

CHAPTER VII

OPERATIONS IN SIALKOT SECTOR

ORBAT AND PLAN

Terrain

The newly created I Corps, commanded by Lt Gen P.O.Dunn, undertook operations in Samba-Jammu-Sialkot sector. This sector stretched between the Ravi and the Chenab rivers, with the Indo-Pak border running close to the foothills in the east. The only road-link between J&K and the rest of India ran through a narrow stretch of the lower foothills, close and parallel to the border, thus rendering this vital artery vulnerable. The international border was 28 km from Jammu and 14 km from Sialkot. The latter was a major Pak communication centre for rail, road and air, and Pakistan's main administrative depot as well. The Pak supplies to Chhamb sector went via Sialkot which was connected with Lahore by rail via Wazirabad-Gujranwala and also via Pasrur-Narowal. Sialkot-Pasrur portion of this railway line was a vital link in Pak defence system. Chawinda was a strategic small town and an important point on the Sialkot-Pasrur railway line. From Sialkot, roads led to Shakargarh via Phillora-Zafarwal; and to Lahore via Pasrur-Narowal, via Wazirabad-Gujranwala and via Daska and Gujranwala.

The terrain on the Pak side of the border in this sector was generally flat and intensively cultivated. It was bisected by the Degh Nadi (Basantar river) which flowed from Samba in India to south of Pasrur in Pakistan, running north-east to south-west. The river was fordable by tanks and 4x4 wheeled vehicles, except when in flood. Another important water obstacle in the area was Aik Nala which ran past Sialkot to its south where it had been turned into an anti-tank obstacle, protecting the town from the south. The main artificial obstacle in the sector was the Marala-Ravi Link (MRL) canal which ran north to south from the Chenab to the Ravi, passing west of line Sialkot-Pasrur, and affording protection to main communication lines inside west Punjab. The MRL canal was a formidable obstacle, over 100 metres wide with steep lined banks(1).

Build-up

HQ I Corps was established in Kaluchak (near Jammu) by 4 September 1965. Troops made available to the Corps Commander, Lt Gen Dunn, were I Armd

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Division, commanded by Maj Gen Rajinder Singh, MVC, 6 Mtn Div, under Maj Gen S.K.Korla, DSO, MC, 14 Inf Div led by Maj Gen R.K. Ranjeet Singh, and 26 Inf Div under Maj Gen M.L. Thapan.

In spite of this impressive strength, I Corps was rather in a sorry state for operations. The Corps HQ having been raised only in mid May, was beset with all the teething troubles common to a new raising. Of its four Divisions, two were new and truncated. 6 Mtn Div, which had come into being on 26 March 1963, consisted of only two Bdes (69 Mtn Bde and 99 Mtn Bde) and ever since had been deployed on the Himalayan border. It was neither equipped nor trained for plains warfare. 14 Inf Div was still in the process of raising and not yet in a fit state of operational functioning, and when called up for action, had to make frantic efforts to assemble the formation HQ and units, grouped with it, from outstations. Initially the Division had on its order of battle only two infantry brigades, 35 and 58, and until August 1965, these had been deployed on the UP-Tibet border. The third Bde, 116 Inf Bde, joined the Div in August 1965 at Babina. Neither 6 Mtn Div nor 14 Inf Div had any opportunity for collective training, and yet both these formations had to be launched into brigade and divisional actions. 1 Armd Div had 1 Armd Bde comprising 4 Horse, 16 Cav, 17 Horse and 9 Dogra, and 43 Lorried Inf Bde, composed of 5/9 GR, 5 JAT and 8 Garhwal Rifles. 2 Lancers and 62 Cav were placed under command of 1 Armd Div for the ensuing operations. 26 Inf Div had two Bdes, 162 Inf Bde and 168 Inf Bde. 1 Corps itself had never trained as a full group. In fact, it was introduced to most of its formations virtually in the concentration areas. Only 1 Armd Div and 26 Inf Div were suitably located and trained for the type of operation that had been envisaged for this Corps.

Logistically, the Corps was far from being a going concern. There was a frantic last-minute rush to scrape together ad hoc administrative units to provide logistical support. The Corps had no third line transport; civil vehicles had to be commandeered to fill in this gap in the administrative chain.

Plan

The task assigned to I Corps was to secure area Pagowal (Bhagowal), Phillora (Phillaurah), Chawinda and the Cross Roads with a view to advancing towards the Marala-Ravi Link Canal, and eventually to the line of Dhallewali-Wuhilam-Daska-Mandhali(2).

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Code-word "NEPAL" was given to the operation that would be launched to fulfil this task

Pakistan had already concentrated substantial forces in the Sialkot Sector. This sector was the responsibility of Pakistan's I Corps commanded by Lt Gen Bakhtiar Rana(3). His Formations included 6 Armoured Div under Maj Gen Abrar Hussain and 15 Infantry Div beefed up with 115 Brigade. 10 Infantry Brigade, 14 Para Brigade and 4 Corps Arty were also rushed up to the sector from Chhamb area, thus giving up all Pakistani hopes of capturing Akhnur. Sluggish moves of India's I Corps enabled Pakistan to bring up by 12 September even the 1 Armoured Div (less one brigade) from Khem Karan sector to the Pasrur area.

The Indian plan was elaborate. Deployment of troops along the International Border, to seal off the main Pak routes of ingress to the road Pathankot-Samba, prior to the commencement of concentration, was necessary. Units of 6 Mtn Div were to be employed for this purpose with instructions to be in position by D Day. This would be Phase I.

Move and deployment of the Strike Force units in their respective concentration areas preparatory to mounting the offensive was Phase II.

Phase III was establishment of bridgehead. According to the Corps plan, 6 Mtn Div and 26 Inf Div were to secure the right flank of the main advance : the former by seizing the area Maharajke and Charwa, and the latter by capturing Bajragarhi and Anula nearby, so as to establish a 'bridgehead' across the International Border to serve as a springboard for launching India's main strike element, 1 Armd Div. These objectives were to be secured before first light on 8 September 1965.

Concurrently with the above action, 14 Inf Div less two Bdes was given the task of capturing Ikhna (Nakhna). At the same time, 26 Inf Div was to contain the enemy forces in Sialkot area and thus protect the right flank of the main thrust towards Phillora and Chawinda.

Phase IV was to be the break out. After the establishment of the bridgehead, 1 Armd Div was to strike out for the capture of Phillora and subsequently exploit towards Pagowal and Chawinda en route to the Marala-Ravi Link Canal. 62 Cav less one squadron and four "tentacles" were grouped with 1 Armd Div for this task; 26 Arty Bde, 24 Med Regt (on priority call), and two Air Control Teams were placed in support.

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At a suitable stage in the battle, 14 Inf Div was to capture Zajarwal and secure area Cross Roads - Chawinda, as a complementary action to the thrust of 1 Armd Div. 1 Arty Bde, 6 Mtn Arty Bde and 24 Medium Regiment were provisionally placed in support of 14 Inf Div for this task. 6 Mtn Div was to act as Corps Reserve.

SECURING THE RIGHT FLANK

By last light 7 September 1965, I Corps was ready to cross the international border on a frontage extending from west of Basantar River to Suchetgarh. The formations were deployed according to plan except for 14 Inf Div, which could not be concentrated to participate in the establishment of the bridgehead, as its 58 Inf Bde employed for the security of Madhopur Road Bridge and the Headworks could not be relieved from Pathankot for this role. 28 Inf Bde, which had been promised to 6 Mtn Div, also could not be made available, as it was inextricably involved in the Chhamb sector. Still, promptly at 2300 hrs on night 7/8 September 1965, 6 Mtn Div and 26 Inf Div crossed the international border into Pakistan. 'Operation Nepal' was under way.

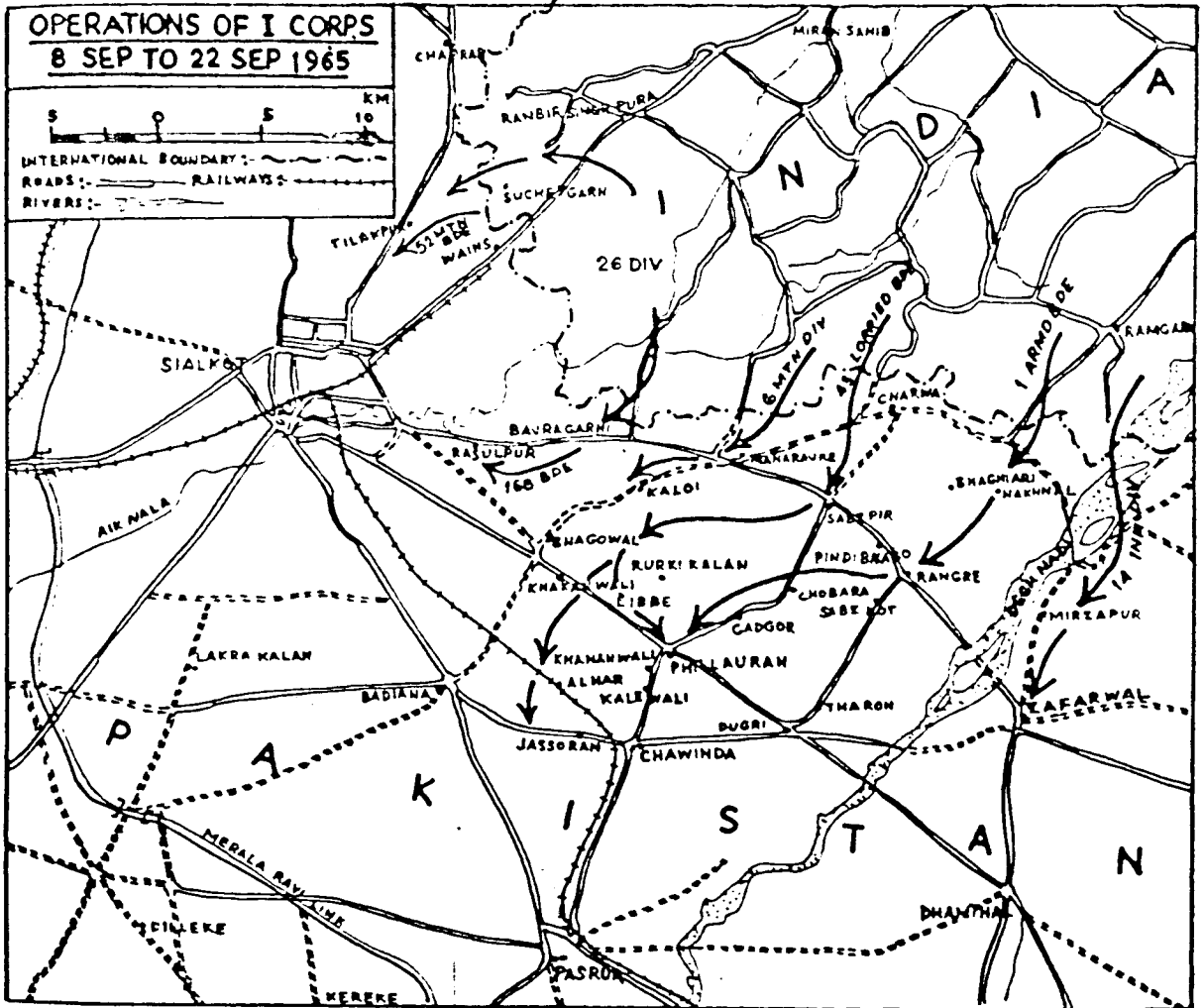
6 Div Takes Charwa and Maharajke

As already explained, the task assigned to 6 Mtn Div was to capture Charwa and Maharajke with a view to establishing bridgehead for the break-out of 1 Armd Div by first light of 8 September 1965 and then exploit towards Pagowal. The operation was to begin at 2300 hrs on 7 September and to be completed by 0430 hrs next day. The Div assigned Charwa to 99 Mtn Bde and Maharajke to 69 Mtn Bde Gp in Phase I of the operation. The 35 Inf Bde which had joined the Div on 7 September was to explore further towards Pagowal in Phase II of the operation(4).

99 Mtn Bde, assigned the objective Charwa, appreciated that the capture of the village would involve clearance of built-up areas, and so the Bde selected objectives on the flanks, to avoid fighting in the village proper during the hours of darkness.

At 2030 hrs on 7 September, two coys of 6 Garhwal Rifles along with their commando platoons crossed the international border to secure the Bde Forming Up Place (FUP), which was secured by 2200 hrs.

2/5 Gorkha Rifles (FF) on the left and 4 Rajputana Rifles on the right completed Forming Up by



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2255 hrs and crossed the Start Line (SL) at 2300 hrs. Intensive artillery fire support covered the assault.

The Gorkhas swept swiftly over the objective and quickly evicted an enemy rifle coy supported by a coy of Mujahids. 106 mm recoilless guns were effectively used to blast an enemy stronghold, especially in the area of the village school. On the right flank, 4 Rajputana Rifles was equally successful in crushing the combined opposition of an infantry (Rifle) coy plus a coy of Mujahids. When finally compelled to vacate the area, the enemy left behind large quantities of mines, ammunition and rations. The main opposition was cleared by both the battalions by 0300 hrs - well ahead of schedule. Exploiting their success, the assaulting battalions pushed forward beyond their objectives to cover the roads coming into Charwa from Maharajke, Chobara and Ikhnal (Nakhnal).

The fight for the village of Charwa, however, was a grim one. The village was a formidable stronghold fortified with elaborate defence works and an intricate net-work of underground tunnelling. Moreover, the defenders fought with courage and determination, and although the main opposition subsided on the night of the attack, pockets of resistance lingered on for another two days.

The capture of Maharajke by 69 Mtn Bde was again aimed at facilitating the subsequent operations of 1 Armd Bde. The attack was planned in two phases. In Phase I, two battalions, i.e. 3 Madras and 9 Kumaon, were to capture the right half of the objective and also block the road to Pagowal/Badiana and Sialkot. In Phase II, 4 Madras was to capture the left half of the objective and then block the road to Charwa and Zafarwal.

By 1700 hrs two companies from 4 Madras had secured the Forming Up Place in area south-east of Jabwal Kalan. At 2250 hrs the assaulting troops for Phase I, 3 Madras and 9 Kumaon, formed up ready for action. The operation was launched at 2300 hrs from the FUP and the right half of the objective was secured against light enemy opposition of about a company plus, by 0130 hrs(5).

Phase 2 commenced at 0300 hrs, but soon after crossing the SL, 4 Madras came under heavy enemy MMC and small arms fire. The assault was held up till 0430 hrs. Now, their gallant Commanding Officer, Lt Col H.L.Mehta, rushed forward to lead the assault. The attack was pushed through with determination, and the objective was secured by 0530 hrs, but the brave CO of

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the battalion fell to an enemy bullet. He was given the award of MVC posthumously. On 8th morning, enemy tanks made a probing attack from the south, approaching to within 1500 metres of the Forward Defended Localities (FDLs). The attack was, however, repulsed by the combined fire of artillery and armour. The Bde thereafter remained at Maharajke until 12 September, and merely provided a firm base for operations by 1 Armd Div towards Phillora and Pagowal. After the capture of Charwa and Maharajke, 35 Inf Bde was ordered to move forward and clear area Cross Roads near (Sabzpir). Thereafter this Bde was placed under command 1 Armd Div.

The casualty figures for the battles of Maharajke and Charwa were as under:-

	Maharajke			Charwa		
	Killed	Wounded	Captured	Killed	Wounded	Captured
<u>Pak</u>						
Officers	-	-	1	3	-	1
JCOs	-	-	1	-	-	-
ORs	33	-	55	205*	-	34
<u>Indian</u>						
Officers	1	4	-	-	-	-
JCOs	1	3	-	-	-	-
ORs	15	42	1 (missing)	-	19**	-

* including Mujahids

** 3 died in hospital later

26 Div Takes Wains and Bajragarhi

26 Inf Div, detailed to contain the enemy forces at Sialkot, went into the offensive with two Bdes on night 7/8 September 1965 for the capture of area Unche Wains, Niwe Wains and Bajragarhi. 162 Inf Bde was given the task of capturing the Wains laying north of Aik Nala, while 168 Inf Bde was ordered to capture Bajragarhi south of it (7).

162 Inf Bde, consisting of 6 Jat and 1 Sikh Light Infantry, was allotted C Sqn 18 Cav for carrying out its task. 26 Arty Bde and 1 Arty Bde were placed in support. The formation decided to launch the attack in two phases. During Phase 1, 1 Sikh LI was to capture Point 857 nearby, and in the second phase, 7 Jat was given the objective Wains. 6 Jat was to be brigade reserve.

The battalions crossed the International Border according to schedule and went on to capture Point 857, and Wains, astride the main Suchetgarh-Sialkot road. Despite heavy shelling by enemy artillery (field, medium and heavy guns) and the fire of his light and medium machine guns, 7 Jat and 1 Sikh LI, pressed on regardless, completing their assigned task by 0210 hrs on 8 September 1965. C Squadron 18 Cavalry moved in with the reorganisation group and the Bde Sector was consolidated according to plan.

168 Inf Bde, composed of 2/1 Gorkha Rifles, 5/4 Gorkha Rifles and 8 J and K Rifles, was allotted A Squadron 18 Cavalry for capturing Anula and Bajragarhi. 168 Field Regt was in direct support(8).

The Bde carried out its task in two phases. In Phase I, 5/4 Gorkha Rifles captured Anula near Bajragarhi. The opposition being comparatively light, the Bde established itself on the assigned objectives by 0530 hrs on 8 September 1965 without much fighting(9).

Thus, both 6 Mtn Div and 26 Inf Div took their objectives on schedule. By first light on 8 September 1965, 6 Mtn Div had established the planned bridgehead in area Charwa-Maharajke. Further north, 26 Inf Div had secured the general areas Unche Wains - Niwe Wains and Bajragarhi, to threaten Sialkot and, in consequence, tie down enemy forces in that sector with a view to minimising opposition to the main thrust.

Although Wains, Bajragarhi, Maharajke and Charwa were all very close to the border, Pak reacted sharply to the threat posed to Sialkot, for it was an objective to which she was most sensitive, militarily and politically. Massive artillery fire was brought to bear on the various dispositions but Indian troops held on gamely to their ground. In fact, A Sqn 18 Cav displayed remarkable audacity in probing forward to the Ura Bridge just 8 km short of Sialkot during the exploitation phase. Enemy Shermans and Chaffees supported by artillery took place, and the Indian armour, after inflicting four tank casualties at the expense of only one listed as missing, withdrew to the bridgehead.

The first round of the contest was thus a clear success, due to tactical surprise. The ground was now ready for the Armoured Division to show its mettle.

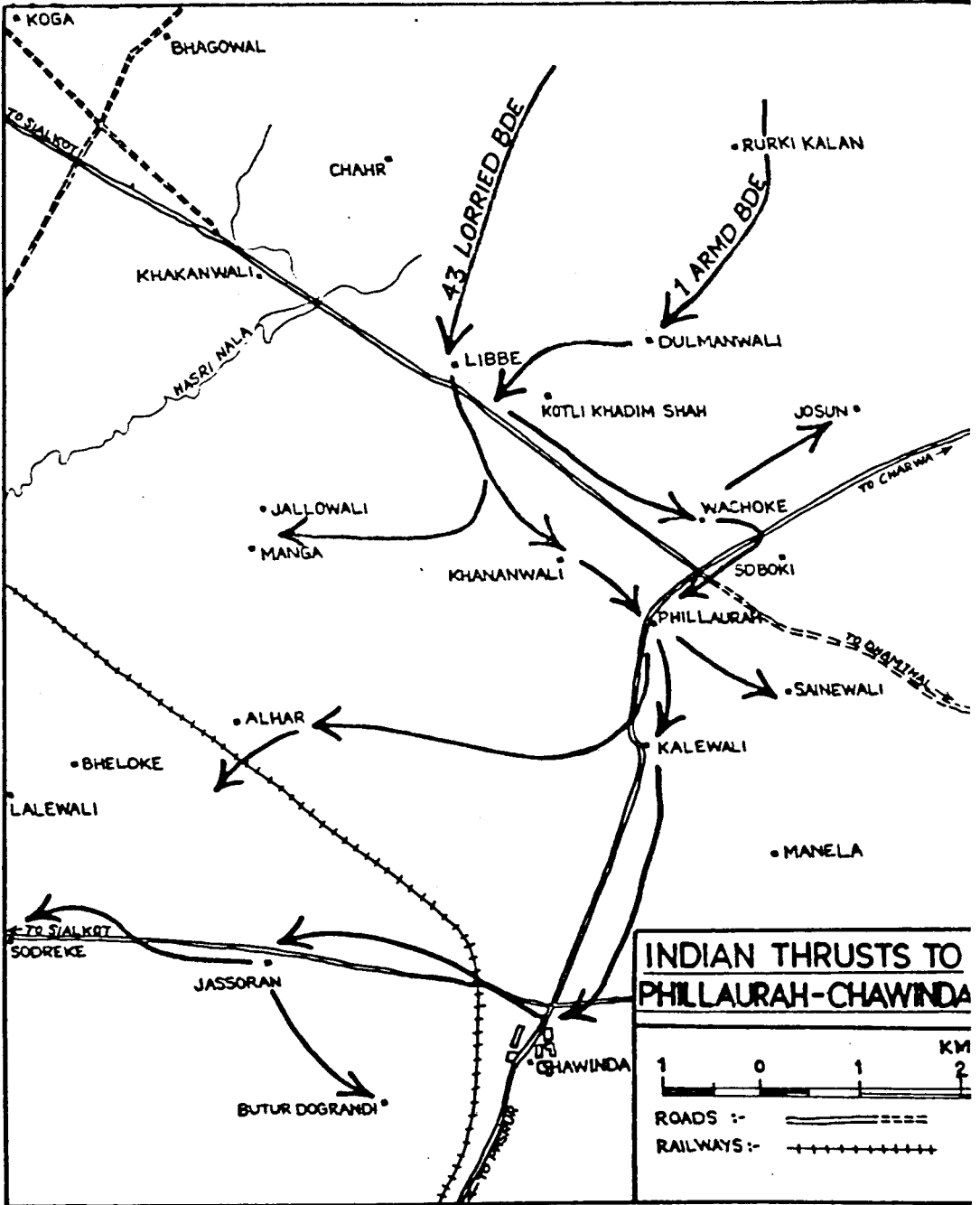
ARMoured THRUST TO PHILLORA

Attack Launched

1 Armd Div was located in Jalandhar before it reached Ramgarh area for operations on 5 September 1965. On the night 6/7 September, the Div completed its concentration near Ramgarh for the offensive. The task allotted to the Div was to smash through enemy territory at first light on 8 September to capture Phillora. The advance was to be carried out as follows(10):-

- 1) 1 Armd Bde under command Brig K.K.Singh on axis Ramgarh-Kangre (Kangre)-Sabzkot-Chobara-Phillora.
- 2) 43 Lorried Inf Bde under command Brig H.S.Dhillon on axis Deoli-Sabzpur Cross Road-Mastpur-Pagowal.
- 3) One regimental group (4 Horse) with one company (9 Dogra) motor battalion was to form the GOC's reserve, and was to be prepared to operate on any of the two axes.
- 4) One Squadron from 62 Cavalry was to act as left flank guard of the Division and operate west of Degh Nadi from Ikhnaal to Kangre under command 1 Armd Bde.
- 5) 1 Arty Bde (under command Brig O.P.Malhotra) -2 Field Regt (SP) and 101 Field Regt (SP) were placed in direct support and under command of 1 Armoured Bde and 43 Lorried Inf Bde respectively. 71 Med Regt was placed in direct support of 1 Armd Bde, to move on the Centre Line.

At 0600 hrs on 8 September, 1 Armd Div crossed the International boundary in two columns: 43 Lorried Inf Bde on the right and 1 Armd Bde on the left. The march of the right column slowed down because due to rain on 7 September some tanks of 2 Lancers got bogged down, and the Bde had to be diverted to an alternative route via Ramgarh(11). The left column (1 Armd Bde Gp) pushed forward smoothly, 17 Horse on the left and 16 Cav on the right going past Sabzkot and Chobara localities. At 0930 hrs, the leading armour (16 Cavalry) encountered some enemy tanks, recoilless guns



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and dug-in infantry in area Gadgor. In the action that followed, 8 enemy tanks and 2 recoilless guns were claimed as destroyed. About the same time, 17 Horse encountered a similar opposition in area Tharoh, south-east of Phillora. A serious tank-to-tank fighting ensued, and in this the enemy air force also took a hand. However, the Regt knocked out 3 Pakistani tanks and one recoilless gun. Knowing that enemy was pushing more tanks in the battle area, the GOC 1 Armd Div ordered his reserve regt (4 Horse) to take enemy armour from one of the flanks and placed the regiment under 1 Armd Bde. But in the meantime, 17 Horse were pulled back to counter enemy threat to area Pindi Bhago. 16 Cav was also disengaged and deployed along Hasri Nala.

One Squadron 62 Cavalry which was given the task of left flank protection by operating west of Degh Nadi could not keep pace with the initial advance of 1 Armd Bde owing to ground conditions. This Bde was, therefore, asked to detach some armour to contain enemy threat in area Kangre. Just before last light 5/9 GR captured Narsing(12). But the tank thrust had been stalled.

Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh (Retd), the then GOC-in-C Western Command, has severely criticised the immature handling of this operation, which was planned to storm through the Pak defences in the area, but had soon limped to a halt. According to him, the Bde Commander (1 Armd Bde) made the unfortunate decision to withdraw 17 Horse from Tharoh for countering an allegedly serious tank threat on the left flank. This was a grave error of judgement as 4 Horse, which by this time had been released to the Bde by GOC 1 Armd Div, could have been used to meet any flank threat posed by the enemy armour. Due to this they could make an advance of only four miles beyond the bridgehead, when a much deeper penetration could have been achieved(13).

43 Lorried Inf Bde fared even worse. By 1800 hrs on 8 September, the formation had cleared village Salarion only and advanced upto Sabzpir cross-roads, where the Bde concentrated and harboured for the night(14). During the day's engagement the enemy lost 20 tanks against India's loss of twelve(15).

1 Armd Div, staked to turn the tide of the war, had made a bad beginning. Much was expected from this powerful formation, but it was unable to achieve the necessary breakthrough. In fact, it was perhaps wrong to launch the two main fighting elements of the Armd Div, the Armd Bde and the Lorried Bde, on

divergent axes. The separation of the Lorried Bde from the Armd Bde compounded the weakness of both.

In view of the developments of the day, the GOC 1 Armd Div ordered the following readjustments in the position of the troops:- (16)

- 1) 35 Inf Bde to establish a firm base in area Sabzpir cross-roads so as to serve as a spring-board for the subsequent operations of 1 Armd Bde.
- 2) 1 Armd Bde was to manoeuvre to the east and west of road Chobara-Phillora with a view to attracting maximum enemy armour in this area.
- 3) 43 Lorried Inf Bde was to establish a firm base at Gat near Kaloi to prevent a breakthrough by the enemy towards Maharajke from the side of Pagowal. It was to adopt a defensive posture.
- 4) 5 Raj Rif with 2 Lancers and one Sqn 62 Cavalry was to establish a left-flank firm base in area Kangre so as to meet any enemy threat from Zafarwal.
- 5) 1 Artillery Bde was to deploy in area east of Sabzpir cross-road and Gangial.

Advance to Kaloi

Commander, 1 Armd Div then ordered the Lorried Bde to continue advance to Pagowal on axis Maharajke-Kaloi-Pagowal. 2 Lancers were detached and placed under command 35 Inf Bde. The advance began at 0700 hrs on 9 September with 62 Cav less one Sqn, and 8 Garhwal Rifles as an advance guard. The enemy air force was again very active and strafed the forward troops as also the gun positions. The Bde succeeded in taking Kaloi but could not reach Pagowal. On 10 September, enemy shelling and air attacks continued. However, the Bde was well dug-in. 62 Cav foiled enemy probing moves towards the evening (17).

The enemy air, which had been very active since 8 September, had destroyed a number of the Indian administrative vehicles. This coupled with the indifferent state of communications in enemy territory, caused a virtual breakdown in administrative support. 1 Armd Div decided that it could not continue its advance, and spent 9 and 10 September reorganising and replenishing.

In the meantime, 6 Mtn Div undertook a series of minor operations for clearing the villages Thikarwala, Jarwal, Khanor, Sangial, Joia, Dinga, Tirke and Saidanial, in which the enemy, on withdrawal, had left

a number of armed civilian snipers. The civilians were rounded up and pushed into enemy territory(18). At this stage it was confirmed that 6 Armoured Div and 15 Inf Div of Pakistan were opposing I Corps.

Meanwhile, on the 26 Inf Div front, the enemy launched desperate counter-attacks in a determined bid to force back 162 and 168 Inf Bdes from their positions in areas Wains and Bajragarhi respectively. The counter-attacks were preceded by heavy artillery bombardment. 26 Inf Div, however, continued to hold on to the ground captured and retaliated with counter-bombardment fire to neutralise detected enemy gun positions(19).

Revised Plan for the Assault

On 10 September, GOC I Corps issued Operation Instruction No.2/65 for the capture of Phillora and exploitation towards Chawinda. 35 Inf Bde and one Battalion from 116 Inf Bde were grouped with 1 Armd Div for this battle, and 6 Mtn Arty Bde and I Corps Arty Bde (24 Med Regt) were placed in support. In addition the following relief and regrouping was also ordered:-

- (a) 58 Bde less one battalion, with one battalion from 99 Mtn Bde was to defend Charwa.
- (b) 99 Mtn Bde less one battalion was to concentrate to the west and adjacent to 43 Lorried Inf Bde. The formation was to come under command 1 Armd Div at 0530 hrs, 11 September 1965.

After an extensive reconnaissance carried out by the GOC 1 Armd Div on 9 and 10 September for launching 1 Armd Div, he located an opening in area Rurki-Kalan, through which no direct route led to Phillora. Moreover, the ground in this area was full of paddy fields and sugarcane plantations. Further, the area was subjected to enemy shelling and infested with enemy parties including Mujahids. GOC 1 Armd Div, however, chose to mount the attack from this most unexpected direction, in spite of the risks involved, to achieve the element of surprise. As a further measure of deception, 1 Armd Bde was to put in a realistic demonstration to entice the enemy armour towards Sabzpir and to create the impression that the attack was being launched from that direction. It was subsequently confirmed that these efforts did achieve a measure of surprise.

After selecting the direction of the attack the GOC 1 Armd Div ordered the concentration of troops as

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follows(20):-

- 1) 1 Armd Bde was to concentrate near Rurki Kalan before mid-night 10/11 September. Tank noise during the move was to be drowned by heavy artillery shelling to keep the move secret.
- 2) 43 Lorried Inf Bde was to leave one battalion (8 Garhwal Rifles) supported by 62 Cavalry less one Sqn located in Gat position. (As a preliminary operation 8 Garh Rif was to capture Gat by 0200 hrs on 11 September). The remainder of the Bde was to be ready to move out for operations by 2200 hrs on 10 September.
- 3) 35 Inf Bde, supported by 2 Lancers less one Sqn, was to continue to hold the firm base in area Sabzpir cross-road.
- 4) 5 Raj Rifles (ex-116 Inf Bde) supported by one sqn 62 Cavalry and one sqn from 2 Lancers, was to hold Kangre.
- 5). 1 Arty Bde was to redeploy in area west of Sabzpir in support of 1 Armd Div assault on Phillora.

43 Lorried Inf Bde, less 8 Garhwal Rifles, were to carry out a night march and clear area Rurki Kalan by first light 11 September, where a firm base would be established for subsequent operations. On further orders, and depending upon the progress of armour action, 43 Lorried Inf Bde was to move to Nathupur for launching an attack on Phillora.

1 Armd Bde was to advance at first light 11 September at full speed from its night assembly area to Rurki Kalan with three regiments up. From Rurki Kalan, two regiments (4 Horse and 17 Horse) were to open out and encircle Phillora by a pincer movement from both flanks. This manoeuvre was intended to split enemy armour echelons into small groups. These groups were to be subsequently isolated for destruction in detail.

16 Cavalry was to establish itself in area Khanawali north-west of Phillora, and in conjunction with the 62 Cavalry and 8 Garhwal Rifles Group deployed on its right, in area Gat, was to provide right flank protection against any threat from the direction of Sialkot. 35 Inf Bde, with 2 Lancers less one Sqn, were to continue in their firm base at Sabzpir cross-roads to secure the flank against any

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armour threat. The dispositions on the left flank were further improved as 116 Inf Bde had by this time established itself in area Ikhnaal with its two battalions (5/5 Gorkha Rifles and 18 Madras). It also remained firmed in at Kangre supported by armour. 1 Arty Bde was to continue to be deployed in area west of Sabzpir(21).

Preliminary moves to the respective areas were carried out according to plan. Despite light rain, 1 Armd Bde concentrated in area Kaloi-Rurki Khurd, alongwith 43 Lorried Inf Bde, for the assault on Phillora.

The Battle

The launching of the Armd Div from an unexpected direction at first light on 11 September surprised the enemy, as he was expecting an attack either from axis Zafarwal-Phillora or Chobara-Phillora. In fact he had prepared defences to cover these two approaches. The cross-country operation from the direction of Rurki Kalan, therefore, greatly upset the enemy plan of defence.

By first light on 11 September, 2 Lancers' tanks had been deployed in battle positions covering the Gadgor-Phillora axis. As per plan, 8 Garh Rif secured Gat (near Kaloi) by 0600 hrs(22). By 0640 hrs, 4 Horse had advanced beyond the village of Rurki Kalan. Meanwhile, 17 Horse moved on to Libbe axis and joined the assault on the right of 4 Horse. 16 Cav established a road-block in area Khananwali, 62 Cav moved to area Pagowal cross roads in order to protect the west flank of 1 Armd Div(23).

The enemy opposition along the axis to Phillora was estimated at two armoured regiments composed of Pattons and tank destroyers. 4 Horse, which formed the left of the Bde advance, was the first to encounter enemy armour. The regiment was assigned the task of protecting the left flank of the Bde attack with a view to preventing a break-through of the enemy armour from Gadgor-Lalapur towards Phillora. The regt was expected to cut the road Phillora-Chobara and also help 43 Lorried Bde(24).

Following the capture of Rurki Kalan by C Sqn, A and B Sqns 4 Horse advanced in the direction of Wachoke and Saboke (just north and north-east of Phillora) respectively. RHQ 4 Horse along with the Battery Commander's tank advanced south between A and B Sqns from the east of Rurki Kalan. In this area one Sqn of enemy armour was found deployed between Libbe and Kotli Khadim Shah just to its east. These were

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immediately engaged by the CO's tank and 3 of them were knocked out(25). Meanwhile, A Sqn came within 1000 yards of the road and engaged enemy tanks in position there. B Sqn also reached the vicinity of Wachoke and engaged enemy armour there. Meanwhile, C Sqn was also asked to join on the right of 'B' Sqn.. In the tank battle that ensued a total of 29 enemy tanks were claimed as destroyed or damaged, while 4 Horse suffered only 3 tank casualties.

The 17 Horse was detailed to lead the centre of 1 Armd Bde's advance on Phillora. It was to advance to Libbe at 0600 hrs with C Sqn as the vanguard. On capturing Libbe, C Sqn was to establish a firm base there and the other sqns were to pivot on it and occupy positions from Libbe to Khananwali and Kot Izzat (a little to the south) so as to provide fire support for the attack on Phillora(26).

The regiment commenced advance at 0800 hrs on 11 September. Care was taken to coordinate movement with that of the 4 Horse advancing to the east of the regiment. The enemy armour was first encountered at 0817 hrs between Phillora and Libbe by the C Sqn. In the ensuing skirmish 3 enemy tanks were destroyed. The Sqn suffered 2 tanks damaged. Three more enemy tanks were destroyed by C Sqn while probing the flanks. The Sqn also lost 3 more tanks from enemy RCL/tank fire coming from village Libbe. Seeing the enemy pressure, B Sqn was consequently ordered to move up and deploy on the west of C Sqn and deal with the enemy threat there.

At this juncture, 5/9 GR was asked to clear village Libbe and the surrounding sugarcane fields. This was done by 1230 hrs, and C Sqn commenced advance towards Phillora with B Sqn holding the firm base at Libbe. When C Sqn had reached east of village Libbe on road Libbe-Phillora, it came under fire from five enemy tanks at a range of about 800 yards. The Sqn retaliated and in the process destroyed three tanks and captured one. Again, nine enemy tanks came to check the Regt's advance. C Sqn, however, claimed to have destroyed seven of them in a gruelling tank action(27).

The grand finale had, however, yet to come, when A Sqn had built upon B Sqn 17 Horse at Libbe, and the latter moved on to take up fire position between Khananwali and Kot Izzat, just to its south. At this stage, information was received that approximately one sqn of enemy tanks was moving from the direction of Alhar towards Phillora. B Sqn thereupon adjusted its positions to meet the approaching threat. A Sqn moved up two tank troops to guard the west flank of B Sqn.

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At the same time, two enemy tank troops emerged from the direction of Kot Izzat, presumably with the intention of taking on C Sqn from the flank. The stage was then set for the battle. The ground was open and the only cover was provided by the sugarcane fields. Hence, maximum security was obtained by movement. The engagement took place at a range of only 100 yards between moving tanks and lasted for about 45 minutes, until surviving enemy tanks withdrew(28). Lt Col A.B. Tarapore, CO 17 Horse knocked out two enemy tanks just in the beginning of the battle in which the enemy lost a total of 28 tanks as against only one of 17 Horse(29).

The enemy armour was thus completely defeated and the hard crust of the defences of Phillora was breached. The objective was now open to a physical assault by infantry. 43 Lorried Inf Bde launched the attack with two battalions up (5/9 Gorkha Rifles and 5 Jat). The objective, including the cross-roads was secured by 1530 hrs, and the battle for Phillora was over. The feats of courage and skill during the day included the outstanding performance of Lt Col M.M.S. Bakshi and Lt Col Tarapore, Commanders 4 Horse and 17 Horse respectively.

The enemy armour was badly mauled during this battle. As many as 67 enemy tanks were destroyed/damaged on this day for Indian loss of only six Centurions. It was an impressive victory. This was mainly due to a combination of excellent gunnery and skillful manoeuvre of tanks and gallant leadership of commanders in action. Because of the heavy concentration of armour in this battle, it was considered to be the biggest tank battle since World War II.

In coordination with 4 Horse and 17 Horse which were responsible for the left and the centre of the 1 Armd Bde advance, 16 Cavalry was to take care of the right. 16 Cav, which had moved to Rurki Khurd on 10 September, was assigned the task to cover road junction and area Khananwali to prevent any enemy armour from breaking through from Sialkot side and interfering with 1 Armd Bde operations towards Phillora. The Regt moved to take up position on 11th morning and was attacked by enemy air en route. At Cross-Roads the enemy attacked B Sqn with a Squadron of Pattons supported by RCLs. In this encounter 6 enemy tanks and 3 RCLs were claimed as destroyed. The Regt lost 4 tanks.

62 Cav (less C Sqn) was employed further west to protect the right flank of 1 Armd Bde attack on Phillora by securing the important Cross-Roads. The

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Regt commenced advance at 0930 hrs along track Kaloi-Haral-Pagowal Cross-Roads, and secured village Haral. But no sooner had it skirted village Pagowal, about 1500 yards from the objective, enemy Pattons located in a grove near Pagowal opened fire on the leading tanks. The enemy armour was taken frontally and on the flanks, two Pattons were destroyed. But the progress of the Regt soon came to a stop owing to heavy enemy artillery fire. Next, a serious counter-attack on Pagowal developed from south-west. This was, of course, a reaction to the thrust made by the Regt which threatened to cut off enemy forces still fighting in Phillora. Two Patton Sqns supported by heavy artillery tried to envelop the Regt around village Haral, a little north of Pagowal. But when the Regt thwarted this plan of envelopment, the enemy launched two parallel thrusts to the east and west of Haral to cut off the Regt from the Bde-defended sector at Kaloi and possibly to drive a deep wedge towards Maharajke.

This counter-attack was checked by the Regt. A strategy of holding lay-back positions one after another delayed the enemy advance. Finally, heavy artillery fire blunted the enemy thrust. Though 62 Cav did not succeed in securing Cross-Roads, it did succeed in providing flank protection to 1 Armd Bde in its operations at Phillora(31).

In this 1 Armd Bde advance on Phillora, 43 Lorried Bde also played a significant part. Its two battalions, i.e. 5 Jat and 5/9 GR, kept on advancing alongside the armour in spite of persistent enemy air attacks. At about 0900 hrs, 17 Horse forward elements had come into contact with the enemy armour along line Libbe-Kotli Bagga. At this juncture, 5/9 GR attacked Libbe with one Coy and cleared it of the enemy. 5 Jat held on in area short of Kotli Bagga. The Bde now conceived the attack on Phillora with the Jats following the left of 5/9 GR. The assault could not, however, go well. Intensive enemy shelling from the right staggered the assault-line, inflicting heavy casualties on the troops(32). The Bde Commander, therefore, chose to clear village Khananwali and Wachoke first, with a view to facilitating a smooth advance on the axis. In this, one troop of C Sqn 17 Horse was to support the attack of 5/9 GR in two-Coy strength. The enemy reacted sharply to this flanking move and attacked from the right with two troops of Pattons. C Sqn 17 Horse foiled this attack, and Khananwali was cleared. As already stated, 5/9 made the final assault on Phillora and captured it by 1530 hrs on 11 September; 5 Jat, who had cleared Wachoke (north of Phillora), also captured their objective, exploiting upto Josun to the east.

FURTHER OPERATIONS, 12-22 SEPTEMBER

Consolidation and Regrouping

The Infantry firmed in at Phillora, mopping up any stray enemy pockets that came to life after the main battle. The axis Sabzpir-Chobara-Gadgor-Phillora was cleared and opened for maintenance traffic. Enemy air, however, continued to be active throughout the day. There was a series of tank skirmishes also west and south of Phillora on 12 September, as the armour manoeuvred itself to a position of tactical advantage for the next phase of the battle. The Division, through a policy of steady creep forward, edged its way upto the line Kalewali-Sainewali south-west of Phillora by 1700 hrs on 12 September. At last light, 1 Armd Div fell back to its firm base for the night. 99 Mtn Bde had by now taken over the defences of Phillora.

The activities in 26 Inf Div Sector during the period 10 to 12 September were mainly confined to aggressive patrolling. 52 Mtn Bde, from XV Corps, was placed under command of 26 Inf Div on 12 September. The formation was positioned to cover the approach Marala Headworks-Chaprar and was also earmarked as a reserve strike force in the Divisional Sector.

On 11 September, GOC 1 Corps ordered the following regrouping to be completed by 12 September, in preparation for next phase of the operation:-

(a) 1 Armd Div

With under Command - Charwa
58 Inf Bde

(b) 6 Mtn Div

- i) 99 Mtn Bde - To move to Phillora
- ii) 69 Mtn Bde - One battalion to capture Pagowal, to be built up to two battalions by 12 September.
- iii) 35 Inf Bde - Sabzpir
- iv) 116 Inf Bde less one battalion - Revert under 14 Inf Div.

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(c) 14 Inf Div

- To establish a patrol base at Zafarwal on night 11/12 September and build it up to one battalion by the 12th.

14 Inf Div Sector

In accordance with directions received from HQ I Corps, 5/5 Gorkha Rifles was ordered to secure Zafarwal. The battalion despatched one company at 2130 hrs on 11 September 1965 on a probing mission with instructions to occupy the town in case it was not held by the enemy. The battalion lost contact with the coy soon after its departure due to wireless failure. A second company was ordered to move by transport to Mirzapur at 0555 hrs on 12 September 1965. This company was instructed to contact the first company at Zafarwal after securing Mirzapur. The company after clearing a minor opposition at Deoli secured Mirzapur at 0910 hrs.

It was later revealed that 5 Rajputana Rifles at Kangre had made radio contact with the 5/5 Gorkha Rifles coy at Zafarwal at about 0500 hrs, when the latter had asked for another coy to be sent up immediately. This message was conveyed to Bde HQ only at 1020 hrs. On receipt of the message the remainder of 5/5 GR was ordered to move forthwith to Zafarwal. B Sqn 2 Lancers, which had been placed under command 14 Inf Div, was also directed to move to reinforce the garrison at Zafarwal, but it took over two hours to refill and did not move out till 1230 hrs. Enroute to Zafarwal the Sqn came under enemy artillery fire in area Pindi Mahrasan just east of Kangre. After the shelling, it made no attempt to push forward to Zafarwal, and having idled away the rest of the day, returned to Kangre at 1850 hrs.

Meanwhile, the first coy of 5/5 Gorkha Rifles, which had met no opposition at Zafarwal, was engaged at first light by a strong roving jeep patrol, equipped with medium machine guns and recoilless guns. As the coy did not get any reinforcement, it withdrew to Mirzapur at 1145 hrs. The rest of battalion built up in this area by 1300 hrs and made an attempt to capture Zafarwal. In the absence of B Sqn 2 Lancers, which continued to linger at Pindi Mahrasan, it was not possible to overcome the opposition at Zafarwal with the available troops. 5/5 GR, therefore, failed to capture their objective and was ordered to fall back on Mirzapur and firm in there for night 12/13 September(33).

These piecemeal and disjointed attempts, in which the armour had shown no interest, saved Zafarwal. For, while the Indians were making ineffective jabs at the objective, the enemy had reinforced the town with armour and infantry. When, on 13 September, a full fledged brigade attack employing 116 Inf Bde, supported by a sqn of 2 Lancers, was at last mounted, it was too late. 5/5 Gorkha Rifles attacking from the direction of Mirzapur was held up by strong enemy tank fire. The squadron of 2 Lancers came to a halt in the Degh Nadi when opposed by recoilless guns and tank fire, and hence failed to contact 5/5 Gorkha Rifles. The attack fizzled out short of the objective.

Capture of Pagowal

On 12 September 1965, 69 Mtn Bde was ordered to secure area Pagowal by 0600 hrs 13 September, and then hold that position to protect the right flank of 1_ Armd Div(34).

About 500 metres south-west of Pagowal, there was an important intersection of roads. Here the road Maharajke-Pagowal-Badiana crossed the roads to Sialkot Cantt and Sialkot city from Phillora. On account of its vital importance, it was decided to secure this road intersection complex as part of the plan for the capture of Pagowal. According to the plan, 69 Mtn Bde with under command 62 Cavalry less one sqn, was to commence the advance led by 3 Madras, from Kaloi at 0400 hrs on 13 September. On capturing area Pagowal, the road junctions were to be secured by physical occupation. The Brigade Commander ordered the leading battalion group not to get involved in clearing Pagowal in the initial stages, but to compel the enemy to withdraw by outflanking the village from the right.

The advance commenced at 0400 hrs on 13 September, as scheduled. 3 Madras Group, after clearing light enemy opposition of approximately one platoon in area north of Pagowal, established itself in area Mile 8 on road Sialkot Cantt-Phillora by 0600 hrs. The rest of the enemy, approximately a weak company group, was based on the village. As the leading elements advanced beyond the village, the enemy, to avoid being encircled, withdrew without giving a fight. 9 Kumaon and the Brigade Reconnaissance Group fetched up at 0630 hrs. 9 Kumaon secured the Sialkot City Road adjacent to and south of the 3 Madras position. By 0700 hrs, the defended sector was adjusted to secure the entire road intersection area. The artillery supporting the Brigade was moved up and redeployed to give added range beyond the objective.

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The disposition of the 69 Mtn Bde at 0630 hrs on 13 September was as follows:-

- (a) 3 Madras - Area Koga
- (b) 9 Kumaon - Area Mile 54

The move of the Bde group into the new defended sector came under observation of the enemy at around 0630 hrs. An hour later, the Bde sector was engaged by heavy artillery fire directed by two enemy Air Observation Posts. Approximately 1000 shells rained into the Bde sector within two hours, but the troops held their ground. Having failed to evict the Indian forces through massive artillery shelling, the enemy switched on to intermittent and harassing fire up to 1600 hrs. Then the Pakistanis attempted a counter-attack from the south-west with approximately two squadrons of Patton tanks supported by infantry. The enemy infantry and tank group approached to within 1500 metres of the Forward Defended Localities, when it was brought to an abrupt halt and disintegrated by the accurate arty and tank fire of the Indian troops. With the repulse of this counter-attack, the Bde defended sector around Pagowal area was well consolidated.

The Indian casualties suffered during the capture of Pagowal included 3 Officers, 2 JCOs and 11 ORs killed, and 4 Officers, 1 JCO and 44 ORs wounded. The casualties were mostly due to enemy artillery and air strikes(35).

First Battle of Chawinda

On 13 September 1965, 1 Armd Div was leaning heavily on Chawinda, and it was decided to make an attempt for the reduction of this area by a pincer movement employing 43 Lorried Infantry Brigade from the north and 99 Mountain Brigade and 1 Armd Brigade from the north-west. GOC 1 Corps ordered 1 Armd Div to cross the railway line Sialkot-Chawinda-Pasrur to encircle the town from the west as a preliminary manoeuvre preparatory to launching the main assault.

The pattern of assault was planned as follows(36):-

4 Horse was to advance cross country to cut Badiana-Pasrur road and then swing south-east with a view to destroying any enemy armour which might try to escape from Chawinda or attempt to reinforce Chawinda from Pasrur. 17 Horse was to thrust towards Kalewali and be prepared to support 43 Lorried Inf Bde assault on Kalewali

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and later on Chawinda, if so desired. 69 Mtn Bde Group, including 16 Cavalry, was to ensure that enemy armour was prevented from joining the main armour battle in area south of Phillora and Chawinda from the direction of Sialkot. 43 Lorried Inf Bde, was to advance and attack Chawinda from the firm base at Phillora, while 1 Arty Bde was to concentrate in support of 1 Armd Div.

The plan was put into execution at first light on 14 September. In the very initial stages of its advance, Indian armour ran into an enemy anti-tank screen in the area west of Phillora and north of Alhar. The enemy opposition was approximately one Patton Regiment, which after giving battle throughout the day withdrew west of the railway line. By last light 1 Armd Div had secured areas Kalewali, and Alhar after inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. Eighteen enemy tanks were destroyed, besides a number of recoilless guns and other equipment. But the progress of the battle fell short of expectations. The armour having failed to create the tactical pre-condition for an infantry assault on Chawinda, the attack on the objective by 43 Lorried Inf Bde was called off.

All this time the right flank had remained comparatively calm, except some minor skirmishes. 168 Inf Bde, which had earlier captured Bajragarhi, had by now occupied Kalarwanda and Rasulpur without any enemy opposition. On 14 September, the company at Kalarwanda was driven off its objective by an enemy force of tanks and infantry, supported by heavy medium artillery shelling. The village, however, was recaptured on night 14/15 September 1965.

On 15 September 1965, Indian forces were deployed as follows:-

1 Armd Div

HQ 1 Armd Div and 35 - Chawra
Inf Bde less one
battalion

43 Lorried Inf Bde,
99 Mtn Bde Less one
battalion, with one
battalion from - Phillora
35 Inf Bde

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1 Armd Bde	- North of Phillora
<u>6 Mtn Div</u>	
69 Mtn Bde less one battalion with under Command - 62 Cav less one Sqn	- Pagowal
<u>14 Inf Div</u>	
58 Inf Bde less one battalion	- Area Cross Road
116 Inf Bde	- Area Kangre-Ikhnal- Wadhala
<u>26 Inf Div</u>	
168 Inf Bde	- Area Rasulpur- Kalarwanda.

Regrouping and New Plans

The 15th and 16th September 1965 were spent in making fresh plans for the capture of Chawinda and for certain preliminary operations essential for the task. Several villages in area Khananwali were cleared on 15 September. 1 Armd Div (4 Horse) had also been able to cut the railway line between Sialkot and Chawinda at Alhar, and occupied it with one battalion (4 Raj Rif) from 99 Mtn Bde(37).

The situation was reviewed on 16 September at a conference attended by the Corps Commander and the Commanders of 1 Armd Div and 6 Mtn Div at Maharajke, and fresh plans were made to capture Chawinda, Badiana and Zafarwal. 6 Mtn Div was given the task of capturing Chawinda. The responsibility of capturing Badiana and Zafarwal was delegated to 1 Armed Div and 14 Inf Div respectively. Since both 69 and 99 Mtn Bdes of 6 Mtn Div were committed to ground, major regrouping became necessary. 35 and 58 Infantry Brigades were taken away from 1 Armoured Division and placed under command 6 Mountain Division. 99 Mountain Brigade was also reverted from 1 Armoured Division to its parent formation.

So, the plan in outline was made as under:-

6 Mtn Div, with under command 35 and 58 Inf Bdes and 99 Mtn Bde, was to capture and hold Chawinda on night 17/18 September 1965. Thereafter it

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was to exploit towards Pasrur and the Cross Roads. On capture of Chawinda and after leaving sufficient armour under command 6 Mtn Div for the security of the area, 1 Armoured Division was to capture and hold Badiana. One infantry brigade from 6 Mtn Div was to be made available to 1 Armd Div after the capture of Badiana. 14 Inf Div was to be prepared to capture Zafarwal as soon as Badiana was secured. One Sqn of armour was to be made available to this formation by 1 Armd Div for this task.

In addition to the above, the following attacks were also planned and ordered by HQ I Corps:-

26 Inf Div (52 Mtn Bde) was to capture area Tilakpur and Muhadipur (north of Wains) on night 17/18 September 1965; while 14 Inf Div was to capture Cross Roads near Dugri to secure the left flank of 6 Mtn Div.

As a preliminary to launching an attack on Chawinda it was decided to capture certain villages in the vicinity and to the rear of the town, which were of tactical importance. These areas were to be used as pivots to hinge the attack on Chawinda, as also to intercept any enemy reinforcements interfering with the operations. Having earlier on secured, Kalewali and Alhar, plans were now made to capture Jassoran and nearby areas.

In a series of brisk actions, these positions were secured by 1 Armd Div, employing 4 Horse, 17 Horse and 8 Garhwal Rifles, by last light 16 September against stiff resistance. The enemy losses on this day came to 28 tanks destroyed. It was during the intense fighting on this day that Indian forces lost a number of good officers and other ranks. Lt Col A.B. Tarapore, CO 17 Horse, got killed by enemy artillery fire on his return to Jassoran at 1730 hrs(38). He was posthumously awarded the nation's highest award, Param Vir Chakra, for exceptional gallantry displayed by him. Lt Col J.E.Jhirad, CO 8 Garhwal Rifles, was also killed near Jassoran whilst leading his troops.

The Indian armour/infantry pivots held on to all the positions tenaciously on 17 September, in spite of heavy casualties inflicted by the enemy. The Pakistanis reacted violently and put in fierce attacks. A tank battle raged throughout the morning and afternoon. The attack was repulsed. Eight enemy tanks were destroyed. The Indians also lost the same number(39).

The Second Failure at Chawinda

The GOC 6 Mtn Div decided to carry out his task in two phases. In Phase I, 35 and 58 Inf Bdes were to attack simultaneously from west of Chawinda, with the Railway line Sialkot-Chawinda as boundary between the two brigades. In Phase II, 35 Inf Bde was to carry out mopping up operations. 1 Armd Div was ordered to maintain existing pivots at the little villages west of Chawinda, and secure the flanks of 6 Mtn Div till the capture of Chawinda. The Armd Div was to ensure that enemy armour did not ingress into Chawinda.

Unfortunately, at this stage, certain factors intervened to jeopardise the success of the operation. According to plans made at the conference at Maharajke, orders were issued by HQ I Corps placing 35 Inf Bde under command 6 Mtn Div from 1 Armd Div, but the Bde through a misunderstanding was moved forward from its location Gadgor to area Phillora by HQ 1 Armd Div on night 16/17 September. This had apparently been done to support an attack on Chawinda planned earlier by 1 Armd Div and scheduled to go in during night 16/17 September 1965. The Bde was later moved back to its original location, but valuable time was lost in the process.

In view of this development, the attack on Chawinda by 6 Mtn Div on night 17/18 September was again postponed by 24 hours on representation from GOC 6 Mtn Div. GOC 1 Armd Div, however, pointed out that his troops had been holding Butur Dograndi, Fatehpur and Jassoran - villages west of Chawinda - against heavy enemy opposition, and that it would be difficult to stick on to these positions for another 24 hours. It was, therefore, decided to withdraw 1 Armd Div elements from Butur Dograndi and Fatehpur, but the pivotal position at Jassoran was to be held by 1 Armd Div at all costs in view of its vital importance of being a firm base for the operations of 35 Inf Bde. Commander 1 Armd Div assured that enemy armour would not be allowed to interfere with the operations at Chawinda(40).

But due to some more misunderstanding, 1 Armd Bde withdrew its troops from Jassoran also on 18 September 1965, along with the vacation of the other pivots, before 6 Mtn Div could mount the attack. GOC 1 Armd Div, therefore, ordered Comdr 1 Armd Bde to reoccupy Jassoran and establish a firm base for the attack of 35 Inf Bde. Comdr 1 Armd Bde, however, did not comply with this order as he thought that it would not be possible to recapture this position at such a short notice. He, however, promised to

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position his tanks at Jassoran by first light 19 September, in approximately eight hours after 6 Mtn Div had launched the assault.

According to the version of 1 Armd Bde, favourable conditions had been created by 1 Armd Bde Gp for an infantry assault on Chawinda on 14, 15, 16 and 17 September. As both Chawinda and Badiana had been isolated and cut off from three sides and as both had also been invested from the rear by 1 Armd Bde, particularly on 16 and 17 September, it was possible to capture easily both these objectives by an infantry assault. These objectives were thinly held by enemy infantry, possibly not more than two Coys in each place. The armd bde was precluded from assaulting these objectives, as both were built up areas. A great opportunity was thus lost. Due to one reason or another, the assault was postponed from one day to another. Finally, when it became evident that no assault would materialise until night 18/19 September, armd sqns in Jassoran, Butur Dograndi and Sodreke had to be withdrawn to north of the railway track, during night 17/18 September. These pivots, if kept indefinitely, were exposed to an enemy counter-stroke(41).

As the securing of Jassoran was considered vital preliminary to mounting an attack on Chawinda, 6 Mtn Div assigned this task to 20 Rajput from 35 Inf Bde. This created a serious set-back in the scheduled plan of operation, as 35 Inf Bde was one of the assaulting brigade.

6 Mtn Div mounted the attack as planned on night 18/19 September. However, probably on account of lack of proper security, the element of surprise had been lost. The enemy started shelling the forming-up places while the troops were being marshalled for the attack. The operation was, in consequence, dislocated from the very beginning.

However, 35 Inf Bde did achieve partial success in its assault; 6 Maratha were able to capture their objective by 0410 hrs, whereas 5 J&K Rifles met with heavy enemy resistance. By first light, enemy tanks opened up from Chawinda. It was found that enemy was using tanks as pill boxes from inside the town and the defences were well dug in and organised in depth. Heavy casualties were sustained and the troops were compelled to fall back on Jassoran. Two Companies of 6 Maratha which had fought their way to Chawinda Railway Station had to be extricated with the assistance of 4 Horse.

The situation that developed on 58 Inf Bde front was even worse. Enemy shelling created such confusion

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that all control was lost. The pounding was so heavy that it unnerved the troops. The leading troops lost direction, and 14 Rajput barged into neighbouring Indian position in Wazirwali, held by a Coy of 5 Jat and sqn of 2 Lancers of 43 Lorried Inf Bde. There was a brisk exchange of fire between the two Indian units. Stunned by the unexpected opposition en route to their objective the Rajputs dispersed in confusion. Two companies of 4 J&K Rifles (the other assaulting battalion) which had managed to reach Chawinda were thrown back by the enemy's combined infantry and tank fire. By that stage, all control at battalion and brigade level was lost and the formation ceased to be a cohesive force. The Comdr 58 Inf Bde decided to send forward 3/1 GR, the reserve battalion, to restore the situation, but it did not succeed in the face of intense artillery and tank fire of the enemy. According to the Comdr 58 Inf Bde, about 500 J&K Riflemen deserted due to Pak armour threat, and the remnants of Gorkhas were found near Lebbe(42).

This was the second time that Chawinda eluded the Indian dragnet. The failure at Chawinda automatically ruled out the pursuance of operations to capture Badiana and Zafarwal.

While giving his observation about the operations at Chawinda, Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh (Retd), the then GOC-in-C Western Command, has stated that (43):-

" Following in the wake of our deplorable performance in the first attempt on Chawinda by 1 Armd Div, the fiasco in the battle of Chawinda-Badiana-Zafarwal complex, added to the series of disappointing failures we had been courting ever since the outbreak from the bridgehead. A critical analysis of the battle reveals the following shortcomings:-

- (a) The approach to the battle was sluggish and complacent. The operation was being postponed, day by day, in a leisurely fashion. A peculiar smugness and inertia appeared to dominate the higher levels of command. At last, after much exhortation, the action was mounted on the night 18/19 September, 72 hours too late. By this time the enemy had had the much badly needed breather and had poised itself to meet our action half way. The result was a foregone conclusion.
- (b) The battle for the Chawinda-Badiana-Zafarwal area involved the coordinated action of

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three formations - 1 Armoured Division, 6 Mountain Division and 14 Infantry Division. It was undoubtedly a Corps battle at a very crucial phase in our campaign for a vital area, the capture of which would have had far reaching consequences. A firm grip of the situation combined with resolute direction at Corps level would have tipped the scales in our favour. A determined leadership at lower levels could have done the rest to score a striking success. Both these vital ingredients were unfortunately missing. The guiding hand of the Corps Commander was conspicuously absent - in fact, he appeared to have played hardly a part in the battle, which even at that late stage, could have laid the foundation of ultimate victory. In the event, however, the rot initiated by the lack of forceful direction at higher levels of command deteriorated into a dismal disaster at lower levels through atrocious execution. We came out of the battle badly battered and bruised, to usher in a stalemate that lasted for the rest of the conflict. It was an inexcusable command failure.

- (C) The lack of rapport between General Officer Commanding 6 Mountain Division and 1 Armoured Division made a further contribution to the chaotic performance at Chawinda. This was reflected in the unnecessary move of 35 Infantry Brigade to Phillora on the night previous to the attack and the vacation of the vital pivot at Jassoran. The refusal of 1 Armoured Brigade to re-establish a firm base at Jassoran in time reflected a sad lack of cooperation between commanders in the field.
- (d) It was obvious that the battle for Chawinda demanded the best in any unit. To ensure the success of this exacting action, it would have been advisable to have provided general Officer Commanding 6 Mountain Division with his own brigades - the Commanders and troops he knew. On the other hand on the eve of this decisive battle, 35 and 58 Infantry Brigades, from 14 Infantry Division, were placed under his command. Through foresight and intelligent staff duties a suitable regrouping could have been achieved to enable General Officer Commanding 6

Mountain Division to go into battle with his own formations. Failure to do so was, in my opinion, a major blunder in staff duties.

- (e) Leadership at battalion and brigade level was lacking. There was a tendency on the part of Brigade and Battalion Commanders to hold themselves back instead of being well forward to dominate the situation. In consequence they had no grip over the circumstances as they developed.

This battle is a classic study in command failure and poor execution. Lack of control at Corps level paved the way to defeat - an indifferent leadership at lower levels made disaster inevitable. The depressing combination decided the fate of the battle and foredoomed the outcome of the entire campaign."

26 Infantry Division Sector

On the far right flank, 52 Mountain Brigade was nominated to capture Tilakpur and Muhadipur on the Chaprar-Sialkot road on night 17/18 September 1965. The D Day was, however, postponed to night 18/19 September to conform with operations at Chawinda. As a preliminary to the main operation, 5/11 Gorkha Rifles carried out a series of actions for clearing areas Nandpur, Malane and Dhure. 1 Madras was given the task of capturing Tilakpur, while 10 Mahar was given Muhadipur as its objective. In a well executed outflanking manoeuvre, 52 Mountain Brigade launched the assault from the right rear at 2230 hrs on 18 September 1965. The enemy, though completely taken by surprise, quickly rallied round to offer a stiff resistance. Nevertheless, by 0300 hrs, 19 September 1965, areas Mile 8 Road Sialkot-Chaprar, Tilakpur and Muhadipur had been captured by the Indian troops.

The enemy reacted sharply to the loss of Tilakpur and Muhadipur, for these villages dominated the axis Sialkot-Chaprar. His medium and heavy guns continuously pounded Indian positions. A number of determined counter-attacks with infantry and armour groups, supported by heavy artillery fire, were also launched on the Brigade Defended Sector. But the Indian troops stuck on doggedly to their positions and repulsed the assaults with heavy loss to the enemy.

The most serious of these counter-attacks was launched on the night of 22/23 September 1965. The enemy demonstrated against 1 Madras at Tilakpur, but carried out the actual assault against 10 Mahar from the area west of the road. A penetration was effected

into the left hand forward company, posing a direct threat to Battalion Headquarters at Muhadipur. After a brief but bitter fighting, the enemy withdrew in confusion. Indian artillery took full advantage of the inviting targets offered by the disorganised, retreating enemy and inflicted heavy casualties(44).

Meanwhile, 1 Armoured Division gave its formations and regiments a general order for refitting and recoupment. Organised rest without prejudicing operational security was insisted upon. A mobile reserve was created and placed at a high state of operational readiness to forestall any opportunistic action by the enemy during this temporary lull.

In the period intervening upto the cease-fire, there were some fluid armour actions, conspicuous amongst which was the fight in the area across the rail line south of Alhar where an enemy infantry and armour concentration was effectively engaged by Indian tanks and artillery.

Cease-Fire and Conclusion

At about 1410 hrs on 22 September 1965, a message was received from Army Headquarters ordering a cease fire with effect from 0330 hours on 23 September 1965. The orders were communicated to all concerned. The troops were, however, cautioned to remain vigilant. It was apprehended that enemy forces might put in a series of strong offensive actions in a last-minute bid to save face and strengthen their subsequent bargaining capacity. In the event, this proved to be a correct surmise. The Pak army made frantic efforts to recapture lost areas in the period intervening upto the deadline for the cease-fire. The most desperate of these attempts was an assault on village and railway station of Alhar. This was repulsed with heavy casualties to the enemy. Pak artillery continued shelling in the entire area of operation until the very last. Indian guns retaliated suitably. At 0330 hrs, on 23 September 1965, however, the last of the shells was fired, and all became quiet.

When the cease-fire came into effect, I Corps had approximately 500 square kilo-meters (about 200 square miles) of Pak territory under its control. It had also taken a heavy toll of enemy armour. The number of enemy tanks destroyed was estimated to total 144, of which 31 lay scattered in enemy territory firmly held by India. The captured equipment included 11 tanks and a large number of arms and ammunition.

The number of enemy troops killed was placed at 693, while the prisoners of war with the Corps

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numbered 448 (including 310 civilians). I Corps' losses in armour were 29 tanks destroyed and 41 damaged. Casualties in personnel were heavy: 38 officers killed, 116 wounded, nine missing; 29 Junior Commissioned Officers killed, 76 wounded, eight missing; 508 Other Ranks killed, 1688 wounded and 410 missing(45). The total number of killed, wounded, and missing were 575; 2880; and 427 respectively.

The I Corps operation in the Sialkot sector is a typical example of a promising action being foiled through a combination of faulty strategic concept and indifferent tactical execution. For, with the exception of a few minor successes, the formation's performance was virtually a catalogue of lost victories. No doubt, it dealt a telling blow to the enemy, but the fact remains that it fell short of a decisive defeat which it was within India's capacity to inflict. In consequence, the enemy's armour was only mauled, instead of being crippled beyond recovery.

The armoured Division fought a good and successful action at Phillora, where it badly hurt the enemy armour. This was the only bright spot in the otherwise lack-lustre performance of the formation. The battle of Phillora was perhaps the biggest engagement of the war in which about 400 tanks took part from both sides. The Indian armour here succeeded in drawing the Pak armour on to the ground of its own choice and then inflicting heavy losses on it.

The Commander 1 Armoured Division claimed that, besides gaining complete victory over the enemy and capturing the total battle field area, the destruction caused on the enemy's ranks and material was quite out of proportion to what India lost and what at any previous time had been the case in one-day tank battles of this magnitude. For instance, it was claimed, the tank losses on the enemy side (67) as compared to India's own tank losses (6) had no parallel when compared with any previous tank battle of World War II. In spite of its overall superiority in tanks both in number and in quality (Pak was estimated to have 5 Patton tank regiments as opposed to India's 3 Centurion regiments) and in spite of fighting in defence on its home ground, Pakistan was defeated. This indeed was a tremendous achievement(46).

The Pakistani version, naturally, gives a somewhat different picture. According to Gen Mohammed Musa, the then Pak Commander-in-Chief: "The enemy attacked Sialkot several times and all these attacks

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were repulsed. But he was able to make headway on the Samba-Chawinda road by sheer force of numbers, till his advance was held up in front of Chawinda.

By all military logic, he should have broken through our dispositions and reached GT road within a few days, because of (a) the great disparity between the opposing forces, (b) the fact that his armoured division had additional and powerful infantry support, whereas ours relied on its own meagre infantry resources, (c) the terrain upto Shakargarh to the east and GT Road to the south was ideal for armoured warfare, and (d) he had the initiative to an extent, being the aggressor.

Despite these favourable factors, he did not even capture Chawinda, against which he struck his head day and night for nearly a fortnight"(47).

Gen Musa faulted the Indian Chief for not making wide encircling moves in spite of his convincing superiority in forces and also because the Pak threat in the area was limited to vigorous and daring patrolling(48). He concluded that "both sides suffered tank losses, but thanks to the superb performance of the PAF the enemy had to lick a much bigger wound"(49).

These observations, however, do not appear quite correct. In the Sialkot sector, India had not even double the strength of the Pak army, that is, eleven infantry brigades and six tank regiments against Pakistan's six infantry brigades and four tank regiments. More Pak forces arrived from 12 September. Indians, owing to their offensive role, should have, in fact, maintained a ratio of 3:1 in their favour, which was not available. Again, the aim of the Indian commander in the sector was, it is argued, not the capture of Pak territory but the destruction of Pak armour, and so he chose a narrow front to attack. Spreading his forces in wide encircling moves would not have given the Indian General the needed armour superiority in Phillora to destroy the Pak tanks.

It is a known fact that the Pakistanis could not use their sophisticated armour with skill and, therefore, lost heavily to the Indians. In this connection a Washington Post report of 17 October 1965 is very revealing. "In terms of equipment, military circles in Washington concluded, on the basis of the post-war information, that Pakistan lost 200 tanks, with another 150 put out of action but recoverable. India by this assessment, lost between 175 and 190, with another 200 temporarily out of commission"(50).

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It does, however, appear that the progress of I Corps on Sialkot front was too cautious and slow. The five brigades of 26 Inf Div were not fully employed. The planners appear to have over-estimated the threat on the flanks of 1 Armoured Division, which incidentally never materialised. In fact, the Pakistanis had neither resources nor a plan to carry out such a threat, though they always made a pretence of it to keep the Indians guessing. The Indians also could not take any important town or communication centre in the Sialkot sector. The tremendous advantages of surprise and initiative were wasted on 8 September, and a rapier thrust degenerated into a slogging bout(51)

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sandhu, Gurcharan Singh, Maj Gen (Retd), PVSM, pp. 382-383
2. From Official Records.
Some place names have different spellings in the Survey of India maps and in official records. Apart from Bhagowal and Phillaurah, it may be noted that Iknal is same as Nakhnal, Rangre as Kangre etc.
3. Musa, Gen, p.64.
4. From Official Records.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. This would not have happened had it carried out a proper reconnaissance of the area.
12. From Official Records.
13. Harbakhsh Singh, Lt Gen (Retd), pp.218-219.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Harbakhsh Singh, Lt Gen (Retd), p. 221.
20. From Official Records.
21. From Official Records.
After orders had been given by the GOC, the Brigade Group and Column Commanders were allowed to use their initiative whilst fighting their own battles within the frame work of this overall divisional plan.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
Within a short time, 5/9 GR had suffered 40 casualties and 5 Jat approximately 20.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.

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39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Report of interview with Lt Col J.S. Mandher (Retd), formerly Bde Comdr 58 Inf Bde, held on 23 August 1989.
43. Harbakhsh Singh, Lt Gen (Retd), p.240-242.
44. From Official Records.
45. Harbakhsh Singh, Lt Gen (Retd), Appendix 'C'.
46. From Official Records.
47. Quoted by B.M.Kaul in Confrontation with Pakistan, pp.89-90, from an article in Dawn, Karachi, of 6 September 1969, by Gen Musa. Also see "My Version" by Gen Musa, page 67.
48. But the fault was Maj Gen R.S. Sparrow's, not Gen Chaudhuri's.
49. Russel Brines, on the other hand, gives credit to Gen Chaudhuri for his bold planning. "General Chaudhuri daringly manoeuvred his armour to mount the Sialkot offensive. He left one force in the Lahore sector and sent the other, mainly the newest equipment, into action around Sialkot. This required the movement of some 3,000 vehicles along a single road and into enemy terrain under potential aerial threat of considerable proportions. The gamble was two-fold; first, that the forces defending the road to Delhi would not be disproportionately weakened and secondly, that the movement toward Sialkot could be accomplished without devastating loss to enemy action. The gamble succeeded to the extent that the Indians were able to inflict heavy punishment on Pakistan's armoured striking force on two fronts". - Russel Brines - The Indo-Pakistani Conflict, p.342. In fact, "tactically, the judgement of impartial experts is that the Indians demonstrated somewhat greater skill and better strategy in the use of armour". - Ibid, p.345.
50. Quoted by Russel Brines, p.344.
51. However, Maj Gen R.S. Sparrow, MVC (Twin Awards) has made the following interesting observation in his interview in Delhi held on 7 May 1987:-
"In every sector, Indian armed forces did badly against Pakistan, excepting Sialkot sector. We lost 150 sq miles near Gadra Road in Rajasthan and 21 villages in Fazilka. We also lost Hussainiwala, Khemkaran, Dera Baba Nanak and Chhamb-Jaurian. Pakistan had total superiority over us in armour, Arty and Air. But as far as our Armoured Div was concerned, our training was better, so were our use of the ground, our gunnery and the decoding system. I ran about between my formations 3 days and nights without any sleep. My plan was to go behind the enemy armoured formations through a right hook after engaging the

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enemy on the front with a small force as part of my deception plan. After getting to the rear of the enemy, I veered round to attack the 3 enemy armour positions one after another and destroyed them completely. By battle front was 25 miles wide in Phillora area. I captured 337 Pak villages opposite Sialkot between Ek Nadi and Dek Nadi.

The armour was the deciding factor in that war. If cease-fire had not been declared I would have captured Wazirabad in the next bound and then Islamabad, and Pakistan had no armour to stop me. We did not plan to capture cities, which would have consumed our trained manpower as in the case of Berlin during the 2nd World War. Our political leaders were kind and the UNO was crying, so we had to agree to a cease-fire. The cause of the success of our armour was good training given to our tank crew."

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