 hours on 06 September and inflicted heavy casualties on Pakistani troops. He pushed ahead on to the Canal and captured Dograi by 1120 hours. He held on to the gains, despite heavy air and ground attacks, till he was ordered to fall back. Lieutenant Colonel Hayde was decorated with the Mahavir Chakra for his exceptional courage and leadership.



Lieutenant Colonel Hayde is awarded the Mahavir Chakra from President Dr S Radhakrishnan

Source: <https://www.rediff.com/news/special/the-hero-of-the-battle-of-dograi/20150914.htm>

15 DOGRA also crossed the border at 0400 hours on 06 September to clear the Ranger Posts and the bridge. They attacked a Pakistani Company at the Upper Bari Doab Canal (UBDC) Bridge and occupied it. Advancing further they attacked the Ranger Posts successfully and captured 20 POWs, including 1 Officer, along with arms, ammunition, vehicles and a Pakistani flag. The Battalion suffered one Officer and thirteen ORs killed, and one Officer, two JCOs

and sixteen ORs wounded in this action. According to the original plan, the Battalion was to move forward with C Squadron 14 Horse to clear the main axis and press on to the GT road bridge over the Canal. But in view of the exaggerated account of casualties suffered by the Battalion, the Brigade Commander modified the plan and the task of capturing the GT Road Bridge was entrusted to 3 JAT. 15 DOGRA was ordered to firm in at Dial.

One Company and a Commando Platoon of 13 PUNJAB advanced towards the Jallo Bridge. Despite firing from an area, 550 m West of Wagah, they proceeded astride the railway track upto 450 m off the Rail Bridge. Heavy shelling and air strikes forced them to withdraw to the Wagah railway station.

13 PUNJAB however remained at Attari awaiting communication from their Company. In the North, 1 JAT after crossing the border was fired upon from the Pakistani Ranger Post at Ichhogil Hithar. But, the resistance was overcome and the Ranger Post, as well as the Ichhogil Uttar Bridge, were captured by 0700 hours. However, the reserve Companies and tanks pushing forward to assist the operation were halted by intense Pakistani shelling and air strafing. In the absence of support from the artillery, armour and air, 1 JAT had to withdraw to Ranian Bund. During this action the JATs suffered thirteen ORs killed, and one Officer and twenty-eight ORs injured.

The Jallo Bridge Action

50 (Independent) Para Brigade was assigned the task of capturing Bhasin by the first light on 14 September. But on being relieved by 41 Mountain Brigade on 13 September, it was allotted the task of securing Pakistani territory upto the Ichhogil Canal and capturing the rail and road bridges at Jallo intact, by the last light on 16 September. Later at the request of the Brigade Commander the time was postponed to the last light on 17 September. 54 Infantry Brigade was ordered to simulate an attack on Dograi to divert the attention of Pakistani defenders.

At 1700 hrs on 16 September, 2 PARA rehearsed for the capture of the Jallo Bridge. As a diversion, 15 DOGRA was infiltrated from Dial at 2330 hours on the 16 September night and the village of Jhuggian was captured by A and C Companies. The Dogras suffered seven killed and fifty-two wounded in this attack. This reduced the distance of no-man's-land to 90 m, enabling the attackers to have a closer look at the Pakistani defences. Thereafter, 15 DOGRA was moved from Dial to Mile 14.

3 PARA secured the Forming Up Place for the subsequent Brigade attack. From Forming Up Place 2 and 6 PARA proceeded along the Upper Bari Doab Canal to press home the attack on both bridges. The Pakistani artillery heavily shelled the assaulting troops but the Canal banks and drains on both sides provided them protection and minimised casualties.

Despite heavy shelling, stiff opposition and mounting casualties, the 2 PARA assault elements reached the Jallo Bridge. At this stage the demolition party, approaching the bridge, also came under heavy shelling. 6 PARA, a newly raised Battalion, attacked the rail bridge on 17 September. Both objectives were captured but the Pakistanis had already destroyed the road bridge. The Battalions were then ordered to occupy the defences in the area Bhama Bhatta. There was some confusion in this regard as after the capture of the objective both the Battalions were to stay put on the Canal itself as per the instructions of the GOC 15 Infantry Division.

Operations of 38 Infantry Brigade

38 Infantry Brigade was ordered to capture Wahgrian-Dogaich. The Brigade launched the attack on the night of 18/19 September, with 3 GARHWAL RIFLES but was repulsed by the Pakistani artillery and small arms fire. 3 GARHWAL RIFLES had to fall back to its original position in the Brigade defended Sector. On the night of 22/23 September, the Brigade was ordered to secure the junction of Pul Distributary and the Ichhogil Canal but it failed to do so as 1 JAT, one of its forward Battalions, came under attack on the evening of 22 September. The attack was repulsed, but the Brigade plan also suffered.

The Epic Battle of Dograi

54 Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Nirinjan Singh was then ordered to plan for an advance upto 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 and 20 September. During this period, the Brigade suffered fifty-eight killed, including three Officers and four JCOs and two hundred and five wounded, including five officers and seven JCOs.

Final orders issued at 1700 hrs on 20 September, provided for a two phased attack on Dograi as follows:

(a) Phase I

13 PUNJAB to attack the Mile 13 area at 2359 hours on 21 September.

(b) Phase II

3 JAT to attack Dograi at 0130 hours on 22 September.

Phase I - Attack by 13 PUNJAB

On 19 September, 13 PUNJAB was relieved by 15 DOGRA in the Dial area and Jhuggian Mian Darswali, with a view to attack the Mile 13 area from the direction of Lakhanke. On 21 September, it was ordered that the Mile 13 area was to be captured with D Company on the left and C Company on the right, astride the road, from Jhuggian. A Company from Lakhanke, on relief by a Platoon of 15 DOGRA, re-joined the Battalion at 2100 hours on 21 September. 'H' hour was fixed at 2359 hours on 21 September, and the objective was to be captured by 0130 hours on 22 September. Artillery and mortars were to shell the Mile 13 position from H minus 10 to H plus 4 minutes.

At about 2200 hrs, D Company, located to the South of Jhuggian was threatened when the Pakistani troops in Platoon strength, supported by Browning Machine Gun and mortar fire, tried to close in. The threat, which might have been intended as a spoiling attack, was removed by D Company.

The Indian attack was delayed, due to heavy Pakistani shelling during the initial formation and could, therefore, be launched only at 0100 hours on 22 September. The attack was supported by a Squadron of tanks of Scinde Horse from the area South of Jhuggian, Brigaded Mortars from the area North of the GT road, Bren guns of 15 DOGRA from the area South of the GT road, and the Division artillery. In spite of heavy shelling, D and C Companies formed up

astride the GT road and carried out the assault. When 180 m away from the Pakistani defences, the Companies were pinned down by intense MMG, mortar and artillery fire from all directions. Heavy casualties were suffered but the Companies did not abandon the occupied ground. The assault was resumed on both side of the GT road soon after first light, with tanks moving alongside the Companies. Under pressure, the Pakistanis ran towards the Dograi village. The objective was captured at about 0700 hrs after inflicting heavy casualties on the defenders. By containing the bulk of the Pakistani forces on the main GT road axis, 13 PUNJAB facilitated the capture of Dograi by 3 JAT.

In the battle of Mile thirteen, 13 PUNJAB suffered thirty-one killed, including one Officer and five JCOs, and over a hundred wounded, including five Officers and five JCOs. The Pakistani casualties included fifteen killed and three Prisoners of War. They also lost a number of weapons and ammunition including recoilless guns, MMGs, mortars and other small arms to the Indians.

Phase II - Attack by 3 JAT

On 21 September, 3 JAT carried out extensive patrolling to gather intelligence on Dograi, which was to be attacked in the night. It was discovered that the Pakistanis were well entrenched, "some huddled over Machine Guns in pill-boxes and others tucked into the buildings of Dograi behind Light Machine Guns and rifles, with piles of ammunition and grenades at hand". With two Light Machine Guns 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". 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 trench and to reach it, 3 JAT (523 men) had to negotiate the mine-fields 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 less one Platoon 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 September and reached the firm base North of Lakhanke at 0045 hours on 22 September, 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, which was leading the attack, crossed the start line at 0150 hours on 22 September, and after fighting through the outskirts of the town and silencing a pill-box enroute, secured the North-East projection of the town against minor opposition.

C Company, under Maj 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 pill-boxes 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 actually the Company's objective. Thus the passage to Dograi from the North-West was cleared.



Army Chief General JN Chaudhri with the Corps Commander Lieutenant General JS Dhillon and Lieutenant Colonel Desmond Hayde

Source: Northern Command - Indian Army

B Company under Maj Sandhu cut through the centre of Dograi, to secure the south-west portion of the town. It silenced a pill-box 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 pill-box 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 pill-box guarding the southern approach to Dograi. In a gallant charge the pill-box was destroyed and the defenders dislodged. In this action Major Tyagi was mortally wounded.

The Battalion secured the objective by 0530 hours on 22 September, but a number of pockets in Dograi still remained to be cleared. The houses on both sides of the GT road, at the eastern edge of Dograi, had been turned into defensive positions. A Platoon, detailed to clear these houses, flushed out about a dozen men from a single room.



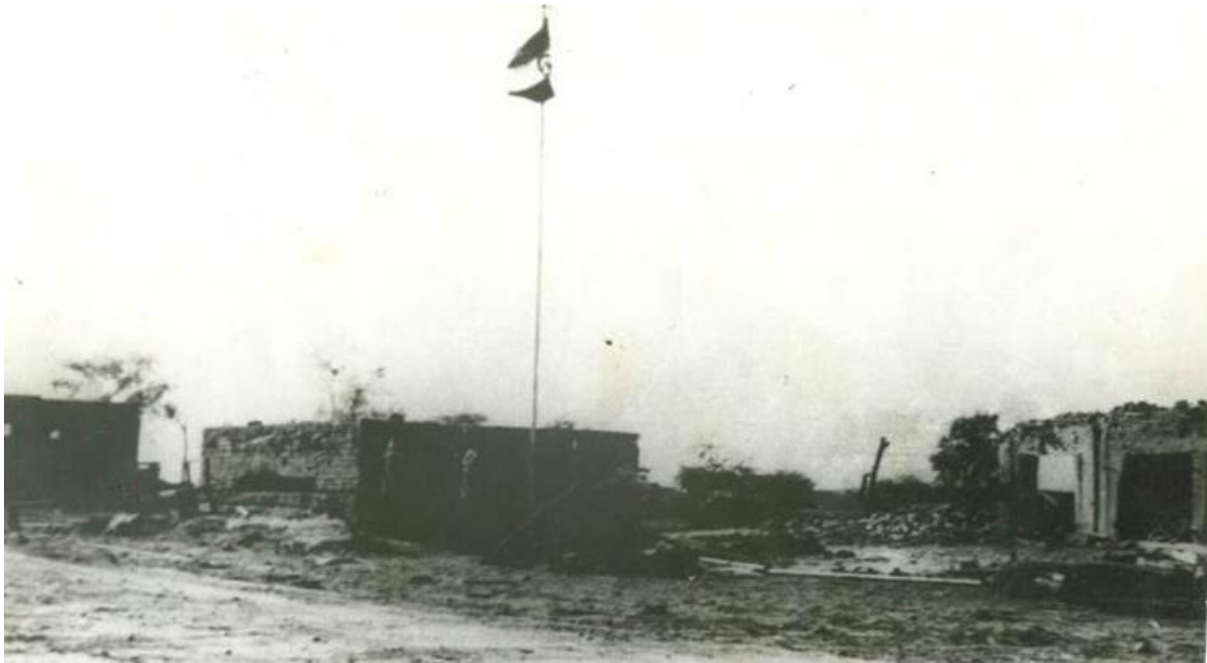
Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri escorted by Brigadier Nirinjan Singh greets Lieutenant Colonel Desmond Hayde in Dograi.

Source: <https://www.rediff.com/news/special/the-hero-of-the-battle-of-dograi/20150914.htm>

The price paid by 3 JAT for the capture of Dograi amounted to fifty-eight killed, including four Officers, and one hundred and fifty seven wounded, including six Officers and four JCOs. The operation launched by 54 Infantry Brigade resulted in a complete success. A large quantity of arms and equipment and over one hundred and eight soldiers, including a Brigade Commander were captured. Three hundred dead bodies of Pakistani soldiers were counted.

In the battle of Dograi many JAT soldiers distinguished themselves. Major Asa Ram Tyagi led the forward-most Platoon of his Company during the attack on the Eastern edge of the Dograi township. The area was well defended in company strength and protected with pill-boxes, recoilless guns and a troop of tanks. Despite two bullet injuries he pressed on against the Pakistani tanks, hurled grenades on their crew and captured the tanks intact. He also shot and bayoneted a Major. He continued to lead his men till two more bullet hits made him unconscious. Inspired by the Commander, the men overran the stronghold. Major Tyagi was decorated with a Mahavir Chakra for exceptional courage, posthumously.

Captain Kapil Singh Thapa was another JAT officer, who bravely led a Platoon of D Company. When his Company advanced to secure a foothold on the North-Eastern projection of Dograi township, a Pakistani Platoon entrenched on the east bank of the Canal opposed it with intense MMG fire. At this stage Captain Thapa's Platoon charged the Pakistani position across a minefield. In the fierce hand to hand fight, he engaged Pakistanis with grenades and a bayonet charge.



3 JAT flies the Tricolour proudly at the captured Dograi post

Source :

https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=421298898066745&set=pcb.421299014733400&locale=af_Z

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The objective was captured. Captain Thapa was awarded the Mahavir Chakra for displaying conspicuous gallantry, posthumously. Major General Mohinder Singh, who took over command of 15 Infantry Division from Major General Nirinjan Prasad after the troops were pulled back after the initial capture of Dograi also displayed exceptional leadership during these operations. Unmindful of his personal safety, he moved from one unit to another encouraging his men to fight. He was awarded the Mahavir Chakra.

After the success at Dograi, 3 JAT continued to clear the Pakistanis from the built-up area till the cease-fire. The Battle of Dograi fought by the unit in the 1965 India-Pakistan war is regarded as the finest battle fought by an Infantry Battalion.



Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi at the Dograi War Memorial Also seen in the photograph are the Army Chief General Dalbir Singh and the Western Army Commander Lieutenant General KJ Singh

Source: https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pm-visits-1965-war-memorials-in-PUNJAB-spends-diwali-with-officers-and-jawans-of-the-indian-armed-forces/