



**AIR MARSHAL PREM PAL SINGH (Then WING
COMMANDER)**

SERVICE NUMBER	3871
RANK	Air Marshal (then Wing Commander)
NAME	Prem Pal Singh
SON OF	Shri Sucha Singh
RESIDENT OF (Village/District/State)/ DOMICILE	Ferozpur (Punjab)
UNIT/REGIMENT/CORPS	5 SQN
SERVICE	Indian Air Force
DATE OF ENROLMENT/ COMMISSION	15 April 1950
AWARD/DATE OF ACTION	06 September 1965
WAR/BATTLE/OPERATION	Indo-Pak War 1965
OTHER AWARDS WITH DATE	Ati Vishisht Seva Medal Param Vishisht Seva Medal

Wing Commander Prem Pal Singh was born on 10 Feb 1929, in Gujranwala, in then undivided India presently in Pakistan, to Shri Sucha Singh. He was commissioned into the Indian Air Force on 15 April 1950 as General Duty (Pilot). He passed his matriculation from King George Hindu High School Gujranwala prior to family migrating to India. He later settled in Hansi in Hissar, Punjab. After a distinguished flying career spanning more than three decades, Wing Commander Prem Pal Singh retired from the Indian Air Force as an Air Marshal on 28 Feb 1987.

The genesis of the Indo-Pak conflict can be traced back to the year 1947. The bone of contention between India and Pakistan are the attempts by Pakistan to annex the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir by any means. The ceasefire line in Jammu and Kashmir and our frontiers with Pakistan has remained a sensitive zone for years. Pakistan has on and off resorted to firing, incursions and intrusions at several points of these frontiers, compelling India to adopt defensive measures. These attempts of Pakistan have been met by the Indian Armed Forces with commendable bravery and steely resilience, but always with great restraint to not escalate the conflict. The Indo-Pak war of 1965 was the second war fought between these two bordering countries. While India was still recovering from the damages of 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. The war began on 24 April 1965, when the 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. The aerial phase of the war began on 01 September 1965 when the Indian Air Force responded to an urgent call for air strikes against the Pakistani Army.

In 1965, Indian Air Force comprised of twenty-six Fighter Squadrons, four Bomber Squadrons, thirteen Transport Squadron and five Helicopter Units. During the 1965 Indo-Pak War, after the failure of Operation Gibraltar, a desperate Pakistan Army mounted a major armour-cum-infantry thrust in Chhamb, on 01 September 1965. The objective was to capture Akhnur Bridge and cut off Jammu-Punch Road. The same day at 1600 hours General Jayanto Nath Chaudhuri the Chief of Army Staff and Air Marshal Arjan Singh, the Chief of Air Staff, met the Defence Minister Yashwantrao Balwantrao Chavan and Defence Secretary Shri PVR Rao and sought permission to use the Indian Air force (IAF) against the invaders. A go ahead was obtained and within an hour the IAF went into action to stem the onslaught. 26 fighter-bombers of IAF (12 Vampires and 14 Mysteres) took off from Pathankot for Chhamb Sector just before sunset. In a swift action, the IAF destroyed ten tanks, two automatic guns and 30-40 vehicles of the invading column. The PAF Sabres, which were patrolling just across the border retaliated and shot down four Indian Vampires killing three of our pilots.

Indian Army's Operation Riddle, which targeted Lahore and Kasur, on 06 September 1965, startled the Pakistani forces. Seeing the dire situation, Pakistan Premiere Ayub Khan ordered the Pakistani Chief of Air Staff (CAS), Air Marshal Nur Khan, to target and eliminate the IAF

offensive capability. The CAS rolled out PAF's war plan No. 6, which called for pre-emptive strikes against the frontline IAF bases in Pathankot, Halwara, Adampur, Jamnagar, as well as the IAF radars at Amritsar, Ferozpur and Porbandar. 06 September was pronounced to be the striking day. As decided, PAF launched these raids on the evening of 06 September. All raids, except for Pathankot, failed.

The Indian Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Arjan Singh, decided to retaliate and strike PAF bases on 07 September. The IAF bases at Agra, Halwara and Adampur were alerted and tasked to carry out multiple strikes against the PAF bases, including Sargodha, Dab, Wagowal, on 07 September



Wg Cdr P.P Singh with Flt Lt H.S Mangat, his navigator.

Source - The Duels of the Himalayan Eagle, Air Marshal Bharat Kumar

Wing Commander Prem Pal Singh was commanding the No. 5 "Tuskers" Squadron, stationed at Agra. The unit equipped with the Canberra bomber, was assigned the triple task of tactical bombing, close support and armed patrolling. The squadron operated the interdictor version of the Canberra bomber featuring 4 x 20 mm Hispano cannons and the capacity to carry 16 x 4.5" flares or 3 x 1000 lb. bombs internally, along with 2 x 1000 lb. bombs on external stations. On their first mission, Wing Commander Prem Pal Singh led a formation of four Canberra aircraft, launching a dawn attack armed with 8 x 1000 lb. bombs, with each aircraft spaced one minute apart.

Their mission was to strike a Pakistani Army Corps HQ situated near the town of Gujarat, positioned west of a road near the town. However, upon reaching the target area, the formation discovered no trace of the Corps HQ or any troop presence, only vast open fields. Despite this unexpected turn, the aircrew followed their briefing instructions and released their bombs in the designated area as directed.

Following the initial dawn strike, six Canberra aircraft conducted a subsequent mission to the same target later in the day, with the added support of Gnats for escort. Unfortunately, this mission also proved futile, seemingly due to faulty intelligence or an inaccurate appreciation of the Corps HQ's location.

The Indian Air Force had executed all tasks assigned by the Army's Western Command. On September 6, they conducted 31 Mystere sorties from Pathankot and Adampur, 16 Hunter sorties from Halwara, and ten Canberra sorties from Agra, all in support of the Army's operations and offensive reconnaissance in the XI Corps area. Additionally, 14 Gnat and four MiG-2 air defence missions involving escorts and offensive sweeps were carried out in areas where ground attack aircraft were supporting the Army. The Air Force reported significant destruction, claiming the destruction of nine tanks, 12 heavy guns, four anti-aircraft guns, 26 vehicles, and one military train. Remarkably, there was minimal interference during these activities, possibly attributed to the presence of air defence aircraft in the region or Pakistan Air Force's preparations for their planned preemptive strike that evening.

It is different that in some of the locations, the enemy Headquarters were not there and the pilots had to look for alternate targets where they could usefully expend their armament.

Sargodha base was a prime target for the Indian Air Force, one of the most heavily defended locations in Asia. On the night of 06 September 5 Squadron initiated their attack, with the first bomb dropping late at night. Employing shallow dive attacks from medium altitudes, the Canberras of 5 Squadron launched a nighttime raid on the airfield. Regrettably, the raid did not result in significant damage.

In the initial strike conducted by the Mysteres of No. 1 Squadron, seven out of the eleven aircraft managed to approach the target undetected, while the remaining four encountered navigational challenges and fell behind. Despite poor visibility that prevented the aircraft above the target from seeing the ground, the formation's leader, while pulling out of the dive, spotted a group of aircraft positioned on the Operational Readiness Platform (ORP). Acting swiftly, the aircraft attacked despite the limited visibility, and their efforts resulted in significant damage inflicted upon both the BPI (Base Production Installation) and the aircraft parked at the ORP and within the hangars.

One Mystere, piloted by Sqn Ldr AB Devayya, was reported missing. It was later learnt from a Pakistani source that having accomplished a successful raid over Sargodha airfield, the said Mystere was intercepted and damaged by a supersonic F-104 Star-fighter, piloted by Flt Lt Amjad Hussain of PAF. With utter disregard for his personal safety, Sqn Ldr Devayya, manoeuvred his damaged aircraft, and shot down the Star Fighter, from which Flt Lt Hussain ejected successfully. For this exceptional act of gallantry Squadron Leader Devayya was awarded the Mahavir Chakra in 1988, posthumously.

Under the skilled leadership of Wing Commander Prem Pal Singh, the Squadron executed tactical bombing missions aimed at crippling the Pakistan Air Force on the ground. Wing Commander Prem Pal Singh personally led these missions, resulting in successful attacks on various targets. These included the Pakistani army camp located East of Gujarat, as well as airfields at Chaklala, Dab, Murid, Akwal, Risalwala, Wagowal, Sargodha, and Peshawar.

The Squadron also provided close support to the Army in Kasur, Khem Karan, Pasrur, Chawinda and Sialkot sectors. Bombs were dropped on the enemy concentrations at all these places. During the period of war the Squadron undertook 39 sorties of armed patrolling over Agra, Palam, Ambala, Halwara and Adampur. Most of the operational missions over the enemy territory were carried out during the hours of darkness. The targets were identified in the moon-light. These dangerous operational sorties were undertaken in the face of heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire with exceptional courage and determination. For displaying high sense of duty and courage, he was honoured with MahaVirChakra.

The Squadron also played a crucial role in providing close support to the Indian Army in various sectors, including Kasur, Khem Karan, Pasrur, Chawinda, and Sialkot. They conducted bombing runs on enemy concentrations in these areas, effectively aiding the ground forces. Throughout the war, the squadron carried out 39 armed patrolling sorties over Agra, Palam, Ambala, Halwara, and Adampur. Most of these operational missions took place under the cover of darkness, with targets identified by moonlight. Undertaking these perilous sorties in the face of intense enemy anti-aircraft fire demonstrated exceptional courage and unwavering determination. In recognition of his outstanding sense of duty and bravery, Wing Commander Prem Pal Singh was honoured with the #MahaVirChakra.

Air Marshal Prem Pal Singh later served in various capacities in the Air Force. He served as Director of Air Force Intelligence, Air Officer Commanding No. 4 Wing (Agra) and Assistant Chief of Air Staff (FS&I) at Air Headquarters New Delhi. Promoted to the Rank of Air Marshal – he was posted as Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO) incharge of operations at Eastern Air Command (Shillong).

In 1971, Air Marshal Prem Pal Singh, Group Captain at that time, served as the Staff Officer in charge of operations at Command Headquarters. He played a pivotal role in meticulously planning bomber operations in the western sector and against Pakistani occupation forces in Bangladesh, significantly contributing to their success. Recognizing his outstanding leadership, dedication, and service during both peacetime and wartime, he was honoured with the *Ati Vishisht Seva Medal*. He also had the privilege of serving as ADC to the first President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad.

In 1982, For the conduct of IX Asian Games, he was appointed the Chief Administrator of the Prestigious JawaharLal Nehru Stadium. This task involved dexterous handling and coordination between multifarious agendas and was executed in a commendable manner. Later in 1985, Air Marshal Prem Pal Singh was awarded the Param *Vishisht Seva Medal* for distinguished service of the most exceptional order, while he was serving in the Air Headquarters as Vice Chief of Air Staff (VCAS). Subsequently, in 1986, Air Marshal Singh was appointed as the Air Officer Commanding in Chief of the South Western Air Command, a position he held until his retirement in February 1987. His illustrious career and unwavering commitment to duty left an indelible mark on the Indian Air Force.

Air Marshal Prem Pal Singh passed away on 13 August 2020, at the age of 91, at the Command Hospital, Western Command, Chandimandir.

CITATION

WING COMMANDER PREM PAL SINGH (3871) GD(P)
(Effective date of award - 6th September 1965)

Wing Commander Prem Pal Singh was Commanding Officer of an Operational Bomber Squadron which achieved a high pitch of operational preparedness within a short time. During the period from the 6 to the 9 September, 1965, he undertook six major offensive and tactical close support operations which included reconnaissance over the Sargodha airfield complex, Dab, Akwal and Marud airfields, marking of Peshawar airfield and bombing of Pakistani troop and armour concentrations in the various sectors. Disregarding his personal safety, in these very dangerous operations in the face of heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire, he led a number of bombing and reconnaissance missions deep into enemy territory and carried out his missions with courage, determination and tenacity.

Wing Commander Prem Pal Singh displayed a high sense of duty, professional skill and gallantry in the best traditions of the Indian Air force.

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