



रक्षा मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE



VICE ADMIRAL (Then CAPTAIN) SWARAJ PARKASH

SERVICE NUMBER	00022-Z
RANK	Vice Admiral (Then Captain)
NAME	Swaraj Parkash
SON OF	Milkhi Ram
RESIDENT OF (Village/District/State)/ DOMICILE	Jalandhar, Punjab
UNIT/REGIMENT/CORPS	INS Vikrant
SERVICE	Indian Navy
DATE OF ENROLMENT/ COMMISSION	03 September 1943
AWARD/DATE OF ACTION	Maha Vir Chakra/ December 1971
WAR/BATTLE/OPERATION	1971 Indo-Pak War/OP TRIDENT
OTHER AWARDS WITH DATE	Param Vishisht Seva Medal

Vice Admiral (Then Captain) Swaraj Parkash was born on 03 September 1923, to Shri Milkhi Ram, a school teacher in Jalandhar Punjab. Captain Parkash did his early schooling from Jalandhar. He had an excellent academic record and was sent to college in Lahore. He appeared for and cleared the examination for recruitment to the Indian Mercantile Marine Training Ship (IMMTS), Dufferin, and a career in the Merchant Navy, but gave up that option and chose to join what was then the Royal Indian Navy. He had a spectacular career in the Indian Navy, beginning as a Sub Lieutenant in World War II and retiring as Vice Chief of Naval Staff almost four decades later, in the rank of Vice Admiral.

He specialised in navigation and commanded five ships, heading the Western Fleet and Eastern Naval Command. In 1949, he was chosen to participate in the Long Navigation and Direction Course and traveled to the United Kingdom. Then he served as the Flag Lieutenant to Vice Admiral Sir William Edward Parry, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Indian Navy. He specialised was in navigation and direction. In December 1952, he was promoted to acting Lieutenant Commander. In 1955, he attended the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington and later became a member of the Directing Staff there.

Captain Parkash commanded several ships, including the Black Swan-Class Sloop INS Krishna, the Leopard-Class Frigate INS Betwa (1959), the Blackwood-Class Frigate INS Khukri (F149), and the Leander-Class Cruiser INS Delhi (C74). In 1965, he attended the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, USA. On 30 June 1967, he was promoted to the substantive rank of Captain. He also served as the Naval Attaché at the Indian Embassy in Moscow, working with the Ambassador of India to the USSR. Afterwards, he transferred to Naval Headquarters and became the Director of the Submarine arm. On 26 January 1971, he was honored with the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal.

The third India-Pakistan war began on 03 December 1971, when the Pakistan Air Force launched pre-emptive air strikes against Indian airbases. The war was forced upon India due to the widespread genocide of people in East Pakistan carried out by the military regime under General Yahya Khan of Pakistan. As a result, an estimated ten million refugees took shelter in India within a space of nine months, leading to a war between the two countries. The Indo-Pak War of 1971 was the first war when the Indian government employed all three services on a large scale in two theaters. The Indian Navy played a crucial role in securing victory for India in a short and intense war fought on both the Eastern and Western fronts. 04 December is celebrated as Navy Day to commemorate Operation Trident during the 1971 War.

Captain Parkash played a stellar role as the Captain of INS Vikrant during the 1971 war. He assumed command of Vikrant in mid-1971, when war clouds loomed over the subcontinent, but a question mark hung over the participation of Vikrant in the war. It seemed that the aircraft carrier INS Vikrant with her Air Squadrons would not see any action as both the ship and the aircraft were in a poor state of repair. Vikrant was non-operational with one of the four boilers requiring replacement, limiting the speed of the ship to 14 knots against the designed 24.5 knots. which was insufficient to operate aircraft or to deal with potentials

submarine threats. When there is no ambient wind on the deck to provide critical buoyancy under the wings, aircrafts need over 20 knots of carrier speed for take-off. In any event, there would be no steam to launch the aircrafts. These infirmities in INS Vikrant directly impacted its operations, the carrier's availability and deployment posed a difficulty for the naval planners. While the visionary leadership of Admiral SM Nanda and Vice Admiral N Krishnan decided to bite the bullet and deploy the carrier in the main theatre of operations, that is the Bay of Bengal, from June 1971 onwards, it needed someone of the calibre of Captain Parkash to galvanise the rank and file of the ship and deliver the goods.



INS Vikrant

Source: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/features/1971-war-hero-on-role-of-ins-vikrant-sea-hawks-221772#>

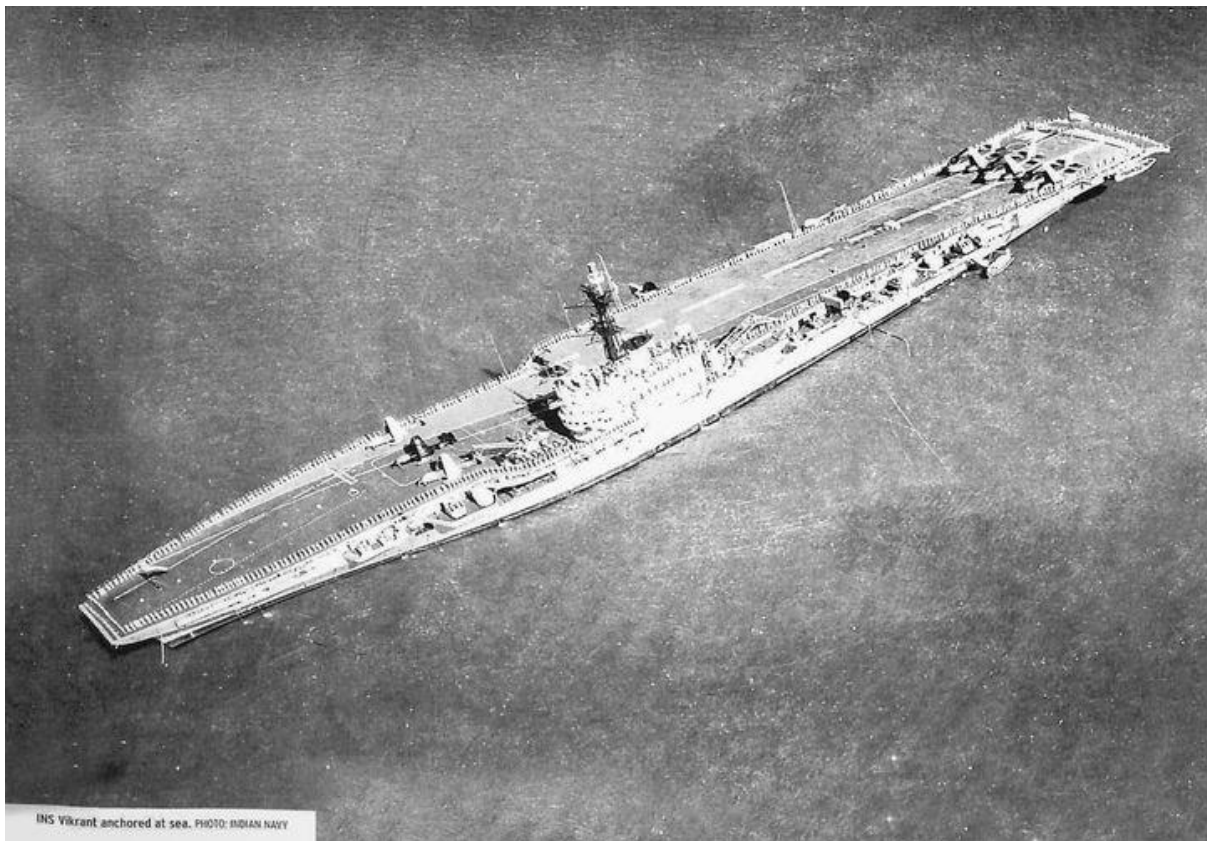
On board, the carrier had three Air Squadrons: INAS 300 'White Tigers' with eighteen Seahawks, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Santosh Kumar Gupta; INAS 310 'Cobras' with five Alizes, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Ravindra Das Dhir; and INAS 321 'Angels' with Alouette Helicopters, commanded by Lieutenant Commander V Ravindranath. Commander Benoy Roy Chowdhury was Cdr E, the Engineering Officer of INS Vikrant (R11), responsible for the boilers generating the steam that was essential for the operation of the carrier.

INS Vikrant's Cdr E, Commander Benoy Roy Chowdhury came to the rescue and fixed the ailments of the ship. He, with Senior Engineer Lieutenant Commander B. Bhushan (later Vice Admiral) and an excellent engineering team, confidently implemented hair-raising, high-risk innovations, such as placing steel straps around the cracked boiler, adjusting the safety valves to tolerate higher risks, and leaving the boiler-room unmanned but remotely monitored when the risks were elevated. His exceptional technical skills, combined with his ability to motivate his team, made it possible for the carrier to function effectively. All boilers were operational. INS Vikrant sailed at speed of over 20 knots. Captain Parkash was instrumental in getting the ship going, in backing his engineers to resolve its boiler problems and much else through typical Indian innovations, and in working up his Air Squadrons to perfection.

PNS Ghazi was sent by the Pakistanis to attack Vikrant. The failure of a Pakistan's intelligence led them to believe that the Vikrant was present in Vishakhapatnam, but in

reality, Vikrant was prowling the Bay of Bengal off Cox's Bazar. Aboard the carrier was a complement of flying craft comprising 10 Seahawk jet planes, two Alouette Helicopters and four Alize turboprop anti-submarine craft. At about 1100 hours on 04 December, eight of the Seahawks ambled off the angled deck of the Vikrant towards the Cox's Bazar airfield. The first targets were the airstrip, the hangars and the communications system. Considering that the Pakistan Air Force in Bangladesh had not yet been immobilised it was a daring enterprise because the Seahawks would have to face the Sabres.

After damaging the installations at Cox Bazar, all the Seahawks returned safely to their carrier base. Later that same afternoon, they launched another mission targeting the heavily defended Chittagong airfield. Upon spotting the small but determined enemy aircraft, the Pakistani medium and heavy anti-aircraft guns began a fierce barrage. Despite the intense fire, only one Seahawk sustained damage. The remaining aircraft returned to their carrier after hitting the harbor control tower, igniting a fuel dump, and sinking two gunboats.



INS Vikrant anchored at sea.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1672189166469270&set=a.1425653847789471>

On 05 December, the Vikrant redirected its operations westward to Khulna, Mongla, and Chalna. Facing intense pressure from the Indian Army and Air Force, enemy troops began fleeing to these areas of Bangladesh, attempting to escape via sea routes. However, they soon realised that the naval punches were the hardest.

The Seahawks had to take a big leap of 120 kilometres to reach the inland port of Khulna and having gone so far obliged, the enemy by sinking a bunch of his gunboats inside the harbour.

A rank by-stander, an armed merchant ship in the outer anchorage, presented a 'gun salute' to the aircraft. The Seahawks returned the courtesy which was not at all to the liking of the victims. A few small craft, tugs and port installations were also damaged.



Breguet Alize anti-submarine aircraft taking off from Vikrant

Source: <https://www.peepultree.world/livehistoryindia/story/eras/ins-vikrant>

On the fourth day of the naval battle off Bangladesh, Seahawks launched a vigorous early morning strike, targeting the Mongla, Khulna, and Chalna areas at the mouth of the Pussur River. In Mongla, they faced intense anti-aircraft fire from both riverbank positions and enemy gunboats. The Seahawks responded by neutralizing the gun positions and hitting four gunboats directly, destroying two and severely damaging the other two. In Khulna, the aircraft encountered heavy anti-aircraft fire from an armed merchant ship. Despite this, they were drawn to the picturesque entrance of the Pussur River, where they targeted a port wireless transmitting station, setting it ablaze and severing all communication with the Pakistani Naval Command in the area. In retaliation, the Pakistanis unleashed heavy anti-aircraft fire from multiple batteries. Meanwhile, Alizes launched rockets at a merchant ship, which was ultimately sunk.

Back in the Chittagong area that afternoon the Seahawks picked on the army barracks and workshops and set them on fire. The usual bouquet of heavy anti-aircraft fire was sent up to them in the air. In return the aircraft silenced the battery with their superior fire power. While the Seahawks were pounding Chittagong during the day, the Alizes were fishing for enemy submarines and surface ships after dusk. Taking advantage of the darkness of the night, they screamed off the Vikrant, heading for Chittagong. Unobtrusively they reached the airport and bombed the runway scoring several direct hits.

On 07 December, Cox's Bazar was the primary target. The mission was meticulously organized: the Seahawks, affectionately nicknamed White Tigers, focused on the airfield, while the Alizes, also known as Cobras, targeted the fuel dumps. After completing their objectives, our pilots proceeded to Chittagong. The Pantanga Battery did not open up as usual. To ensure no threats were left, the Seahawks conducted rocket attacks on the Pantanga position. The absence of response from the Battery suggested that the earlier strikes had been effective. That evening, as they returned to their base, the pilots noticed the first signs of imminent Pakistani surrender: Pakistani aircraft in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar were displaying large white flags from the tops of their masts.



INS Vikrant in 1971

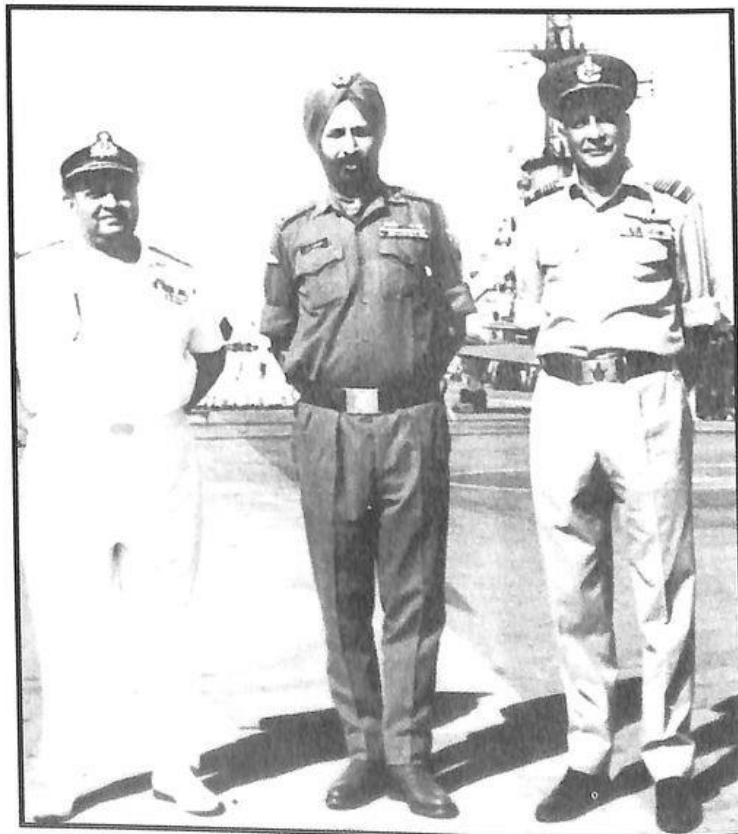
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1037531073661781&set=gm.1263702550699313>

The war was now five days' old. Meticulous planning of every strike and every action and successful execution of every plan was yielding rich dividends, and the Eastern Fleet was in full command of the Bangladesh coastal air space and water front. That was what had earned Captain Swaraj Parkash the well-deserved decoration.

The fleet was now perfectly positioned to launch an assault on Barisal, where enemy troop concentrations had been reported. Consequently, the Alizes conducted a nighttime attack under moonlight. During this operation, no ship movements were detected in the Tetulia, Bighai, and Bishkali rivers within the Barisal area. However, in the subsequent wave of

attacks, the Seahawks targeted the Barisal, Bakarganj, and Patuakhali regions, where they located and destroyed three enemy bages laden with troops, arms, and equipment. Additionally, they successfully struck Pakistani troop concentrations and artillery positions.

Among the many "firsts" scored by the Navy in this war was the amphibious landing of troops on enemy-held beaches. The landing calls for careful planning and meticulous execution. Intensive reconnaissance of the beaches must be carried out and the gradient ascertained before selecting the most suitable place for the landing. Above all, the coast must be clear of the enemy.



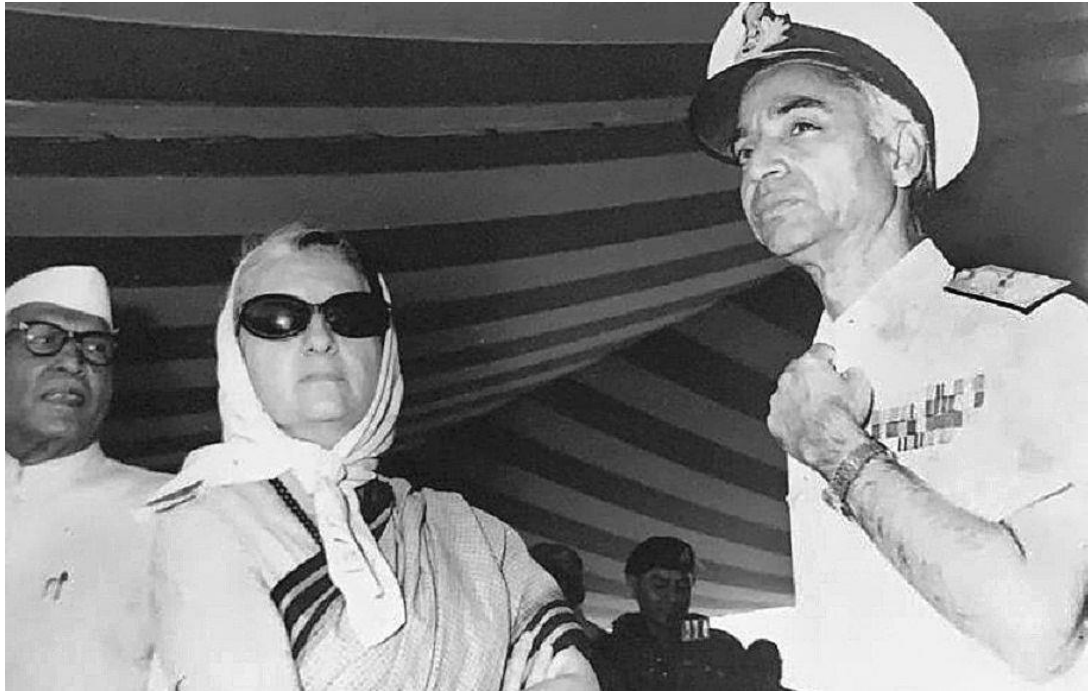
*Vice Admiral N Krishnan, Lieutenant General JS Aurora, and Air Marshal HC Dewan
onboard INS Vikrant on 28 December 1971.*

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1692109587810561&set=a.328836737471193>

Logistic support, including transport and heavy supplies, must be moved under the cover of darkness to minimize the risk of detection. Special landing ships are deployed by every Navy to handle this task. Around 13 December, reports indicated that groups of Pakistani forces were attempting to flee into Burma via the overland route through Cox's Bazar. In response, it was decided to land a battalion at Cox's Bazar to block and disrupt the enemy's escape route.

Unfortunately, the Navy's landing ships were unavailable at that time, so the fleet had to rely on the merchant ship SS Vishwavijaya to transport the battalion. The ship took the troops to a point off the Cox's Bazar coast, where they were then transferred to regular landing ships.

Prior to this, the Alizes had conducted a preliminary photo reconnaissance of the coast, which helped in selecting a suitable landing spot. On 14 December, the beachhead area was bombed to prepare for the landing. Subsequently, frogmen conducted a thorough search of the area. The landing craft arrived as planned on the night of 15 December, and the first amphibious landing of Indian troops occurred shortly thereafter.



Captain Swaraj Parkash with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

Source: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/features/capt-swaraj-parkash-who-played-a-stellar-role-as-captain-of-ins-vikrant-during-1971-war-343683>

To sum up, during the operations, the Vikrant operated in the most perilous waters and was the primary target for both enemy submarines and aircraft. Despite these dangers, Captain Swaraj Parkash demonstrated remarkable determination, leading relentless offensive actions against the enemy. The air strikes launched from the Vikrant had a profoundly destructive impact on ports along the Bangladesh coast, effectively denying the enemy access to both sea and inland waterways. The overwhelming dominance of our naval forces, epitomized by the Vikrant, crippled the enemy, eroded their morale, and significantly hastened their surrender in the eastern theatre. Captain Swaraj Parkash displayed conspicuous gallantry, inspiring leadership, professional skill and devotion to duty in keeping with the highest traditions of the Indian Navy.



White Tigers on board INS Vikrant in the Bay of Bengal, December 1971.

Source: <https://m.tribuneindia.com/news/features/capt-swaraj-parkash-who-played-a-stellar-role-as-captain-of-ins-vikrant-during-1971-war-343683>

After his retirement from the Navy, Vice Admiral Swaraj Parkash headed the Coast Guard for two years, rounding off his four-decade-long career in whites. He retired on 31 March 1982. Vice Admiral Swaraj Parkash died in New Delhi on 20 January 2004, at the age of 80.



Vice Admiral N Krishnan, #FOCINC (East) addressing the officers and men of INS Vikrant, after cessation of hostilities in the 14-day war in December 1971

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1692822721072581&set=a.1425653847789471>

CITATION

CAPTAIN SWARAJ PARKASH

(Effective date of award – December 1971)

Captain Swaraj Parkash commanded INS Vikrant which was the nucleus of the Naval interdiction and strike force operating against the enemy in the Bay of Bengal. Throughout the period of those operations, the ship was operating in most hazardous waters and was the principal target both for the enemy Submarines and Aircraft. With indomitable spirit, he launched ceaseless offensive operations against the enemy. The successful air strikes from the Vikrant had devastating effect on Ports all along the Bangladesh coast and completely denied the enemy the use of sea and island waterways. The complete supremacy of our Naval force symbolized by the Vikrant paralyzed the enemy, shattered his morale and considerably expedited the enemy's capitulation in the Eastern Theatre.

Captain Swaraj Prakash displayed conspicuous gallantry, inspiring leadership, professional skill and devotion to duty in keeping with the highest traditions of the Indian Navy.

Reference: Gazette of India, Notification No. 19-Pres/72 dated February 12, 1972

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