



रक्षा मंत्रालय  
MINISTRY OF  
**DEFENCE**



**MAJOR VIJAY RATTAN CHOWDHURY**

<b>SERVICE NUMBER</b>	IC-11004
<b>RANK</b>	Major
<b>NAME</b>	Vijay Rattan Chowdhury
<b>SON OF</b>	Dr MD Chowdhury
<b>RESIDENT OF (Village/District/State)/ DOMICILE</b>	Ambala, Haryana
<b>UNIT/REGIMENT/CORPS</b>	9 Engineer Regiment
<b>SERVICE</b>	Indian Army
<b>DATE OF ENROLMENT/ COMMISSION</b>	14 December 1958
<b>AWARD/DATE OF ACTION</b>	Maha Vir Chakra (Posthumous)/ 11 December 1971
<b>WAR/BATTLE/OPERATION</b>	Indo-Pak War of 1971
<b>OTHER AWARDS WITH DATE</b>	

Major Vijay Rattan Chowdhary was born on 09 July 1939, to Dr. MD Chowdhary in Ambala District of Haryana. He joined the Army at the age of 19 years on 14 December 1958. He was commissioned into 9 Engineer Regiment of Madras Engineering Group in the Corps of Engineers, an important combat support arm of the Indian Army. He obtained his Engineering degree from the College of Military Engineering, Pune, in 1962.

The Corps of Engineers is one of the oldest arms of the Indian Army. The origin of the Corps dates back to 1780 when the two regular pioneer companies were raised in the Madras Presidency Army. Subsequently, the Group of Madras, Bengal and Bombay Sappers were formed in their respective presidencies. These Groups came together when the British Indian Army was formed after 1857 and were later merged on 18 November 1932 to form the Corps of Indian Engineers. Engineer Groups initially consisted of field companies (a sub-unit organization that exists to this day). Till 1911, the Sappers also had the duty of passing battlefield messages. Between 1911 and 1920, they handed this task to a batch of their own kinsmen who then formed the Corps of Signals. The Sappers also contributed the first batch of airmen when the Indian Air Force was raised in 1932. From 1942-1945 officers of the Indian Railways were recruited into this Corps to participate in Britain's Burma Campaign. The former Chief of the Army Staff General Manoj Pande, PVSM AVSM VSM ADC belonged to the Engineers.

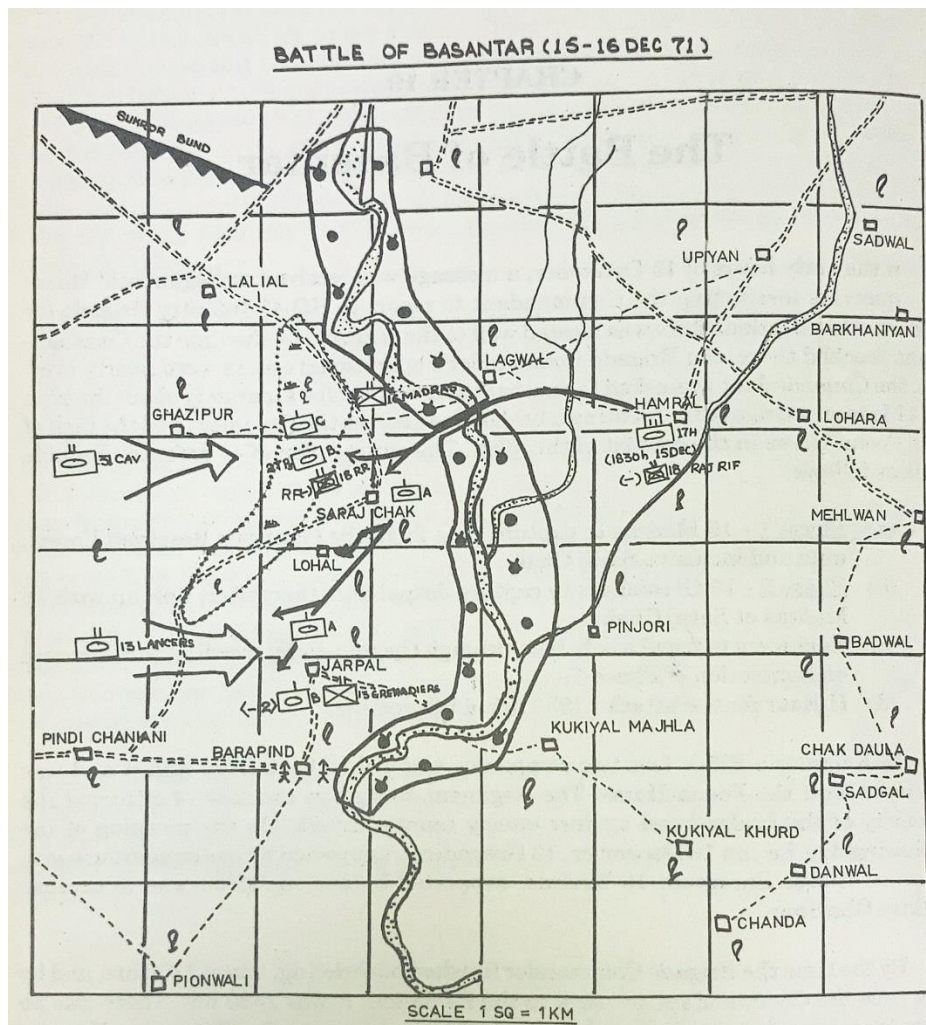
India gained Independence in 1947, and the partition resulted in the creation of Pakistan. The foundation of Pakistan was laid by the Muslim League based on the two-nation theory. Pakistan comprised two wings- East and West Pakistan which were geographically separated by 1600 kms Indian Territory. The two wings of Pakistan were culturally and linguistically different and the diversities between the two wings could not be bridged by an emotional appeal to religion. Consequently, fissures started erupting in the political body of Pakistan soon after the Independence and with each passing year it widened. In the absence of appropriate defence arrangements, the people of East Pakistan felt isolated and abandoned. Finally, the malfeasance of Pakistani leadership during Cyclone Bhola and the overwhelming support for the Awami League in the 1970 elections, proved the proverbial last straw on the camel's back.<sup>2</sup> The Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (of East Pakistan) secured an absolute majority in the general elections held in December 1970. This entitled the League to form a Government in Pakistan. However, Pakistan's military rulers denied this democratic right to the Awami League, in connivance with the PPP, led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. This arbitrary act of government caused deep resentment among the population of East Pakistan resulting in widespread protests. When the slide became unmanageable, the Pakistani rulers resorted to a midnight crackdown on 25 March 1971. The government ordered a military crackdown and the Pakistan army under Lieutenant General Tikka Khan unleashed a reign of terror and massacred thousands of Bengalis in a genocide codenamed 'Operation Searchlight'. Pakistan launched its attack against India on 03 December 1971. The Indo-Pak War of 1971 was the first war when the Indian Government engaged all three services on a large scale.

54 Infantry Division earmarked 47 Infantry Brigade with 17 HORSE to establish a Bridgehead in the Lalian Reserve Forest area across the Basantar River. In the early hours of 15 December, a message was received at Regimental Headquarters instructing the Commandant to report to HQ 47 Infantry Brigade for orders. This Headquarters was located well to the rear and by the time the Commandant reached there, the Brigade Commander's operational orders were nearly over. So, the Commandant was asked to stay back and was briefed separately about the plan of 47 Infantry Brigade for securing a bridgehead across the Basantar, and the task of the Poona Horse in the context of this plan. The outline plan of 47 Infantry Brigade was as follows:

Phase 1 – 16 MADRAS to capture area 2r in the Ghazipur Reserved Forest, upto and inclusive Saraj Chak.

Phase 2 – 3 GRENADIERS to capture Jarpal and, thereafter, link up with 16 MADRAS at Saraj Chak. Engineers to trawl a safe lane through the minefield; trawling to commence on completion of Phase 1.

H Hour for the attack: 1930 hours, 15 December.



Map

Source: "Fakhr-E-Hind" The Story of the Poona Horse

On the 03 December 1971, the official outbreak of war with Pakistan saw the deployment of the 9 Engineer Regiment under Lieutenant Colonel BT Pandit to the Western front. Post-midnight, three Infantry Brigades of 54 Infantry Division, with the 47 Infantry Brigade at the

forefront and supported by the 74 and 91 Infantry Brigades, crossed the border to counter the Pakistani army's offensive.

The task allotted to 54 Infantry Division included the destruction of Pak 8 (1) Armoured Brigade and capture of Zafarwal. After capturing Lohara-Laisar, Kalan-Mehlwan-Lagwal it decided to establish a bridgehead to the south-west of Basantar. The 47 Infantry Brigade was ordered to establish the bridgehead, in the area Barapind-Sikandarpur-Lalial and south-west shoulder of the Supwal Ditch, while the 74 Infantry Brigade was ordered to capture the remaining part of the Supwal Ditch. The Pakistanis had predictably concentrated the bulk of their armour to the west of the Basantar river in the area of the Supwal Ditch and Zafarwal.

The terrain was devoid of roads and abounded in streams. The Pakistanis had sited obstacle belts in considerable depth, and had covered them by infantry, RCL guns and tanks. Medium Machine Guns and infantry 'Nests' supported by automatics were positioned in between the minefields. The positions were fortified with bunkers, connected by a network of communication trenches and alternate positions. Gaps in platoon localities and flanks were covered by elements of reconnaissance and support battalions. Formidable mine barriers, approximately 1460 metres deep, were laid.

The tanks from the 16 (Independent) Armored Brigade commanded by Brigadier (later General) AS Vaidya, MVC needed to support the infantry in operations, and they planned to advance through Thakurdwara. However, this route was mined with anti-personnel and anti-tank mines by the enemy. Major Vijay Rattan's 405 Field Company, part of the 9 Engineer Regiment, was tasked with clearing these mines. This crucial minesweeping operation was necessary to clear the path for the tanks to enter the Battle of Basantar.

The battle of Basantar was one of the deadliest battles fought on the Western front, and Indian tanks were needed as soon as possible and as much as possible. For this, Major Rattan ordered the 405 Field Company's Sappers to start opening multiple passages through the minefields of Chakra and Thakurdwara to make way for the tanks. It was a laborious and time-consuming operation because of the soft going and because the bed of the Basantar had to be hand breached as the trawls could not operate in the boggy river bed. Apart from that, the depth of the minefield was not clearly known and there was also some confusion regarding its exact alignment. The territory filled with mines was over a kilometer wide!

To support Major Rattan's 405 Field Company, the 404 Field Company arrived, but the task at hand was heavily challenged by relentless Pakistani artillery shelling from 03 December. From 03 December to 17 December, Major Rattan and his team tirelessly cleared paths through minefields at Chakra, Thakurdwara, Lohara, and near the Basantar river. This allowed Centurion tanks to engage Pakistani Patton tanks, resonating across Basantar with thunderous tank and anti-tank gunfire. Despite being exposed to infantry assaults, Major Rattan led from the front, overseeing operations under constant enemy fire, moving between positions to bolster morale and ensure mission success.

In his entire tenure of his responsibility in this heat of battle, he was unmindful of his own safety. Dacca surrendered on the Eastern front on the 16 December, 1971, but the fighting in Basantar still raged on. Just a few hours before the ceasefire was declared on the Western

front at 2000 hours on 17 December, Major Rattan was hit by enemy artillery! Shrapnel ravaged his body, and he was seriously injured, but his boys evacuated him out for giving him medical treatment. Unfortunately, he passed away from his grievous injuries.

Major Vijay Rattan Chowdhary—the icon of the Madras Sappers and the 9 Engineer Regiment, has been awarded the Maha Vir Chakra, posthumously. To honor his bravery, the Municipal Corporation of Ambala subsequently named one of the main crossroads at the Ambala Cantonment, Saddar Bazaar after him, now called Vijay Rattan Chowk.

To honour the braveheart, Vijay Rattan Vihar—the Army Welfare Housing Complex in Sector 15 Gurugram is named after Major Vijay Rattan Chowdhury.



*Major Vijay Rattan Chowdhary*

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=438535561139929&set=a.123136879346467>

## CITATION

Major VIJAY RATTAN CHOWDHARY.  
(IC-11004). Engineer Regiment (Posthumous)  
(Effective date of award—11 December, 1971)

Major Vijay Rattan Chowdhury was incharge of minefield clearance at Chakra on the Western front. The safe lanes had to be made with great speed to enable our tanks and anti-tank weapons to reach Chakra which was in imminent danger of a counter-attack by enemy armour. With utter disregard for his personal safety, Major Chowdhary personally supervised the operation inspiring and motivating his men to their optimum efficiency. Throughout this period, the area was subjected to intense artillery, mortar and automatic fire but Major Chowdhary worked round the clock till the lanes were cleared and tanks and anti-tank weapons reached onwards. Major Chowdhary displayed exemplary devotion to duty and was responsible for clearance of minefields of 1000-1500 yards depth at 'Thakurdwara' 'Lohara' and 'Basantar River'. While supervising the minefield lane near 'Basantar river' nthis gallant officer was killed due to enemy artillery fire.

Major Vijay Rattan Chowdhary's exceptional devotion to duty, extraordinary bravery, inspiring leadership and supreme sacrifice was in the highest traditions of the Army.

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