



रक्षा मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE



SEPOY PANDURANG SALUNKHE

SERVICE NUMBER	2760401X
RANK	Sepoy
NAME	Pandurang Salunkhe
SON OF	Shri Balkrishna Salunkhe
RESIDENT OF (Village/District/State)/ DOMICILE	Sangli, Maharashtra
UNIT/REGIMENT/CORPS	15 MARATHA LI
SERVICE	Indian Army
DATE OF ENROLMENT/ COMMISSION	13 February 1969
AWARD/DATE OF ACTION	Maha Vir Chakra/ 06 December 1971
WAR/BATTLE/OPERATION	Indo-Pak War 1971
OTHER AWARDS WITH DATE	

Sepoy Pandurang Salunkhe was born on 01 May 1950, to Shri Balkrishna Salunkhe, in Sangli district of Maharashtra. He was enrolled into the 15 MARATHA LI on 13 February 1969. During the Indo-Pak War of 1971, Sepoy Salunkhe's battalion, 15 MARATHA LI, was deployed on the Western front in the Amritsar Sector of Punjab. He was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra for his exceptional bravery, indomitable spirit and supreme sacrifice in the Battle of Burj.

The MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY was formed as the 103rd Mahrattas in 1768, making it the senior most Light Infantry Regiment of the Army. Their Regimental Centre has been Belgaum, Karnataka, since 1922. The battle cry of the MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY is, 'Bol Shri Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj ki Jai!' (Cry Victory to Emperor Shivaji!) in tribute to the Maratha Emperor Shivaji. Indian independence saw the Regiment reverting to the original five battalions, with the 3 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY converting to the airborne role and becoming 2 PARA in April 1952. With the integration of the erstwhile Princely States, the 19th, 20th, 22nd battalions were amalgamated, from the State Forces of Kolhapur, Baroda, and Hyderabad, with the Regiment. The expansion of the Indian Army to meet the omnipresent threat to its borders has seen the Regiment grow to its present total of 18 battalions and two TA battalions whilst the period also saw the conversion of 21st Bn into 21 Para (Special Forces) and the 115 Infantry battalion (TA) being grouped under the MAHAR Regiment. The five Mahavir Chakras and the numerous other war and peace time gallantry awards bear testimony to the front-line leadership and courage of the Regiment's Officers, JCOs and NCOs. Gen JJ Singh (9th and 5th) who became the Chief of Army Staff in Feb 2005 was from the Maratha Light Infantry and was also the Colonel of the Regiment. During the 1947-48 Indo-Pak war, 3 (PARA) MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY was a part of 50 Para Brigade commanded by Brigadier Usman Mohammad. The battalion participated in the crucial battles of Jhangar and Naushera.

The 1971 War was a military conflict between India and Pakistan during the Bangladesh Liberation War from 03 to 16 December, 1971. India gained Independence in 1947, and the partition resulted in the creation of Pakistan. It began with preemptive airstrikes by the Pakistan Air Force on Indian targets, leading to India's involvement in support of Bengali nationalist forces. Pakistan suffered a significant defeat in this War. The Indo-Pak War of 1971 was the first war when the Indian Government engaged all three services on a large scale. A total of 4090 Indian soldiers made supreme sacrifice during this war and about 600 officers and men of the Indian Armed Forces were decorated with Gallantry awards. Of these, 04 were Param Vir Chakra, 76 Maha Vir Chakra and 513 Vir Chakra. 15 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY won the Battle Honour Burj and the Theatre Honour Punjab during the 1971 War.

The Punjab Sector, which included Punjab, Haryana and the Ganganagar District of Rajasthan was the responsibility of the XI Corps commanded by Lieutenant General NC Rawlley, PVSM, AVSM, MC under the overall command of Lieutenant General KP Candeth, PVSM GOC-in-C, Western Command. The area of responsibility of the XI Corps thus extended over 640 km along the international border. Its Main HQ was at Amritsar from where it controlled the Northern half of the Sector. The skeleton Advance HQ at Kot Kapura looked after the area south of the river Satluj. The Corps led by Lt Gen NC Rawlley, PVSM, consisted of three independent Sectors. It had assigned the following defended Sectors to its formations:

The 15 Infantry Division under Maj Gen BM Bhattacharjea, MVC was to defend the Amritsar Sector, including the prominent towns of Amritsar, Dera Baba Nanak and Ajnala. Its Brigades were deployed as follows:

86 Infantry Brigade in Dera Baba Nanak area

58 Infantry Brigade in Ajnala area

96 Infantry Brigade in Fatehpur-Burj area

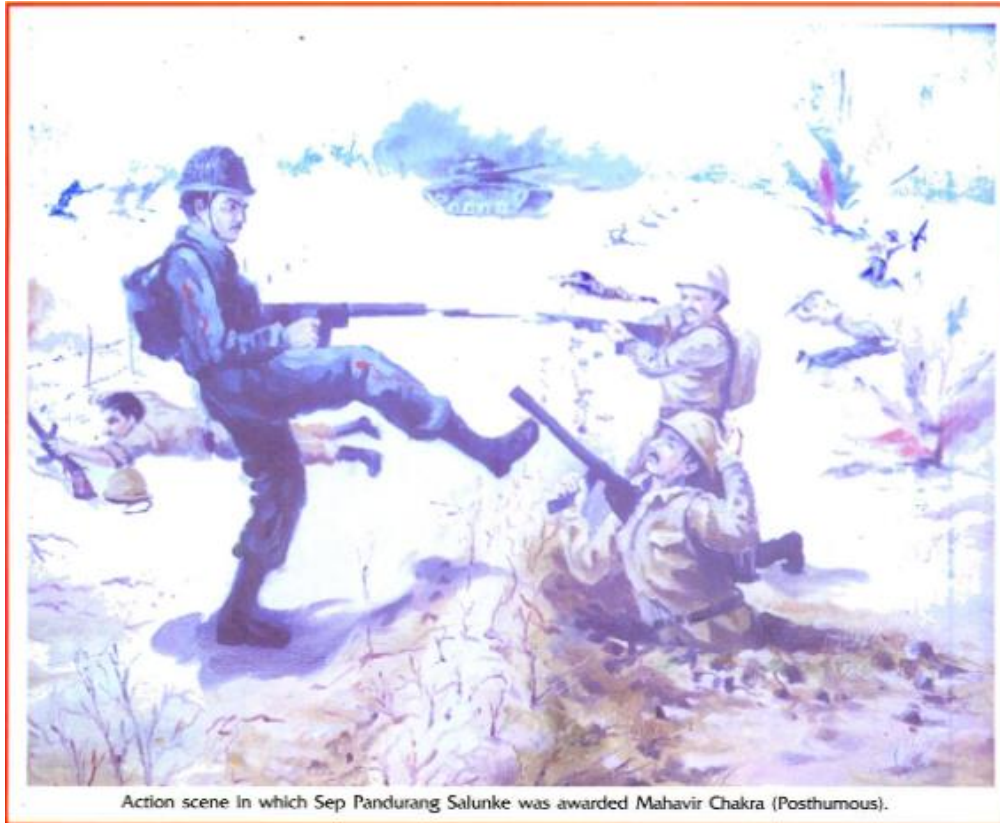
54 Infantry Brigade in Atari-Ranian area

38 Infantry Brigade in Neshta-Rajatal area

The 96 Infantry Brigade was given the responsibility of defending the area between Chann Malla and Bhindi Aulakh in the North-West of Amritsar. Across the Ravi, Pakistan had a sizeable enclave at Fatehpur and Bhago-Kamo and it could establish a Bridgehead there and pose a threat to Amritsar. The Indian Army, therefore, decided to capture the enclave.

On the night of 03/04 December 1971 Pakistan inducted the major part of their 88 Infantry Brigade belonging to 17 Infantry Division into this enclave and under pressure from this force the Border Security Force was forced to vacate Ghoge, Behlol, Gulgarh, Burj and our Fatehpur Posts. The Border Security Force, thus withdrawn, were re-deployed further back at Vara and the defences there were strengthened by the induction of two Platoons of 15 Maratha and one Troop of 66 Armoured Regiment equipped with Vijayantha tanks with orders that there would be no further withdrawal.

Orders were then issued to 15 MARATHA LI to attack Tur and Burj and a Troop of tanks were placed under command for the attack. Before the attack could be launched a Company of 43 Baluch attacked Bhindi Aulak from Tur. The plan had therefore to be altered: to first contain the Pakistani attack. The attack was beaten back by Indian Artillery and armour and the attackers fled leaving behind their dead and some arms and ammunitions.



Source: Infantry, A Glimpse of the Bayonet by Directorate General of Infantry

The attack was finally put in by Major Ranbir Singh, the Second-in-Command, with two companies, on 06 December 1971. The enemy taking shelter in bunkers bought down heavy fire on the assaulting troops. A close fight ensued. The Marathas fought their way doggedly from bunker to bunker physically. In many cases the enemy was dispossessed of his weapons forcibly. When fierce battle was going on, an enemy Rocket Launcher was found posing a threat to Indian tanks and infantry. Sepoy Pandurang Salunkhe decided to eliminate this threat. He charged the enemy, killed the operator and physically snatched away the Rocket Launcher. But in this bold charge he himself received a burst of sten gun fire at point blank range and fell dead. But the great sacrifice did not go in vain. It enabled the Marathas to recapture Burj and paved the way for the success of 96 Infantry Brigade.

The soldiers of the 15 MARATHA LI beat the enemy and, in the process, badly mauled 43 Baluch, who left behind 53 bodies, besides a large quantity of arms, ammunition and equipment.



Sepoy Pandurang Salunkhe's statue

Source: <https://honourpoint.in/profile/sepoy-pandurang-salunke-mvc-2/#tab-photos>

Sepoy Salunkhe displayed outstanding courage and determination during the battle and laid down his life at the age of 22 years in the line of his duty. Sepoy Pandurang Salunke was given the nation's second highest gallantry award, Maha Vir Chakra for his exceptional bravery, indomitable spirit, and supreme sacrifice.

Army Welfare Housing Society in Pune has been named after him as Salunke Vihar" in his honour.

CITATION

2760401 Sepoy Pandurang Salunkhe
Maratha Light Infantry (Posthumous)
(Effective date of award–6th December 1971)

During an assault by a battalion of the Maratha Light Infantry, supported by armour, an enemy rocket launcher posed a threat to the tanks assaulting with the infantry. Realizing the danger to our tanks, Sepoy Pandurang Salunkhe, at great risk to his life, charged towards the rocket launcher, jumped on the enemy, and physically snatched away the rocket launcher even though he received a burst of stengun fire at pointblank range.

In this action, Sepoy Salunkhe displayed indomitable courage and determination of a very high order.

Reference: Gazette of India, Notification No. 18-Pres./72. dated February 12, 1972

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