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CHAPTER - V

DEBACLES AT SE LA AND BOMDILA

After the Indian troops vacated Tawang on 23 October 1962, the Chinese occupied it. But they did not pursue the Indians and stopped their push north of Tawang Chu. There was then a lull in fighting in Kameng which lasted a little over three weeks. The period of lull was utilised by the invaders in making preparations for further thrust into Indian territory beyond Tawang.

CHINA PREPARES

As it had been witnessed, the Chinese strategy in the Korean War had been to make a strong push towards some pre-determined military objective, then halt, replenish the supplies and ammunition, bring up the formations again to adequate strength and then make a further push towards a new objective(1). In this case the Chinese needed a 'breather' badly for the following reasons:-

- (a) Nearly five battalion strength of the Chinese attacking force on the two approaches - Dhola-Tsangdhar-Lumpo and Khinzemane-Shakti had suffered many casualties during its march to Tawang from the morning (0500 hrs) of 20 October to night of 22-23 October. The third Chinese column - more than one battalion - which came through Bum La and reached Tawang on the evening of 23 October, had also suffered many casualties. This total force of approximately two to three "Regiments" or brigades had been sufficiently reduced as the dead and wounded soldiers had not been replaced by fresh induction.
- (b) The Chinese had considerably extended their Line of Communication up to little short of Jang. The whole area up to Tawang from the Indo-Tibetan border was a mountainous terrain and only tracks existed there. The Chinese were finding it difficult to supply even food-stuffs to their advancing troops. There was no question of moving heavy guns. A road connecting Bum La with Tawang had to be constructed. Immediately after 24 October, the Chinese got themselves busy in constructing that road.

- (c) Bridge 4 over Tawang Chu at Jang had been blown by the Indian army, and the Chinese were not in a position to cross the river in sufficient strength. For that purpose a bridge had to be constructed.

To gain time for their troops to regroup themselves and make necessary preparations before commencing fresh attacks, the People's Republic of China, on 24 October 1962, issued a statement a copy of which was sent by Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Nehru, through the Chinese Charge d' Affairs in Delhi on the evening of 24 October(2). The circumstances in which the statement was made and the conditions stipulated by China in that statement for a 'friendly settlement' of the boundary question were such that there could hardly be any doubt that it would be rejected by India. But this exercise, apart from its propaganda value, provided a good cover for the lull in fighting which was, in fact, utilised by China to make preparations for further offensive.

REORGANISATION IN IV CORPS

The lull period was made use of by India, too, to organise defences to check further enemy advance. HQ IV Corps issued the following orders(3) to advance HQ 4 Inf Div at 2305 hrs on 23 October for the immediate disposition of troops and their tasks:-

- (a) 4 Arty Bde, with under command 18 Fd Coy, already located at Jang, and one Inf Bn from Tawang, should hold Jang, and it should not be allowed to fall into enemy hands.
- (b) HQ 62 Inf Bde with one Bn from Tawang and 4 Sikh LI (ex 48 Inf Bde) will hold Se La.
- (c) HQ 65 Inf Bde was assigned the responsibility of Bomdila defences.

To instil confidence in the rank and file of the Army, some important changes in the Command of IV Corps and its units were made. Lt Gen B.M. Kaul who was at that time lying sick in Delhi, was replaced on 24 October by Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh as the new GOC IV Corps. Maj Gen A.S. Pathania, who was at that time occupying the post of Director General, National Cadet Corps at Army Headquarters, replaced Maj Gen Niranjan Prasad as GOC 4 Inf Div wef 25 October 1962. Gen Pathania had a good combat record and was highly decorated officer, having won the Military Cross in World War II and MVC in November 1948 during Jammu and Kashmir Operations.

A new Division, viz., 2 Inf Div, was created to look after the operations in all the NEFA areas other than Kameng Frontier Division, with Maj Gen M.S. Pathania, a cousin of Maj Gen A.S. Pathania, as its GOC. Maj Gen M.S. Pathania was GOC 23 Inf Div at that time.

While new troops were being inducted, changes were made at the level of Brigade Commanders as well. Brig Kalyan Singh was moved to IV Corps and in his place Brig G.S. Gill became Commander, Arty Bde under 4 Inf Div.

Brig Hoshiar Singh, an officer with an outstanding war record, replaced Brig N.K. Lal as Commander 62 Inf Bde and Brig A.S. Cheema succeeded Brig G.M. Sayeed as Commander 65 Inf Bde.

The new Div Cmdr, Maj Gen A.S. Pathania, arrived at Tezpur, along with newly appointed Corps Commander, Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh, on 24 October, where the Army Commander Lt Gen L.P. Sen gave him the task of defending area Se La-Dirang-Bomdila. This task was given the code name Operation OLYMPUS with effect from 0001 hrs on 10 November 1962.

7 Inf Bde with its four battalions (viz., 9 Punjab, 2 Rajput, 1/9 GR and 4 Grenadiers) having completely disintegrated, the troops available under 4 Inf Div at that time consisted of elements of three scattered battalions - 1 Sikh, 4 Garhwal Rifles and 13 Dogra. While efforts were being made to bring in more troops for induction in the area, the new GOC established his Rover Gp at Shukla Camp between Senge and Se La and shifted his Main HQ, 4 Inf Div from Tezpur to Dirang. HQ 4 Arty Bde also handed over its additional responsibility of commanding infantry elements to 62 Inf Bde on 27 October and joined main Div HQ at Dirang.

To bring confidence in the troops and to re-activate their energies, the new Corps Commander on 28 October issued a Special Order(4) of the Day, as under:-

"On Taking over command of IV Corps at this critical juncture, I am conscious of the great responsibility that has fallen on my shoulders. My task however is made easy by the knowledge of your skill, tenacity, courage and endurance as soldiers and patriotic fervour as citizens of our great country. I should like you to know that I am mighty proud to be in command of such a fine body of men. With abiding faith in our

nation and our leaders and in the sacred cause of the defence of our motherland, on to battle, and may God be with you".

But, just when the new Corps Commander had completed a recce of the area and was coming to grips with the situation, he was suddenly changed. Exactly after five days of taking over command of IV Corps, Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh was replaced and Lt Gen B.M. Kaul assumed the command of the Corps again on 29 October 1962.

TOPOGRAPHY OF SE LA, DIRANG DZONG AND BONDILA SECTORS

(A) Ridges/Rivers(5)

The Se La, Dirang Dzong and Bomidila sectors are marked by high mountain ridges. The Se La Ridge emanates from the main Himalayan range at the orographical knot of the Kangto (7,090 metres) massif. It forms the watershed between the Nyamjang Chu and the Bhareli (Kameng) river basins, and separates the Tawang Sector from the Dirang Dzong Sector. The Ridge runs south-west and terminates in the immediate north-east of Dewangiri (Devsthan). Its prominent passes are the Tse La, Kye La, Se La, Chebra La and Orka La, all of them over 4000 metres in altitude. In the northern vicinity of the Orka La and Se La Ridge sends out a bifurcation which after separating from the parent feature runs south-east and then east, making a curve - the Mandala arc or Ridge.

The Mandala Ridge forms the watershed between the basins of the Dirang Chu and the Rupa Chu. It ends at the confluence of these two rivers. The average height of this Ridge is 2,700 metres. Its important passes are the Samya La, the Manda La, the Rib La (Bomidila II) and Bomidila.

The Lagam Ridge is a spur of the Se La Ridge and bifurcates from the latter in the vicinity of Tse La, running in a southerly direction, and crossed by the Poshing La (3,660 metres). From here, the Ridge starts losing height till it comes down to 1,525 metres near Thembang. The turning in an easterly direction, it disappears at the junction of the Bhareli (Kazeng) and the Dirang Chu rivers.

In the whole of Arunachal Pradesh, the Bomidila area is peculiar, as at some places the altitude of the Piri range is more than three thousand metres, whereas in other parts of the State, the heights of the outer hills seldom exceed even 1,500 metres. The Piri Ridge, which is a bifurcation of the Se La offshoot and separates from it near the Orka La, runs

parallel to the Mandala Ridge in an arc. Its bulge is towards the plains of Assam, extending a few km to the south of Shergaon. It runs up to the great bend of Bhareli (Kameng) river.

Besides the Piri range, there are many of its branches, each separating a pair of streams rising from the Piri range itself. These spurs have given a south-easterly direction to these streams and rivulets.

The main river of the Se La sector is the Nuranang Chu. It emanates from the Se La (Pass) and flowing from south to north, joins the waters of the Tawang Chu, a little north of Jang. An important tributary of the Nuranang Chu, which has its source at Kye La joins the Nuranang Chu just below Se La.

The main river of the Dirang Dzong area is the Dirang Chu, which has as its catchment areas the eastern and the northern slopes of the Se La Ridge and the Mandala spur respectively. The main tributary of Dirang Chu is the Sangti Chu. The Sangti Chu, which drains the southern slopes of the upper Se La Ridge, joins the Dirang Chu about 3 km west of Dirang Dzong.

Bhareli (Kameng) river is the biggest river of the Bomdila Sector. Its main tributary is the Rupa Chu which emanates from Orka La. Rupa village is situated on the bank of this stream. The Rupa Chu also separates the Piri range from the Mandala Ridge.

Besides the Rupa Chu, there are many other rivulets in the region: the Belsiri is notable among them.

(B) Main Defensive Positions

Se La, Dirang and Bomdila were the main defensive positions selected in Kameng Frontier Division after the withdrawal of Indian troops from Tawang.

Se La

Se La, situated at a height of 4,190 metres is the gateway to the Jang-Tawang sector. It can be said to be an impregnable defensive position due to its horse-shoe formation, rugged peaks, and great height(6). The flat area on the top is extensive and includes two small lakes bordered by large patches of rhododendron bushes(7). About 3 km to the west of the Se La top, the valley begins to drop sharply towards Jang and narrows down. At Nuranang, about 10 km from the top, the valley becomes quite constricted, with

wooded slopes rising sharply on either side(8). It lies behind a formidable river obstacle - the Tawang Chu - at Jang. The Senge area provides an excellent supporting depth for the main position at Se La. But there were tracks that by-passed Se La. However, there could be mud only with Yak-borne or porter-based forces, and that too not in any great strength(9).

Dirang Dzong

The village where HQ 4 Inf Div were located during the second phase of the operations, is situated approximately 150 metres above and on the right bank of the Dirang Chu(10). At an altitude of 1,670 metres (5,500 ft), it was a most inviting location, not only because of the comfortable huts it offered but also because it was a good twelve to fifteen hundred metres below the cold Senge Camp, where TAC HQ of 4 Div were located. The place contained many structures and barracks constructed by the Border Roads Organisation. However, the location was a tactical death trap, boxed in and with high Ridges and peaks surrounding it on all sides(11). Moreover, many tracks existed which easily by-passed the location.

Bomdila

Situated at an altitude of 2835 metres, Bomdila lay about 160 km to the north of Tezpur, and 181 km from Tawang(12). It was the headquarters of the Kameng Frontier Division of NEFA. A little less than 2 km north of the town was situated the pass Bomdila(13). The pass Bomdila II (also called Rib La) was about 305 metres (1,000 ft) above the main pass.

(C) Road Communication

Se La, Dirang Dzong and Bomdila were located along the road connecting Tawang with Foot Hills. When hostilities with China broke out in October 1962, the road from Tawang to Se La was only jeepable, but from Se La to Foot Hills, it was a fair weather one-ton road(14). The whole road alignment was cut across the grain of the slopes of the Himalayas and was subject to frequent landslides. The road from Se La that was in use in 1962 passed through Senge Dzong, Sappers Camp, Dirang Dzong, Munna Camp, Bomdila, Rupa, Piri La, and down to Chako and Foot Hills. A new alignment was subsequently brought into use because the old one was prone to landslides.

Starting from Jang the road along the south bank of Nuranang Chu, crossed it at Bridge 3 before reaching Nuranang. Nuranang, now called Jaswantgarh, was 18 km south of Jang. Se La was the highest point

crossed on way from Tawang to the plains of Assam. From Se La, the road went down 27 km to reach Senge (2810 metres). From Senge the road covered another 25 km, crossing Bridge 2 and a sharp turn near Nyukmadong, before reaching Sappers' Camp (1,704 metres). Further south-east from Sappers' Camp, the road crossed Dirang Chu at Bridge 1 and then reached Dirang Dzong (1,630 metres), situated in an open valley and about 10 km from Sappers' Camp. From Se La to Dirang Dzong, the descent was fairly steep and the road passed between densely-wooded ranges on either side, each rising to over 4,000 metres. Before reaching Bomdila from Dirang Dzong - a distance of 42 km - the road passed through Munna Camp (1,361 metres), about 12 km south-east of Dirang Dzong, and then, after running along the river Dirang Chu for a little distance, the road climbed to the pass Bomdila (2835.3 metres), two km short of the town of that name. About 20 km south of Bomdila was Rupa(15). Throughout, the road ran through high mountains and deep valleys, and on many occasions, as for example between Jang and Nuranang and between Se La and Nyukmadong, the gradient of the road was steep(16).

(D) Routes/Tracks

Many foot-paths, and mule tracks emanated from both the right and left sides of the main Bum La axis coming from the Indo-Tibet border. While the foot-paths and goat tracks were being used by the local population to reach their settlements, the traders used the other routes to reach places in India - in the Assam plains - from Tibet, as these were shorter than the main trade route. The Chinese, during the 1962 Operations, were able to use some of these traders' tracks to their advantage to by-pass the Indian defensive positions/garrisons at Se La, Dirang Dzong and Bomdila, and also to cut Indian Line of Communication. Some of the important tracks used by the Chinese during the operations were(17):-

On the right side or south of the main road axis

- (a) Mukto Bridge area to Senge Dzong, via Chebra La.
- (b) Chebra La to Dirang Dzong along right bank of Dirang river.
- (c) Across Tawang Chu, then through Bhutan - Sakteng Orka La along Pobrang Chu to Bridge 1 on the main road, and then to Dirang Dzong.
- (d) Sakteng - down Phudang Chu - Phudang.

The enemy used the first two foot-paths(18) to come to the rear of Indian garrison at Se La and also to cut the Lines of Communication of the 4 Inf Div at various places. The remaining two tracks were circuitous and also passed through Bhutan. Moreover, as these tracks were not established ones, a large body of troops could not be moved through them(19).

On the left side of the main road axis from North.

(a) Chuna - Se La

Chuna (3,965 metres) in the Mago area, which used to be Indian summer post, stood connected with Tsona Dzong and Lhuntza Dzong in Tibet through Tulung La and Pen La. The track came down to Gorio Chu, where it crossed the river over a wooden bridge. The track coming from Tse La in the east joined this track before it crossed the river. The track then came to Truke La (4,575 metres), after crossing the valley of Gorio Chu. From Truke La, the track ran south to Luguthang and then moved in the south-westerly direction and climbed up the Se La Ridge to avoid deep gorges in the lower reaches of the river, specially near nullah junctions. It then descended into the valley of the Nuranang Chu tributary, which emanated from Kye La, and finally terminated at Se La (Pass) after skirting the two glacial lakes(20), embedded in the pass itself.

There were several narrow footpaths also from Mago valley to Dirang valley across the Se La Ridge. One of them started near Luguthang passed through Yangyap La and terminated near Nyukmadong on the main road. During 1962 Operations, the Chinese used this track when they established a road block near Nyukmadong, 52 km south of Se La.

(b) Chuna-Lap-Tse La-Poshing La - Lagam-Pangma -
Thembang - Rahung - Bomdila Track.

As already mentioned in (a) above, the track coming from Chuna to Gorio Chu bifurcated before crossing the river. An offshoot of this track continued to the east and reached Lap. Here it crossed the Gorio Chu valley and climbed up to Tse La. From Tse La, the track turned south-west for some distance and then turned south-east and reached Poshing La. From Poshing La, the track came down to Lagam monastery, passed through Pangma (2,000 metres) and then moved down to Thembang, a village on a spur over-looking the main valley between Se La and Bomdila(21). After crossing the river, the track met the main road near Rahung village.

(c) Tungri - Dirang Dzong Track

From the main track, Lap Bomdila, a foot-path emanated, from Tungri, some distance north of Lagam, and came direct to Dirang Dzong. Yet another track joined Tungri to Munna Camp on the main road, via Chongdor.

(d) Thembang - Dirang Dzong Track

Another track emanated from Thembang, took a north-westerly direction and terminated a little north of Dirang Dzong on the main road. This track was comparatively less difficult to traverse than the Tungri-Dirang Dzong track described above(22).

(e) Dirang Dzong - Manda La - Phudung Track

From Dirang Dzong a track went up to Manda La and then to Phudung, after which it descended into Rupa Valley. After crossing Shergaon and Pankim La, the track ended at Udalgiiri.

The Chinese blocked the Manda La track on 20 November, when bulk of the Indian troops trapped forward were using this route to escape to the plains. This Chinese infiltration caused heavy casualties among the Indian troops(23).

TROOP-BUILD UP IN THE AREA(A) Chinese

Extensive patrolling was being done by the Indian troops to know the Chinese movements. Aerial photography was also being carried out. All these revealed that the Chinese had improved the vehicular traffic from Tsona Dzong to Shao. Continuous flow of vehicular traffic was also observed on the route from Shao, the Chinese forward post in Tibet, to Tawang through Bum La. It was noted with surprise that the Chinese were able to construct the road to Tawang in less than three weeks. Rapid road development towards Tawang by the Chinese indicated their intention to complete the stocking before snowfall. They had also improved the road from Tawang to Jang, constructed a large bridge over Tawang Chu and also repaired Bridge 4.

As appreciated by the HQ IV Corps vide their Operational Instruction No.3(24), issued to 4 Inf Div on 9 November 1962, the Chinese had, by the middle of November 1962, i.e., before the start of the second phase of Chinese offensive, concentrated two divisions(25) in the Tawang area. An estimated one Chinese division crossed the Tawang Chu for operations against Indian positions in Kameng Frontier Division in the second phase. Of this force, approximately one Regiment (equivalent to an Inf Bde) was pushed through

Mukto Bridge by the evening of 15 November. As had been visualised by the HQ IV Corps(26), elements of this force tracked down to Senge Dzong and Dirang Dzong to cut the line of communication of 4 Inf Div at various places from south west of the main road. Simultaneously, two Chinese brigades crossed the Tawang Chu nearabout Bridge 4 and Mago for operations from the north and east of the main road axis. Of one of those brigades, one battalion was assigned the task of attacking Indian covering troops (4 Garhwal Rifles) and the other two battalions crossed the Se La Ridge via Kye La to by-pass Indian defensive positions at Se La and to harass the Indian troops in the area. Elements from this Chinese column infiltrated into the Dirang valley in the east of Nyukmadong Ridge and took up positions on a dominating feature north of the village, Nyukmadong. Of the other brigade, two battalions reached the vicinity of Poshing La through the track via Tse La(27).

(B) Indian (under 4 Inf Div)

By 28 October 1962, in this first reconnaissance carried out after taking over Command of 4 Inf Div from Maj Gen Niranjan Prasad, Maj Gen A.S. Pathania felt that in order to effectively stop an enemy offensive along the Tawang-Foot Hill main approach, there were two vital grounds to be held, i.e. Se La-Senge Ridge and the Bomdila feature. As these two points were separated by a distance of about 104 km, it was felt necessary to station some troops mid-way. The GOC established his Headquarters at Dirang Dzong and Rover Group at Senge Dzong. In his first appreciation made in the first week of November, the GOC had asked for a force of nearly 17 battalions to ensure a coordinated defence of the Se La - Dirang Dzong - Bomdila area(28). However, troops made available were 12 infantry battalions (of which two viz. 6/8 GR and Jammu and Kashmir Rifles reached the area of operations towards the fag end of the fighting and hence made little impact on the course of the operations), which were placed under three Brigade Headquarters - 62, 48 and 65 - at Se La, Bomdila and Dirang Dzong in the above order of priority.

Se La Sector:

Indian Army's plan was to convert Se La into a 'Fortress'. Se La was indeed a natural fortress whose occupation provided every tactical advantage against any attacker. It could never easily be stormed frontally. The new Commander 62 Inf Bde, Brig Hoshiar Singh, had taken over the command on 29 October 1962. By mid-November, all the five battalions earmarked for the defence of Se La, under 62 Inf Bde, were fully

employed. A few anti-personnel mines had been laid around the covering defensive positions of the battalions and the Brigade HQ. The Brigade was being maintained almost completely by air. It had about first-line scales of ammunition (SAA) and ten days' stocks stocked with the units. Artillery, however, had only one and a half scale of first line(29) ammunition. The deployment of troops in Se La sector is as follows:-

HQ 62 Inf Bde - a few kilometres south of Se La.

Infantry

4 GARHWAL RIFLES - as covering troops deployed between Nuranang and Jang (Area Bridge 3)

2 SIKH LI (ex 65 Inf Bde) }
4 SIKH LI (ex 48 Inf Bde) } All deployed at
1 SIKH } Se La or nearabout.

13 DOGRA (ex 11 Inf Bde) Senge Dzong(30).

Supporting Arms(31)

Artillery

HQ 5 Fd Regt with its own 95 and 96 Fd Btys; and under its command 87 Fd Bty of 6 Fd Regt(32)

One Battery (less section) of 22 Mtn Regt

'C' Tp Hy Mor Bty(33) of 36 (Maratha) Lt Regt (Towed)

MMG

One Pl of 'A' Coy 7 Mahar (MG) plus a section(34) of 6 Mahar (MG)

Engineers

19 Fd Coy

Dirang Dzong Sector

65 Inf Bde, which completed its move to Dirang Dzong area by 10 November 1962, was assigned the task of defending the general area from international boundary with Bhutan and Pobrang Chu to Dirang Dzong and (excluding) Bridge 2(35). 65 Inf Bde group had reached Bomdila on 24 October with its battalions -

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4 Rajput, and 2 Sikh LI. But 2 Sikh LI was taken away from 65 Inf Bde and placed under 62 Inf Bde. Instead, 1 Madras and 19 Maratha LI were to come under its command on reaching the operational area. In the meantime, the Commander of 65 Bde was changed. Brig A.S. Cheema replaced Brig G.M. Sayeed on 3 November. After 48 Inf Bde arrived at Bomdila, a demarcation in the area of responsibility was made. Under the revised task, 48 Inf Bde was made responsible for the Bomdila sector and 65 Inf Bde was assigned the task of defending the Dirang Dzong sector and to reinforce, as a secondary task, 62 Inf Bde in case of need.

The deployment of 65 Bde Gp and units under it on 12 November 1962 was as under:-

HQ 65 Inf Bde with

Sig Coy and LAD

One Pl 19 Maratha LI
(as defence platoon)

Tac HQ 65 Inf Bde

Infantry

19 Maratha LI

Bn HQ with one coy
plus Pl

Two Coys and one Pl

}
}
} Area Ewang, near
} Sappers' Camp.
- Area Sappers' Camp

- Area Dirang
- deployed in the
north (Pt 2090),
northwest (Chug),
South - west
(Pt 2900) and west
of Dirang
(Lunchhana).

4 Rajput

Bn HQ

One Coy

One Coy

Two Coys

- Area Sappers' Camp
- Area Bridge 1
- North of Sappers'
Camp
- South (Lubrang
area) and south -
west (Dangsikpu)
area of Sappers'
Camp(36).

Supporting Arms

Arty

HQ 6 Fd Regt with 86 Fd Bty(37); under command one Tp of Mtn Bty of 22 Mtn Regt (in support of Pl 4 Rajput south of Sappers' Camp)(38).

MMG

One Pl of 'A' Coy of 7 Mahar (Pl HQ and one section with 4 Rajput and one Section with 19 Maratha LI)(39).

Armour

'B' Sqn Less one Troop, 7 Cavalry(40).

Besides HQ 4 Inf Div, 4 Arty Bde also had their HQ located in Dirang. As the Div HQ had no troops for its defence, it ordered 48 Inf Bde and 62 Inf Bde to send troops to Dirang for the purpose. Consequently, a Coy of 1 Madras arrived from Bomdila on 16/17 November night and two Coys of 13 Dogra from Senge Dzong reached Dirang on 17/18 November night for the defence of Div HQ(41).

Bomdila Sector

48 Inf Bde, whose 'R' Gp alongwith 1 Sikh LI had arrived in Misamari from Ambala on 25 October, was made responsible for the defence of Bomdila sector on 28 October(42). For this task, two more battalions - 5 Guards (moved from Jungle Warfare School, Dehradun)(43) and 1 Madras (from OP RAJI area)(44) were placed under it. 1 Madras arrived in Bomdila on 27 October and 5 Guards concentrated there on 7 November. The bulk of the third battalion - 1 Sikh LI - reached Bomdila on 11 November.

On or about 11 November, the forces under 48 Inf Bde in the Bomdila sector were:-

Infantry

1 Madras
1 Sikh LI
5 Guards

Supporting Arms

Artillery

HQ 22 Mtn Regt with one Mtn Bty(45); under command 135 Hy Mor Bty less one Tp(46) and 88 Fd Bty of 6 Fd Regt(47).

MMG

'A' Coy of 7 Mahar (MG) less two Pls(48).

Armour

One Troop (3 tanks) of 7 Cavalry(49).

Engineers

15 Fd Coy

On 15 November, 48 Inf Bde issued its Operational Order No.1(50) which mentioned that the Bde Gp would occupy the defences with a view to holding Bomdila. The brigade defences were based on Bomdila Pass I and II, as they covered approaches from the north and dominated Bomdila town, dropping zone and helipad. No penetration was to be accepted in the defence sector and the whole area was divided into 3 zones, making each battalion responsible for one of the zones.

1 Madras was to be deployed on the right flank, high ground with Palit Hill being the dominating position. The battalion was assigned the tasks of denying to the enemy track from Hut to Bomdila, observation of Bomdila DZ and helipad, and to dominate the locality(51). 88 Fd Bty of 6 Fd Regt and one section MMGs were also placed under the Battalion.

The CO of 5 Guards with one officer and four ORs had left for Bomdila from Misamari on 29 October, two days after the battalion had concentrated at Misamari to recce the area for deployment of the battalion. The battalion could, however, concentrate at Bomdila only on 7 November. 5 Guards were given the responsibility of defending Rupa - Bomdila axis, and deny the enemy Observation of Bomdila DZ/helipad(52).

1 Sikh LI less 'B' Coy had left Foot Hills on 9 November and after forced marching for 3 days reached Bomdila on 11 November. The battalion was given the task of holding Bomdila Pass I and II(53-54). One Section MMGs, One Tp of 135 Hy Mor Bty and one Tp of mountain guns were in support for 1 Sikh LI. Administrative build-up situation on 14 November 1962 was as follows:-

(a) Se La

Ammunition	- One first line
Rations	- Ten days

(b) Dirang

- Ammunition - One first line
- Rations - Fifteen days

(c) Bomdila

- Ammunition - One first line for SAA and half first line of Arty ammunition (which was built upto one first line by 17 November)
- Rations - Fifteen days.

Main reasons for the slow administrative build-up were:-

- i. Insufficient MT especially Nissan 1 Ton, which could operate upto Se La.
- ii. Turn round of vehicles from Misamari to Dirang was 3 days when road conditions were good.
- iii. Heavy requirement for daily maintenance by air.
- iv. Sudden induction of troops that arrived without even the first line transport.
- v. Airlift was available upto about 50 tons a day only, whereas there was a requirement of nearly 250 tons a day(55).

In other words, on 14 November the GOC 4 Inf Div had only 2/3rd of his minimum requirement of 17 Inf Battalions, 1/3rd Field Artillery and 1/4th Mountain Artillery and Heavy Mortars.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES UPTO 16 NOVEMBER

(A) 62 Bde Sector

Intensive patrolling was being carried out by all the units under 62 Inf Bde to find out enemy's activities, to recce various tracks/approaches available to the enemy which he could use to outflank the main Indian defensive positions, and to keep the enemy at bay. In this task the troops of 4 Garhwal Rifles, played active part.

4 Garhwal Rifles was positioned in the area between Nuranang and Jang which covered Bridge 3. It was responsible for the defence of the Nuranang valley. 'A' Coy was positioned ahead of other Coys on the left of the road on the slopes - midway between Bridge 3 and 4(56). 'B' Coy, (which was directly under the advance HQ 4 Inf Div at the time of the Battle of Namkha Chu, had initially withdrawn to Dirang Dzong but by the middle of November had rejoined the battalion) with Sec MMG from 6 Mahar(57) was backing up 'A' Coy and covered the left flank of Battalion HQ which was immediately south of Bridge 3. 'D' Coy was forward on the right side of the road. 'C' Coy was in depth on the right side of the road. One section of mountain guns (2(D) Mtn Bty of 22 Mt Regt) was deployed on the right side, behind 'C' Coy(58).

The battalion, which covered the withdrawal of the Tawang garrison across the Tawang Chu, had suffered from confusion and disorder on reaching south of the river. As a result many of its troops ran southward towards Se La in what appeared to be a state of demoralisation. But they were halted, grouped together and the situation was stabilised(59). They then occupied delaying positions at Jang where they battled with the Chinese(60), inflicted casualties on the enemy and when the defence of the Bridge 4 over Tawang Chu became untenable, they, as per plan, got it demolished on 24 October 1962, around 1800 hrs(61). As it appeared that the Chinese had no intention to continue further advance, the battalion was to be prepared to stay for the on-coming winter in its 'Delaying Position'(62). The Garhwalis thus settled down in the Nuranang area to perform their duties as covering troops for main defences of 62 Bde sector. They were to hold the area "as long as the enemy build up permits"(63). In the meantime, the covering troops were "to harass the enemy and impede his build up" in order to provide more time to induct additional troops(64) in the defensive positions of 4 Inf Div.

During the period 24 October - 16 November 1962, 4 Garhwal Rifles carried out aggressive patrolling in the no-man's land. A fighting patrol which included Major H.B. Rai, Coy Cmdr 4 Garhwal, and Maj Goswami of 2 Derajat Bty, covered the area upto Mukto suspension bridge over Tawang Chu from 1 to 6 November 1962. They harassed enemy on the other side of the river by directing Howitzer shelling on their concentrations. Finally Mukto Bridge abutments were partially destroyed(65).

On 11 November, reports were received that the enemy was moving troops, in small groups, from Rho village towards Meling. Movement of a large number of mules was also observed eastward north of Tawang Chu. To assess the situation, a patrol, consisting of one JCO and 40 ORs, under 2/Lt V.K. Goswamy was sent to village Rho on 14 November at 1500 hrs. The patrol established a firm base in an area south of Tawang Chu. It observed about 20 Chinese near a hut in Rho village across the river. 2/Lt Goswamy, with seven men, crossed Tawang Chu with the help of a log. Lt Goswamy was successful in capturing a Chinese soldier who was standing outside a hut. The patrol lobbed hand grenades inside the hut which killed and wounded all the occupants. In the meantime, the enemy got alerted and they opened fire all over the place. The sub-unit of the patrol, which was allocated in support of this patrol, on hearing the enemy fire moved across Tawang Chu to create further confusion in the enemy and to facilitate the withdrawal of Goswamy's patrol. In order to avoid fire from Chinese weapons sited on fixed lines by night, Lt Goswamy decided to roll down from precipitous heights to reach the river. During this process of rolling down, the Chinese prisoner was killed. His arms and equipment were, however, brought back. The patrol returned safely to firm base at 0100 hrs without any casualty(66). Lt V.K. Goswamy was later on awarded Vr C for his exemplary courage, initiative and leadership.

Besides the above, the battalion had been regularly informing the HQ 62 Inf Bde about:-

- (a) Movement of enemy troops and loaded mules along the track north of Tawang eastward towards Chuna. This happened almost daily. These very forces obviously debouched themselves to Kye La behind Se La and Dirang Dzong.
- (b) Rapid progress in the construction of the road from Bum La to Tawang.
- (c) Movement of enemy across the Mukto Bridge in single file towards the Bhutan border. These troops apparently moved in that direction to cut off line of withdrawal of Indians. A portion of it moved to Dirang Dzong(67).

But, unfortunately, no proper notice of those reports was taken. In fact, higher Headquarters admonished the reporting units for sending "exaggerated" reports about the enemy movements and activities(68).

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By 16 November, the Chinese had succeeded in extending Bum La road to Tawang and constructing a log bridge over Tawang Chu approximately 275 metres west of the destroyed Bridge 4. In spite of best efforts of Arty elements attached to 4 Garhwal to harass the enemy, the Chinese succeeded in crossing the river. Thereafter, hectic Chinese build-up began against the Garhwalis. At this juncture, CO 4 Garhwal spoke to Maj H.B. Rai, Coy Cmdr 4 Garhwal from Brigade HQ ordering him to take out a patrol to area behind the battalion's defences and towards north-east of Kye La. As claimed by Maj Rai, in view of the prevailing situation, he protested against this order. The CO then came down to Battalion HQ at about 0400 hrs (17 November) and repeated the same order, Maj Rai again resisted pleading to let him remain with the battalion. CO 4 Garhwal then consulted Brigade Cmdr and as per the wishes of the Bde Cmdr, ordered Maj Rai to take out a patrol to find feasibility of establishing a Coy defence in that area and whether local resources were available for the same.

Maj Rai alongwith 2 weak sections, left at about 0900 hrs on 17 November, by which time the Chinese attack on forward positions had already started. After having quickly finished the task, the patrol was on its way back on 18 November morning when enemy mortar shells fell amidst them. Soon a platoon under Sub Sardar Singh Aswal which had been attacked by the enemy also joined them. A patrol sent to the battalion area reported that the 4 Garhwal Rifles had left the area. Moving towards Se La, Maj Rai found it in occupation of the enemy. Major Rai then broke the combined party of about 30 men into five groups, which were to move on their own towards Bomdila. Some of these men perished enroute and others were captured by enemy (69).

2 Sikh LI had reached Se La on 28 October. The main task assigned to the battalion was to check the entry of the enemy to the southern part of the Se La Ridge from the Kye La and to protect the right flank of the Brigade. One Fd Bty was made available to the battalion in support. The deployment of the battalion(70) was as follows:-

Battalion HQ about 4 km ahead of Se La towards Nuranang along the road.

'A' Coy - Kye La (Pass) (4,270 metres)
with one section
of 7 Mahar (MG)

'D' Coy - North-east of Se La. and
approximately 2 km south of
Kye La.

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- 'B' Coy - On a feature (4,850 metres), north-east of Se La.
- 'C' Coy - One km behind battalion HQ with one section road Se La - Jang. of 7 Mahar (MG)

On 1 November, the battalion was ordered to send a patrol under the command of an officer from Kye La to reconnoitre a track from Kye La along nullah to south of Mago Chu and then along south bank of the river to Jang and Bridge 3 and to report on any dispositions of the enemy if seen from south bank of Mago Chu. When this patrol under Captain M.K. Saxena did not turn up at Bridge 3 by the appointed time on 4 November, a patrol of 'D' Coy was sent from Bridge 3 on 5 November to locate Captain Saxena's patrol. 'B' Coy sent another patrol towards south of Mago Chu for the same purpose on 6 November. 'A' Coy sent a third patrol with the same objective. The search patrol located captain Saxena lying with frost bite on the toes approximately 2 km away from Kye La(71).

Lt Col A.R. Irani, the Commanding Officer of the unit, who had been on leave, was recalled and rejoined the unit on 9 November 1962. After appreciating the dispositions on the ground of all the companies, he preferred to reinforce Kye La at least with another company and with one section Medium Machine gun.

The various patrols sent in the area brought some valuable information(72) which indicated that the Chinese were -

- (a) guarding bridge 4 over Tawang Chu in strength;
- (b) holding ridge, north of Rho with more than a battalion;
- (c) holding Iron bridge over Mago Chu; and
- (d) visiting villages south of Mago Chu, and had issued the villagers some sort of a 'pass' to identify them.

Upto 15 November most of Indian patrols had suffered heavy casualties at the hands of the enemy(73). It had a bad effect on the morale of the troops. To boost it up, the Bde Cmdr on a visit to 2 Sikh LI, on 14 November ordered that a strong column of 3 Coys under command of Maj S.S. Jaspal, 2 I/C, 2 Sikh LI, be sent to ascertain the enemy activities at Luguthang and to destroy them if possible. Besides

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two Coys of 2 Sikh LI, one Coy of 1 Sikh and one Pl of 1 Sikh (to carry 3-in mortar ammunition) comprised the column. The column was to be self-sufficient for four days and a Forward Observation Officer also accompanied the column. The column was given the nick name of KAUA(74). The CO of the battalion established his command post at Kye La to watch the progress of the column, which left the battalion HQ at 0430 hrs on 15 November. The column established a night harbour a little short of Luguthang. One platoon from the Coy of 1 Sikh(75) was left behind at a pass as a firm base with a wireless set 31, on the command net of the Column Commander.

At 0005 hrs on 16 November(76), approximately 500 to 600 Chinese attacked the column in its night harbour from all directions. The column gave a good fight for two hours. Due to the nature of the ground, none of the sets could communicate with the control set Kye La, and as such the FOO could not arrange any artillery shoot, although the column was within the range of field guns at Se La. The column Cmdr therefore, gave orders for withdrawal(77). In the meantime, the platoon ex 1 Sikh positioned at firm base was also attacked and thrown back. The route of withdrawal of the whole column was, thus cut off by the enemy. When 2 Sikh LI men reached the firm base, they found enemy already in occupation of the place. The column ultimately returned to battalion HQ by approximately 1100 hrs after suffering heavy casualties - 1 JCO and 59 ORs were reported to be missing. 2/Lt Khaira of 2 Sikh LI was killed during the engagement with the enemy(78). Another strong patrol was sent out to the area at 1100 hrs on 16 November with a view to assist any straggler that might be trying to make for the battalion HQ. This patrol returned to battalion HQ at 1700 hrs after collecting a few wounded soldiers(79).

This episode, it is reported, caused some bad blood between the two battalions. 2 Sikh LI felt badly let down by 1 Sikh(80).

After its withdrawal from the Bum La-Tawant axis on 23 October, 1 Sikh moved to Se La and was deployed under 62 Inf Bde. One Fd Bty and elements of 34 Hy Mor Bty were placed in support of the battalion. The deployment of companies of 1 Sikh was as under(81):-

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Battalion HQ | - South of Se La (Pass) on the right side of the road. |
| 'A' Coy | - High Ground on the right of the Se La. |

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- 'B' Coy - South-east of 'A' Coy position.
- 'C' Coy - South-east of 'B' Coy position.
- 'D' Coy - High Ground in the south-west of 'C' Coy position. 3-in mortars - west of 'D' Coy position.

The unit had been sending regular patrols to Kye La, Luguthang and Yangyap La to know the enemy activities and to keep them under check(82). As already narrated, 'A' Coy of the battalion under S/Lt Surendra Dagur had formed part of the three-Company fighting patrol, which was sent to Luguthang on 15 November under the command of 2 I/C of 2 Sikh LI. The men of 1 Sikh had stayed at the firm base, established by this fighting patrol near Dzalung La. They were attacked by the enemy and forced to withdraw(83).

Another patrol of this battalion under Maj A.C. Lahiri, with one platoon of 'B' Coy and two platoons of 5 Assam Rifles, was sent on 17 November 1962 to locate two platoons of Assam Rifles which were positioned at Yangyap La. Before the return of this patrol to its base, the battalion had withdrawn from Se La, and when the patrol came to know about the situation, it also withdrew to Senge/Dirang. This patrol party was ambushed by the enemy on its way and was forced to split itself in small parties(84).

The fourth battalion - 4 Sikh LI - was moved from Dagshai (Simla Hills) as a part of 48 Inf Bde on 22 October 1962, and immediately on arrival in the area it was placed under 62 Inf Bde(85). It reached Se La on 24/25 October. Its Rifle Companies were deployed(86) as under:-

- Battalion HQ - High Ground on the left of 'B' Coy Se La
- 'D' Coy - Nuranang
- 'A' & 'C' Coys - Two-Lake area, north-west of Se La

87 Fd Bty was in support of the battalion and was deployed south of Nuranang.

The battalion was made responsible to protect the left flank of the Bde defences and to prevent the infiltration of the enemy down to Dirang Dzong from the tracks/routes available to the enemy on the left of the road axis, i.e. via Chebra La.

The Unit continuously patrolled the routes coming up from Tawang Chu to the Two-Lake area and Senge Dzong so as to see that the enemy could not by-pass Se La defensive position(87). The troops positioned in the Two-Lake area on 16 November reported movement of more than 1,000 Chinese troops along Bhutan border towards south between the border and the track Chebra La - Jangle CG.

The fifth battalion - 13 Dogra - under 62 Inf Bde was deployed at Senge on the high ground overlooking the Dirang Dzong. It was located midway between Dirang Dzong and Se La(88). The place was 35 km north of Dirang Dzong and 27 km south of Se La.

(B) 65 Bde Sector

The two battalions 4 Rajput and 19 Maratha were sending regular patrols in their area of responsibility on various tracks to get latest information about the Chinese. The Rajputs, whose task was to check the Chinese infiltration from the east, sent one Coy patrol under Maj K.P.P. Nair and on 15 November instructions were issued to reinforce Maj Nair's column for intensifying combing operations in the area(89). The reinforcement patrol was ambushed on its way. When another patrol was sent to retrieve the casualties, it too, was ambushed and failed to return. On 16 November, a Coy strong patrol was sent to the area, but this patrol was also fired upon and had to return to the base(90).

'C' Coy of 19 Maratha under Maj S.D. Parab with a Forward Observation Officer was sent to Tungri via Sangti and Rungza. The AR post Chhangla had been withdrawn earlier and there was no communication with the Coy of 5 Guards that had been sent to Chhangla a day earlier. At 1400 hrs on 17 November, 'C' Coy was ordered to withdraw from Rungza to area Kachow and occupy a defensive position there(91).

After the 'C' Coy column had left on 16 November, it was decided to send another column to area Chongdor under Maj A.M. Shaikh, consisting of 'D' Coy less one Pl and a Pl from 'B' Coy. This column, with a FOO, going along the Dirang-Munna Camp-Namsu route arrived in the vicinity of Chongdor by the noon of 17 November. There they were halted by the enemy(92). On orders from Bde HQ, all patrols that were out were then ordered to return to battalion HQ as the enemy had established a road block between Dirang and Bomdila(93).

(C) 48 Bde Sector

1 Madras being the first battalion to reach Bomdila, it was given the task of digging positions for the whole Bde(94). Later, after the arrival of other two battalions - 1 Sikh LI and 5 Guards - in the area, all the three battalions got busy in digging their defences. By 16 November all weapon pits, fire trenches and bunkers were ready, except completion of over-head covers in certain cases(95).

All the battalions were also asked to carry out regular patrolling to obtain information about approaches to the Indian positions, enemy movements, etc(96). Accordingly, between 1 and 16 November, 1 Madras sent thirteen patrols in different directions. When 'D' Coy of the battalion under Maj Harbans Singh was sent to Dirang on 15/16 November for the defence of the Div HQ, the defences of the battalion were reorganised. An ad-hoc Coy was formed from Pl of 'C' Coy, Admn Coy personnel and Sp Coy anti-tank platoon to man the position vacated by 'D' Coy on the left flank of the battalion location(97).

Even before the second battalion - 1 Sikh LI - could concentrate in Bomdila, its 'B' Coy under Maj J.L. Sharma was sent as a special patrol on Bhutan border. Till 17 November, the battalion continued preparing main defensive positions, and one first line small arms ammunition was dumped in each Coy locality, except 3-in mortar ammunition which was 280 rounds only(98). Battalion occupied defensive position by 1000 hrs on 16 November. No defence stores like wire/mines were, however, issued to the battalion.

The third battalion - 5 Guards - which was deployed to the rear of 48 Bde defended area, from 4 November onward was ordered to move, piecemeal, to the Poshingla axis, first as a patrol and then as a force to counter the advance of the enemy from that direction. In this way the whole of the battalion was strung out along the Poshingla-Thembang track on 16 November.

BATTLE OF NURANANG

In the morning around 1000 hrs on 16 November, a patrol led by Jem Partap Singh Rawat, Pl Cdr of 'A' Coy which was occupying the forwardmost position in the 4 Garhwal defended area, reported heavy enemy concentration in area Lhau across the Tawang Chu. The patrol also reported, at 1800 hrs, that enemy was constructing a bridge over the river near the old Bridge 4 which had been demolished earlier(99-100).

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At about 0500 hrs on 17 November, Jem Gabar Singh Rawat, Pl Cdr No 2 pl, which was defending the right forward point of 'A' Coy, was informed by his Observation Post that some men were advancing along the road in Monpa dress towards the defences. On receipt of this information, Jem Rawat, along with two riflemen moved forward to personally check up who these men were. When the Pl Cdr was about 30 metres from the men in the Monpa clothes, he could see some rifles sticking out of their dress, which they were trying to conceal. At about the same time, noise of mine explosion was heard from the west flank of the company. It became clear that the Chinese were launching an attack. Jem Rawat and his party lobbed a few grenades on the approaching enemy, and made their way back to the company under covering fire from the forward defended localities(101).

The Chinese were now moving towards the defences, and attacked in a series of waves for about 30 minutes under cover of mortar fire. These attacks were beaten back with heavy casualties to the enemy. The enemy was then seen withdrawing to the rear, possibly to reorganise for a fresh effort. 'A' Company Commander, 2/Lt S.N. Tandon, apprised the Commanding Officer of the situation on telephone and the Commanding Officer reported the details to the Brigade Commander.

In the meantime, the patrol led by Jem Partap Singh Rawat, which had left the locality on 15 November 1962, reported at 0715 hrs on 17 November that approximately two infantry battalions of Chinese were forming up opposite 'A' Coy Defended Locality and were being followed up by a large body of men moving from the direction of Jang. The enemy launched a fresh attack at about 0745 hrs. This time, the attack was preceded by heavy mortar and artillery fire. Centre and right flank of the Garhwalis came again under heavy pressure. It was again mainly due to the hand grenades, that the enemy attack was broken up. This assault lasted for about twenty minutes. Having failed, the enemy withdrew again, leaving more casualties in front of Indian FDLs.

The enemy having regrouped and reorganised, again launched assault on 'A' Company locality at 0910 hrs. The battalion successfully repulsed the enemy attack again, inflicting heavy casualties. As the 'A' Coy of the battalion occupied the forward-most location of the battalion defended area, the enemy could not attack other Coy's locations without over-running 'A' Coy first. Battalion defence was in a deep ravine, with high cliffs on either side and as such flanks of the main battalion HQ were adequately protected(102).

The Chinese once again formed up and launched their most determined attack from three directions - front and both the flanks preceded by very heavy shelling, at 1055 hrs. The attackers came very close to the forward trenches of the front platoon. Nk Ranjit Singh Gusain, seeing an imminent danger, came out of his bunker to an open trench, and threw hand grenades very effectively on the assaulting enemy. He was hit by a bullet in the head, but continued throwing grenades till the enemy assault was broken up. He then fell unconscious(103). By this time, the enemy managed to bring forward and site a medium machine gun within thirty metres to the left flank of the Indian position, and simultaneously continued attacking in wave after wave(104). The 'A' Coy Cmr sent L/Nk Trilok Singh Negi, Rifleman Jaswant Singh Rawat and Rifleman Gopal Singh Gusain, who volunteered to destroy the MMG. L/Nk Negi was armed with a sten gun and the jawans with grenades. When these three reached within about 12 metres of the MMG position, they threw hand grenades which killed many enemy soldiers. Rifleman Jaswant Singh was also hit and collapsed on the spot, while Rifleman Gopal Singh Gusain was wounded(105). Enemy continued the assault in successive waves, but was repulsed every time. The wounded Indian soldiers were evacuated and the captured medium machine gun of the enemy was sent to the battalion HQ at 1330 hrs(106).

Once again the enemy attacked in strength at about 1450 hrs, preceded by intensive shelling and automatic fire(107). The attack was repulsed again, and at about 1600 hrs the enemy was compelled to withdraw under cover of his mortar and artillery fire. After these encounters, approximately three hundred Chinese were seen lying dead and wounded, compared to two Indians killed and eight wounded(108).

Realising that the enemy had obtained a foothold on flanks of 4 Garh Rif and had been shelling the battalion with mortars and mountain guns continuously, the Bde Cmr concluded (at 1530 hrs) that it was better to withdraw the battalion to the main defensive position at Se La before it was badly mauled(109). The Garhwalis had well served their role as a forward screen for Se La, serious attack on which was clearly building up.

As line and wireless communication between Bde and Battalion HQ had broken down, a message was sent by the Bde Cmr, at 1830 hrs to the Battalion Cmr through Captain Abraham of 4 Sikh. In his message the Bde Cmr congratulated the Bn Cmr and his officers and men for "a very steady and a well-controlled defensive battle". The instructions for re-deployment

of the battalion were as under:-

- (a) Battalion HQ less two Coys with Bde HQ at Se La (Bde HQ was 18 km in the rear from battalion HQ).
- (b) Two Coys under command 1 Sikh, at Se La.
- (c) Abandon present position so as to cross km 108 road Bomidila - Jang not later than midnight 17/18 November.
- (d) Inform Forward Observation Officer at km 106 road Bomidila - Jang to engage the enemy with artillery fire, once the positions were abandoned(110).

The orders for withdrawal to Se La were passed on to all sub-units, except the special patrol sent out under Maj H.B. Rai earlier, as he was not in communication with battalion HQ(111). The battalion arrived at Se La at 0300 hrs(112).

In the battle of Nuranang, the Garhwalis, fought very bravely and earned acclaim(113). The under-mentioned officers and personnel of 4 Garhwal Rifles were awarded gallantry awards after the Battle of Nuranang(114):-

MVC

1. Lt Col B.M. Bhattacharjea, OC 4 Garh Rif (IC-1338)
2. Rfn Jaswant Singh Rawat (Posthumous)

VrC

1. 2/Lt Vinod Kumar Goswamy (IC-12323) (Posthumous).
2. 2/Lt S.N. Tandon (IC-12691)
3. Rfn Gopal Singh Gusain
4. L/Nk Trilok Singh Negi (Posthumous)
5. Rfn Madan Singh Rawat (Posthumous)
6. Sub Udai Singh Rawat
7. Jem Jatan Singh Gusain

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS - 17 NOVEMBER (EVENING)

The few hours from the late afternoon of 17 November to the early hours of 18 November proved decisive for the operations in the Kameng sector. The sequence of events and developments in the evening of 17 November 1962, which led to the withdrawal of 62 Inf Bde from Se La and abandoning of Dirang Dzong by HQ 4 Inf Div, still remains shrouded in mystery. Statements made by persons directly concerned with those developments are contradictory to one another on important points. At times, they are at variance with recorded facts.

For example, Maj Gen A.S. Pathania, GOC 4 Inf Div, the central figure in those developments said that Brig Hoshiar Singh, Commander 62 Inf Bde had told him in the evening of 17 November (no specific time was mentioned) that his position was "attacked heavily from both flanks"(115). According to Gen Pathania, Brig Hoshiar Singh told him that in the face of one division strong enemy "his position at Se La was becoming untenable" and he could not hold on for more than 5 or 6 days. This, obviously, was the rationale for Gen Pathania to have ordered withdrawal of 62 Bde. But, according to an official record(111), Brig Hoshiar Singh, wherever he went, told the troops that Se La was impregnable and even if the Chinese did outflank them and cut off their axis of maintenance, they must hold on to their defences in the area. Brig Hoshiar Singh was clear about this tactical concept from the beginning. None of the persons who should have known the facts and none of the available records mention Brig Hoshiar Singh to have contemplated withdrawal of Bde on his own at any stage.

In a supplementary statement Gen Pathania admitted that "there was actually no real attack on Se La position on the evening of 17 November"(117), when Brig Hoshiar Singh talked to him at about 2230 hrs that night. It was Gen Pathania, who from the conversation claims to have drawn this impression that Brig Hoshiar Singh wanted to convey to him that heavy enemy pressure was building up and that the process of withdrawal of units under 62 Bde should start the same night. This clearly means that the idea of withdrawal of 62 Inf Bde had already been mooted before the position of the Bde became untenable consequent upon any attack by the enemy, although the plan had been to stand and fight even if the L of C was cut(118).

Under the circumstances, an attempt has been made in the following lines to gather various facts from different sources and to reconstruct the sequence in which developments are most likely to have happened on that momentous evening.

Maj Gen M.N. Rawat (Retd), who was EM 48 Inf Bde during the 1962 Operations, has stated in an interview that on 17 November early evening in a conversation with GOC 4 Div, Bde Cmdr 48 Inf Bde suggested to the former that since Chinese had reached Thembang, Pathania alongwith 62 and 65 Brigades withdraw to Bomdila, from where the whole Divisional resources would put up strong fight against the enemy if it advanced upto Bomdila. As an alternative, Brig Gurbux Singh proposed that if Se La could be assured of continued supplies through air, then HQ 4 Inf Div along with 65 Inf Bde should fall back to Bomdila, from where they could put up a successful fight. But, the idea was not acceptable to GOC 4 Inf Div at that time(119).

But as early as 1500 hrs on 17th it was known that HQ 4 Inf Div was planning to move back to Tenga valley, south of Bomdila. Chief Signal Officer of 4 Div had informed the Chief Signal Officer IV Corps that at about 1630 hrs he would be moving out with lay out group for the purpose of establishing the Div HQ in a new location(120). In the meantime, at 1630 hrs Thembang had fallen, and the enemy had established a road block between Bomdila and Dirang Dzong. The move to Tenga valley was, therefore, abandoned by HQ 4 Div(121).

The Chief Signal Officer 4 Inf Div while giving above information to Chief of Signals IV Corps also said that GOC 4 Div wanted to speak to Lt Gen Kaul. On being told that Gen Kaul was away from his HQ he expressed a desire to speak to BGS in the absence of Corps Commander(122). According to the statement given by Lt Gen K.K. Singh (Retd), who then was BGS IV Corps, at about 1630 hrs, GOC 4 Div, not finding Lt Gen Kaul, spoke to BGS. He described the situation of 62 Bde and his own HQ as very precarious as a result of road blocks established by the Chinese, and pleaded for permission for withdrawal. BGS refused to give permission for withdrawal. Rather, he advised him to stay put. Thereupon Maj Gen Pathania rang off(123). It was about 40 minutes after the above conversation between BGS IV Corps and GOC 4 Div, at about last light, that Gen Thaper, Lt Gen L.P. Sen, Brig D.K. Palit and Brig H.K. Sibal arrived at the Corps HQ(124). After briefing the high dignitaries about the situation on the ground, BGS told them about his tele-conversation with Gen Pathania earlier(125).

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Thereafter Gen Thapar and Gen Sen also talked to GOC 4 Div. But, in their conversations with GOC 4 Div neither Thapar nor Sen was willing to authorise the request for withdrawal in the absence of Kaul. They told him that it was only on the return of Kaul that any decision on the matter would have to be taken(126). Soon after, Lt Gen Kaul arrived(127) when the above conversation was still on(128).

The talk between Gen Kaul and Gen Pathania, must have taken place sometime around 1900 hrs, or thereafter. It is certain that GOC 4 Div spoke to Brig Hoshiar Singh before his tele-conversation with the Corps Commander. While talking to Brig Hoshiar Singh, Gen Pathania had asked him to prepare for the withdrawal of 62 Bde on 17 November night(129). Hoshiar Singh is reported to have protested against such a move and said that he had sufficient supplies to last for about a week and if he continued to be supplied by Air, he was prepared to give a fight to enemy, notwithstanding his land communication having been disrupted. Gen Pathania did not give any assurance for continuance of supplies, and wanted the whole Bde to fall back to Bomdila rather than lose the whole Bde at Se La. As GOC 4 Div had no reserves, road to Se La could not be opened if the enemy cut off Se La. Left with no alternative, the Bde Commander said he would withdraw "if ordered to do so". But the withdrawal could not take place before night of 18/19 November and withdrawal on 17/18 November night, for which the GOC was keen, was not possible as such a withdrawal without any plan and prior knowledge of Unit Commanders would have created panic amongst the troops. In the same conversation Brig Hoshiar Singh informed GOC that he had earlier issued orders for the Battalion 4 Garhwal Rifles and 2 Coys of 4 Sikh Light Infantry in the Two-Lake area to withdraw to the main defences of Se La. GOC gave ex-post-facto approval to those moves. GOC also ordered Brig Hoshiar Singh to send 2 Coys out of his garrison immediately for attempting to remove road blocks and for the defence of the Divisional HQ. Consequently, two companies of 13 Dogra were rushed to Dirang the same night(131).

Official records indicate that the tele-conversation between Brig Hoshiar Singh and Maj Gen A.S. Pathania, (in which the decision to withdraw 62 Inf Bde from Se La was taken) took place before 1800 hrs. As a result of that conversation the Bde Cmr, at 1800 hrs, called a conference of the senior officers at Bde Headquarters for briefing for withdrawal and the briefing was over and plans for withdrawal made, by 1830 hrs(132). If we exclude the possibility of GOC having talked to BGS, IV Corps,

around 1630 hrs as hinted to by BGS IV Corps(133) and accept the time of GOC 4 Inf Div's tele-conversation with the Corps HQ at about 1800 hrs, as informed by Lt Gen Sen(134), Lt Gen B.M. Kaul(135) and Brig P.S. Gill(136), the conclusion is inescapable that Gen Pathania had spoken to Brig Hoshiar Singh before he had contacted the Corps HQ. In any case, it was well before any semblance of authorisation for such planned withdrawal could have been given by the Corps Commander, since from all the available evidence it is clear that Gen Kaul returned to his HQ from the Walong Sector not before 1900 hrs(137).

To pick up the thread of developments on 17 November 1962 in the evening, after Lt Gen Kaul arrived at the Corps HQ around 1900 hrs, there was a discussion among Gen Thapar, Lt Gen Sen, Lt Gen Kaul and Brig Palit about the situation in the 4 Div Sector and on Maj Gen Pathania's request for withdrawal for about half-an-hour. Lt Gen Kaul also talked to GOC 4 Inf Div. But from the available evidence one cannot be very clear as to how many times and at what time exactly did Gen Kaul speak to Gen Pathania(138). But, from all the records pertaining to those developments one can be certain about the following:-

(a) That on the pleadings of Maj Gen A.S. Pathania on telephone for permission to withdraw as there was a possibility of his being cut off from Senga that night, Lt Gen B.M. Kaul told him to stick out that night, and that he would issue final orders on 18 November morning(139). According to another record, Gen Kaul also told Gen Pathania that the latter could withdraw at his discretion if the situation was very bad(140).

(b) Lt Gen B.M. Kaul gave message(141) to C Sig O "withdraw to Bomdila", with instructions to clear immediately to HQ 4 Inf Div. BGS IV Corps did question as to why such a decision at that stage, but, Kaul simply asked him to get it cleared without any loss of time. Since it would have required considerable time in encyphering, transmitting and decyphering it after receipt at the other end, BGS immediately rang through to Cmdr 48 Inf Bde at Bomdila and gave the message to him to be passed on to GOC 4 Inf Div as soon as he could speak to him(142). Meanwhile, the message was encyphered in about 20 minutes. When it was being transmitted to HQ 4 Inf Div, Gen Kaul came and asked for its withdrawal(143). The transmission of the message was stopped(144). BGS then immediately told Cmdr 48 Bde on telephone that the message was not to be conveyed to HQ 4 Div. Brig Gurbux Singh informed that since the telephone line between Bomdila and Dirang was down, that message had not been passed on and he assured that no further action would be taken on that account.

(c) After about 20 minutes of the withdrawal of the above message(145), obviously, as a result of consultations with Gen Thapar and Lt Gen Sen, Gen Kaul handed over to BGS another message written in his own hand to be conveyed to 4 Inf Div(146). The message, read as follows(147):

"Firstly, you will hold on to your present positions to the best of your ability. When any position becomes untenable I delegate the authority to you to withdraw to any alternate position you can hold.

"Secondly, approximately 400 enemy have already cut the road Bomdila - Dirang Dzong. I have ordered Commander 48 Bde to attack this enemy force tonight speedily and resolutely and keep this road clear at all costs. You may be cut off by the enemy at Senge, Dirang and Bomdila. Your only course is to fight it out as best as you can.

"Thirdly, 67 Inf Bde less one battalion will reach Bomdila by morning 18 November.

"Fourthly, use your own tanks and other supporting arms to fullest extent to clear L of C".

The message was cleared to HQ 4 Inf Div at about 0230 hrs (18 November)(148).

(d) Lt Gen B.M. Kaul spoke to Brig Gurbux Singh, Cmdr 48 Inf Bde, on telephone, more than once, and ordered him to move out troops to destroy the road block.

At about 2230 hrs, Brig Hoshiar Singh rang up Maj Gen A.S. Pathania. The Bde Cmdr had rung him up, ostensibly to inform the GOC about the plan of withdrawal of his Bde and its progress. Gen Pathania then informed Brig Hoshiar Singh that as authorised by the Corps Commander, plan for withdrawal could be made but final orders to that effect would be given in the morning(149).

But, before the morning could dawn, 2 Sikh LI was pulled out of Kye La during night 17/18 November, according to plan(150), and not because that position was made untenable because of enemy pressure. Information about this step was given by the Bde Cmdr to GOC also(151).

On 18 November 1962, Maj Gen Pathania spoke to Lt Gen Kaul on telephone at 0530 hrs and sought his permission to fall back to Bomdila, which was given after the GOC had informed that 62 Inf Bde had started pulling out from Se La on 17 November night, as it was "attacked by the enemy from both flanks"(152).

WITHDRAWAL FROM SE LA

(A) Commencement of Withdrawal

Reports of the Chinese infiltration on both the right and left flanks of 62 Inf Bde defences had reached the Bde HQ. 4 Sikh LI troops, positioned in Two-Lake area had reported, on 16 November, movement of more than 1,000 Chinese troops along Bhutan border towards south-east. The 3-Coy strong patrol under 2-I/C of 2 Sikh LI had been attacked on the morning of 16 November which clearly confirmed the concentration of Chinese troops in the Luguthang area, on the right flank of the Bde defences. The enemy had followed the stragglers of this patrol. On 17 November, the enemy had secured a foot-hold on the main road axis by hammering the Garhwals' position. When it was found that 4 Garhwal could not stand the enemy's attack any longer, it was ordered to fall back to the main defences at Se La. There was every possibility that the brigade-defended area would soon be attacked from three sides; there was also a possibility that the line of communication of the brigade might be cut, isolating the formation from the 4th Division. In other words, there was a likelihood of the Chinese surrounding the Brigade on all sides.

In spite of this tactical situation, the Bde Commander stuck to his decision that the Brigade would stay put and fight the Chinese. When the Bde Commander was at Nuranang on 17 November, he ordered the 'D' Coy of 4 Sikh LI to take up a screen position in the area forward of Nuranang to cover the withdrawal of 4 Garh Rif and 'A' and 'C' Companies of its own battalion from Two-Lake area. These two coys of 4 Sikh LI were given orders to withdraw at 1730 hrs. The screen was to hold the position till first light 18 November and then withdraw on orders to main battalion defended area at Se La(153). At 2130 hrs on 17 November, 'A' and 'C' Coys of 4 Sikh LI ex Two-Lake area commenced their withdrawal through Nuranang to the main battalion HQ at Se La. As the track was frozen and steep, the progress was very slow. This withdrawal of 'A' and 'C' Coys was completed by 0450 hrs. The decision to withdraw 4 Sikh LI from Two-Lake area was taken by the Bde Cmdr to strengthen the battalion position at Se La which

was being manned only by the battalion headquarters' personnel and the 'B' Coy. 4 Garhwal Rifles had arrived at Se La earlier, at 0300 hrs. 'D' Coy 4 Sikh LI then withdrew towards Se La.

Chinese had reportedly pushed more than one Division troops through Kye La and Poshingla axis and these troops were using the numerous tracks to by-pass the 4 Inf Div defended locations on the main road axis. Poshingla had been attacked by the enemy on 15 November and Chinese troops were racing down to Thembang with speed. The Indian troops sent to Lagam to check the advance of the enemy coming through Poshingla had to retreat in a disorderly manner. By the evening of 17 November, the enemy was able to cut the L of C Bomdila - Dirang.

Faced with the above tactical situation, GOC 4 Inf Div talked to Cmdr, 62 Inf Bde on telephone late in the afternoon of 17 November and in that conversation it was decided that 62 Inf Bde would plan to withdraw during night 18/19 November from Se La to Dirang, from where, together with HQ 4 Inf Div and 65 Inf Bde, they would reach Bomdila, and there, alongwith 48 Inf Bde, full resources of 4 Inf Div would put up stout defence(154).

During the conversation, the Bde Cmdr informed about his earlier orders to 4 Garhwal and two Coys of 4 Sikh LI (deployed in Two-Lake area) to withdraw to the main defences at Se La and the GOC gave his approval to those moves. GOC also authorised Cmdr 62 Inf Bde to demolish Bridges 2 and 1 in the event of withdrawal from Se La. It was also agreed that 4 Rajput, located at Bridge 1 and east of Nyukmadong Ridge, would come under command of 62 Inf Bde so as to cover its withdrawal to Bomdila. On the orders of GOC, two Coys of 13 Dogra were sent to Dirang on night 17/18 November for the defence of Div HQ.

Soon after the teleconversation with GOC 4 Inf Div, Cmdr 62 Inf Bde chalked out the plan of withdrawal as follows(155):-

- (a) 4 Garhwal Rifles, ordered to withdraw from Nuranang to Se La, were to go straight to Senge and cover withdrawal of Bde.
- (b) 13 Dogra, (less two Coys) with 4 Garh Rif, to cover withdrawal of rest of the Bde from Se La.
- (c) 2 Sikh LI : to abandon Kye La at 1630 hrs on 18 November (no thinning before 181530), clear forward Coy location of 1 Sikh by 1700 hrs, and take up delaying position at Nyukmadong to cover withdrawal of rest of the Bde.

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- (d) 4 Sikh LI : Its forward Coy to withdraw at 1600 hrs on 18 November and the battalion (with 'A' and 'C' Coys already withdrawn from Two-Lake area to Se La and 'D' Coy from Nuranang, (after having acted as screen for the withdrawing 'A' and 'C' Coy of 4 Sikh LI and 4 Garhwal Rifles, also having reached Se La) to abandon its defences at 2100 hrs and concentrate at Bridge 1.
- (e) 1 Sikh to abandon its defences at 2300 hrs on 18 November.
- (f) HQ 62 Inf Bde: "Unessentials to leave at 182130 with 4 Sikh LI and rest of the Bde HQ to withdraw at 182300".

Later, at about 2200 hrs(156), Bde Cmdr advanced the abandoning of Kye La by 2 Sikh LI from 1630 hrs on 18 November to 2230 hrs on 17 November. Battalion less one Coy was asked to take up covering position at Nyukmadong. One Coy was to be left to cover Nuranang road(157). The reasons for this crucial change in the plan were later (after Bde Cmdr's death) recorded as follows:-

- (a) Enemy, building opposite Kye La, was likely to launch an attack on the morning of 18 November. It would then be difficult to extricate the battalion (2 Sikh LI) during the day.
- (b) By withdrawing the 2 Sikh LI earlier, it would be able to prepare its position at Nyukmadong and be able to cover withdrawal of 62 Inf Bde on night 18/19 November.

The Bde Cmdr informed CO 2 Sikh LI, CO 1 Sikh and GOC 4 Inf Div on telephone about this change.

In pursuance of the withdrawal orders, 4 Garhwal Rifles, (except the special patrol sent earlier under Maj B.B. Rai who was not in communication with Bn HQ) concentrated at about 0100 hrs on 18 November, with the company of 4 Sikh LI acting as screen to cover the withdrawal of 4 Garh Rif. The battalion arrived at Se La at 0300 hrs and waited for orders. By this time, the enemy had already contacted Se La defences from the direction of Kye La. The battalion crossed Se La but the rear was engaged by the enemy and a few casualties occurred(158).

In the meantime, as per the changed plan of withdrawal of 2 Sikh LI, the CO ordered his adjutant

at 2340 hrs to withdraw the battalion the same night and as soon as possible. The men were to carry all their personal weapons and ammunition and one sleeping bag each. Equipment which could not be carried was to be destroyed. 'C' Coy, with under command one section MMG and one section 3 inch mortar, were given an alternate locality and left there with a view to cover the withdrawal of 4 Garh Rif(159).

When the battalion withdrew, they were closely followed by the Chinese from the direction of Kye La(160). The enemy began mortar fire on them. Arty units and all others were withdrawing on the same route, and gaps between units either in terms of time or distance soon disappeared. The withdrawal was not orderly, CO 2 Sikh LI alongwith 'A' and 'D' Coys was able to reach Se La at 0300 hrs.

1 Sikh were informed by the Bde Cmr about the plan of withdrawal of the Bde. Its CO was later also informed about the advancement of the time of withdrawal of 2 Sikh LI from Kye La. There was, however, no change in the plan of withdrawal of 1 Sikh. According to the plan, 1 Sikh were to abandon Se La - last of all at 2300 hrs on 18 November night. But the CO of 1 Sikh, Lt Col B.N. Mehta, called his 2 I/C, adjutant and QM and gave orders for the withdrawal of 1 Sikh from its location at 2330 hrs on 17 November night(161). This decision appears to have been taken by the CO on his own, i.e., without any orders from the Bde Cmr, which resulted in the hurried and unexpected withdrawal of the battalion almost 24 hours before it was to withdraw as per the plan.

It seems that the news about the withdrawal of 4 Garhwal Rifles from Nuranang, the plan for withdrawal of the Brigade and above all, the advancement of the time of withdrawal of 2 Sikh LI had created confusion and panic in the brigade. Information about the withdrawal of 2 Sikh LI having been advanced was probably not passed on to the troops of 1 Sikh. Consequently while 2 Sikh LI troops were passing through 1 Sikh defences, at night time, with the enemy pressing on, their unexpected withdrawal resulted in disorderly withdrawal of troops of 1 Sikh also(162).

When, at about 0400 hrs on 18 November, the Bde Cmr left his HQ for Se La to watch the progress of the withdrawal, as per the plan, of 2 Sikh LI and 4 Garhwal Rifles, and to brief their COs, he saw that 2 Sikh LI and 1 Sikh were all mixed up and completely disorganised. All communications from Bde HQ to battalions had broken down or were cut off. Even

line/wireless communications with HQ 4 Inf Div were disrupted after 0500 hrs, and progress of the withdrawal could not be communicated to Div HQ. At this stage, the Bde Cmdr, realizing that the right side of Se La was completely devoid of troops, ordered that all troops should withdraw immediately, instead of withdrawing during night 18/19 November, and concentrate at Senge(163). The Bde Commander tried to withdraw 4 Sikh LI as well, but there being no communication and the route to the battalion being blocked by the Chinese, no orders could be conveyed to 4 Sikh LI. They were, therefore, left on their own.

(B) 62 Inf Bde disintegrates

After giving the withdrawal orders at 0545 hrs, the Bde Commander left Se La and reached at the battalion HQ of 13 Dogra at Senge at about 0630 hrs. At 0800 hrs, BM 62 Bde informed GSO I IV Corps from Shukla Camp that 62 Inf Bde was on its way to Dirang to join 65 Inf Bde, and Div HQ. BM also informed BM 48 Bde at Bomdila that 62 Inf Bde was expected to reach Bomdila on 19 November after clearing the enemy on Dirang Bomdila road.

When most of the troops, except 4 Sikh LI and 7 Mahar, withdrawing from Se La reached Senge, the Bde Commander divided his troops into three columns, i.e., vehicle column and two marching columns. The vehicle column was asked to move immediately to Dirang Dzong and report there to C Arty. Of the two marching columns, one consisting of two Coys - 'A' and 'D' of 4 Garhwal Rifles under their CO, was ordered to reach Dirang Dzong by the old mule track Nyukmadong - Dirang along the heights and not by the main road, with a view to protect the Bde Column's left flank. The other marching column - known as the Bde Column - consisted of all the other troops and their planned order of march was -

4 Garh Rif ('B' and 'C' Coys)

2 Sikh LI

Bde HQ and minor Units

1 Sikh

13 Dogra (less two Coys - 'C' and 'D' - which had already been moved to Dirang Dzong on night 17 November) was to act as rear guards.

4 Sikh LI and section 7 Mahar (MMG) were still at Se La as they had not been conveyed the withdrawal orders.

(i) 4 Sikh LI Column

The two Coys - 'A' and 'C' - of 4 Sikh LI were ordered to withdraw to Se La from Two-Lake area at 1730 hrs on 17 November. On arrival at Se La they were to occupy their original localities on the left flank of the main Se La defences. These Coys started withdrawal at 2130 hrs to Se La through Nuranang. Their progress was very slow because the track was frozen and steep. The 'D' Coy of the Battalion, which was holding a screen position in the area forward of Nuranang to cover the withdrawal of 4 Garh Rif and its 2 Coys from Two-Lake area, was also asked to withdraw from the screen position by the first light of 18 November. On withdrawal, it was to hold its original position at Se La. The orders issued by the Bde Commander at 0545 hrs - 18 November - to all the troops to withdraw from Se La could not be conveyed to 4 Sikh LI Battalion HQ and its companies because of breakdown of communication. As such, while troops of the Bde were marching towards Senge from Se La, the troops of three Coys of 4 Sikh LI - 'A', 'C' and 'D' - had not yet reached even Se La.

As the enemy had, by 0700 hrs on 18 November, infiltrated into Se La defences, these troops, while in the process of their withdrawal to Se La, came under enemy rifle and mortar fire. Pl 'A' Coy troops on reaching their original Coy locality at Se La, found to their dismay the Chinese troops in occupation of their trenches. A charge was made to clear the enemy out. Though a number of casualties were inflicted on the enemy, Pl 'A' Coy, too, suffered heavily (164). An enemy MMG opened fire from northern heights, earlier held by 2 Sikh LI, on to 4 Sikh LI troops astride the road, inflicting heavy casualties on the Indian troops.

Realising the futility of any aggressive action, OC 'D' Coy - the seniormost officer on the spot at 1030 hrs on 18 November - ordered the troops to withdraw south of Se La Ridge through a small saddle on the crest, and then move in one column to effect a link with the rest of the Battalion (Battalion HQ and 'B' Coy). The Battalion HQ and 'B' Coy location also came under repeated attacks. Being aware of his inability to hold Se La position any longer, with the enemy already in the rear, the CO 4 Sikh LI (Lt Col R.B. Nanda) ordered to fire all the remaining ammunition on the enemy, and then to withdraw southwards. The troops of the Battalion divided themselves into small parties and started marching south of Se La. These parties were repeatedly ambushed by the enemy in their downward march and a

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large number of them were killed or wounded. Most of the troops who could escape entered Bhutan. Capt R.D. Rosario who was killed in one of the ambushes was later on awarded Vr C (posthumously)(165).

(ii) 7 Mahar MMG Troops

While 'C' Coy, 2 Sikh LI, left behind to cover the withdrawal of 4 Garhwal Rifles, was conveyed orders to withdraw to Se La, such orders, however, could not be conveyed to the MMG Section of 7 Mahar under it. Unaware of the Infantry's withdrawal and in the absence of any orders to the contrary, the MMG Section continued to occupy its location. Later, the Section position and Platoon HQ was encircled by the Chinese under cover of darkness. When grenades were hurled into gun position, it was realised that the position was surrounded by the enemy. Hav Govind Kamble, the Section Commander, bore the full brunt of the bursting grenades and, both his legs were blown off. Undaunted, this gallant NCO ordered his Section to withdraw, while he himself took possession of the gun to cover their withdrawal. Even in that state he inflicted casualties on the enemy and his gun continued firing till it was silenced for ever. For his bravery and devotion to duty Hav. Kamble was awarded Vr C (posthumously).

In the absence of a planned withdrawal and with darkness all round, some personnel of this Section and Pl HQ after a long march of many days crossed into Bhutan. In the whole operation, the MMG platoon (the above section and the section which withdrew along with the Bde HQ) suffered 25 casualties, which included 3 killed, 7 wounded, 7 missing and 6 taken prisoners(166).

(iii) Vehicle Column

Vehicle column of the entire Brigade was permitted to move towards Dirang at 0830 hrs from Senge. At about 1030 hrs, when the column was approximately 2 km short of Bridge 1, it was ambushed by the enemy(167). The Bty Commander, 2(D) FF, accompanied by three jawans went up a knoll and took up an LMG position. The enemy opened fire from several directions on the vehicles and the Indian troops were pinned down. Soon, every one got separated and tried to make his way downwards independently. In this ambush, more than 30 all ranks were killed and many were made prisoners. Only a few could escape.

(iv) 4 Garh Rif Column

This column, consisting of 'A' and 'D' Coys under the CO of the Battalion, in its downward journey cleared enemy delaying position of about a platoon strength in the area of Nyukmadong and a series of enemy stops in order to facilitate the withdrawal of Bde HQ and other units moving along the road. Soon the Garhwals found the enemy in much greater strength and in depth. In these encounters, 4 Garhwal suffered many casualties. It was just after midnight 18/19 November that this column reached Dirang Dzong, where it ran into an ambush laid by the enemy. Most of the lead tired personnel were either killed, or captured. The CO and Lt Tandon were captured in the early hours on 19 November(168). Before this column could reach Dirang Dzong, the troops there had already withdrawn from the area but this fact was not known to the CO 4 Garhwal. What they took to be friendly troops from a distance turned out to be Chinese who were already in occupation of Dirang Dzong.

In the whole operation, including the battle of Nuranang and the withdrawal, 4 Garhwal Rifles (including the two Coys withdrawing with the Bde Column) suffered heavily - 3 Officers, 4 JCOs, 148 ORs and 7 NCsE were reported killed and 5 Officers, 8 JCO's 244 ORs and 7 NCsE were taken prisoner.

(v) Bde Column

At about 1100 hrs the leading elements of the Bde column came under fire when they were a little ahead of Bridge 2. 2 Sikh LI was leading, and tried clearing the enemy located on high features on both sides of the road. The jawans using 2-in and 3-in mortars were able to clear a distance of about 3 km. The column was being fired upon heavily by two or three MMGs from ahead. All further attempts to clear the enemy ambush along the road proved futile. A platoon of 2 Sikh LI under Lt Karam Singh was then sent on the ridge left of the road to try and drive out the enemy. But during its advance along the ridge, the platoon met heavy fire and the Platoon Commander was killed(169). In the meantime, 13 Dogra, who were in the rear, were attacked twice and could not, therefore, be brought forward to assist 2 Sikh LI or 4 Garhwal Rifles. Another cause of the disruption in the command and control at this time was the lack of wireless communication between Bde HQ and the units(170).

By 1600 hrs on 18 November the Bde Column was completely disorganised. Three or four enemy MMGs were still sweeping along the road and there was also intermittent fire of mortars. The efforts of 2 Sikh

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LI to dislodge the enemy had failed. As darkness came, even the semblance of command and control also broke down completely. The remnants of the Bde started dispersing in small parties with the aim of reaching Foot Hills. Some of these parties were again ambushed that night while trying to escape. But, generally speaking, there was a lull after darkness and many Chinese parties were seen moving here and there flashing torch lights. It was noticeable that as soon as darkness fell, the Chinese had stopped aimless firing, to conserve their ammunition(171).

Brig Hoshiar Singh's party was reportedly ambushed near Phudung on 27 November 1962, and the Bde Commander was killed much after the Cease-fire announced by the Chinese government with effect from 23 November.

13 Dogra, which was acting as rear guard, suffered casualties of 2 officers, 3 JCOs, 65 ORs and 6 NCsE killed, 24 all ranks wounded, and 56 all ranks made prisoners(172).

The withdrawal of 62 Inf Bde was so disorderly and disorganised that till 1 December 1962, i.e. after 14 days of withdrawal, two thousand, two hundred and ninety one all ranks were still missing as under(173)

Unit	Officer	JCOs	ORs	NCsE	Total
HQ 62 Inf Bde	6	2	47	4	59
62 Inf Bde Sig Sec	2	1	54	1	58
62 Inf Bde LAD	--	--	4	--	4
1 Sikh	3	9	339	17	368
2 Sikh LI	5	9	369	17	400
4 Sikh LI	12	18	487	19	536
13 Dogra	9	6	307	20	342
4 Garh Rif	8	12	488	16	524
Grand Total	45	57	2095	94	2291

GOC 4 INF DIV ABANDONS DIRANG DZONG

9 Decision Taken

During the tele-conversation held between GOC 4 Inf Div and the Corps Commander on 17 November evening, wherein GOC had sought permission to withdraw his troops from forward positions as well as Dirang Dzong to Bomdila, the former was told by the Corps Commander to stick out that night. He was also told that based on the tactical and operational situation, the final orders would be issued next morning, though he could plan for the withdrawal.

Before talking to the Corps Commander, it seems the Div Cmdr had made up his mind that by withdrawing the troops from Se La and Dirang Dzong he would be in a position to defend Bomdila, successfully. Some of the important events which, it seems, influenced the GOC 4 Inf Div to take the decision to withdraw his troops to Bomdila, before his tele-conversation with the Corps Commander, are enumerated below(174):-

- (a) Withdrawal of 4 Garh Rif from Nuranang to the 62 Inf Bde defences at Se La on the afternoon of 17 November.
- (b) Withdrawal of 4 Sikh LI from Two-Lake area with the result that enemy infiltrated to the south of Se La defences.
- (c) There was every possibility that 62 Inf Bde defended area would be attacked by the enemy from three sides any moment.
- (d) The Rajput Coy, occupying defended locality in area north-east of Dirang Dzong, had failed to check the infiltration of the enemy in the Dirang Valley.
- (e) The troops of 19 Maratha LI, after their engagement with the enemy in area Chongdor, had failed in their bid to check the advance of the enemy towards Dirang Dzong from that side.
- (f) Failure of 5 Guards to check the advance of the enemy from Poshingla axis and the subsequent occupation by the enemy of Thembang on the evening of 17 November. (Withdrawal of 5 Guards from there was ordered by the Commander 48 Inf Bde)(175). By occupying Thembang, enemy had reached the rear of 4 Inf Div defended sector, south of Dirang Dzong, and was in a position to cut the L of C any moment.

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- (g) The infiltration of the enemy on both the right and left flanks of the main road axis had forced the 65 Inf Bde to order the return of all Coys and patrols of 19 Maratha LI, to Battalion HQ at 1845 hrs on 17 November(176). The Marathas were occupying ideal positions for cutting the supply lines of the enemy and they had ammunition and supplies which could maintain them for a few days(177).

In anticipation of the written orders to be received from the Corps Commander next morning, the GOC 4 Inf Div seems to have decided to pull out his troops to Bomdila. At a Conference held at Div HQ at 1930 hrs, (17 November) most probably immediately after his tele-conversation with Corps Commander, it was decided that "62 Inf Bde will withdraw to Dirang Dzong during the night 17/18 and will advance to Bomdila with 65 Inf Bde Gp and Div HQ during the night 18/19. Whole div was to conc at BOMDILA"(178).

The tactical situation during night 17/18 November further worsened. GOC was informed by 62 Inf Bde Commander at about 2230 hrs that he had ordered 2 Sikh LI less one Coy, to withdraw from Kye La and Battalion HQ area and take up delaying positions at Nyukmadong.

The Bde Commander reportedly told the Div Commander that with the enemy build-up in front, which was estimated at one Inf Div, and with the limited artillery ammunition available to him, his position at Se La becoming untenable. There was also the likelihood of his getting cut off by the enemy which had by-passed the main Se La position from the left(179).

The withdrawal of troops Chongdor and Sangti, during the evening of 17 November, had facilitated the enemy's advance on Dirang Dzong. Not having any spare troops at Dirang, the Div Commander had called for troops - 2 Coys of 13 Dogra from Senge and one Coy of 1 Madras from Bomdila. These troops were intended to stop any advance from the direction of Bomdila and to link up with 48 Inf Bde, if possible with support of tanks from Dirang the following morning. This attempt was to be made by 48 Inf Bde only if they got fresh troops which were being rushed up on the morning of 18 November(180).

Information was also received in the early hours of 18 November that portion of Nyukmadong Ridge below

It seems no plans for withdrawal of the troops on Dirang Dzong were made or given out. The last order that the GOC gave was to Maj Jamwal, the Sqn Commander, 7 Cavalry, to clear the enemy road-block on the Bomdila-Dirang road, as related already.

After the GOC had left the place, some officers of the rank of Major and below made attempts to rally the troops into a scratch force to fight their way to Bomdila. But in the face of Chinese pressure, those efforts soon fizzled out, units split into small parties and made for the plains(187). Like his GOC, Commander 65 Inf Bde too, left the place immediately without giving any withdrawal plan to his troops.

At Phudung, where there was a Coy of 1 Sikh LI from Bomdila, the GOC was informed that the Coy had not been in touch with the Battalion since 1030 hrs, 18 November. Later when the GOC heard news about the fall of Bomdila, he decided to get to the Foot Hills via Kalaktang. The GOC, and a few officers of HQ 4 Inf Div were picked up by the Corps Commander on 22 November 1962, in his helicopter, near Bhairabkund. A total of 400 all ranks arrived at Udalgiri on 22 November 1962(188).

(B) Withdrawal by Units

'B' Squadron of 7 Cavalry, under Maj S.D.S. Jamwal, with 11 Stuart tanks was placed under 4 Inf Div, and reached Misamari on 27 October 1962. Out of the 11 tanks, one became defective on 2 November, and another went down into a Khud on 3 November. The remaining nine tanks reached Bomdila on 5 November 1962. Three tanks (one with seized engine and two in working condition) were left at Bomdila under Jem Siri Chand. Six tanks reached Dirang Dzong on 16 November, but two more went out of order, leaving only four tanks with the Sqn(189).

The Sqn Commander was warned by the GOC 4 Inf Div on night 17 November to be ready at first light on 18 November to clear the road block that the enemy had established on Bomdila - Dirang road. Again, on 18th morning, the GOC visited the Sqn harbour area at 0730 hrs and ordered the Squadron to break through to Bomdila. Further the Squadron Cmdr was instructed that if the tanks failed to clear the road block, they were to cover the withdrawal of Dirang Dzong Garrison, and later the Squadron was to abandon the tanks and withdraw on foot.

At about 0800 hrs, move towards Bomdila started. No.3 Tp, under Jen. Fateh Singh, led the party, followed by Maj S.D.S. Jamwal with the 'B' Vehicles Column. The leading troop came across a road block in the village of Dirang Dzong, covered by heavy automatic fire by the Chinese, at about 0830 hrs. Brushing aside such minor opposition, the troop advanced further. But after a few bends on the road it found a wooden bridge which had been damaged by the enemy, making it impossible for the tanks to advance any further. The halted column particularly the 'soft' vehicles, came under heavy automatic and mortar fire. It was estimated that the enemy was holding that position with approximately two Coys - with one Coy on either side of the road block. In a few minutes, several vehicles were destroyed and one Artillery officer and 5 ORs were killed(190). At 0930 hrs, the Commander ordered the vehicles column to abandon vehicles and make their way back towards the Dirang village. It was clear that the tanks could not break through to Bomdila.

Having effectively blocked the withdrawal route to Bomdila, the Chinese attempted to cross the Dirang valley and push on towards Rupa, using the direct track via Manda La. Maj Jamwal re-deployed his tanks as well as Rifle troops to engage the Chinese and the enemy was forced to withdraw to the hill in the North.

At 1100 hrs, No.3 TP was told to abandon their tanks and join the men from the Vehicles column at Dirang village. A message was sent to Tp 1 Commander, which was in the rear, to cover the withdrawal of Troop 3 and after covering the withdrawal to abandon his tank troop and withdraw.

In the afternoon the enemy attacked Dirang village in Coy strength supported by automatic weapons and mortars. 7 Cavalry troops held the ground and brought down heavy fire, halting the rushing enemy. A similar enemy attempt was made further to the north-west, in the area vacated by Div HQ, where Squ HQ was in position with a Rifle Coy and two tanks. The result was identical and the enemy was beaten back with much loss. The action continued till last light. Having been badly mauled in their earlier attempts, the Chinese did not come down from the hills again during day. Had the Squadron not fought off the Chinese, they would have been able to push through and block all the remaining routes for the withdrawing troops of 4 Inf Div. After last light on 18 November the Squadron personnel were collected, complete with

personal weapons and ammunition, and pulled out as a well organised force. It was tragic, but inevitable, that six tanks had to be left behind. Although the enemy had no anti-tank guns, his infantry would have rushed to the tanks during the night, and the tank crew would have been sacrificed needlessly.

19 Maratha LI except the patrol column to Chug and D Coy at Munna Camp, was ordered to collect at 'A' Coy location on the Ridge south of Dirang, after setting fire to bunkers/tents. Battalion HQ along with the troops moved at 0815 hrs, and on the way one Coy 4 Rajput joined the troops. The Battalion halted on 18th night, near Manda La and reached Phudung at 1400 hrs on 20 November.

4 Rajput could not withdraw as one body as its Coys were widely dispersed. 'D' Coy, ordered to withdraw to Foot Hills after destroying its heavy stores, reached Bhairabkund on 24 November. The jawans carried their personal arms, wireless sets, pouch ammunition and two grenades each. The other Coys of the unit - one Coy at Point 3582, one in area Bridge 1 and the third with Battalion HQ at Sappers' Camp - were to withdraw after troops of 62 Inf Bde had crossed their locations on their move downward. After waiting for the whole day of 18 November at his HQ for the troops of 62 Inf Bde, but getting no news about them, the CO of the Battalion - Lt Col Avasthi, decided to withdraw to Dirang Dzong next morning. However, during the day at about 1400 hrs, he ordered his Coy at Point 3582 to withdraw, and this Coy left for Foot Hills at 1600 hrs on 18 November. These troops came under heavy enemy fire near kilometre stone 33.

The CO, along with the rest of his troops, took the Dirang Dzong - Manda La route on 19 November and on the way some stragglers from other units also joined this column. In the night of 22 November, the column crossed the Rupa Chu and climbed the hill which skirts Shergaon on the left(191). Next morning on 23 November, the column - approximately 300 under Lt Col Avasthi was heavily engaged by enemy MMG and mortar fire(192), even though the enemy had declared unilateral cease-fire. The column was caught unawares, tried to extricate, and in the attempt killed more than a hundred Chinese, but also suffered heavy casualties. Among those killed was the CO of the Battalion.

The precipitate retreat and the manner in which Dirang Dzong was abandoned was perhaps the most humiliating episode of the NEFA campaign.

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THE SE LA DEBACLE CHRONOLOGY

17-18 November 1962

17 November

1030 hrs: Brigadier Hoshiar Singh, Commander 62 Bde, visits Nuranang. Orders Coy 4 Sikh LI to move up, to cover pull back of 4 Garhwal to Se La main positions.

Mid Day: Commander 48 Bde informs GOC 4 Div (A.S. Pathania) of Chinese advance to Thembang and suggests withdrawal of 4 Div to fight at Bomdila.

1500 hrs: 4 Div Signals informs Corps HQ Signals at Tezpur of an advance group to leave at 1630 hrs to prepare Div HQ area behind Bomdila (Tenga Valley).

1630 hrs: Chinese road block between Bomdila and Dirang Dzong intimated to 4 Div HQ, and move to Signal Party to Tenga Valley is cancelled.

1640 hrs: Pathania speaks to BGS IV Corps (Brig K.K. Singh) who refused permission for any withdrawal, as Corps Commander (Kaul) was away in Walong.

1710-1745 hrs: Army Chief Thapar, Army Commander Sen and DMO Palit arrive at Corps HQ and are briefed by K.K. Singh in absence of Kaul. Pathania again rings up, but Thapar and Sen refuse to say yes or no to Pathania's urgent request for permission to withdraw.

1700-1830 hrs: Pathania suggests to Hoshiar Singh withdrawal from Se La the same night. Hoshiar resists. Finally agrees to withdraw next night, i.e. night of 18-19 November.

1830 hrs: Hoshiar Singh informs his battalion Commanders about withdrawal from Se La during night 18-19 November.

2000 hrs:

After Gen Kaul's return from Walong, situation is discussed with Gen Thapar and Gen Sen. Coded signal is issued permitting withdrawal by Pathania but signal stopped before transmission.

2200 hrs:

After further discussions between Kaul, Sen and Thapar, Pathania is informed that he should act on his discretion, hold on for the present and await final orders next morning from Corps HQ.

2230 hrs:

2 Sikh LI deployed at Kye La is ordered to withdraw same night (instead of next night, as planned earlier) to positions behind Se La. Pathania is informed of this by Hoshiar Singh.

2330 hrs:

Learning of withdrawal of 2 Sikh LI CO 1 Sikh also orders withdrawal of his Battalion, and the debacle begins.

November

0300 hrs:

4 Garhwal Rifles from Nuranang and 2 Sikh LI from Kye La reach Se La, closely followed by 1 Sikh, and behind them the Chinese.

0400 hrs:

On learning this, Hoshiar Singh speaks to Pathania: "Something awful has happened. 1 Sikh are withdrawing and Se La Right Defences are gone. I am going up to stop them". Line communication between Bde and Div HQ broke down soon after.

0530 hrs:

Hoshiar Singh returns to Bde HQ after failing to stop the withdrawing troops at Se La; issues orders now for immediate withdrawal of full Bde. Communications with 4 Sikh LI and 7 Mahar are out and orders cannot reach them.

0530 hrs:

Pathania seeks Kaul's permission again, and is permitted to withdraw, in view of loss of Se La.

0800 hrs:

HQ 4 Div pulls out of Dirang Dzong in a hurry. Div Signals informed 4 Corps about 0830 hrs that no staff officer was available, and Signal station was closing down.

OPERATIONS IN BOMDILA SECTOR

(A) Action on Poshing La Axis: Fall of Thembang

In the "Appreciation" prepared by the GOC 4 Inf Div on 28 October, it was visualised that the enemy could push about one Regiment group on a wide hook on the Topgey-Lap-Poshing La approach. To meet this threat, the GOC indicated that at least one battalion must be positioned there immediately, in addition to the two Assam Rifles' Platoons already in Poshing La - Chhangla area. As soon as the troops arrived in Bomdila, a flash signal was sent on 2 November to 5 Guards that a patrol, comprising one officer and a platoon, should leave on 4 November for Chhangla - the Assam Rifles' post location - and from there go on to Topgey. The task of the patrol was to report on suitability of tracks, availability of DZ in the area, watching enemy movement and harassing the enemy(193). So, on 4 November, Capt Amarjit Singh, OC 'B' Coy with a JCO and 30 ORs left for Dirang for further instructions about the task. The patrol, which was given the code name 'PENCIL PAPER', was instructed to prepare defences for a Coy and patrol forward to report enemy movements in area Lap-Topgey. The Coy Commander was to have plans ready for deploying a Battalion Gp. The move of the patrol was delayed due to late arrival of ponies/porters, and the patrol left Dirang on 6 November at 1100 hrs. It reached Tungra on the evening of 7 November and Chhangla at 1700 hrs on 8 November. The ponies/porters, accompanying the column, ran away that night. In the hope that they would get fresh porters/ponies from Bomdila, 'PENCIL PAPER' stayed on at Chhangla on 9 November 1962.

On 10 November, Capt Singh proceeded to Poshing La with a small party to reconnoitre the area for subsequent deployment of a Coy, and returned to Chhangla the same evening. On the same day a JCO with 15 ORs with ponies/porters carrying 15 days' rations and two and a half first line scale of ammunition left Bomdila to join 'PENCIL PAPER'. On 11 November 'PENCIL PAPER' moved to Poshing La to prepare a defended locality for a Coy, and it returned to Chhangla the same evening, leaving behind one JCO with a section. On the same day, the Battalion Cdr ordered to send the remainder of 'B' Coy to join 'PENCIL PAPER' at Poshing La and to establish a post there and patrol forward up to Topgey. A second platoon of 'B' Coy moved on 12 November and the remainder of the Coy on 13 November(194).

On 13 November, Capt Amarjit Singh was able to establish his small force at Poshing La. Four sections of Assam Rifles took positions approximately 5 km behind. Next day, at about 0600 hrs, Capt Singh with a JCO of Assam Rifles and 20 ORs left Poshing La for Topgey. He halted for the night at Topo. Next day i.e., 15 November, when Capt Singh's patrol was advancing from Topo to Topgey, it ran into the enemy force advancing from the opposite direction. The enemy was much superior in number and after a brisk fight it overwhelmed the patrol. Capt Singh and 16 CRs were killed.

The Chinese pushed on rapidly, and at 1530 hrs launched an attack at Poshing La in overwhelming strength. Their assault was supported by mortars and MG fire. The post at Poshing La - which had at that time only 2 JCOs and about 25 ORs (1 JCO and 10 CR of Capt Singh's patrol and 1 JCO and 15 ORs of 10 November patrol) - fell after giving a fight for about one hour. The troops withdrew to Chhangla. The Assam Rifle post, established 1.5 km behind the Poshing La post, had already been vacated.

At about 1930 hrs the same day, the enemy started shelling Chhangla. The Assam Rifles personnel, after passing a brief message regarding the operational situation to their Battalion HQ, destroyed the radio set and abandoned their post. The personnel of 'B' Coy, (5 Guards) who had withdrawn from Poshing La, too, could not hold Chhangla against the mounting pressure of the enemy and withdrew from there. They reached Lagam at about 0330 hrs, 15/16 night where they met the troops of 'B' Coy who had left Bomdila on 12 and 13 November. With a view to halt the enemy, the Coy 2 I/C immediately pushed forward two platoons to occupy the heights at Tungri. These troops were still trying to reach the heights overlooking the northern slope of Tungri when the enemy, who had already reached the top of the feature, started bringing down observed Mortar and MG fire. The two Guards platoons fell back in confusion and disintegrated into small parties.

The track coming down from Poshing La, after crossing Tungri bifurcated. One branch proceeded to Chongdor towards south-west, and the other west-south, to Thembang via Lagam. The track to Thembang was a well-known track. It is estimated that the track - approximately 65 km - could be easily covered in two days if the troops were carried by transport, part of the way, otherwise it would take 3 days (195). By infiltrating through this track, the Chinese could come to the rear of the Indian Army positions on the Bomdila - Se La road. So it was important to guard this track.

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Learning, that the enemy had over-run the Poshing La position, the 48 Bde Commander ordered at 1830 hrs on 15 November that another Coy should leave immediately to establish contact with the enemy and re-capture Poshing La. 'D' coy of 5 Guards under Maj K. Mani was detailed to carry out the task and left for Thembang at 0730 hrs, 16 November. The CO of 5 Guards was also ordered to take the rest of the Battalion and build up at Thembang. One Tp of Mtn Bty was deployed in Rahung village and one Tp of Fd Bty was placed at km 9 in support of 5 Guards(196).

Thembang is about 15 km from Bomdila and about 300 metres above the Dirang Chu. It lies on a plateau in the immediate east of which there is a Nullah which joins the Dirang Chu. In the valley of this Nullah, is situated the village of Sachi(197).

Maj Mani's Coy reached Thembang at 1700 hrs on 16 November. The Battalion also reached Thembang at 0630 hrs, on 17 November as due to non-availability of transport and mules the Battalion could concentrate at km 9 on Bomdila - Dirang road, (from where the track led to Thembang) only at 2000 hrs on 16 November. Due to shortage of mules, additional 3-in mortar ammunition had to be carried by unit personnel.

At that time the Battalion had only three Rifle Coys in addition to remnants of 'B' Coy, who had been driven back by the enemy from the area forward of Lagam. These were formed in a platoon and placed under 'C' Coy to guard the right forward flank of the Battalion defended area. 'C' Coy under Maj R.K. Khanna was disposed to guard the track Pangma - Bomdila. 'A' Coy under Maj Som Dut was allotted left forward flank which adjoined the nullah, south of Thembang 'D' Coy, under Maj Mani, was in depth.

At about 1400 hrs (17 November) a patrol of platoon strength together with FOO was sent under 2/Lt V.K. Gupta as the enemy was reported building up at Pangma. At about 1440 hrs a message was received from the patrol that enemy was contacted. Soon enemy started firing small arms, MMG and mortars on the Battalion area also from the area of Thembang village and the hill in the north.

In the first contact with the enemy, the carrying wireless set of Maj Brij Raj Singh, Arty Cdr, was shot and fell in a Khud, snapping communications between the Battery Commander and guns.

After some time the enemy started forming up in the Nullah south of Thembang, in front of 'A' Coy and 'C' Coy localities, and on the right flank of the battalion area. The three-pronged movement was to encircle the battalion and cut the route of withdrawal. The total enemy strength on the front and both the flanks was estimated between 1,500 to 1,700 by the battalion.

The Chinese launched the three-pronged massive attack with a signal from the very light. The Guards small arms, 2-in and 3-in mortars fired effectively and claimed that at least 500 casualties were inflicted on the enemy. The Field and Mountain guns also played havoc among the attackers massed in the Nullahs, firing over open sights or on instructions conveyed by wireless via the Bde HQ at Bomdila.

Within two hours, 3-in mortar, 2-in mortar and LMGs ammunition had, it is claimed, practically finished by late afternoon. The Bde Commander was apprised of the situation and ordered the battalion to withdraw. At about 1645 hrs the CO of the Battalion Lt Col Jai Singh, ordered the withdrawal in an orderly manner. But due to no suitable ground being available as 'lay back position', in the extremely broken ground, and increasing darkness, all control was lost and the Battalion disintegrated into small parties(198).

The Commander 48 Inf Bde informed the GOC 4 Div at about 1700 hrs that 5 Guards were unable to hold the Chinese advancing on track Poshing La - Thembang, and so he had ordered the Battalion to withdraw. The GOC countermanded the orders issued by the Bde Commander, but nothing could be done to reverse or retrieve the situation as the Battalion had already started withdrawing(199).

The Battalion endeavoured to reach Bomdila the next morning but found the enemy already established at km 9 on Bomdila - Dirang road. The Guards then split up into small parties and started moving towards Tenga Valley and Charduar. A party of two officers and 85 ORs under Maj Mani, however, managed to reach Bomdila the next morning by 0930 hrs. This party, with Maj Mani subsequently withdrew to Tenga Valley alongwith the other personnel of 48 Inf Bde. Lt Col Jai Singh - alongwith his 2 I/C, three officers, 5 JCOs and 70 ORs rejoined the Unit on 29 November at Misamari.

In the battle of Thembang and other encounters, 5 Guards suffered the following casualties(200):-

- (A) Killed - Two Officers, three JCOs and 85 ORs
- (B) Wounded - One Officer, one JCO and 46 ORs
- (C) Taken prisoners - 26 ORs

The manner in which the defence of the Poshing La axis against enemy advance was conducted left much to be desired. The Div Commander was aware of the threat from Poshing La, as is clear from his Appreciation of 28 October, but failed to take timely action to guard this Pass. He did order on 2 November troops to be sent immediately to Poshing La, but it was only after four days, i.e. on 6 November, that some troop moved. Those troops reached Poshing La as late as 13 November. The distance which could have been covered in 3 days was covered in seven days. The supply column which left Bomdila on 10 November could reach there only on 15 November after a lapse of five days, by which time the Chinese had fully entrenched themselves in the area. The other two platoons of 'B' Coy which left Bomdila on 12/13 November were still at Lagam, the first stage of the track on 16 November and could render no help to the troops already sent there. In contrast, the Chinese moved extremely fast, and got behind the Indian troops again and again. It may be possible that they had started infiltrating the thickly forested area even earlier than 15 November, when the Indian troops first encountered them well to the north of Poshing La.

(B) Battle of Bomdila

(a) Troops at Bomdila on 18 November

With the disintegration of 5 Guards after their defeat at Thembang on 17 November, the Chinese were in a position to cross the river any moment and also occupy the Mandala Ridge. In fact, the same evening the enemy cut the L of C and established a road-block on the road Bomdila-Dirang Dzong. The strength of this enemy column was reported to be about 400(201). When the Corps Commander was apprised of this situation, he ordered the Commander 48 Inf Bde at 22 hrs to send a mobile column of two Coys and two tanks to open the road to Dirang Dzong. The Bde Commander protested against that order, saying that he had no extra force, and was not in a position to undertake the task. So the order was cancelled at approximately 2315 hrs the same night. GOC 4 Inf Div again discussed the issue with Cmdr 48 Inf Bde and it was

decided that the latter would make an attempt to clear road Bomdila - Dirang on arrival of reinforcements on 17 November 1962. On night 17/18 November, Cmdr 48 Bde had only six Rifle Coys - with little supporting troops - for the defence of his Sector, as under:-

- i. Three Rifle Coys of 1 Madras; (its fourth Coy had been sent to Dirang Dzong earlier).
- ii. Three Rifle Coys of 1 Sikh LI; (its fourth Coy was at Phudung).

Supporting troops

- iii. One troop of 'B' Sqn 7 Cavalry; (only two tanks were road-worthy)
- iv. One Section of 2(D) Mtn Bty;
- v. One Tp of 88 Fd Bty (its 2nd Tp was with 5 Guards)
- vi. One Pl of 7 Mahar (MMG)

The Chinese column which had established a road-block between Bomdila and Dirang in the evening, hid itself in the thick forests. Their second column was advancing from the west along the Mandala Ridge towards Bomdila. Thus Bomdila was in danger of being attacked from the north as well as the west. Under these conditions, 48 Bde Commander, who was apprehensive of an attack on Bomdila, did not want to deplete his defences by lifting a force of 2 Coys plus for an attack on the enemy in the area of the road-block. However, on the morning of 18 November, 1 Sikh LI sent one platoon-strength patrol to Tusker Camp near km 9, and platoon-strength patrol to Flag Hill to learn about enemy movements and concentration in that area(202).

At about 1040 hrs, 18 November, 48 Inf Bde was asked by the GOC IV Corps to send the mobile column to Dirang to link up with main 4 Inf Div. The troops, consisting of 2 Coys of 1 Sikh LI, two tanks, and a Section of Mtn Guns, were lifted from their defensive positions and formed into a mobile column. The mobile column moved out of Battalion defensive position at about 1115 hrs, leaving the Battalion main defensive position held by only one platoon and Battalion HQ personnel.

(b) Enemy attacks 1 Sikh LI positions

At about 1230 hrs, the Battalion defensive position of 1 Sikh LI was attacked by the Chinese from the direction of Old Bomdila Pass. At that time, only one platoon of 'A' Coy and one section MMG in 'C' Coy locality was in position to defend. As the movement of the enemy in the thick jungle was not clearly visible, the MMG fire was not very effective. However, after severe fighting, the attack was beaten back and the enemy withdrew. In the mean time, 'C' Coy patrol had come in and was rushed to their Coy locality, which had been completely vacant.

At about 1330 hrs the enemy attacked again. The attack was also repulsed with the help of artillery, 3-in Mortar, and MMG fire. After this attack there was a lull in the battle for about half an hour, during which all the casualties were evacuated. Some personnel of 3rd Battalion the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles and 377 Fd Coy had arrived by then, and they were ordered to occupy the vacant position of 'B' Coy defensive locality.

The mobile column under command 'C' Coy of 1 Sikh LI with two tanks of 7 Cavalry (No.2 TP of B Sqn) started its advance at 1200 hrs 18 November, to clear the road-block. The column had hardly advanced about 4 km when the enemy opened automatic fire from the ridge on the left of the road. This fire was returned by the Infantry, but the tanks did not open fire, because the enemy was not in sight. The mobile column was ordered back, as it appeared held up by enemy fire. The tanks reversed in the very narrow space with great difficulty. The mobile column did not suffer any casualty during its advance and return(203).

At about 1445 hrs, when the mobile column troops were trying to get back into their defences, the enemy put in a massive attack with approximately 600 to 700 men. The Battalion was now getting surrounded and enemy small arms and MMG fire appeared coming from all directions.

At this crucial stage a thick fog and mist set in and visibility became very poor. With even the elements helping him, the enemy surrounded the 1 Sikh LI position from three sides. By about 1515 hrs, 'A' and 'C' Coys and Battalion HQ were completely over-run. The Battalion pulled back to lower heights and took up a new defensive position. The CO went to the Bde HQ and apprised the Commander with the latest position. By that time, the enemy had gained control

of all the dominating grounds and was firing at Bde HQ and gun positions. All attempts to restore the situation failed, and the 1 Sikh LI fell back and took a defensive position near the School building at Bomdila and remained there upto 0300 hrs on 9 November 1962.

During these operations, 1 Sikh LI suffered 73 casualties, which included 22 killed, 35 wounded and 16 missing/believed killed. The enemy casualties in fighting with the Battalion were reported to be more than 250.

(c) Tanks prevent advance of the enemy from west

The two tanks, which returned to Bomdila along with the mobile column, were ordered by the Bde Commander to be positioned in the Circuit House area to guard all approaches from the west. As the two tanks got in position, heavy enemy fire came from the ridge. The tanks opened up on the enemy positions and prevented any further advance of the enemy. The tank Commander of even the off-road tank put two LMGs under his tank, one guarding the front and the other the rear. The Chinese who had thought Bomdila as virtually captured, were taken by surprise when subjected to firing from the MMGs of the tank, and disappeared into the hills, leaving behind several dead. This action gave the troops some time to organise the defences.

(d) Enemy attacks 1 Madras position

Having failed to advance towards Bomdila town because of the positioning of tanks on that side, the enemy increased intensity of his fire on 1 Madras positions on the right flank. At 1630 hrs, the Chinese were seen forming up on the left flank of the battalion. The Battalion Commander was not in touch with Bde HQ. The troop leader of the 88 Fd Bty and FOO, who were with 1 Madras, had also lost all communication with the gun positions and their HQ. However, the guns had engaged the targets in front by direct laying. But the firing was not effective enough to disrupt the enemy's intended assault. The enemy assaulted 1 Madras position at 1645 hrs and was successful in dislodging the extreme left platoon of the Battalion. At 1655 hrs, the CO informed all Coy Commanders of the situation. A patrol sent out to establish communication failed to make contact with the Battalion HQ. It reported that there was no one in Bde HQ or in Bde Signal Exchange. At about 1730 hrs Commanding Officer gave orders for withdrawal to save the Battalion from complete annihilation. His intention was to join the Bde which he thought had

withdrawn to Tenga Valley. Thinning out of positions started at 2100 hrs and the defences were finally abandoned at 0200 hrs on 19 November 1962(204). By this time, enemy had already come into the position and was exchanging fire with rear parties. The Field guns had to be ferried because there were only three gun-towing vehicles and a 15 Cwt vehicle. No ammunition could be brought back(205).

When the Battalion, after its withdrawal from Bomdila position, was near Tenga Valley on 21 November, it was surrounded by the Chinese. Many of its officers, JCOs and men, - 125 all ranks - were made prisoners, while 120, including one Officer and two JCOs, were reported missing. The few who escaped scattered themselves into small parties, and even destroyed their weapons to save them from being captured by the enemy.

(C) Withdrawal from Bomdila

Side by side with their attack on the left and right flanks of the 48 Inf Bde defended area, the Chinese put in a massive attack on Bomdila at 1500 hrs on 18 November. After the fall of 1 Sikh LI position, the Bde Commander found it impossible to hold on to Bomdila any longer. He had no troops for the defence of Bde HQ, as the two Battalions - 6/8 GR and 3rd Battalion the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles - promised by the Corps Commander as replacement for 5 Guards and the mobile column, had not reached Bomdila by 1600 hrs, 18 November. Only some advance elements of 3rd Battalion the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles had reached Bomdila at 1620 hrs and the main body of the Battalion had been brought to a halt nearly 8 km short of Bomdila bowl. At about 1630 hrs, the Bde Commander decided to pull back to Rupa.

The Bde HQ reached Rupa at 1900 hrs. A check post was established to stop all stragglers and to get them in their Unit Groups again. The Bde Major was sent to Tenga Valley to contact IV Corps on phone. A communication of the Bde HQ with Div HQ was already out. He contacted GSO-1(OPs) IV Corps at 2130 hrs and gave the latest position.

At Bomdila, when the 22 Mtn Regt Commander arrived at the Bde Command post immediately after 1600 hrs, he found it deserted. Neither the Bde Commander nor his staff was there. He heard some one calling on the telephone, and on picking up the instrument, found himself connected to BGS IV Corps. The BGS asked for the whereabouts of the Bde Commander. Thereupon the BGS ordered the CO 22 Mtn Regt to take over command of the Brigade in the absence of Bde Commander.

runner made his plan to defend Bomdila with about 100 men of his regiment, two tanks of 7 Cavalry and 1 Madras, if the latter were still intact. He ordered the field battery to manhandle the guns to south of Bomdila and went back to Bde Command Post with a view to contact 1 Madras. But he could not contact the Battalion, and returned to DZ area. There he met the Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion Jammu and Kashmir Rifles, whose Battalion was in the process of moving up, and after putting him in full picture of the situation, handed over the command of 48 Bde to him. He also assured the CO of the 3rd Battalion Jammu and Kashmir Rifles that fire support would be provided as and when required(206).

At about 2100 hrs, Bde Cmdr returned to Bomdila. There he met the Commanding Officers of the 3rd Battalion Jammu and Kashmir Rifles and 22 Mtn Regt at the school building at 0230 hrs on 19 November. At the meeting it was felt that unless the new troops had reconnoitred the area, an immediate attack on the enemy was inadvisable. Bde Commander considered the situation and again ordered all troops to withdraw from Bomdila(207). The Bde Cmdr was back in Rupa area at dawn on 19 November. The troops finally left Bomdila at 0515 hrs, 19 November.

Bomdila was thus vacated by 48 Inf Bde and fell to the enemy easily. It is true that there was nothing with the Bde Cmdr to hold it - few troops, no barbed wires, no mines. Out of the three Battalions earmarked for the defence of Bomdila which were supposed to be there all the time, only a platoon of 1 Sikh LI and 3 Coys of 1 Madras were positioned at Bomdila when the Chinese attack came. But the fact remains that the Bde Commander gave orders for withdrawal of troops from Bomdila on the afternoon of 18 November without prior consultation with his Battalion and Supporting Arms Commanders. In this he might have been influenced by coming to know of the withdrawal of HQ 4 Inf Div from Dirang Dzong on 18th morning.

(D) Withdrawal to Foot Hills

The Corps Commander, when he came to know of the withdrawal of troops from Bomdila, sent a special message through Maj Nahar Singh, Signal Officer of Tanker Force, for the Commander 48 Inf Bde saying that in the event of withdrawal from Bomdila, the Rupa position should be held by 48 Inf Bde(208). At that time, the Bde Commander had only troops of 1 Sikh LI and some elements of the 3rd Battalion Jammu and Kashmir Rifles and 6/8 GR. 1 Sikh LI was ordered to occupy a high ground near Rupa. About 0800 hrs, when

the Battalion was getting ready to move, the Chinese opened up with automatic and MMG fire from all the features around Rupa defile. By that time, troops of 6/8 GR, which had returned to Tenga Valley in the early morning in vehicles, were on their way back to Rupa. The troops were caught in enemy fire in the Rupa gap and started running helter-skelter. At that stage, the Bde Commander, who was present there, again ordered withdrawal along the high ground on either side of the Rupa valley.

The Battalion Commander of 6/8 GR was ordered to position his troops at a narrow defile, approximately 2 km south of Rupa gap, until all Units of the Bde had passed through. The 6/8 GR - less one Coy which was deployed on the northern track beyond Rupa Valley, held the Gap until approximately 1200 hrs on 19 November, when the Bde Commander ordered that the troops should withdraw from the Rupa Gap to Chako to foil a possible Chinese attempt to cut off the entire force there(209).

However, the enemy continued following up the withdrawing troops. The 3rd Battalion Jammu and Kashmir Rifles, which withdrew from Bomdila directly to Tenga Valley, came under heavy enemy fire from the opposite ridge at about 0900 hrs. Enemy used automatics, 2-in and 3-in mortars and Bren fire. The Battalion Mortar Pl returned the fire. After about half an hour, the Battalion withdrew, still under heavy enemy fire. It suffered heavy casualties and broke up. Some elements withdrew to Chako, while the rest moved down directly to Tezpur(210).

The two tanks of 7 Cavalry acting as rear guard, covered the withdrawal of the troops of 48 Inf Bde from Bomdila to Rupa and from there to Chako. The tanks engaged the advancing enemy between Rupa and Chako and pinned the enemy leading elements to the ground for a while. As the tanks were finding it difficult to keep pace with the Infantry because of steep gradient of the road, one Coy of 6/8 GR marched with them for protection. The tanks reached Chako at 2345 hrs on 19 November(211).

Of the Five Battalions - 1 Sikh LI, 1 Madras, 5 Guards, 3rd Battalion Jammu and Kashmir Rifles and 6/8 GR - placed under 48 Inf Bde for the defence of Bomdila area, the Bde was left with only three or four Rif Coys of 1 Sikh LI and 6/8 GR after its withdrawal from Bomdila, when it reached Chako by the last light of 19 November(212). Of the other three Battalions, 5 Guards and 3rd Battalion Jammu and Kashmir Rifles had been badly mauled at Thembang and Tenga Valley on 17 and 19 November respectively. Their personnel were withdrawing into small groups to escape enemy ambushes. The third battalion - 1 Madras had lost contact with the Bde HQ.

RESTRICTED

The fresh troops, which were being inducted into NEFA from other parts of the country were still in the process of concentration at Misamari/Tezpur and could not join the troops of 48 Inf Bde for the defence of Chako on the morning of 20 November.

The troops of 1 Sikh LI and 6/8 GR, after their withdrawal reached Chako by approximately 1730 hrs on 19 November, by which time it was quite dark. The Commander 48 Inf Bde had withdrawn from Tenga Valley to Chako with the troops of 6/8 GR.

The CO of 1 Sikh LI informed the Bde Commander that there was approximately one Coy worth of troops with him, and that he had recced positions for other sub-units also. With his advice and help, the two Coys - 'B' and 'C', 3-in Mortar and Battalion HQ of 6/8 GR were sited. In the absence of any digging tools, troops got down to digging their positions with mess tins and bayonets. The men were still busy preparing their trenches when, at about 0245 hrs on 20 November, the position came under heavy enemy MMG and Mortar fire from the surrounding heights. Soon after, the position was attacked at different places along the perimeter. Sikh LI troops, which were positioned on the high ground astride Chako Check post, were the first to come into contact with the enemy. The Sikhs soon had to pull back as their ammunition got exhausted(213). After this the Chinese surrounded the 6/8 GR positions. By 0330 hrs, two major attempts by the enemy to break into 'B' & 'C' Coy positions had been thwarted. But Bn HQ of 6/8 GR was overrun by the enemy by approximately 0345 hrs. In order to physically stop the on-rush, the Mortar dets used their personal weapons in a hand to hand scuffle against an overwhelming number of Chinese. The few remnants of Bn HQ personnel then fell back on nearby Coy's localities and continued to fight from there. Although the troops of 6/8 GR continued to suffer casualties, they held on to their respective positions tenaciously till 0530 hrs(214).

At about 0500 hrs, on 20 November the enemy made a clever move and brought up an anti-tank weapon onto a ridge which could not be effectively engaged by the tank guns because of limitation of their elevation. The Tp Commander then opened the hatches to engage the enemy with the anti-aircraft gun. Crew of the other tank also took similar steps to fight this new menace. The fight lasted about half an hour, and the Tp Commander Jem Siri Chand was wounded while coming out of his tank. Three other crew members were killed. One of the tanks caught fire, most probably due to enemy shelling. The crew then abandoned the tanks and started withdrawing to Foot Hills on foot(215).

Day light was about to break. With the large number of casualties in the defensive positions, the battle by the remnants against the large Chinese force would clearly be futile. Accordingly, at 0530 hrs, the Bn Commander, 6/8 GR ordered Coy-wise withdrawal by cross country routes. Till 1 December 1962, more than 150 all ranks were still missing.

48 Inf Bridge Headquarters arrived at Foot Hills at 0700 hrs on 20 November 1962 ending this sad story of unrelieved gloom.

REVIEW

For the operations in Kameng Frontier Division during the second phase, it is estimated that the Chinese had more than two divisions available at Tawang. But, because of the nature of the terrain, only one division and a regiment group (or brigade) were put into action, and the other division remained at Tawang as a reserve(216). The Chinese plan, as revealed in actual operations, was:-

- (a) One regiment was employed to maintain pressure on covering troops at Nuranang and for strong probing attacks at Se La. One regiment was put in the area Jang to exploit the situation.
- (b) One battalion plus was sent along track Chebra La-Jangle - Bridge 2 which ambushed 62 Inf Bde column between Bridge 2 and Nyukmadong.
- (c) One regiment less one Bn was sent along track Yangyap La-Nyukmadong to join up the column mentioned at (b) coming from the southern side.
- (d) One strong column of a regimental group went along Luguthang-Poshing La-Chhang La-Tungri-Lagam. After Lagam it split into two sub-columns:
 - i. One went south-west to Chongdor and Munna Camp and established a road block west of Munna Camp at Km 31 on night 17/18 November.
 - ii. The other (and probably much bigger) sub-column went to Thembang and Bomdila. Elements from this sub-column had established road block at Km 9 north of Bomdila. This sub-column went ahead to Rupa and thereafter broke up into three parties one going to Tenga, the second going to Piri La and Chako and the third to Phudung.

An enemy Division, of about four brigades, thus defeated and destroyed 4 Inf Div of three brigades in defensive positions when normally a successful attack required a numerical superiority of 3:1. The enemy, moreover, had no artillery support, and had been able to carry only mortars and MGs with him over the difficult mountain tracks. Though most of the Indian troops were hurriedly inducted from the plains and thrown into battle without proper acclimatisation or winter equipment, the basic causes of the defeat lay in the areas of leadership and morale.

When the second phase of the operations in Kameng started around 14 November, the gloomy pall of retreat - from Namkha Chu, from Bum La, from Tawang - still lay heavy over the officers and men of 4 Div. The Garhwalis' stout stand at Nuranang and aggressive patrol actions raised their spirits, but the severe mauling suffered by the large fighting patrol of the Sikhs on 16 November again demoralised the troops. There had been persistent rumours that some senior officers favoured retreat from Se La also, and wanted 4 Div to make a stand only at Bomdila. This was true, and those favouring Bomdila included Brig K.K. Singh (BGS, HQ IV Corps), Maj Gen A.S. Pathania himself, and Lt Col Manohar Singh GSO I in HQ 4 Inf Div.

In fact the last named officer is reported to have freely voiced his opinion in favour of retreat, and that the enemy was invincible so much so that Gen Pathania started thinking of getting him replaced immediately, and a chronicler of these operations has suspected even his patriotism(217). In such a climate of retreat and demoralisation, the wildest rumours were believed, and any tactical withdrawal could turn into a rout. And this is what happened at Se La.

The Se La position was exceedingly strong, well-stocked and held by a brigade of five battalions. Troops were first told that Se La would be held even if its L of C was cut. Then on 17th evening they learnt that withdrawal would again start the next night. But within, a few hours they saw 2 Sikh LI being pulled back, their confusion and demoralisation was complete, and the rout began.

Even Gen Pathania, whose personal bravery was beyond all doubt, seems to have fallen a prey to the prophets of doom, and pulled out of Dirang Dzong in frantic haste, when his best chance lay in digging his toes in and firmly rejecting all talk of retreat. His fears were exaggerated, for the enemy could only put up road blocks and could not successfully assault prepared defences due to lack of proper artillery or

armour. At the back of Pathania's mind may have been the persistent thought that the place to fight at was Bomdila, and not Se La or Dirang. He could not perhaps, give of his best in executing a plan in which he did not really have faith.

Retreat from Dirang Dzong was caused by the road blocks established near MS 9 and Munna Camp by the Chinese column advancing on the Poshing La axis. It appears that nearly a brigade moved along this axis, which had never been anticipated by the Indian Commanders, who considered the route practicable only for a few hundred troops. The Guards were, thereafter, sent to block this route, and committed to battle piecemeal. The battalion was thus destroyed and achieved no success. It appears that the Indian Commanders were resorting to the same tactics which had successfully worked in the J & K Operations in 1947-48, without realising that the fight now was not against raiders but against the professional army of one of the major military powers of the world.

This hangover of 1947 was made worse by the purely defensive attitude adopted after the retreat from Tawang. There was no question or thought of recapturing Tawang but only of holding up the Chinese advance at Se La, or even at Bomdila. The all-important initiative, therefore, always remained with the enemy, and he could choose the time and place for his next blow.

If Pathania, Hoshiar Singh, Gurbux Singh and their subordinate officers were guilty of tactical mistakes, their seniors like Lt Gen B.M. Kaul, Lt Gen L.P. Sen and Gen P.N. Thapar proved unequal to the task of stopping the rot. Thapar and Sen refused to give any orders on Pathania's request for permission to withdraw, leaving the decision to Kaul even though he was not present. Kaul, with his severely limited experience of actual fighting, issued orders for moving even Companies and Platoons, and thought that tanks could operate successfully against road blocks in the mountains. On the vital question of withdrawal of 4 Div from Dirang Dzong, Kaul totally failed to impose his will and control events, or even his own subordinate Commanders. By the night of 17-18 November, the Commanders were as badly demoralised as the troops. And battles are lost or won basically in the minds of the Commanders. The debacles at Se La and Bomdila will remain classic examples of this old dictum.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. From Official Records.
2. Letter from Premier Chou En-Lai to Prime Minister of India (24 October 1962), along with statement of the Chinese Government, 24 October 1962. WHITE PAPER, VIII (October 1962 - January 1963) pp.1-4.
3. From Official Records.
4. Ibid.
5. The main source for the description of ridges/rivers of the Se La - Dirang Dzong and Bomdila Sectors in S.R. Johri's Chinese Invasion of NEFA.
6. Niranjana Prasad, The Fall of Tawang, p.125.
7. From Official Records.
8. Niranjana Prasad, The Fall of Tawang, p.134.
9. Ibid.
10. Johri, S.R., Chinese Invasion of NEFA, p.146.
11. Niranjana Prasad, The Fall of Tawang, pp.129-130.
12. From Official Records.
13. Ibid.
14. Dalvi, J.P., Himalayan Blunder, p.125.
15. From Official Records.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Johri, S.R., Chinese Invasion of NEFA, p.124.
19. From Official Records.
20. Johri, S.R., Chinese Invasion of NEFA, p.93.
21. Ibid., p.148.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p.165.

24. From Official Records.
25. One of those Divs was Chinese crack Division - 55 - which was brought from Sining to Tawang with all its equipment and stores on or about 15 November after covering a distance of approximately 2100 km in eight days. Mullik, B.N., The Chinese Betrayal, p.415.
26. In its assessment, HQ IV Corps had foreseen that "Once the enemy committed the main striking force to the west of the main road, he would continue to make successive threats from the west with a view to intercepting and cutting our road communications". From Official Records.
27. Johri, S.R., Chinese Invasion of NEFA, p.124.
28. Detailed plan of deployment of this force was as under:-

ALONG THE MAIN ROAD AXIS

(a) Sela - Senge Area

One Bde Gp of at least five Bns.

(b) Nyukmadong Area

One Bde Gp of at least three Bns.

(c) Bomdila Area

One Bde Gp of at least three Bns.

WESTERN FLANK

Nagakur - Remba Area and Phutang -
Kalaktang Area

At least two Bns.

EASTERN FLANK

Poshing La Area

At least one Bn.

DIVISIONAL RESERVE

One Bde Gp of at least three Bns. The GOC 4 Inf Div also recommended that all the above force be provided with adequate defence stores and administrative backing with the fire support of Div Arty plus five first-line ammunition. From Official Records.

29. From Official Records.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid. An official record, however, erroneously mentions 86 Fd Bty instead of 87 Fd Bty. 87 Fd Bty which remained under CO 4 Garh Rif for direct support to the Bn was withdrawn on 16 November afternoon and put in support of the Bn under the Command of HQ 62 Inf Bde.

33. From Official Records.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Johri, S.R., Chinese Invasion of NEFA, p.178.
55. From Official Records.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. According to Commander 4 Arty Bde, on 23 October, when he stopped for a while at Bridge III he was horrified to notice a number of people belonging to 4 Garhwal withdrawing towards Se La as against the task assigned to and assured by CO 4 Garhwal, of holding a delaying position for next 72 hrs. To Brig Kalyan Singh that was "a pathetic sight to watch a demoralised, defeated and disorganised army. Men had lost their fighting spirit and sense of shame". Brig Kalyan Singh "immediately put a check post to stop any further withdrawal of the battalion In all over 250 personnel were collected by the morning and marched back to Bridge III and put in a defensive position. At about sunrise Commanding Officer 4 Garhwal also returned but with only 50 men. He reported that he had lost control of his troops during the night He was a bit relieved to find that a part of his battalion was already in action at Bridge III". From Official Records.

Maj Gen B.M. Bhattacharjea, MVC
PVSM(Retd), the then CO 4 Garhwal Rifles
however, gave a different version. Gen
Bhattacharjea, told that as per original order
of withdrawal from Tawang, all the troops were
to proceed to Se La, which was to be a delaying
position. Main defences, however, were to be
concentrated at Bomdila. In pursuance of that
order CO with one Coy was already at Jang. His
battalion was to move towards Se La after all
other elements of 4 Arty Bde had passed through
to Se La. When his two Coys reached embussing
area, not knowing the change in the order, they
found that no transport was available there.
Other troops, not waiting for transport, started
running towards Se La. On seeing this, troops
of those two Coys of his Bn also started running
towards Se La. As per the changed orders his Bn
was to entrench itself around Jang. He
therefore, sent one JCO to call back the troops
of those two companies who were speeding towards
Se La. As a result, the bulk of troops of those
two Coys were brought back to Nuranang. Report
on Interview of Major General B.M.
Bhattacharjea, MVC, PVSM, (Retd), dt 11 December
1987.

60. From Official Records.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid. Maj Gen B.M. Bhattacharjea also narrated same incidents confirming the above attitude of higher authorities. Corps Commander IV Corps did not visualise the enemy coming until the winter snow was over. Once Bhattacharjea told his Bde Cmdr that he had seen Chinese troops moving from Bum La to Tawang side towards the west. When this was brought to the notice of GOC 4 Inf Div by Cmdr 62 Inf Bde, Maj Gen A.S. Pathania, ordered Brig Hoshiar Singh to ask for explanation of OC 4 Garhwal for having made such a report which GOC was not prepared to accept as correct. GOC 4 Inf Div, in his assessment, was so firm that the enemy could not have done that in such a quick time that he was not prepared at all mentally to believe in the correctness of that report which did not correspond to his own appreciation of the enemy's intentions and capabilities.

69. Some official records mention about the dispatch of a 'Special Mission' under Maj H.B. Rai which left for Gersing La at 0830 hrs on 17 November and was supposed to return by last light of 18 November. But, there are no further details as to what happened to the 'Mission'. It is only mentioned that the orders for withdrawal of the Bn to Se La were passed on to all sub units, except the special patrol earlier sent out under Maj Rai who was not in communication with Bn HQ. (From Official Records).

Maj Gen B.M. Bhattacharjea (Retd), the then CO, 4 Garhwal Rifles, however, gave a different version as to how Maj Rai and Sub Aswal of anti-tank platoon and others were captured. He informed that when, in the evening on 17 November, Brigade Commander issued orders for

the withdrawal of the Battalion from the Nuranang area, it was decided that Maj Rai's company was to take up position at a height North of the road to cover the withdrawal of the rest of the Battalion to Se La. It so happened that after the Battalion had passed through the track, Maj Rai's Coy was attacked by the enemy from behind and they were overpowered. Gen Bhattacharjea also gave unhappiness of Rai with him as another reason for circulating this version of his capture for he, as CO 4 Garhwal Rifles, had refused to accept Maj Rai's request to nominate him as 2 I/C of the Bn. (Report on Interview of Maj Gen B.M. Bhattacharjea, MVC, PVSM, (Retd), 11 December 1987.)

70. From Official Records.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid. The enemy attack on the column came at about 0200 hrs. on 16th, according to another report.
77. From Official Records.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid. Nuranang acquired the name of "Jaswant Garh" and the locals have interesting folk tales about the hero.
106. From Official Records.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid. HQ IV Corps had also ordained that "on no account the covering troops were to be sacrificed by delaying their withdrawal in face of superior build up".
110. From Official Records.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid.
113. In recognition of the gallant fight put up at Nuranang, the Battalion - 4 Garhwal Rifles - has been permitted by the Army HQ to celebrate NURANANG DAY as a Regimental Day on 17 November every year. From Official Records.

114. Encyclopaedia of Soldiers with Highest Gallantry Awards (Compiled by S.S. Gandhi, 1980).
115. From Official Records.
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. Interview with Maj Gen M.N. Rawat (Retd), 1 July 1987.
120. Ibid. The information gets corroborated from another source. Capt N.N. Rawat, GSO 3 (Ops), HQ 4 Div, was told at 1100 hrs on 17 November by Maj Narinder Singh GSO 2 (Ops), when the former had left the place with necessary equipment to set up the HQ in new location, to come back as the plan to shift the Div HQ to Tenga Valley had been agreed upon and the colour party to recce and select the Div HQ area in Tenga Valley was to go at 1630 hrs.
121. From Official Records.
122. Ibid. At about 1700 hrs the Chinese having appeared in strength on the right flank of 4 Div defended sector, GOC felt that 62 Bde may not be able to hold the defence for long. It was this subject, which in all likelihood the GOC wanted to discuss with Corps HQ. In his statement, Gen Pathania, informs that in his teleconversation with BGS the former informed the latter that it was absolutely essential to obtain decision since the Cmdr 62 Inf Bde now felt that he could not hold his position much longer. This clearly means that the GOC had already spoken to the Bde Cmdr before he contacted BGS at Corps HQ.
123. From Official Records.
124. Ibid. According to Lt Gen Sen, they arrived in Tezpur at about 1700 hrs.
125. Ibid. BGS IV Corps, informed the Army Chief and the Army Commander about the conversation a little after 1800 hrs.
126. Ibid. This has been corroborated by Brig P. Gill. Brig D.K. Palit, DMO, had also narrated this to Lt Gen Kaul.
127. Ibid.

128. Ibid.

129. According to an official record, "it was felt that 62 Inf Bde may not hold the defences for a long period" and, therefore, "the Bde was asked to withdraw to Dirang". As in other places, in the interview also Gen Pathania asserted that at no point of time did he give clear-cut instructions to 62 Inf Bde to withdraw. He only, 'asked' Brig Hoshiar Singh to be 'prepared with a plan for withdrawal' in case it became necessary. (Interview of Maj Gen A.S. Pathania (Retd), 13 October 1988). But this cannot be accepted on the face of it. A GOC asking his Bde Cmdr around 1800 hrs to prepare a plan of withdrawal of the Bde that night and his emphasis that the plan for withdrawal should be for that very night is virtually an order by Div Cmdr for withdrawal of the Bde. This suggestion that all this did not amount to a clear cut order for actual withdrawal appears simply to be a technical argument in order to provide a cover for the lack, till then, of sanction of the Corps HQ for such an important step.

130. From Official Records.

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid.

133. Ibid.

134. Ibid. According to Lt Gen L.P. Sen, BGS IV Corps informed them "a little after 1800 hrs" about his conversation with GOC 4 Inf Div.

135. Ibid. According to Lt Gen B.M. Kaul "at about 1800 hrs" GOC 4 Inf Div rang up.

136. Ibid. "At about 1800 hrs" Brig Gill located BGS IV Corps in Ops Room and "from there BGS spoke to GOC".

137. Maj Gen D.K. Palit, (Retd), who then was DMO, stated that around 1900 hrs Lt Gen Kaul returned from Walong. Interview of Maj Gen D.K. Palit, (Retd), 2 November 1987.

138. According to K.K. Singh, B.M. Kaul talked to A.S. Pathania soon after his return to Corps HQ. It gives one to understand that Lt Gen Kaul had already spoken to Maj Gen A.S. Pathania when, at approximately 1900 hrs he gave his first message

to Sig 0 for transmission to GOC 4 Inf Div. Lt Gen Kaul has himself stated that he spoke to A.S. Pathania at about 1945 hrs on return from Walong. Lt Gen Sen has stated that Lt Gen Kaul spoke to Maj Gen Pathania to ascertain the situation after Gen Sen himself had advised that GOC 4 Inf Div being man on the spot should be given discretionary power to take any appropriate action. Gen Sen also stated that B.M. Kaul thereafter spoke to A.S. Pathania and Gurbux Singh on telephone on two or three occasions. From Official Records.

But according to Maj Gen D.K. Palit, (Retd) who was then DMO, at about 2200 hrs, GOC 4 Div rang Corps HQ and then Lt Gen Kaul spoke to him. Interview of Maj Gen D.K. Palit (Retd), 2 November 1987.

139. Gen Kaul has claimed that his conversation with Gen Pathania took place at about 1945 hrs. From Official Records. According to Maj Gen D.K. Palit, (Retd), B.M. Kaul had told A.S. Pathania to hold on to his defence during night and to have another 'Chat' in the morning before he withdrew. Interview of Maj Gen D.K. Palit, (Retd), 2 November 1987.

140. From Official Records. According to Maj Gen A.S. Pathania, Lt Gen B.M. Kaul had told the GOC that he could plan for withdrawal but, that the Corps Commander would give final orders in the morning. In this connection it may be worth mentioning that the advice given to Lt Gen Kaul by Lt Gen Sen was that in a situation like that, Pathania, as the man on the spot, should be given discretionary powers of withdrawal - should he consider it necessary, Gen Sen also told Gen Kaul to order Cmdr 48 Inf Bde to attack and dislodge any road-block laid by the enemy in the Bomdila - Dirang Dzong road.

141. Ibid. At about 1900 hrs, according to Brig P.S. Gill, C Sig 0 IV Corps.

142. Ibid.

143. Maj Gen D.K. Palit, (Retd), who was then DMO, claimed in an interview on 27 October 1987, that when BGS showed him the message permitting withdrawal, he showed it to Gen Kaul disapprovingly but Gen Kaul told that it was not his own decision but of the Army Commander. DMO protested against it to the Chief of Army Staff who then consulted GOC-in-C and Corps Commander and then ordered for the withdrawal of the message. Interview of Maj Gen D.K. Palit (Retd), 2 November 1987.

144. From Official Records. But, according to Lt Gen K.K. Singh (Retd), the message was not fully encoded till the time when its withdrawal was ordered.
145. From Official Records. According to Brig P.S. Gill, the new message was given for transmission to HQ 4 Inf Div at 2245 hrs.
146. From Official Records.
147. Ibid.
148. Ibid.
149. Ibid. Although Gen Pathania does not mention specifically as to when, to be exact, during which teleconversation he informed Brig Hoshiar Singh about Gen Kaul's conditional authorisation for withdrawal. It could not have been done in the first teleconversation which took place before 1800 hrs. Obviously, it was done during the one under reference at 2230 hrs.
150. Ibid.
151. Ibid.
152. Ibid. Maj Gen A.S. Pathania, in his statement, claims to have told only vaguely that "situation at Se La had further deteriorated". Whereafter Lt Gen Kaul left the decision to withdraw at the discretion of the GOC.
153. From Official Records.
154. Ibid.
155. Ibid.
156. Ibid.
157. Ibid.
158. Ibid.
159. Ibid.
160. Ibid.
161. Ibid.

162. Ibid.
163. Ibid.
164. Ibid.
165. Encyclopaedia of soldiers with Highest Gallantry Awards (Compiled by S.S. Gandhi, 1980).
166. From Official Records.
167. Ibid.
168. Ibid.
169. Ibid.
170. Ibid.
171. Ibid.
172. Ibid.
173. Ibid.
174. Ibid.
175. Ibid.
176. Ibid.
177. Johri, S.R., Chinese Invasion of NEFA, p.155.
178. From Official Records.
179. Ibid.
180. Ibid.
181. Ibid.
182. Praval, K.C., The Red Eagles - A History of Fourth Division of India, pp.292-293.
183. From Official Records.
184. Ibid.
185. Ibid.
186. Ibid.
187. Praval, K.C., The Red Eagles - A History of Fourth Division of India, p.293.

- 188- From Official Records.
189- Ibid.
190- Ibid.
191- Johri, S.R., Chinese Invasion of NEFA, p.160.
192- From Official Records.
193- Ibid.
194- Ibid.
195- Johri, S.R., Chinese Invasion of NEFA, pp.148
and 177.
196- From Official Records.
197- Johri, S.R., Chinese Invasion of NEFA, p.181.
198- From Official Records.
199- Ibid.
200- Ibid.
201- Ibid.
202- Ibid.
203- Ibid.
204- Ibid.
205- Ibid.
206- Ibid.
207- Ibid.
208- Ibid.
209- Ibid.
210- Ibid.
211- Ibid.
212- Ibid.
213- Ibid.
214- Ibid.
215- Ibid.
216- Ibid.
217- Saigal, Lt Col, T.R., The Unfought War of 1962
(Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1979).

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