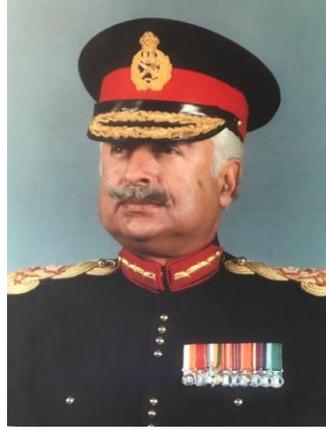




रक्षा मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE



MAJOR GENERAL (THEN LIEUTENANT COLONEL) SHAMSHER SINGH

SERVICE NUMBER	IC-7018Y
RANK	Major General (then Lieutenant Colonel)
NAME	Shamsheer Singh
SON OF	Dr. Sardar Harbans Singh
RESIDENT OF (Village/District/State)/ DOMICILE	Rajpur, Dehradun, Uttarakhand
UNIT/REGIMENT/CORPS	8 GUARDS
SERVICE	Indian Army
DATE OF ENROLMENT/ COMMISSION	04 December 1954
AWARD/DATE OF ACTION	Maha Vir Chakra/ December 1971
WAR/BATTLE/OPERATION	Indo-Pak War of 1971
OTHER AWARDS WITH DATE	

Major General (then Lieutenant Colonel) Shamsheer Singh was born on 21 July 1934 in Lahore District of present day Pakistan. Major General Shamsheer Singh is a scion of a distinguished family with rich military traditions. He is the grandson of Sardar Bahadur Sardar Basawa Singh and the son of (Dr) Sardar Bahadur Sardar Harbans Singh. His father on completion of higher studies in Medicine in England joined the British Army for Military Service during World War II, and later, on his return joined the Medical Service in India. His mother Sardarni Tej Prakash Kaur dedicated herself in the service of the nation and looking after the families of the Armed Forces and distinguished herself as a Lady Civil Liaison Officer during World War II. After Independence, she was co-opted by Smt. Kamala Nehru to help the country in the recovery of women abducted during the Partition and rehabilitation and resettlement of multitude of refugees. His brother Major General Harkirat Singh had the singular honour of being appointed the General Officer Commanding Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka. His Uncle was one of the top most Generals of the Indian Army, Major General Atma Singh.



Young Shamsheer Singh as a Second Lieutenant

Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

Selected to join the Fifth Course Joint Services Wing of the Indian Military Academy, General Shamsheer Singh was awarded the Silver Medal for his commendable all round performance in being declared the Best All Round Cadet of his batch in 1952. On completion of his training at the Indian Military Academy he was commissioned into the 'Brigade of the GUARDS', an honour conferred then on a selected few only. He was commissioned into 3 GUARDS (1st RAJPUT). From 3 GUARDS he was posted to the Military Operations Directorate at Army Headquarters. Transferred to 8 GUARDS in December 1964, he commanded the battalion with distinction.

The Brigade of The GUARDS is a Regiment of the Indian Army. The Regiment was formed in 1949 as the first mixed class Indian regiment by Field Marshal KM Cariappa OBE. Four of Army's oldest Battalions - 2 PUNJAB, 1 GRENADIERS, 1 RAJ RIF and 1 RAJPUT were converted as the GUARDS Battalions in 1949. At the moment, the Regiment consists of 19 Battalions. The majority of these operate as Mechanised Infantry. During the first war of Kashmir 1 RAJPUT (4 GUARDS) showed their mettle in the battle of Taindhar, where Naik Jadunath Singh fought valiantly and won the first Param Vir Chakra for his Regiment. During the 1971 Indo-Pak War, the Regiment earned its second Param Vir Chakra through Lance Naik Albert Ekka of 14 GUARDS for heroism in Gangasagar in the Eastern Theatre in 1971.

Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh took over the command of the 8th Battalion, Brigade of the GUARDS from Lieutenant Colonel TS Grewal in Ukhrul, Nagaland in 1969. On taking over command, in his Order of the Day, Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh promised the Eighth to take it from "strength to strength". He fulfilled his promise and the Battalion was given the title of the 'Honour Battalion' by the Divisional Commander Major General ZC Bakshi, MVC, VrC, VSM, for its outstanding performance in Nagaland.

1971 Indo-Pak War

The 1971 Indo-Pak War began with Pakistan launching pre-emptive air strikes against 11 Indian airbases on 03 December 1971. The war was forced upon due to widespread genocide of people of East Pakistan carried out by an oppressive military regime under General Yahya Khan of Pakistan. The war, which was short and intense, was fought on both Eastern and Western fronts. The 13 days war resulted in complete surrender of Pakistan forces and the creation of Bangladesh. The Indian Armed Forces reigned supreme over the Pakistani military in the battle field. The Battle of Poonch is one of the most notable battles which were fought on the western sector.¹

20 Mountain Division, under the leadership of Major General Lachhman Singh Lehl, VrC, a distinguished veteran from the 1947 Indo-Pak conflict, was designated for operations in the Bogra Sector. The Division comprised several Infantry Formations including 66 Mountain Brigade, 165 Mountain Brigade, 202 Mountain Brigade, and 340 Mountain Brigade. Besides these they also had three Armoured Regiments under Brigadier Armour 33 Corps, 471 Engineer Brigade, and two Artillery Brigades with additional support from 33 Corps Artillery. 202 Mountain Brigade was tasked with the strategic objective of capturing Hilli, a crucial border town in the Western Sector of East Pakistan.

202 Mountain Brigade was commanded by Brigadier Farhat Bhatti, VSM who during the Battle of Asal Uttar in 1965 was commanding 4 GRENADIERS. Among its three Infantry Battalions, 8 GUARDS was tasked with capturing the Northern defences of Hilli, specifically in Morapara Village, with 5 GARHWAL RIFLES in reserve. The third Battalion, 22 MARATHA LI, later secured Baigram to the North of Hilli. Support for the attack on Morapara by 8 GUARDS included a Medium Artillery Regiment (less one Battery), two Field Artillery Regiments, a Light Battery, and a Squadron of 63 Cavalry equipped with T-55 tanks. Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh was the Commanding Officer of 8 GUARDS.

¹ Vijay Diwas Celebration at National War Memorial Southern Command Pune, Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, 16 December 2020. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1681094>

In May 1971, 8 GUARDS was deployed in Cooch Bihar. From Cooch Bihar Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh was deputed to train the Mukti Bahini. He said in Nov 1971, "Foreseeing the clouds of war because of the Pakistanis nefarious activities and re enforcement by them of that area in large numbers, a Divisional attack was planned. But our superiors felt instead of a divisional attack, a brigade would launch an attack. My brigade was chosen to go in. A day before the attack, it was decided that instead of a brigade, only a battalion would be launched. Brig F Bhatti tasked 8 GUARDS to spearhead the national offensive. When we got the information, I can swear that each man of my battalion was overawed by the fact that ours was the first battalion chosen to carry an attack by our country."

"It was a national campaign and we were the chosen few. Casualty or no casualty; Pakistani resistance or no resistance -- with that kind of spirit and without seeking anything, we went in."



Recce Team under Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh before attack on Morapara

Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

Hilli town was divided by the International Border, with the Indian side housing the town itself and the Pakistani side consisting of sparse villages and open paddy fields. Surrounding Hilli were villages like Basudeopur, Chandipur, Moaoana, and Morapara. The defences of Hilli were held by the 205 Infantry Brigade of the Pakistan Army. Specifically, 4 Frontier Force (FF) troops were stationed there along with a Reconnaissance & Support Platoon from 34 PUNJAB. They were supported by six field guns of 80 Field Regiment, three M-24 tanks from 29 Cavalry, two jeep-mounted Anti-Tank Recoilless Rifles, one Platoon of the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces, and around fifty Mujahids. The Pakistani forces had extensively prepared and fortified their defences over a long period, anticipating an assault from the Indian side. Their positions were well entrenched and stocked, ready to withstand an Indian attack.

The complete Pak defensive posture was being transformed into an aggressive defence. The Pakistanis had carefully prepared the defences of Hilli, over the past few months. What followed therefore when 8 GUARDS went into action was, what was to be expected – a determined elite force attacking a well defended position; and both sides equally determined to fight it out irrespective of casualties suffered by them.

We had no reconnaissance, because Pakistan was not to know. Usually an offensive is carried out after a great deal of reconnaissance -- aerial and on foot -- but here it was not possible because we were not allowed to cross the border. Hence our assessment of the enemy positions and the terrain was based on distant observation and information from Mukti Bahini and the locals. Up to this time, we were under strict orders to ensure that no regular troops of ours were sent across the border under any circumstances. Such an order naturally barred any patrolling by our own troops. This led to superficial assessment of enemy strength, dispositions, obstacles and layout of weapons. The border was a railway line. We only crossed it when we launched our attack. Pakistan on the other side was continuously pushing in troops to reinforce the position. They were prepared to fight till the last.



Captain Sheryar Khan of Mukti Bahini briefing Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh & Captain PT Ghogale

Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

The main objective of the Indian Army was to capture Bogra, which would isolate Pakistani forces in Northern East Pakistan. The most viable route to Bogra was through Hilli. The offensive began on the night of November 22/23 led by 202 Mountain Brigade, initiated ten days prior to the formal declaration of war between India and Pakistan. Before the midnight assault on 22 November, Indian artillery heavily targeted Pakistani defences, although it was later found that the fortifications were so robust that only a few bunkers were affected by the shelling. Around 0100 hours, amidst ongoing artillery fire, the attack commenced with two

Companies from 8 GUARDS leading the charge. As Indian troops advanced towards their objective, they encountered intense Machine Gun fire from well-prepared Pakistani defences. 8 GUARDS attacked with determination and unconventional tactics. In the initial stages the Battalion fought the battles of Noapara on 23 November and Morapara from 23 to 25 November.

The Company Commanders of 8 GUARDS displayed remarkable bravery and leadership, leading their men through challenging terrain and perilous obstacles. They fearlessly took charge at the forefront, urging their soldiers to follow suit. Throughout the night of November 23/24, they encountered mines, barbed wire, booby traps, and waded through waist-deep water. "We fought on with only one thing in mind -- that this is a National battle. This is the first attack by Indian troops and we must not let the Pakistanis get the better of us," said Shamsheer. The combat evolved into intense hand-to-hand fighting, with the situation remaining fluid into the early hours. We suffered enormous casualties -- Officers, Junior Commissioned Officers, and Guardsmen.

When the wounded were taken to the hospital where they were met by Major General Lachhman Singh, PVSM, VrC, he said "I went to see our wounded in the Field Hospital on 24 November. One of the wounded NCOs of 8 GUARDS told me that he was anxious to get back to his unit to carry on the fight. He was very happy and told me that when I visit Morapara, I should check if any Guardsman was lying dead with his back to the enemy. He was certain that I would find no one like that. All dead would be facing the enemy. How right he was! No wonder that this Battalion fought so well". The men had taken bullets in the chest which meant that they were determined to fight and defeat the Pakistanis.

The move forward to establish a firm base at Ghasuria commenced after last light on 22 November, and by 1800 hours B Company under command of Major Ravinder Nath had completed the task without any difficulty. This was to be the kick-off point across the border for D Company following close behind. D Company under Major KK Rao, stepped out at 18.30 hours to secure the forming up place (FUP) in area approximately 800 meters north of Noapara and proceeded along a track north of Nandipur and Handia Pokhari villages. The move was preceded by patrols to ensure security of the column. D Company established itself across the railway line and fanned out to the east to secure the FUP. This was followed by the move in and forming up of C Company for attack on Noapara and positioning of A and B Companies in Handia Pokhari as reserves.

The Battle of Noapara

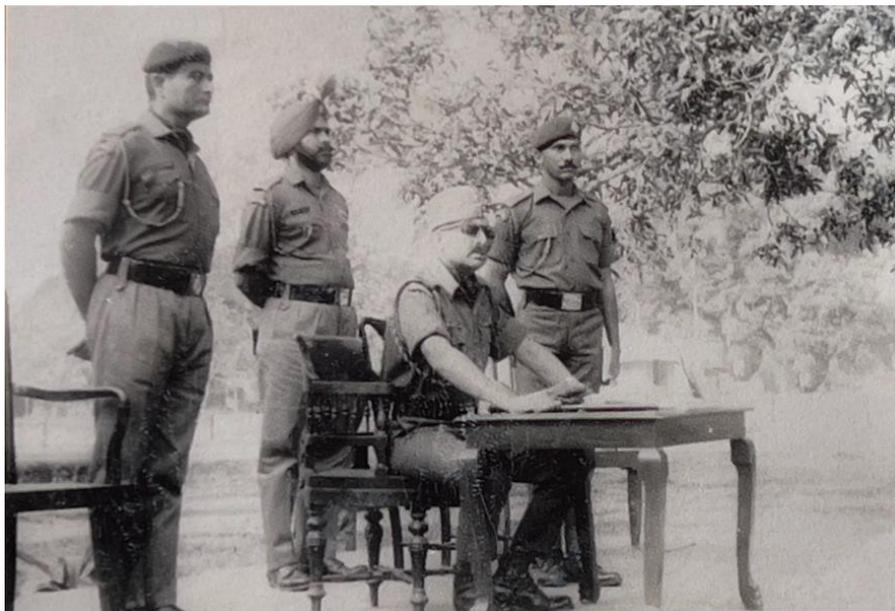
We launched our first attack on Noapara, north of Hilli. Pakistan had reinforced that area with a brigade, while we were just a battalion attacking a brigade -- this is something that never happens. C Company, with Major PP Singh in command, launched itself to attack Noapara with complete stealth. However, in their endeavor to surround the village they encountered extensive marshy and boggy areas, paddy fields with standing water and numerous ponds. These impediments permitted the surprised enemy to slip away towards Bisapara under cover of darkness, but they left behind their equipment and ammunition. The company had encountered mines and booby-traps and 4 guardsman sustained serious injuries from mine blasts. Major PP Singh escaped narrowly as a fragmentation mine accounted for his radio operator and orderly.

The mine blast acted as a signal and drew heavy machine-gun fire from the railway embankment positions of the Pakistanis. Completing a house to house search, Noapara was secured within two hours.

The Battle of Morapara

Hilli was so well defended by Pakistani soldiers that every house, every inch of ground was fortified. The Indian troops led by Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh fought a pitched battle. In Morapara more than 70 bunkers with anti-tank and anti-personnel mines and automatic weapons formed a strong defensive position. The ground was low lying and marshy with high paddy crop especially around Noapara and Morapara. The area had not been attended to by the peasants since long and had become boggy with knee to waist deep water in most places. The paddy was still standing which besides impeding movement, effectively screened distant observation to ascertain the state of ground.

The villages in this area mostly mud huts, were approximately 500-800 yards apart and most of them had a number of ponds all around and inside the village. These had been developed into an obstacle belt around the village with little effort. The enemy fully exploited the defence potential of these villages and developed them into veritable strong points interlinked with communication trenches which had been stocked, prepared and strengthened over a protracted period. Built up areas surrounded by marshes and dense groves had been converted into strong points to contain and neutralize thrusts aimed at achieving a breakthrough in this sector. Practically every house was fortified and every mound burrowed through to make it a shell-proof pillbox. Mines were laid along all approaches. Booby traps and wire were also used extensively. Heavy machine-guns were sited on the flanks to cover gaps in the defences as also on the roof tops and trees. These strongpoints cleverly sited, well removed to the flanks of the possible objectives, played a decisive role in inflicting casualties out of all proportion on our attacking troops.



Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh addressing the Battalion before attack on MORAPARA

After the capture of Noapara, A and B Companies moved forward for the assault on Morapara. They were wading through waist deep water and encountered very heavy going. The assault was further impeded by anti-personnel mines and wire. Bobby-traps and grenades attached to the wire made it a formidable obstacle. Slowed down by the obstacles, the assault echelons encountered devastating fire from a large number of artillery fire, machine-gun fire and other automatic weapons. The enemy had reinforced the threatened flank and was now bringing down all available fire to bear upon the attacking companies. Both companies however continued to inch forward with grim determination, and continued their advance. The company commander Major HD Manjrekar of the right assault A Company was at the head of the assault echelon as they encountered the wire obstacle and mines in addition to the bog through which they forced themselves in knee deep water.

The situation was further aggravated by heavy machine-gun and small arms opening up a murderous fire on the assault troops. Nevertheless, by sheer grit, determination and cold courage, this gallant and brave officer ordered his men to follow him. Near the objective he was hit by a heavy machine-gun burst but he continued to lead his troops. Finally another burst got him on the head and on the chest as he was lobbing a grenade to silence the gun that got him. It was his sheer drive and raw courage that enabled his company to gain a foothold on the objective. It was indeed travesty of justice that this epitome of courage and intrepidity, recommended for the highest gallantry award by the unit, failed to get any recognition for this superlative action. By now, all his three platoon commanders were casualties – 2nd Lt SS Samra and 2nd Lt PN Gupta were killed and Nb Sub Avval Singh wounded.



Major HD Manjrekar pointing out MORAPARA and PAK Hilli

Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

2nd Lt Shamsheer Singh Samra who was leading the left assault platoon, was only twenty metres from the enemy defences when he came under withering crossfire of two HMGs. The first burst was received by him on the right side of his chest. Unmindful, unhesitating and uncaring for his wounds, this young officer charged into the nearest HMG bunker and lobbed his first grenade. He had removed the pin of the second grenade when he was mortally wounded. At this time of falling to the ground, he had the pose of clutching at the side of the bunker while

trying desperately to throw the grenade. He was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra posthumously for the part he played in this attack. In the first wave of attack Guardsman Kailash Nath Tiwari was wounded, but with dogged determination, courage and presence of mind continued to fight hand to hand. The enemy HMG on the eastern flank of Morapara was inflicting heavy casualties on the surviving men who had penetrated onto the objective. Although already wounded, displaying cold courage, grit and devotion to the cause, he rushed to the bunker and killed the crew with a grenade. He then picked up the HMG along with ammunition and rushed out. At this juncture the company was spread out on the objective and the situation was obscure. While trying to rush towards an enemy bunker, he was again fired upon by the enemy. He returned the fire and killed a Pakistani soldier who was assaulting towards him. He again charged into another enemy bunker and was shot down but not before he had lobbed a grenade to silence yet another enemy HMG. He was later found still clinging to the HMG that he had captured.

Another young officer, Lt P N Gupta, who was doing a great job in trying to preserve what we had captured, fought through the objective from bunker to bunker to obtain a foot-hold. Each individual rose to dizzy heights of valour in utter disregard of personal safety and unhesitatingly charged the enemy, grappling with them in hand to hand combat till he too was hit and died fighting bravely.

In spite of the loss of the officers and several other casualties suffered during the assault, the men inspired by their leaders' personal examples and acts of bravery of the highest magnitude continued to move forward. Determination and dash of all officers and men projected the will to win. Many acts of gallantry, grit, and determination were shown, and many performed great acts of self-sacrificing leadership and pressed on the assault till death over took them.

The other assaulting B Company also experienced similar stiff resistance and heavy fire from the enemy as they approached Morapara. The company commander Major Ravinder Nath went in like a bull into the heavily dominated Pakistani position along with his troops. He took a bullet. It went through his chest and shoulder, but he carried on fighting and encouraging his troops to move on. He refused to be evacuated and continued to lead his company forward until the commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh reached there and ordered his evacuation. Another instance was that of Captain Surinder Kumar Bansal, who commanded the left forward platoon. He fought his way through till he reached the depth objective. The tenuous hold on the flank was entirely due to the leadership of this young officer. For his boldness, young Bansal was mentioned in despatches. One of the platoon commanders, Nb Sub Mohd Nayeem was commanding a platoon during B Company assault. So aggressive was his leadership that despite intense enemy fire, his platoon was the first on the objective. In spite of the LMG burst on his left arm, he pressed on with the assault. While clearing the LMG post he was shot in the leg. He fell to the ground but continued to exhort his men forward. He was fired upon again and received a bullet in the chest. He lay in a pool of blood throughout the night. As dawn broke he could discern three of the enemy withdrawing. Calling upon all his reserve he rose to his knees and fired at them, killing one. The others turned to face this challenge. Finding that he had expended the last of his ammunition, he tried to close with the enemy with his bayonet. He was found dead with a bullet through his heart.

Sub Raj Bahadur Singh was with the assaulting troops leading his men through heavy artillery and machine-gun fire when he was wounded by a mine. Undaunted, he continued to crawl

forward towards the nearest machine-gun and attacked it with a grenade and silenced it. Unable to move, he continued to exhort his men to move forward. He soon succumbed to his injuries. For his outstanding feat of bravery and exemplary leadership he was awarded the Vir Chakra, posthumously.

Assessing the situation amidst this heavy fighting in the dead of the night was an extremely difficult task for the commanding officer. But Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh kept his cool, and moving from place to place at great personal risk, appreciated that the time had come to launch D company of Major KK Rao to complete the capture of Morapara. In a fast and furious encounter, this company began the formidable task of clearing bunkers. With audacity, cunning and verve, Major KK Rao led his men into the nest of hidden heavy machine-guns in the complex. He received a bullet injury in his thigh in the early moments of the assault, but he pressed on leading his men into the village where most houses were smouldering as a result of intense shell fire. Elevated HMGs from inside the safety of houses were firing relentlessly, making progress a hazardous task. Consequently hand to hand fighting ensued and bunker-bursting teams went into action with devastating effect. Major KK Rao, rushing forward to destroy a bunker with grenades, was hit squarely by an MMG burst. He refused to be evacuated to safety lest his troops falter. Even as he fell mortally wounded, he urged his men forward. For his supreme sacrifice in this daring assault he was awarded the Sena Medal, posthumously.

When Major Rao was killed, his gallant second in command of D company Captain VS Sharma was in the thick of battle, marshalling his force. As ammunition ran low, he occupied some of the Pakistani communication trenches, and from there launched a series of raids to bayonet the enemy in their bunkers. With a fine sense of timing, he finally launched a charge and broke out with about thirty of his men. For this conspicuous act of gallantry, Captain Vishnu Swarup Sharma was awarded the Vir Chakra.

L/Nk Ram Ugrah Pandey of D Company played a crucial role in these operations. He lobbed a grenade into the first bunker of the advancing line. Having silenced the bunker, he rushed for the second and managed to silence that too. As the momentum lagged he grabbed a rocket launcher and blasted the third bunker. He personally shot three Pak soldiers before an enemy rocket blew him into bits. For the most heroic deed and exemplary valour displayed by him, he was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra, posthumously.

Unknown to each other, small teams and sections were fighting in isolated pockets, capitalizing on the existing crawl and communication trenches. Each held onto the ground won without knowing the situation around them. Junior leadership was seen at its best. New leaders sprang up as old ones fell. LMGs were manned, bunker bursting teams organized and savage charges were led to exterminate the dogged enemy resistance. The savagery of the assault and the intensity of clashes was writ large on each face, each dead body indicating the last ounce of effort expended to overcome the opposition to reach the allotted objective. Many acts of gallantry, grit, and determination were shown.

By dawn, the situation had deteriorated beyond all comprehension. The companies had suffered heavy casualties. One company was holding parts of Morapara and two had to step back in view of Pakistani counter attacks. The tanks had failed to join the battle. D company had run out of ammunition and attempts to re-supply the companies became extremely hazardous during the

day.

Given below in the words of the GOC Major General Lachhman Singh PVSM, VrC:

“All efforts to re-supply ammunition had failed. I told Bhattu to use tanks more boldly and send ammunition through tanks. I was shocked to learn at this stage that the tanks had never reached the objective and were stuck in the marsh about a hundred meters on our own side of the border. I had been assured that tanks would be able to support this attack without any difficulty. I learnt later that the tank driver had come on ERE and lacked adequate experience of driving T55 tanks. The second tank tried to go past it and also got stuck. After that the Armoured Regt commanding officer got busy trying to extricate the tanks, while 8 GUARDS were fighting their desperate battle. I at once ordered a squadron of PT 76 tanks to move at maximum speed from Patiram to Morapara. I went up to the command post of Bhattu to discuss further plans. On the way I passed a number of jawans from 8 GUARDS who were lying along the way, but there were no officers with them. I did not know at this stage that most of their officers had already been killed or were wounded. Shamsheer was also not with them as he was busy trying to organize evacuation of the wounded. This gallant officer had moved from company to company in an effort to inspire his men through-out the night despite very heavy fire from enemy artillery and Machine-guns. He returned the next day only after he had collected most of his men for yet another assault against Morapara.”



Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh with Brig Farhad Bhattu, Cdr, at DINAJPUR

Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh quickly and ably took the situation in hand, collected the remnants of his shattered companies and regrouped them for yet another attempt to capture Morapara with C Company of Major PP Singh. The Pakistani Battalion at Morapara continued to remain under pressure from the 8 GUARDS. Unmindful of the consequences and knowing fully well the casualties suffered by A, B and D Companies during the previous night, Major PP Singh and his company supported by another 200 men of the battalion rushed through the

minefield at about 5am the next morning under intense shelling and observed machine-gun fire from the Morapara defences which were barely 200 meters away. Undeterred, Major PP Singh finally captured the remaining part of Morapara. The company was strafed while advancing towards the objective. Yet, the men moved undeterred through various obstacles. 2nd Lt KS Roy Jain successfully occupied the western part of Morapara. Sub Charan Singh who had led the rear platoon rushed to the southern end of Morapara whilst still being heavily shelled and interfered with from Chandipur. In the meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh reinforced C Company as best as he could with the remaining personnel. The fleeing enemy troops were engaged as they tried to reach Chandipur. It all happened in one night -- in pitch darkness that we finally accomplished the capture of Morapara and the casualties strewn on and around the objective told their own story and reflected the savagery of the action. Twenty-five of the enemy were found dead on the objective. The dead included the company commander Major Akram who was later awarded the highest Pakistani award for gallantry, the Nishan-e-Haider, posthumously.

Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh, the Commanding Officer of 8 GUARDS, led his men boldly in this attack. The enemy had put up formidable defences with well-coordinated Artillery Tank and Machine Gun fire combined with mines, wire, and booby traps. In spite of strong opposition from the enemy the Battalion managed to get a foothold on the objective and held on to it, notwithstanding heavy casualties in bunker-to-bunker fighting. The enemy launched a series of counter attacks during which the Battalion ran short of ammunition. Undaunted, Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh engaged in hand-to-hand fighting. He personally directed his troops by moving from place to place and he encouraged his men to hold on to their positions. Simultaneously, he arranged for Artillery and Medium Machine Gun support. After regrouping his Battalion, he launched a fresh attack and despite heavy opposition, succeeded in capturing the objective inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy.



Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh inspecting the remnants of MORAPARA after the Battle

Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

“It was a battle of attrition won by the 8 GUARDS which gained its objective by sheer

determination, grit and display of cold courage. How well the battalion did and how much it suffered during the fighting of one night may be gauged from the fact that it lost 68 killed and 153 wounded. Each officer of mine was a very brave officer. One gets overawed. I single them out because they laid down their lives.” Says Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh.

In view of the very heavy casualties sustained by the battalion in the fighting of two days, viz., sixty killed and eighty-nine wounded, the brigade and divisional commanders contemplated pulling out the battalion for reorganisation and recuperation. Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh politely but firmly declined this offer. The survivors were by now fully blooded and looked forward to an opportunity to avenge the death of their brave comrades who had died so valiantly.

Having accomplished the eviction of the crack Pakistani 4th Frontier Force from Noapara and Morapara, 8 GUARDS commenced to re-site the defences to meet a possible counter attack. Each individual including officers and JCOs helped to move ammunition to the new defences facing south and east. Fresh mines and wires were laid over an area where the extent of old mine fields was not known and many approaches were full of booby traps. Most of the digging, evacuation of casualties, and replenishment had to be carried out during the hours of darkness. Captain PT Ghogale, the adjutant, also helped in lifting ammunition, and arranging speedy evacuation of casualties. Unfortunately the PT-76 tanks only fetched up after the capture of Morapara and that too only two tanks reached Morapara. One of these tanks received a direct hit and was destroyed. The second tank got bogged down east of Morapara, and left the area soon afterwards. Thereafter, all tanks remained west of the railway line throughout the following eighteen days.



Captured Ammunition at the HILLI Rly Station in background

Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

The fighting at Morapara received wide publicity in the national press as would be evident from a clipping from the Hindustan Times dated 13 December 1971. (Morapara was also called Mahapara). Excerpt from the clipping is given below:

Mahapara witnessed Fierce Encounter Khaprail, Bangladesh.

DEC 13 (UNI) – “Long after the current fighting in the sub – continent is over, the battle of Mahapara which held the key to the capture of Hilli, will be discussed as one of the fiercest confrontations between Indian and Pakistani Forces.”

On 11 December, in the battles of Chandipur, High School, & Pak Hilli, the enemy fought delaying actions.

Capture of Chandipur

Chandipur was a thickly wooded and densely built up area. It was heavily defended and protected by obstacles of all types. Lieutenant Colonel Shamsher Singh first sent two raiding parties on the night of the 10 December - one from the west and the other from the north-east. While the raid in the west destroyed a machine-gun bunker during the night, it was the commando platoon led by young 2nd Lt KS Roy Jain that completely surprised the defenders. 2nd Lt KS Roy Jain captured the embankment bordering the north eastern edge of the Pakistani defences by 4.30am on 11th December. As he continued to engage them, C Company under the aggressive and inspiring leadership of Major PP Singh which was ready in the rear rushed in to isolate them. Major PP Singh carried out this task boldly with courage and speed. The Pakistanis panicked and withdrew towards the Girls' High School to the south east of the village. Lieutenant Colonel Shamsher Singh was moving with the C Company and he decided to take full advantage of the sudden weakening of the enemy and pressed on with quickly prepared attacks. He ordered Captain Umang Seth's B Company and Major SS Saini's D Company to follow C Company.

Capture of High School Area

Major PP Singh moved C Company forward. While 2nd Lt KS Roy Jain in the lead with his commandos enveloped the Pakistanis from the east, Major PP Singh and his company charged into the High school area. His company completely threw the enemy off balance. They vacated the area with C Company in hot pursuit. From now onwards it was constant pressure against the enemy. Lieutenant Colonel Shamsher Singh kept chasing and pushing the enemy into Pak Hilli. Such was the speed of this advance that the enemy withdrew towards Hakimpur without further resistance. Boldness and speed was their motto.

Capture of Pak Hilli

The part of Hilli town was across the Jamuna in Pakistan and was referred to as Pak-Hilli. C Company launched another attack, this time on Pak-Hilli where the Pakistanis had managed to occupy a layback position. C Company had suffered heavy casualties in these attacks due to artillery and automatic fire. But their indomitable spirit was at its highest. The valour and determination of Major PP Singh earned him a Mention in Despatches.



CO'S rover crossing a modified boat bridge on the Jamuna River

Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

Capture of Hakimpur

Hakimpur lies to the east of the High School area on the main road. There was no stopping the 8 GUARDS now. Such was the enthusiasm of the troops that the Guardsman followed on the heels of the enemy into Hakimpur defences. It was the turn of B and D companies (Captain Umang Seth and Major SS Saini) to capture Hakimpur. There were no elaborate plans and there was no forming up as in a normal conventional attack. Making use of the cover provided by thick foliage and trees, the troops closed onto the enemy to destroy him. Such was the fury of the attack that the Pakistanis withdrew to Dangapara, 400 meters to the east of Hakimpur. They covered their withdrawal with heavy fire. It was here that D Company suffered many wounded.

Capture of Dangapara

It was necessary to hold Hakimpur for which Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer had only the D Company under Major SS Saini left for this task. Captain Iqbal Singh pushed his machine-guns, recoilless guns and mortars over an open ground of 400 meters crawling through slush and mines and was instrumental in destroying an enemy tank and MMG bunkers. Under the cover provided by the battalion supporting weapons, Major SS Saini infiltrated with his company to within 100 meters of the enemy. By about 3.30pm (11th December), the company charged the defenders so swiftly and aggressively that the Pakistani troops were unnerved, and withdrew in panic.

With the support of tanks, the Pakistanis counter attacked Dangapara. Major SS Saini brought down all available artillery fire within 100 meters of his defences. This checked the attackers

who beat a hasty retreat. Once again, D Company pursued them to the edge of the village. Barely had the company regained its positions when it was counter-attacked the second time by enemy tanks approaching Dangapara with speed from the east and with their guns blazing. Once again, Major SS Saini and his D Company stood their ground. The recoilless guns checked the advance of the tanks. Finally, as the light faded, the recoilless gun crew manoeuvred close to a tank located in Dangapara and destroyed it. The other tank sought to clear out of the village under covering fire of the tanks to the south and east of Dangapara. These were engaged by the medium artillery which destroyed one tank. After this the remaining tanks beat a hasty retreat. We moved on company by company -- something many armies would not think of -- fighting a superior enemy with a mere battalion, or a mere company, but we carried on till the last objective Dangapara had been captured by one of gallant officers Major SS Saini.



The enemy in a surprise counter-attack with tanks tried to regain the position but was beaten back with the help of artillery fire and recoilless guns

Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

The capture of Dangapara broke the back of the Pak defenders. The 8 GUARDS captured it without the support of tanks. With its capture, the Pakistani defences in the Hilli Complex were liquidated. The casualties suffered by the 8 GUARDS in the fighting of 11th December bear testimony to the intensity of the fighting. Six ORs were killed and thirty four wounded.

The battalion's selfless devotion, fortitude and indomitable courage is difficult to put into words. It would suffice to say in the words of Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh: "The major brunt of some ten battles in Hilli sector were borne by this battalion which had the unique honour to fight seven of them. The battle of Hilli was the bloodiest battle fought in East Pakistan. Though our losses have been heavy, a glorious chapter in the history of The Eighth has been written in blood. It shall forever bear testimony to the supreme sacrifice made by the brave and valiant officers and men of the battalion. May the soul of our martyrs rest in eternal

peace in the knowledge that their noble and supreme sacrifice has not gone in vain. The saga of untold bravery, courage, valour and sacrifice will inspire the Eighth to greater glory.”

The Commanding Officer’s inspiring leadership helped the 8 GUARDS capture seven objectives by the end of the war. His Mahavir Chakra citation pays tribute to his conduct in battle where he engaged in close combat, moved from place to place between enemy positions personally directing his troops, and encouraging them to hold on to their positions. Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh believes, that if an officer is fighting from the front, his troops fight four times over and above that. If you see various actions fought by the Indian Army, in any battle, the officers lead their troops. The battalion commander is not supposed to sit in his bunker, he goes in with his troops. If he has good luck, he survives. If he doesn’t, he doesn’t. “There was my intelligence Havaldar who was following me. I was walking ahead through waist deep water. He was behind me -- I crossed, but he stepped on a mine. He was wounded badly, but he survived.

In another instance, I still remember I was standing with artillery forward observation OP Major Bhardwaj, the battery commander and a shell landed between us. His stomach came out, he was hit in his legs, but nothing happened to me. Till destiny decides, you can carry on through whatever fire.” He proudly said: “Each soldier was my brother in arms. We fought together and achieved glory for India. We fought on with only one thing in mind -- that this is a national battle and we must not let the Pakistanis get the better of us.”

The 8 GUARDS next advanced to Ghoraghat, Saidpur and thence to Rangpur. On 12 December morning it was at Nasirabad. It was then ordered to move to Fatehpur. One Pakistani company deployed in the area of the bridge at Fatehpur waived a white flag signifying its desire to surrender. The battalion was 6 kilometers short of Rangpur and awaited orders to participate in the surrender ceremony of the Rangpur garrison.



Advance to DINAJPUR after MORAPARA & DANGAPARA

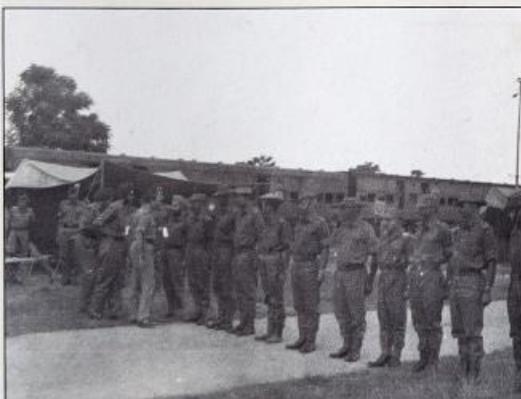
Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

By 18 December, the 8 GUARDS found itself at Dinajpur to help maintain law and order and protect the lives of the Bihari Muslims. The men patrolled the surrounding areas to prevent loot, murder and arson. On 20th December, vast throngs of jubilant men and women gathered at the parade ground where the new leader raised the flag of Bangladesh.

The Battle of Hilli, which raged before the commencement of Indo-Pak War was one of the fiercest battles of the 1971 War. The then Army Commander, Eastern Command, Lt Gen JS Arora, PVSM, had called Hilli the bloodiest battle in the then East Pakistan. 8 GUARDS kept on pushing with their advance, but the Battalion lost 68 men in the Battle of Hilli—all killed in action.



The battle hardened heroes after the Victory



Source: Jyotika Shamsheer Singh

On 5th January 1972, the Corps Commander Lt Gen ML Thapan, PVSM visited the battalion and praised the role of the 8 GUARDS in the capture of the Hilli Complex.

The Battalion captured three Chaffee tanks, 46 personal arms, 21 vehicles, one wireless set, spare machine-gun barrels, 1, 50,000 rounds of various types and 500 bombs/shells.

An extract from Gen Moti Sagar's letter, amply highlights the gallant deeds of the Battalion:

“The magnificence of your Battalion and action at Hilli is incredible. How well it performed, under the outstanding leadership of its distinguished Commander. Such an action should find a very prominent place in the history of our army”.

The Eighth was conferred with the most prestigious recognition of valour in battle for its saga of bravery, courage and sacrifice. We proudly don the title of “The Eighth of Hilli” and “Triple MVC Battalion” for the accolade of “Battle Honour Hilli” earned in 1971 Indo-Pak War. We were also conferred with the “Theatre Honour – East Pakistan” as a mark of aforesaid recognition.

The Battalion under his command was accorded the National Recognition for valour and given the singular honour of leading the Victory Parade on 26th January 1972 down Rajpath through India Gate to Red Fort.



Lieutenant Colonel Shamsher Singh with the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

Source: Jyotika Shamsher Singh

During his long and distinguished career, spanning about four decades, he served with distinction in most operational areas including Nagaland, Western Desert, Ladakh and Kashmir and provided bold and inspiring Combat Leadership during active operations. He has several professional courses to his credit and has the singular honour of distinguishing himself and topping in each one of them. A graduate from the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, and an alumnus of the National Defence College, he has successfully held a wide and varied range of important Command, Staff and Instructional assignments. He has also served as a Senior Instructor at the Staff College, Wellington and as our AMA at Moscow (USSR).

He distinguished himself in the Command of 114 Infantry Brigade in High Altitude area in Ladakh and subsequently in the Western Desert. He was later promoted General Officer Commanding of the prestigious 19 Infantry Division in a highly volatile LFC environment in Kashmir. He was appointed Chief of Staff of 10 Corps in May 1986, where he served till posted

to National Defence Academy in March 1989. Major Gen Shamsheer Singh, MVC, retired from the Indian Army in 1990 after 40 years of distinguished service.

A Guardsman to the hilt, he had the proud privilege and honour of being appointed the Colonel of the 'Brigade of the GUARDS'.

A keen sportsman, he has represented the Indian Military Academy and the Services, as also Punjab at National level Cricket in the Ranji Trophy and Cooch Bihar Cricket Championships. He was amongst the few acclaimed fast bowlers of that time in India. He is also a Glider Pilot with a 'Silver Cee' in flying. He is also a National Level Skier and a Defence Services Staff College Blue in Sailing and has competed in the 1961 National Sailing Championship held at Khadakwasla. A keen Golfer, he has been instrumental in popularizing the game and its proliferation.

He is also a keen preservationist of wildlife & forestation & has been actively instrumental & invested in preservation of the Green Environment in today's concrete jungle all around us.

His wife, Princess Jyotir Kumari (Honey), is the daughter of Maharaj Kumar Ghanshyam Sinhji of Limbdi, (Saurashtra), who apart from being a known humanitarian and a social worker was one of the outstanding cricketers and sportsmen of his time. He was the Vice-Captain of the first Indian Cricket Team that toured England in 1932. Her sister Princess Jagatendra Kumari was married to Vice Admiral VL Koppikar PVSM, AVSM of the Indian Navy. Honey and Shamsheer have two daughters Jyotika & Rohini who were enthusiastic athletes and have in particular excelled themselves at National Levels in Skiing, Sailing and Golf. Jyotika (cherry) is married to Major General NS Jamwal, VSM of 1/9 Gorkha Rifles and Rohini was married to the late Sardar Brahm Gyan Singh Majithia.

Shamsheer & Honey are both settled at their home in Rajpur, Dehradun, at the foothills of Mussoorie, amidst pristine surroundings and their own private jungle, the only green belt left in Rajpur. Shamsheer is leading a leisurely retired life playing golf and reading while Honey is busy looking after her home and 12 Dogs!



Major General Shamsher Singh with his wife Princess Jyotir Kumari
Source: Jyotika Shamsher Singh

CITATION.

Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh (IC-7018) the Brigade of GUARDS.

Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh was commanding a Battalion of the Brigade of GUARDS during an attack in the Eastern Sector. The enemy had put up formidable defences with well-coordinated Artillery Tank and Machine Gun fire combined with mines, wire and booby traps. In spite of strong opposition from the enemy the Battalion managed to get a foot-hold on the objective and held on to it, notwithstanding heavy casualties in bunker to bunker fighting. The enemy launched a series of counter attacks during which the Battalion ran short of ammunition. Undaunted, Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh engaged in hand to hand fighting. He personally directed his troops by moving from place to place and he encouraged his men to hold on to their positions. Simultaneously, he arranged for Artillery and Medium Machine Gun support. After regrouping his Battalion, he launched a fresh attack and despite heavy opposition, succeeded in capturing the objective inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy.

In this operation, Lieutenant Colonel Shamsheer Singh displayed conspicuous gallantry and outstanding leadership.

Reference: Gazette of India, Notification No. 71 Press /72 — dated June 17, 1972



Government of India,
Ministry of Defence,
New Delhi.

Citation in respect of Lieutenant Colonel
Shamsher Singh (IC-7018), The Brigade of
Guards, awarded Maha Vir Chakra.

Lieutenant Colonel Shamsher Singh was commanding a Battalion of the Brigade of Guards during an attack in the Eastern Sector. The enemy had put up formidable defences with well coordinated Artillery, Tank and Machine Gun fire, combined with mines, wire and booby traps. In spite of strong opposition from the enemy, the Battalion managed to get a foot-hold on the objective and held on to it, notwithstanding heavy casualties in bunker to bunker fighting. The enemy launched a series of counter-attacks during which the Battalion ran short of ammunition. Undaunted, Lieutenant Colonel Shamsher Singh engaged in hand to hand fighting. He personally directed his troops by moving from place to place and he encouraged his men to hold on to their positions. Simultaneously, he arranged for Artillery and Medium Machine Gun support. After regrouping his Battalion, he launched a fresh attack and, despite heavy opposition, succeeded in capturing the objective, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy.

In this operation, Lieutenant Colonel Shamsher Singh displayed conspicuous gallantry and outstanding leadership.

(Govind Narain)
Secretary to the Government of India,
Ministry of Defence.

- 1974.

Official Citation Lieutenant Colonel Shamsher Singh

Source: Jyotika Shamsher

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Ian Cardozo. 1971 Stories of Grit and Glory from the Indo-Pak War. Published by Penguin Random House, 2021.
2. SN Prasad and UP Thapliyal. The India - Pakistan war of 1971 A History. Published by Natraj Publishers, Dehra Dun on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, 2014.
3. Armour 71, Cavalry officers Association. (2022). Defstrat Books.
4. "Lance Naik Ram Ugram Pandey MVC." n.d. Honourpoint. Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://honourpoint.in/profile/lance-naik-ram-ugram-pandey-mvc/>.
5. SNS. 2023. "Army Commemorates Victory in Battle of Hilli." The Statesman. December 20, 2023. <https://www.thestatesman.com/bengal/army-commemorates-victory-in-battle-of-hilli-1503251513.html>.
6. The Battle of Hilli: Tactical Lessons Anuraag Chhibber, Scholar Warrior, Spring 2016, CLAWS
https://archive.claws.in/images/journals_doc/2131815590_AnuraagChhibber.pdf
7. Strive Harder, Soar Harder, Reminiscence 1963-2013
8. Major General Lachhman Singh, Indian Sword Strikes in East Pakistan, Vikas Publishing House, 1979.
9. The Invincible Garuda: Brigade of the Guards, 1949-1990