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## **The Battle of Khem Karan: A Defining Victory for India in the 1965 Indo-Pak War**

### **Introduction**

The 1965 Indo-Pak War, a conflict of immense historical significance, was fought over the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, which had remained a source of tension between India and Pakistan since their independence in 1947. This was the second war fought between these two neighbouring countries. While India was still recovering from the Sino-India War of 1962, Pakistan saw it as an opportunity to acquire Jammu and Kashmir with might, presuming India to be weak in terms of defence preparation. A number of other factors also seemed to favour Pakistan that could have made them wage the war at this time: a) India had lost its best-known statesman, Nehru, in 1964. b) At this time, Pakistan was prospering economically and recording food surpluses while India was facing local famines and serious economic difficulties. c) The international situation was viewed as more favourable to Pakistan, their relations with China were rapidly improving to the point of a de facto alliance. The USSR was less hostile than for many years.

The war initiated on 24 April 1965, when Pakistan Army, attacked our territory in the Rann of Kutch and penetrated six to eight miles inside the Indian territory. This act of illegal occupation of Indian territory constituted violation of Indo-Pak Border Agreement 1960 and international law as per the United Nations Charter. Pakistan's army had recently modernized its arsenal, particularly with advanced American equipment, including Patton tanks and Sabre jets, instilling confidence in its ability to wage war. After the failure of Desert Hawk, in August 1965, Pakistan launched "Operation Gibraltar," a covert operation designed to infiltrate Indian-administered Kashmir and incite an insurgency. India's firm and decisive response escalated the situation into a full-scale war, with skirmishes spreading from the mountainous terrain of Kashmir to the fertile plains of Punjab. The failure of Operation Gibraltar saw 'Operation Grand Slam' put into effect by General Ayub Khan on 01 September 1965. The operation was launched across the Southern most portion of the CFL and was aimed at Akhnur; thus, Pakistan aimed at cutting of Indian positions in Naushera, Rajauri and Punch.



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*The Victory of Khem Karan: Euphoric Jawans rummage through an abandoned Patton near Khem Karan.*

Source: <https://thebetterindia.com/82213/havildar-abdul-hamid-tanks-param-vir-chakra/>

Indian reaction to Pakistan's Grand Slam came by way of counter offensives across the International Border in J&K, Punjab and Rajasthan, commencing on 06 Sep 1965. The 'go ahead' for an all-out military response had been given by the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on 03 Sep 1965. The Indian strategy was to threaten Lahore and Sialkot, thus relieving pressure in Chhamb-Jaurian Sector and while doing so, degrade Pakistani armed potential and capture some territory which could be used for bargaining in the post-war negotiations.

This war witnessed several fierce battles, but one of the most decisive engagements occurred at Khem Karan. Located in Punjab, near the India-Pakistan border, the small town of Khem Karan became the site of a key battle that altered the trajectory of the war. This battle is known for the sheer scale of tank engagements and strategic importance. This battle is also often referred to as "Graveyard of Pattons" due to the sheer number of Patton Pakistani tanks destroyed by the Indian Army. This battle not only demonstrated India's superior defensive capabilities but also highlighted the tactical brilliance of the Indian military leadership.

### **The Strategic Significance of Khem Karan Town**

Khem Karan is a small town in Punjab situated close to the international border. It was a critical entry point to deeper Indian territory, with access to vital transportation routes and the potential to threaten important cities like Amritsar and Ludhiana. The Khem Karan-Kasur Sector is



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shaped like a trapezoid, an inverted kite, with Kasur at the bottom left corner 3 miles West of the International Borders and Khem Karan 3 miles East of the International Borders. Chathian Wala at the top left corner just East of the Ichhogil Canal and less than a mile from the International Borders; the Beas Bridge on the Beas at the top right corner 60 miles through Patii from Khem Karan, and the bottom right corner, Harike on the Sutlej River, 25 miles from Khem Karan. The distance in a straight line from the International Borders between Khem Karan and Kasur through Rattoke to the Sutlej is 15 miles. South of this line was an enclave of Pakistan referred to as the Sehjra Bulge through which the Sutlej made its first entry into Pakistan across the Borders. To the West the trapezoid was bounded by the International Borders and Ichhogil Canal and to the East, by the Beas and Sutlej rivers.

Control over Khem Karan could provide a launching pad for either side to dominate the Punjab sector. Aware of this, Pakistan's military high command envisioned a major armoured thrust into Indian territory via Khem Karan as part of its broader strategy known as "Operation Grand Slam." Pakistan's plan was to capture Khem Karan and advance towards the Beas River, thereby cutting off key supply lines to Indian forces in Punjab. The success of this plan would have been a major blow to India's war efforts and could have forced India into a negotiated settlement under duress.

### **Pakistan's Initial Success**

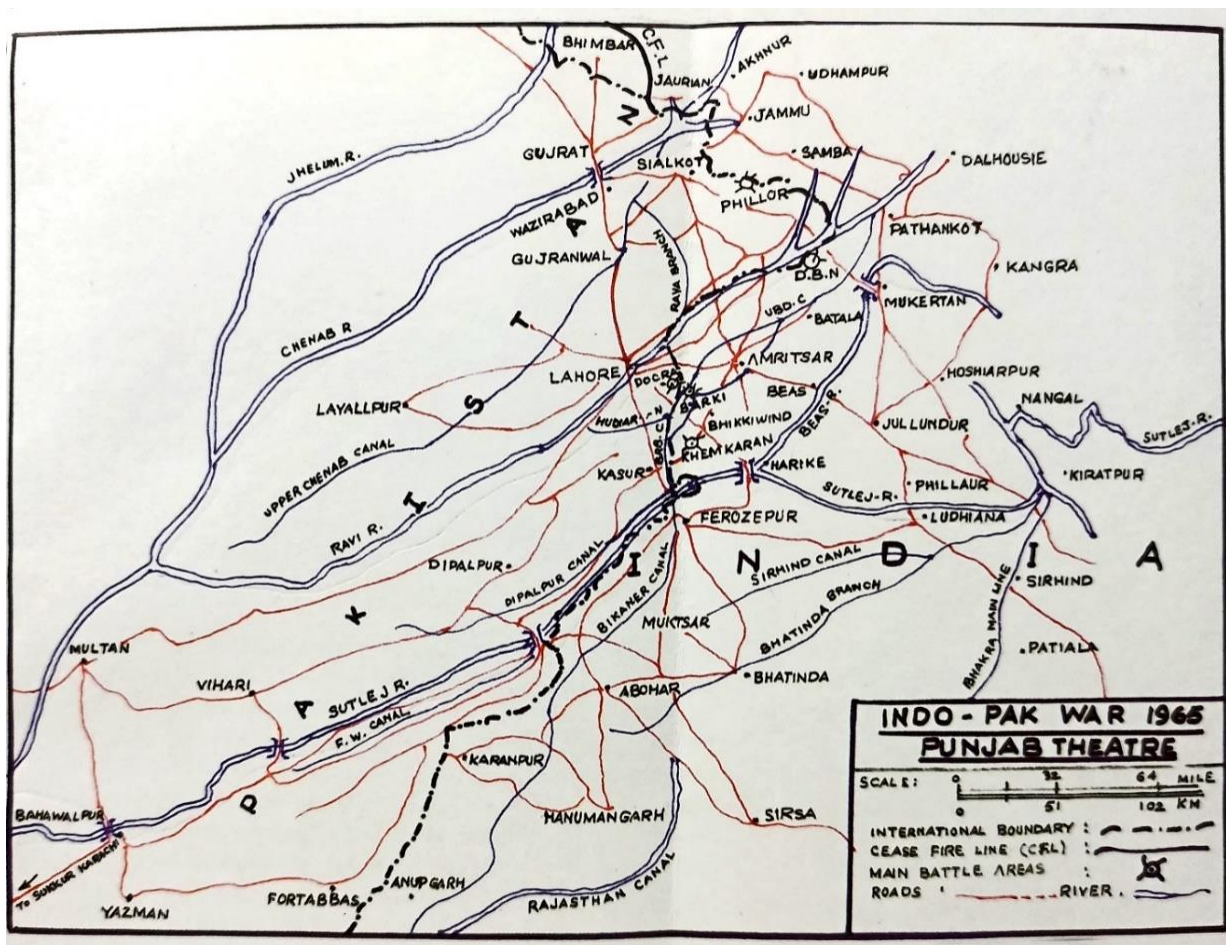
On 06 September 1965, Indian forces crossed the International Border, opening a new front in the Lahore sector. Pakistan responded with a strong counteroffensive in the Khem Karan area, deploying its 1 Armoured Division, which was equipped with M47 and M48 Patton tanks, supported by infantry and artillery units. Their objective was to swiftly capture Khem Karan and advance into Indian territory.

Initially, Pakistani forces made significant gains. The Indian 4 Mountain Division commanded by Major General Gurbaksh Singh was responsible for defending Khem Karan, was caught off guard by the scale and speed of the Pakistani assault. The open terrain in this region was conducive to tank warfare, and Pakistan believed its superior Armoured force would quickly overwhelm the Indian Army. However, the Indian military leadership quickly adapted to the situation. Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, commanding the Western Command, ordered reinforcements, including the 2 (Independent) Armoured Brigade, commanded by Brigadier TK Theograj. Despite the early setbacks, Indian forces regrouped and prepared to confront Pakistan's advancing armoured columns in a decisive manner. The Battle of Asal Uttar unfolded when Pakistani forces captured Khem Karan town, only to be pushed back by the 4 Mountain Division and ultimately decimated by the 2nd Armoured Brigade of the Indian Army in a decisive battle between 08 – 10 September.



## The Plan

Pakistan did not call off Operation 'Grand Slam' despite the UN Security Council's call for an immediate cease-fire on 04 September 1965. It even carried out an air raid on Amritsar the next day. The Indian warning that an attack against Jammu and Kashmir would be treated as an attack against India was also ignored by Pakistan. Meanwhile, apprehending a Pakistani attack, India had also formulated a contingency plan to meet the situation militarily. The Indian plan visualised a limited offensive intended to cover the area from Dera Baba Nanak in the North to the Sutlej in the South.



*Punjab Theatre: 1965 Indo Pak War*

Source: The Indian-Pakistan War of 1965: A History. S.N. Prasad. U.P. Thapliyal (2011). Natraj Publishers and Ministry of Defence, Government of India

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



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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.

In view of the above plan, XI Corps under Lieutenant General JS Dhillon was assigned the tasks on August 1965 to destroy the enemy forces which might enter Punjab and Ganganagar Sector in Rajasthan. Also, on orders from Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, GOC-in-C Western Command, the Corps was to undertake the following measures simultaneously:

- a. To advance to the Ichhogil Canal along the axes GT road, Bhikkiwind-Khalra and Bhikkiwind-Khem Karan, to secure Pakistani territory from opposite Ranian inclusive to its junction with Dipalpur Canal opposite Hussainiwala. Also to capture intact Ichhogil Uttar road bridge, GT road bridge, Jallo road bridge and Barki Bridge on Ichhogil Canal
- b. To eliminate the Pakistani bridge-head at the Dera Baba Nanak and if possible, capture the bridge on the Ravi River, intact.

The initial task of XI Corps was to secure the East bank of the Ichhogil Canal and establish Bridgeheads across the Canal at some points. 15 Infantry Division was on Amritsar - Lahore axis, 7 Infantry Division on Khalra - Barki axis, and 4 Mountain Division on the Khem Karan - Kasur axis. Complete wireless silence was to be observed. The assigned task of 4 Mountain Division (less 33 Mountain Brigade) was to;

- a. Secure Pakistani territory up to the East bank of the Ichhogil Canal from the Canal Junction near Bedian (exclusive) to the Pt 798439 at Ganda Singhwala (inclusive).
- b. Destroy the bridge over the Ichhogil Canal on Road Khem Karan – Kasur.
- c. Occupy a Defended Sector to contain possible Pakistani offensive led by 1 Armoured Division and two Infantry Brigades, particularly along the Kasur- Khem Karan and the Ganda Singhwala - Khem Karan axes. For this, the support of 2 Independent Armoured Brigade would be made available on priority.

The major portion of 4 Mountain Division was to occupy defences in the Khem Karan area to encounter the expected Pakistani offensive of 1 Armoured Division and two Infantry Brigades. 15 and 7 Infantry Divisions were expected to meet not more than one enemy Battalion each, in hastily prepared defences, in their areas of operation. It was appreciated that the success of the operation would depend on the measure of surprise. Therefore, no formation was allowed to cross the Beas River before the last light. To maintain surprise the Indian Commanders even ignored the basic requirement of establishing a firm base before launching the attack.

#### **4 Mountain Division**

4 Mountain Division planned to carry out the allotted tasks in two phases. In the first Phase, territory up to the East Bank of the Ichhogil Canal from Ballanwala to Ganda Singhwala was



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to be captured by a Brigade Group. In the second Phase, territory up to the East of the Ichhogil Canal from Canal junction at Bedian to Ballanwala was to be captured by another Brigade Group less a Battalion. At 0330 hours on 06 September, HQ XI Corps ordered that the territory to the East of the Ichhogil should be secured with utmost speed, unmindful of casualties. It also clarified that the compact defended Sector should be occupied overing the Kasur-Khem Karan and Ganda Singhwala-Khem Karan axes.

The 4 Mountain Division fought this Battle along with the following troops:

- a. 7 Mountain Brigade- 4 GRENADIERS, 7 GRENADIERS and 1/9 GORKHA RIFLES.
- b. 62 Mountain Brigade - 18 RAJPUTANA RIFLES, 9 JAMMU AND KASHMIR RIFLES and 13 DOGRA.
- c. DECCAN HORSE equipped with Sherman tanks.
- d. Artillery Brigade with one Field Regiment (25 pounders), two Mountain Regiments (3.7-inch howitzers), one Medium Regiment (5.5-inch Guns) and one Light Regiment (120mm mortars).
- e. 1, 77 and 100 Field Companies along with 41 Field Park Company.
- f. Corps Reserve, 2 (Independent) Armoured Brigade comprising two Armoured Regiments, 3 Cavalry (Centurions) which had been re-orbatted from 1 Armoured Division and 8 Cavalry (AMX).



*Destroyed Pakistani Patton tanks after the 1965 war*

Source: <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/LAND-FORCES/Army/Patton2.html>



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The intelligence available to the Division indicated that Pakistan had deployed only the Sutlej Rangers and Mujahids to the East of the Ichhogil Canal and that at the most, one Infantry Battalion held hastily prepared positions from Bedian to Ganda Singhwala. In fact, India did not expect a quick major counter-offensive from Pakistan. In view of this, it was concluded that quick occupation of the east bank of Rohi Nala would delay a Pakistani armour thrust, enable Indians to cause more attrition and economise troop involvement on various axes of the Pakistani advance. Therefore, the envisaged plan was:

(a) **Phase 1**

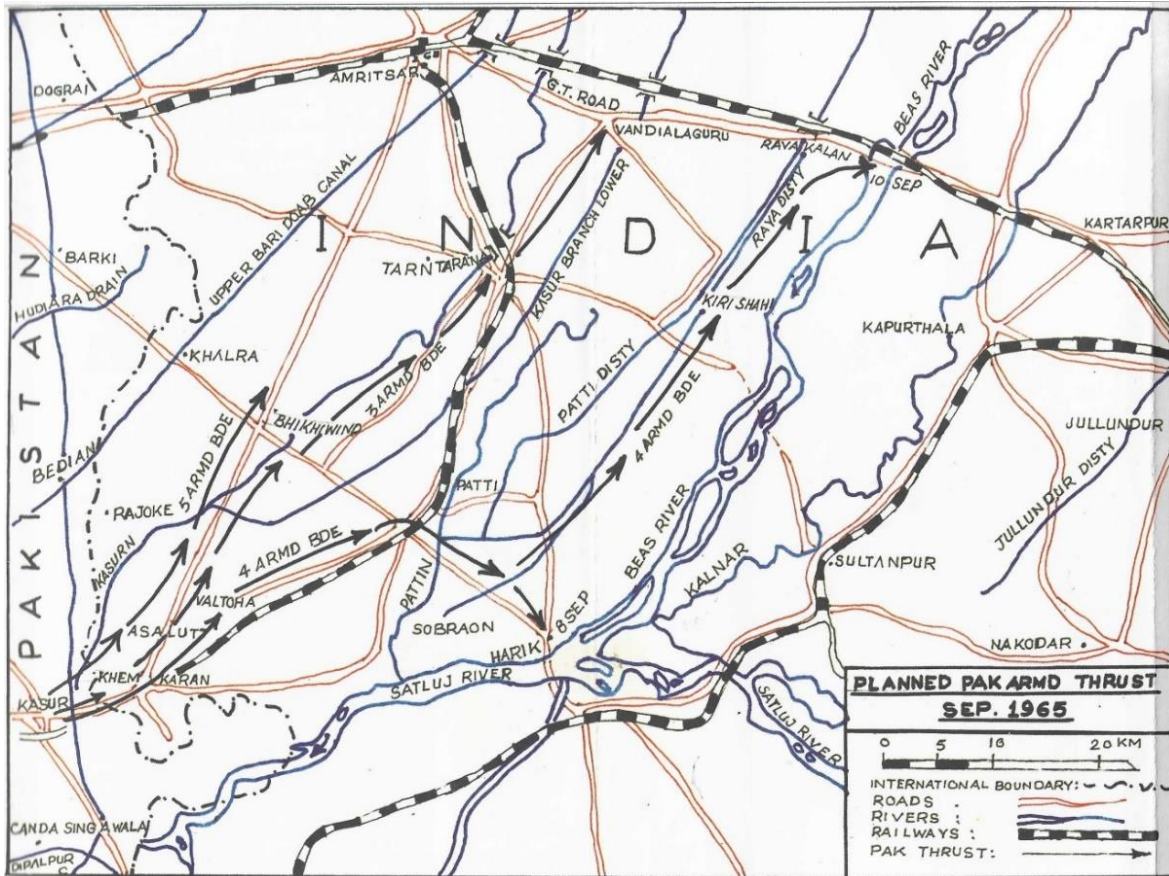
- (i) Securing of Pakistani territory up to the East bank of the Rohi Nala from Road-Nala junction to the Rohiwal area by 62 Mountain Brigade Group.
- (ii) Occupation of the Defended Sector by 62 Mountain Brigade Group with an additional Battalion under command, in the West and South-West of Khem Karan area covering Kasur-Khem Karan and Ganda Singhwala-Khem Karan axes.

(b) **Phase 2**

- (i) Capture of Ballanwala - Theh Pannun and securing of Pakistani territory East of the Ichhogil Canal from Ballanwala (including) to Canal junction near Bedian (excluding) by 7 Mountain Brigade Group less one Battalion.
- (ii) Securing of the East Bank of Ichhogil Canal from Ballanwala (excluding) to Ganda Singhwala by 62 Mountain Brigade and destruction of the bridge over Ichhogil Canal on the Khem Karan-Kasur Road.



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### *Battle of Khem Karan: Planned Pak Armoured Thrust, September 1965*

Source: S N prasad, UP Thapliyal. *The India Pakistan War of 1965.* (2011) Natraj Publication, New Delhi.

62 Mountain Brigade Commanded by Brigadier HC Gahlaut reached Valtoha from Ambala at 2200 hours on 05 September 1965. They launched operations at 0500 hours on 06 September and captured its initial objectives. 13 DOGRA captured its objective by 1100 hours. A Company of 18 RAJPUTANA RIFLES occupied Shejra Bulge. 9 JAMMU AND KASHMIR RIFLES succeeded in taking the Bandh on Rohi Nala.

Phase 2 of the operation under 7 Mountain Brigade Commanded by Brigadier DS Sidhu was launched at 0830 hours on the same day. Two Battalions of 7 Mountain Brigade, viz 7 GRENADIERS and 4 GRENADIERS, advanced on Ballanwala and Theh Pannun respectively. By 1130 hours on 06 September, 4 GRENADIERS secured the line of Rohi Nala and the East Bank of the Ichhogil Southwards of Theh Pannun. But the attack of 7 GRENADIERS on Ballanwala failed.

The Pakistani reaction to the Indian advance was quick and firm. It used Patton tanks and Mechanised Infantry to counter the Indian thrust. It had deployed 11 Infantry Division in a defensive role in this Sector, stretching from Bedian to Hussainiwala. 1 Armoured Division of





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Pakistan was located in the vicinity of Kasur, hiding in a forest area. A large and potentially devastating artillery ensemble of seventy- two field guns, thirty medium guns, and twelve heavy guns were deployed to support the Pakistani operations in this Sector. Throughout the night of 06/07 September, all Indian defended localities and gun areas were subjected to sustained heavy artillery shelling. This quick reaction of the Pakistani troops suggests that they were well prepared to launch an offensive in this sector.

By 0800 hours on 07 September, India had realised that a powerful Pakistani armour thrust towards the Khem Karan- Bhikkiwind axis, from the North of the Khem Karan-Kasur Road, was imminent and that any Defended Sector to the West and South-West of Khem Karan would be bypassed. Setting-up of defended Sector ahead of Khem Karan by Indian troops was perhaps dictated by the sole consideration of providing protection to the town.

It was, therefore, decided to fall back and occupy a Defended Sector to the North-East of Khem Karan so as to cover the Khem Karan-Patti axis and Khem Karan-Bhikkiwind axis in the general area of Asal Uttar-Bhura Kuhna-Chima. 7 Mountain Brigade, which had captured the Theh Pannun area and linked up with Bedian, was ordered to fall back on the defended Sector. While the Indian infantry was busy preparing the defences, the armour and artillery were considering measures to thwart the Pakistani advance. To this end, 9 Horse with a company of 1/9 GORKHA RIFLES, was deployed to the South-West of Khem Karan to delay the advance and to provide cover to the preparation of the defences. The stout resistance offered by these units considerably delayed the Pakistani advance. Indian artillery intensely shelled the likely crossing places over Rohi Nala and the Ichhogil Canal with the same intent.

The withdrawal took place on 07 September and Indian troops were able to dig defences and lay mines. The three field Companies laid mines and the areas to the South and West of the divisional defences were flooded.





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*Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, VrC (Retd.)*

*Source: The General who saved Punjab. <https://m.rediff.com/news/special/the-general-who-saved-punjab-in-the-1965-war/20150907.htm>*

## **The Defense of Khem Karan**

The Pakistani offensive was to be launched in two phases. Phase 1 entailed 11 Infantry Division under Major General Abdul Hamid Khan to establish a Bridgehead across the obstacle system in the area of Khem Karan by first light. In Phase 2, 1 Armoured Division Commanded by GOC Major General Naseer Ahmed was to break out from the Bridgehead in three axes; move into the bridgehead, capture of the line Tarn Taran-Fatehabad, and finally capture of the line Jandiala Guru-Beas Bridges. The break-out operation was to be a two-pronged thrust in which 3 Armoured Brigade under Brigadier Moeen reinforced by 6 Lancers (to be taken from 11 Division after completion of the bridgehead operation). was to advance astride Sobraon Branch Canal and secure the Beas Bridge. 4 Armoured Brigade under Brigadier A. A. Tony Lumb was to advance along Kasur Branch Canal and cut off the Grand Trunk Road at Jandiala Guru. 5 Armoured Brigade under Brigadier Bashir was on reversion from 11 Division, was to be the division reserve. The 12 Cavalry was tasked to initially follow 4 Armoured Brigade and eventually protect the left (Western flank) of the manoeuvre and on its way secure all the bridges on the Kasur Branch, especially those which could sustain tank traffic.

By the afternoon of 07 September, the Pakistani 11 Infantry Division had established a Bridgehead across the Rohi Nala and it captured Khem Karan on 08 September. Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division also started moving to the Bridgehead on the night of 07/08 September, and by 08 September was ready to launch an offensive with a view to capture Harike and the Beas Bridges on the Beas River. The Division comprised four Patton Regiments and five Mechanised Battalions. One Patton Regiment from 11 Infantry Division was also made available to it. It was a formidable force by any yardstick. At 0930 hours on 08 September, a Pakistani Reconnaissance Force comprising two Squadrons of Chaffees, approached 4 Mountain Division position through Ballanwala.

Understanding that Pakistan's superior armour gave them an advantage in open terrain, the Indian Army adopted a clever strategy. Indian forces withdrew from forward positions and established a defensive perimeter around the village of Asal Uttar (meaning "Real Answer" in Hindi), located just East of Khem Karan. Approaching on a broad front, the Pakistani tanks surrounded the Indian defended localities and reached up to the gun area. One Squadron of 9 HORSE immediately moved to block the enemy advance. In the ensuing encounter the Pakistanis lost two Chaffees and withdrew. Meanwhile, Indians continued to prepare defences and by the afternoon of 08 September, three and a half Battalions had dug in around Asal Uttar and laid some mines. The area was low-lying and prone to flooding, a feature Indian engineers exploited to their advantage. They flooded the fields around Asal Uttar, creating a quagmire



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that slowed down the Pakistani tanks and exposed them to Indian artillery and anti-tank fire. The plan was to lure Pakistan's tanks into the swampy terrain, where they would be vulnerable to Indian counterattacks.

At 1445 hours, the Pakistanis again carried out a recce with a Regiment of Pattons. The position of 1/9 GORKHA RIFLES was overrun, but 9 HORSE attacked the Patton Regiment and forced it to withdraw. A diversionary attack by Pattons on 4 GRENADIERS and the gun area was halted in the Rattoke area. The Pakistani move to bypass the defended sector in the North was anticipated by a squadron of 3 CAVALRY, in the Bhikkiwind area. It moved fast to foil the move, inflicted heavy casualties and forced Pakistanis to withdraw. The Indians now anticipated a major armour thrust the next day. 2 (Independent) Armoured Brigade was, therefore, ordered to move up from its concentration area in support of 4 Mountain Division. It was also asked to withdraw 3 Cavalry (less Squadron) from the Chabal Kalan and Rajatal and 8 Cavalry (less Squadron) from the Amritsar bypass to deploy in 4 Mountain Division' Sector. The Brigade was to operate under the command of GOC 4 Mountain Division. All moves were completed on the night of 08/09 September, and the defences were strengthened by laying more mines, and flooding more areas.



*Listening to the ceasefire on a transistor radio at Dibbipura. From Left: Lt Col Arun Vaidya; Commandant Deccan Horse, Maj Reggie Christan; Brigade Maj, Lt Col PC Mehta; Commandant 8 CAV, Lt Col Salim Caleb, Commandant 3 CAV; Brigadier TK Theograj, Commander 2 (I) Armd Bde; and a FAC*

Source: The Patton Wreckers: An account of the actions of 3 Cavalry in the Battle of Asal Uttar-September 1965

At 0200 Hours on 09 September, Pakistan's 4 Armoured Brigade attacked the 18 RAJPUTANA RIFLES position (with two Patton Regiments) utilising moonlight and infrared equipment.



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Even after making a breakthrough, the Patton's were unable to get past Indian defences and were forced to withdraw after sustaining casualties. On 09 September, at 0430 hours, 2 (Independent) Armoured Brigade came under command of 4 Mountain Division. The deployment of troops in 4 Mountain Division Sector on the morning of 09 September was as follows:

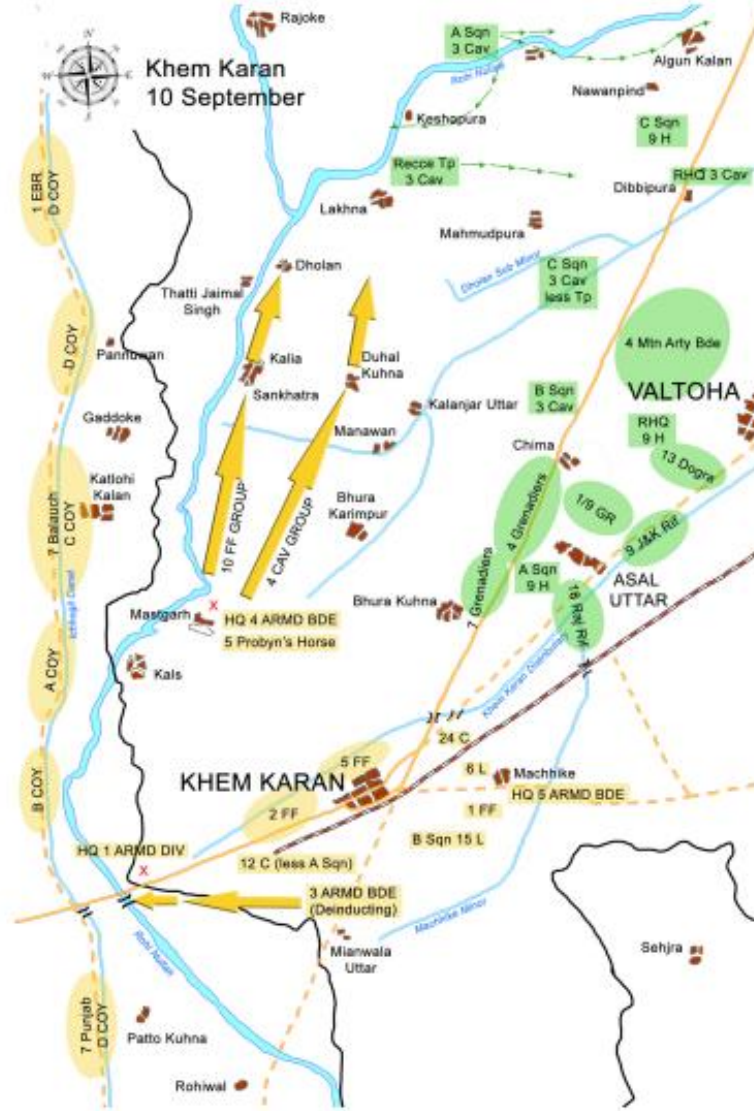
- Three and a half Battalions (out of six) with 9 HORSE less Squadron in the Asal Uttar area, of the Brigade Defended Sector.
- One Squadron 9 HORSE, in between the Brigade-defended Sector and the gun area.
- 3 CAVALRY less two Troops between Dibbipura and Chima. One Squadron 8 CAVALRY East of Valtoha to protect the Southern flank.
- 8 CAVALRY less two Squadrons deployed in the Warnala area in depth.

Unable to overrun 4 GRENADIERS which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Farhat Bhatti position during the early hours on 09 September, the Pakistanis made another attempt at 18 RAJPUTANA RIFLES position during the night. But the Battalion held on and the Indian medium artillery and tanks, positioned in forward defended localities punished them severely. In this encounter Lieutenant Colonel Raghuvir Singh, Commanding Officer of the Battalion, acted boldly and accounted for a good number of Pakistani tanks. He was awarded the Mahavir Chakra for exceptional bravery and leadership.

Pakistan's 3 Armoured Brigade was concentrated in the Manawan area, with the intent to bypass the Indian defences from the North and then cut the GT road in the Jandiala Guru area. Pakistan 4 Armoured Brigade was to advance on the Khem Karan-Patti Road and then along the Sobraon branch- Canal to reach the Beas Road and the rail bridge. A Combat Group (12 Cavalry) from Pakistan's 5 Armoured Brigade was to advance on the Khem Karan-Chabal Kalan axis to protect the left flank of the other two thrusts and isolate Indian 7 Infantry Division. In the follow up action, Pakistan's 11 Infantry Division was to capture and hold the bridge on the Beas and also other tactically important positions. The aim behind unleashing such a powerful force was to capture the Indian territory to the west of the Beas. This, however, was delayed by twelve hours due to some problem at the Rohi Nala bridge, allowing Indians valuable time to organise their defences and deploy additional armour in the threatened area.



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Source: 1965: A Western Sunrise: India's War with Pakistan. Shiv Kunal Verma (2021). Aleph Book Company, New Delhi

At 0330 hours on 10 September, the Pakistani infantry, brought in Armoured Personnel Carriers to probe forward, but withdrew after hitting a mine-field. Pakistani armour, however, continued a reconnaissance during the latter part of the night. By the morning of 10 September, the Pakistanis were in a desperate situation. At 0830 hours on 10 September, a Combat Group from Pakistan's 4 Armoured Brigade was launched against 4 GRENADIERS. A Squadron of 3 CAVALRY was well prepared for such an eventuality. When the line of Pattons exposed itself after negotiating a sugarcane field, the Indian tank gunners responded with deadly accuracy. The tanks managed to overrun the forward trenches. CQMH Abdul Hamid who had



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destroyed three tanks and was shot by the fourth tank. For this act of gallantry, he was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra.



*A RCL jeep in action at Asal Uttar; CQMH Abdul Hamid, PVC (P); Lt A. R. Khan and 2/Lt V. K. Vaid in front of Pattons at Bhikkiwind; Lt Col Raghubir Singh, CO 18 Raj Rif, Lt Col F. Bhatti with troops of 4 Grenadiers with Abdul Hamid's damaged jeep*

Source: 1965: A Western Sunrise: India's War with Pakistan. Shiv Kunal Verma (2021). Aleph Book Company, New Delhi

The attack on 4 GRENADIERS failed, and at 1530 hours, the Pakistani outflanking armour charged on Mahmudpura and they were decimated by the Centurions of 3 Cavalry lying in wait, crushing Pakistan's 1 Armoured Division. On the evening of the same day, an attempt was made on the Eastern axis by enemy armour penetrating close to Headquarters 62 Mountain Brigade and 7 GRENADIERS, which fought relentlessly, compelling withdrawal by enemy armour at 2200 hours. On 11 September, 8 CAVALRY spotted some Pattons near Mahmudpura. These were engaged and the crew fled. Many Pakistanis, including the Commanding Officer of Pakistan's 4 Cavalry, were captured in the sugarcane field.



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*Lieutenant Colonel A S Vaidya, stands atop a destroyed Pakistan Army Patton tank in the Khem Karan Sector during the 1965 Indo-Pak War.*

Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140110175835/http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/LAND-FORCES/Personnel/Chiefs/150-AS-Vaidya.html>

The Pakistani offensive abated completely by the evening. Asal Uttar turned out to be a great victory for 4 Mountain Division. Pakistan had suffered a crushing defeat due to the resolute stance of the Indian troops. 1 Armoured Division, the pride of the Pakistani Army, pushed back to Kasur, badly mauled. Indian troops held firm and the situation was stabilised with heavy losses to Pakistani armour. The bravery of CQMH Abdul Hamid, PVC of 4 GRENADIERS and the outstanding handling of the armour by Brigadier TK Theograj, Commander of 2 (Independent) Armoured Brigade and by Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Salim Caleb, Commandant of 3 CAVALRY and Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Arun Vaidya, Commandant of DECCAN HORSE prevented any enemy ingress and resulted in severe attrition of the attacking forces. Brigadier TK Theograj, Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Salim Caleb and Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Arun Vaidya were decorated with the Maha Vir Chakra for displaying exceptional leadership in the tank battles.

## **Conclusion**

The Battle of Khem Karan, particularly the engagement at Asal Uttar, is celebrated in India as a defining moment in the 1965 war. The Pakistani 1 Armoured Division, despite its numerical and technological superiority, was dealt a crippling blow. Nearly 100 Pakistani tanks, including a large number of Pattons, were destroyed in the ensuing engagements, earning the place its name "Graveyard of Pattons." The battlefield, where the remains of destroyed Pakistani tanks



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still stand as a reminder of the Indian Army's triumph, has become a site of historical importance. A war memorial at Asal Uttar honours the Indian soldiers who laid down their lives in defense of the nation during this pivotal battle.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Battle of Khem Karan was the leadership and tactical ingenuity displayed by the Indian military. Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh's decision to defend Khem Karan at all costs, despite initial setbacks, was a testament to his strategic acumen. Brigadier Theograj's use of the terrain and flooding tactics was a stroke of brilliance that turned the Pakistani armoured superiority into a liability. Pakistan's underestimation of the resilience of Indian forces costed them this battle.

The 1965 war eventually ended on 23 September, with both nations agreeing to a UN-mandated ceasefire. While the conflict ended in a military stalemate, with no significant territorial changes, the Battle of Khem Karan was widely regarded as a clear victory for India. The Indian Army's clever use of terrain, combined with disciplined leadership, turned the tide of battle in its favour. This engagement not only thwarted Pakistan's plans for a major breakthrough but also cemented India's position as a formidable military power in the coming years. The victory at Khem Karan is also a testament to the valour and dedication of the Indian soldiers who defended their homeland with unwavering determination. Their sacrifices ensured that India's territorial integrity remained intact, and the lessons learned from this battle continue to shape the Indian Army's doctrine to this day.





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