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CHAPTER - VIII

RAJASTHAN SECTOR : 11 INF DIV OPERATIONS

After the Kutch crisis, the deployment of Pakistani forces opposite Rajasthan border was defensive, though a Pakistani infantry division was located in Hyderabad(Sind), which could create trouble in Rajasthan or in Gujarat. In order to engage this division, India opened a new front in the Rajasthan Sector, and Indian troops of 30 Inf Bde under 11 Inf Div entered West Pakistan in Sind on 8 September 1965 from Gadra Road, in the Barmer district of Rajasthan.

Terrain

The Rajasthan-West Pakistan frontier was about 1,040 kms long, the longest Indo-Pak border in one Indian State. It passed through the border districts of Ganganagar, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Barmer. Ganganagar district had about 200 kms of common border with Pakistan. The rest of State's western frontier with West Pakistan was in the desert belt, popularly known as the Thar or the Great Indian Desert.

The bordering district of Ganganagar, the granary of Rajasthan, was inhabited by martial races like Sikhs, Jats and Ahirs. The border villages of the Thar Desert were inhabited by Hindu and Muslim cattle breeders and sheep farmers. In the years of drought these inhabitants used to migrate to distant places in search of fodder and water. The Pakistan Rangers and Mujahids looted border villages in this area and kept this part of the border 'hot'. The district of Barmer had about 240 kms of common border with Pakistan. An eight-kilometre sand track linked Gadra Road railway station with the Pakistani village of Gadra. It was situated about 40 kms east of Munabao, the Indian railway terminus on the Barmer-Hyderabad line(1). Being an important railway point it had strategic significance. As for airfields, there were only two airfields in Rajasthan in 1965, - one at Jaipur and another at Jodhpur.

Since the terrain of this sector was peculiar in nature and posed many logistical problems, it needs an elaborate discussion. The inhospitable desert of Thar was characterised by loose and shifting sand dunes, shaped in long ridges, and covered by wave-like curves, formed by the winds. The north-east region was sandy and barren, but the area bordering Sind was comparatively fertile. The only vegetation was phog, bui and thorny bushes. At some places bharoot and siwan grass, and a limited number of trees also grew. The climate, both during the summer and the winter,

was extreme. The hottest months were May and June. However, due to sandy soil the area got very hot around noon and cooled off very quickly after sun-set. In winter this region had quite a cold climate. Rainfall in the sandy region was very scanty, though once in five or six years it could be noticeable. Sub-soil water was generally found 60 to 90 metres below the surface(2). People depended mostly on the rain water stored in tanks and reservoirs. On either side of the international border, most of the water available was from hand-dug wells which were very deep, and situated far apart in the desert. The water in them might be sweet, saline or brackish. Saline and brackish water was also fit for consumption, except during the mid-day hours in summer. But the pond water was not good from the hygienic point of view. In this terrain, water conservation needed special emphasis. The only way to conserve body water was to travel during the hours of the night or in the early hours of the morning. However, in case of emergency, leaves of phog bush, roots of bui bush and dachabri grass were also used as substitute for water for survival during long-range patrolling and battles(3).

In this stark desert terrain, landmarks existed only near water points. To overcome these handicaps, mastery in the art of navigation was required. In addition to other aids of navigation used by the Army, the use of prismatic compass was significant. A thorough knowledge about the stars, shape of the sand dunes, direction of the wind blowing during different seasons, and services of expert 'pagis'(4) were also of great help in this sector.

The area was ill-served with communications. Only a few camel and cart tracks joining villages and water points passed through a series of sand hills(5). Due to frequent sand storms these tracks were soon obliterated and covered with sand. Between the two sand hills, small mounds were also created by the strong winds around the roots of the bushes. In addition, there were small shifting sand dunes. Their position changed rapidly according to the direction and velocity of the wind. However, due to lack of obstacles, the terrain was excellent for tank movement.

As the vast area in this sector was a sea of sand, the camel served as the 'ship'. It was largely used for the transportation of military stores, troops and water. In this terrain, dominated by the sand hills and mounds, the mobility of vehicle column was generally restricted to the sandy tracks. The vehicles were slow to get adapted to the requirements

of the desert. On the contrary, a camel-mounted column could move off the tracks freely and unnoticed by the enemy, even during long range patrolling(6). Thus, the camel had its own suitability and perhaps an edge over mechanised transport for warfare in this unchartered sandy terrain.

The Rival Forces

During the 1965 operations against Pakistan the main battle-field was along the border of the Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. The bulk of the forces had to be employed in the north, and therefore neither Pakistan nor India was in a position to reinforce its troops along the Rajasthan Sector. The aim of Indian operations in this Sector was to tie down maximum Pakistani forces in the Sind area(7).

Till August 1965, the Rajasthan Sector (less Ganganagar Sector) was part of the operational responsibility of HQ Delhi and Rajasthan Area under Western Command with the task of defending the area against aggression by Pakistan and of launching limited raids across the border(8). In September 1965, when the fighting in Jammu and Kashmir Sector intensified, and the Western Command found it difficult to deal with such a vast theatre, Barmer Sector was handed over to the Southern Command(9). Northern limit for operational responsibility of Southern Command was fixed as follows(10):-

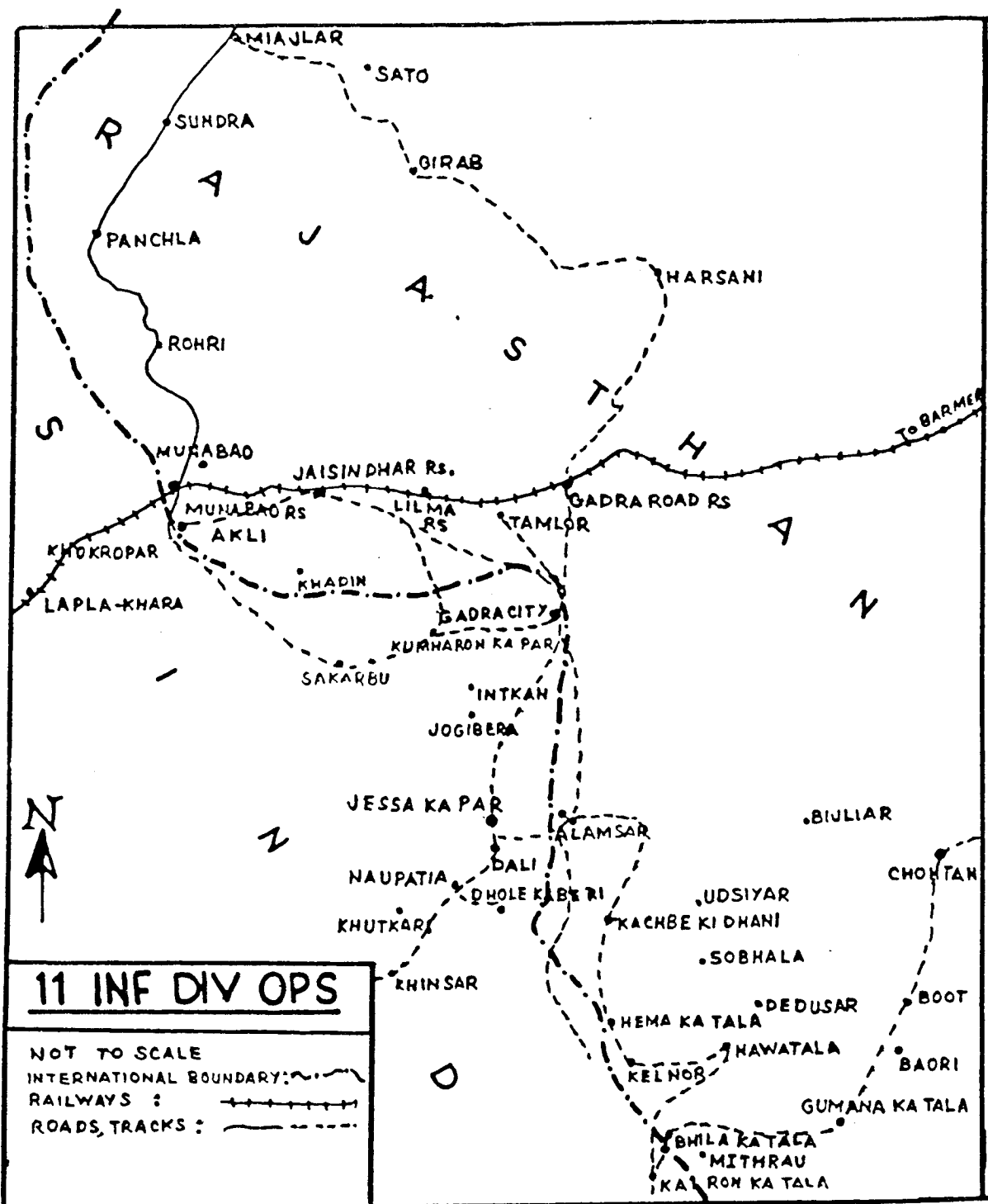
Gadra Road - Barmer - Chawa - Marwar - Erinpara to where it joined Rajasthan border.

Lt Gen Moti Sagar, GOC-in-C, Southern Command, entrusted the task of tying down Pak Forces in Sind to 11 Inf Div under Maj Gen (later Lt Gen) N.C. Rawley, MC.

30 Inf Bde (under Brig J. Guha) of 11 Inf Div was given the operational responsibility of Barmer Sector. Its projected operations were upto and including Railway line Barmer - Gadra Road, and the responsibility of denying the road and railway between Barmer and Gadra Road devolved on this Brigade(11). Following troops were placed under its command:-

5 Maratha LI, 1 Garhwal Rif, 3 Guards, and D Sqn
13 Grenadiers.

The Indian Army was aware that a Pakistani infantry division was located in Hyderabad(Sind). By the end of August 1965, GOC Delhi and Rajasthan Area, Maj Gen D.G.R. Rajwade, had appreciated that Pakistan was likely to deploy one infantry brigade in general



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area Nayachor opposite Barmer Sector(12). On 5 September 1965, 51 Inf Bde (2 Inf bns : 18 Punjab and 8 Frontier Force) of Pakistan Army moved from Karachi to the battle locations opposite Barmer Sector(13). In addition, there were three wings of Desert/Indus Rangers located in that area. Keeping in view her offensive in Jammu and Kashmir, it was estimated that Pakistan's posture in the Rajasthan theatre with the forces available was likely to be defensive. Her activities here were expected to be confined to hit-and-run raids all along the border. However, there was a possibility of her resorting to an advance along the Munabao - Barmer axis by a battalion group with a view to capturing some territory(14).

Operations

On 1 September 1965, Comdr 11 Inf Div assigned 30 Inf Bde the task to capture Gadra City and establish firm base in area Nayachor with a view to exploiting towards Mirpur Khas(15). The Bde HQ including Sig Coy and 1 Garh Rif left Dharangadra for Barmer on 2 September. On the same day, 3 Guards and 5 Maratha left Ahmedabad and Baroda respectively for Barmer. HQ 30 Inf Bde completed its concentration at Barmer as per schedule by 2200 hrs on 4 September with the 3 Guards, 5 Maratha LI, 1 Garhwal Rif, and 85 Fd Coy, under command. After placing 1 Garh Rif at 4 hours notice to move for operations, the Bde Comdr left for reconnaissance of general area Gadra Road - Munabao.

On 4 September 1965, GOC 11 Inf Div issued operation instructions to 30 Inf Bde for carrying out offensive operations against Pakistan in Sind and allotted the following tasks(16):-

- (a) to capture Gadra City and defend it against Pak counter-attacks;
- (b) to carry out strong harassing raids against Nayachor, Umarkot and Dali; and
- (c) to be prepared to reinforce Bakhsar Rajasthan Armed Constabulary(RAC) garrison with one coy, should a threat develop in that area.

The Bde received the Code-word 'Barrel' for offensive operations in Rajasthan Sector from HQ 11 Inf Div on 6 September at 1100 hrs. Immediately, the Bde moved for Gadra Road and completed its concentration there late in the evening.

Capture of Gadra City

The Bde attack to capture Gadra City, which was planned for the night of 6/7 September, had to be postponed by 24 hours for lack of information about the enemy and lack of armour and artillery support. But on arrival of 95 Mtn Comp Regt, one bty of 167 Fd Regt, and 3(Indep) Armr Sqn (less one troop) at Gadra Road on 7 September, the Bde issued orders for the capture of Gadra City and sent OC 5 Maratha to cut off the enemy line of withdrawal(17).

It was at 0100 hrs on 8 September when the international boundary between India and Pakistan was crossed by 3 Guards and the sand dunes north of Gadra City were captured by 0230 hrs. 1 Garh Rif, Commanded by Lt Col K.P. Lahiri launched the attack on Gadra City at 0645 hrs and captured it by 1300 hrs. This town was held by a weak battalion of Indus Rangers who did not offer much of a fight(18). In this action eight Pakistani ORs were killed and four captured. Indian troops suffered casualties of one Officer and five ORs wounded. The enemy left behind sizeable amount of arms and ammunition and two vehicles which were captured by 1 Garh Rif. In retaliation, Pak aircraft strafed Gadra City next morning, but could not cause any damage to the Indian troops.

After the capture of Gadra City, one coy 5 Maratha was sent to cut off enemy line of withdrawal to Kumharon-Ka-Par. This coy captured two Pak ORs. Another coy of 5 Maratha was despatched to reinforce an RAC post at Munabao.

A Night of Confusion

The night of 8/9 September 1965, became a night of confusion. Frantic telephone messages were received at main HQ, Ahmedabad, of enemy para and sea landings in area Jamnagar. Information was received from Home Secretary, Gujarat, that 700 Pak para-troopers, heavily armed, had landed at Kanalus near Jamnagar on 8 September at 2300 hrs, and were proceeding towards the coast to a place called Sika. Another message was received of sea landing at Sika. After protracted telephone calls between Gujarat Govt. and HQ 11 Inf Div/HQ Southcom, Southern Command decided to fly in two coys of 3 Punjab from Poona to Jamnagar to restore the situation. Brig S.M. Pahilajani was ordered by the Div Comdr to take a nucleus HQ with him and to fly to Jamnagar to take control of the situation. However, enquiries and assessment by Brig Pahilajani in Jamnagar revealed that the whole story had been baseless and probably fabricated by pro-Pak elements(19). By afternoon of 9 September the scare was over.

On 9 September, 5 Maratha less one coy with under command 3 (Indep) Armd Sqn (Shermans) less two tps and 1673 Fd Bty 167 Fd Regt. Det 30 Inf Bde Sig Coy and one ambulance car, resumed advance along track Gadra City - Sakarbu - Khokhropar with the aim of capturing Khokhropar. It was reported to be held by one coy of the Pak regular army and one platoon Indus Rangers. This convoy was strafed and rocketted by F86 aircraft twice during the day. The air attack resulted in the killing of two ORs of 5 Maratha and one civilian. A civilian truck carrying 75 mm HE ammunition was completely destroyed. 5 Maratha firmed in in area Sakarbu as further movement was not possible due to vehicles getting bogged down in the sand and also due to enemy strafing(20).

PAF's F-104, F-86 and B-57 aircraft, which were active in the sky throughout the day, raided and strafed Gadra Road and Gadra Railway Station several times. The air raids resulted in casualties to the Indian troops. In addition, a railway train coming from Barmer was hit by Pak rockets near Gadra Road Railway Station. Four railway wagons were destroyed. In view of the enemy air strikes, Army HQ and HQ Western Air Command had been requested on 9 September to allot some air support to HQ 11 Inf Div(21), but no such support was provided.

After an appraisal of the overall situation on 10 September, the Div Comdr instructed the Bde Comdr(22):-

- (a) to withdraw 5 Maratha from Sakarbu, in case it was serving no useful purpose;
- (b) to organise deep raids; and
- (c) to raid Dali with a balanced force latest by the night of 11/12 September.

Skirmishes around Munabao

On 9 September, one coy of 3 Guards with 954 heavy mortar battery was ordered to reinforce RAC post at Munabao which was held by 5 Maratha. But the reinforcement could not move by train during the day due to air raids. Its movement could commence by road only at night(23). But Pakistani troops resorted to intensive shelling in this area in the afternoon of 10 September, and it continued throughout the night. Consequently, the Indian troops at Munabao withdrew under pressure to area mile 336 without any casualty(24). 5 Maratha group pulled back to Gadra City and 954 heavy mor bty and the coy of 3 Guards

withdrew to Gadra Road, leaving behind one 3-ton truck loaded with 120 mm mortar ammunition. 5 Maratha coy with some RAC personnel took up defences on ridge, south-east of Munabao. The Bde received information about the fall of Munabao on the night of 10 September, from the RAC sources next morning.

As a result of 4 air raids carried out by the PAF on 10 September, Indian troops suffered 2 ORs killed and 4 wounded. In addition, a number of civilian buses, trucks and military vehicles were damaged.

After reconnaissance of Gadra Road on 11 September, the Bde Comdr made some readjustments in his defences. 5 Maratha group from Sakarbu was pulled back to Gadra City for further operations. 3 Guards less one coy was ordered to take defences astride Gadra Road - Munabao to ensure security of Gadra Road. Nos. 6 and 7 battalion of RAC were placed under command of the Army and deployed along the border with HQ at Barmer and Sakarbu respectively on 12 September(25). The Pak troops with approximately one coy strength had moved into Munabao area, and were well dug in. Also, the presence of Pak anti-aircraft guns in Khokhropar area was indicated by Tactical Recce reports.

3 Guards less one coy was ordered to take position astride road Gadra Road - Munabao to ensure security of Gadra Road. One platoon 3 Guards with a section each of RCL and MMG was despatched in transport along road Gadra Road - Munabao to go as far forward as possible and establish contact with the Pak forces and interfere with their advance. This platoon, however, returned on seeing some vehicle movement in area ahead. Earlier, a strong camel patrol was despatched to establish contact with the troops in Munabao area and to report Pak activities. On receiving the information through the camel patrol that RAC personnel were still holding Jaisindhar ridge in Munabao, 5 Maratha coy reinforced Jaisindhar ridge during the night of 11/12 September.

Again in the morning of 12 September, a coy of 3 Guards with a battery of field guns was ordered to establish contact with the Pak forces, interfere with their build-up and occupy Munabao, if not already occupied by Pak troops. The advance started at 2000 hrs. On 13 September, the coy of 3 Guards established firm base in area Jaisindhar, while rest of 3 Guards halted for the day a little behind. But the attack on Munabao was postponed, as the enemy strength there was found to be approximately three rifle coys supported by a battery of field guns and a troop of heavy mortar.

Indian Raids

As per instructions of GOC 11 Inf Div, Dali was to be raided on the night of 11/12 September. One coy of 1 Garh Rif with one section of camels (13 Grenadiers) and a detachment of MMG and 3" mortars left Gadra City for Dali on 11 September night(26). However, as the coy neared Dali it came under Pak mortar and MMG fire next morning(27). The Coy returned to Gadra City in the evening, and intimated the occupation of Sand Dunes, south and south-west of Dali, by approximately one coy of Indus Rangers with MMG and Mortars. A camel patrol which returned from Dali on 14 September, however, reported that Pak troops had withdrawn from Dali on the night of 12/13 September, but reoccupied it by the evening of 13 September, and that Dali was held by approximately 200 Indus Rangers.

Meanwhile, 95 Mtn Compo Regt, which had been temporarily placed under command of 30 Inf Bde, was pulled back to Gadra Road on 13 September for concentration at Jodhpur by 16 September on orders from HQ Southern Command.

On 14 September, the Bde Comdr instructed 5 Maratha to detail one coy with one section each of MMG and 2" mortars supported by a section of field guns to advance along route Gadra Road - Sajan-Ka-Par - Jessa-Ka-Par - Dali, and raid Dali. However, this raid did not materialise, as the route was unfit for the movement of guns and heavy vehicle traffic. Again, this coy of 5 Maratha with a section of MMG and 3" mortars was despatched on the night of 14/15 September on route Gadra City - Dali, while one troop of tanks was to follow after first light on 15 September. The troop of tanks despatched after first light could not however, join the coy as one tank got bogged down approximately 5 km beyond Gadra City. This coy was therefore ordered to return to Gadra City.

5 Maratha coy with RAC personnel which had moved from Khadin and Jaisindhar Ridge on the morning of 13 September established its firm base in Sakarbu by the evening. The coy was ordered to raid Pak positions in Khokhropar between 0300 to 0500 hrs on 15 September to synchronise with 3 Guards attack on Munabao(28). One det of 3" mortars and one det of MMG was also sent to join the coy for the task. 5 Maratha raid on Khokhropar was carried out successfully as planned(29). However, as already stated, 3 Guards attack on Munabao was postponed as the Pak strength at Munabao was found to be approximately 3 rifle coys, supported by a battery of guns and a troop of heavy mortars(30).

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On 13 September a raiding column of D Sqn 13 Grenadiers with an Engrs det based on camels embarked upon the mission to raid Nayachor with the primary task of disrupting rail communication by blowing up railway line between Khokhropar and Nayachor. The column penetrated deep into Pak territory in area west of Khokhropar and successfully blew up railway line south-west of Lapla Khara on the night of 16 September(31). No enemy was, however, encountered by the raiding party.

On instructions from the GOC on 16 September, 5 Maratha was ordered at 1730 hrs to attack Kachbe-Ki-Dhani RAC post which was reported to have fallen to Pak attack during the night of 15/16 September. It was planned to carry out a night approach march to area Sand Dunes, south-west of Kachbe-Ki-Dhani post, during the night of 16/17 September and to recapture it in a dawn attack. However, by 2000 hrs this information was found to be incorrect, and one officer from 1 Garh Rif was despatched immediately to contact OC 5 Maratha and to inform him not to attack Kachbe-Ki-Dhani post. The officer moved at great speed through enemy infested territory and managed to stop the column when the attack was about to be launched. The column moved back to Jessa-Ka-Par after contacting the RAC post at Kachbe-Ki-Dhani(32).

Pak attacks at Panchla and Munabao

On 13 September morning, 2 Pak regular coys supported by MMG attacked the RAC post of Panchla (under operational control of HQ Delhi and Rajasthan Area/Western Command). In this attack, Panchla, held by one coy RAC, was over-run by the Pak troops. The RAC coy put up a good fight, but fell due to enemy superiority in strength(33). Stragglers from this post reaching Girab confirmed that the RAC coy comdr was killed, and that after the capture of Panchla the Pak forces were advancing towards Girab via Sundra. In view of the enemy threat from Panchla-Girab-Harsani on L of C Barmer-Gadra Road, patrolling of this route was intensified. One RAC and 13 Grenadiers patrol with a section each of mortar and MMG was despatched to Panchla on 19 September to ascertain enemy strength and to cut off Munabao-Panchla Road. The camel patrol returned on 25 September and reported that the post was held by one platoon Indus Rangers and approximately 40 armed civilians.

Two coys of Pak 8 Frontier Force attacked the 3 Guards position in area East Munabao from the north-west on 17 September(34). The attack was preceded by strafing from air and shelling by guns,

and was supported by MMG. However, 3 Guards repulsed the attack. Due to enemy shelling, air strike and attack, 3 Guards suffered 7 ORs killed and another 7 wounded. The Pak troops left behind 3 dead and 2 wounded ORs. Interrogation of the captured ORs revealed the presence of 51 Inf Bde in this area with 8 Frontier Force, 18 Punjab and 6 Baluch(35). Captured ORs also revealed that HQ 52 Inf Bde from 8 Div had moved to Jammu and Kashmir 4 days earlier and that there were two bns in area Khokhropar and Munabao.

Jessa-Ka-Par and Dali

As per orders of HQ 30 Inf Bde, operations were launched in area Jessa-Ka-Par - Dali. One coy of 1 Garh Rif with a section each of MMG and 3" mortars on camels was sent at 2200 hrs on 15 September to raid and capture Jessa-Ka-Par with the aim of providing firm base for projected raids on Khinsar by 5 Maratha(36). The coy of 1 Garh Rif occupied area Jessa-Ka-Par without any opposition. After establishing firm base there by early morning next day, it started sending patrols towards village Dali to obtain information about enemy strength and dispositions there. However, one of the patrols was ambushed by Pak troops in village Alamsar, and the Pakistani troops captured 4 ORs, and 3 camels(37).

One coy of Pakistan troops supported by 81 mm mortars and MGs raided 1 Garh Rif firm base at Jessa-Ka-Par in the early morning of 17 September(38). But the raid was repulsed, and the Pak troops fled leaving behind 12 bodies, one jeep, several weapons and a large quantity of ammunition. 1 Garh Rif suffered casualties of 2 ORs wounded(39).

Indian troops, consisting of 2 coys of 5 Maratha and a coy of 1 Garh Rif, commenced advance on Dali on the morning of 18 September. A map captured from the Pak troops had indicated that Dali was held by one coy of Indus Rangers, and one pl 18 Punjab, supported by three sections of motars and two sections of machine guns(40). The force reached Dali at about 1100 hrs and captured it without any opposition. Pak troops, as it was later detected from an intercepted message, had anticipated this move and withdrawn to Khinsar(41).

17 Madras left Ahmedabad for Barmer on 15 September to join 30 Inf Bde. On arrival the battalion concentrated in area near Utarlai airstrip and was subjected to PAF strafing on 17 September. The casualties suffered by the battalion were 2 ORs killed and 17 wounded(42). The battalion was made responsible for the defence of Gadra Road, and it occupied 5 Maratha positions there next day. One coy, sent to

Dali on the night of 18/19 September, relieved a coy of 1 Garh Rif. Later, on regrouping 17 Madras came under HQ 85 Inf Bde on 21 September.

85 Inf Bde Comes In

The newly raised HQ 85 Inf Bde (Brig H.N.Summanwar) arrived at Barmer from Ahmedabad on 18 September and commenced regrouping for further operations. In the process of re-grouping, 5 Maratha and 17 Madras came under the command of 85 Inf Bde, while 30 Inf Bde had 3 Guards and 1 Garh Rif. HQ 30 Inf Bde changed its location to area north-west of Lilma Railway Station, and HQ 85 Inf Bde moved into Gadra area.

From 1200 hrs on 21 September, the division of responsibility between the two Bdes was to be as under:-(43)

Headquarters 30 Inf Bde established in general area Munabao railway station was given the operational responsibility for Munabao-Khokhropar Sector.

Headquarters 85 Inf Bde located in general area Gadra City was given operational responsibility for Gadra Road - Gadra City - Dali - Khinsar Sector.

The deployment of the troops which came under the command of 85 Inf Bde was:-(44)

17 Madras

17 Madras less two coys at Gadra Road, one coy at Harsani, and one coy at Tamlor. (17 Madras was being conc at Dali).

5 Maratha

5 Maratha less two coys in area Jessa-Ka-Par - Dali, Coy 5 Maratha at Sakarbu and the other coy at Khadin. (Both these coys were to relieve 1 Garh Rif by first light on 21 September).

1673 Fd Bty

1673 Fd Bty at Gadra Road. (It had no prime movers to move forward).

3 Indep Armd Sqn less 3 tps

Sqn HQ at Gadra City and one tp at Dali.

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On 21 September, a combined force of two coys 5 Maratha two coys 17 Madras (under their respective COs) and a tp of tks of 3(I) Armd Sqn concentrated at Dali for further advance to Khinsar-Chachro-Dali. While the firm base was held by two coys 17 Madras, 5 Maratha column along with tanks advanced to Khinsar. The enemy was holding defence in area Naupatia, Dhole-Ki-Beri and Khutkari with two coys 18 Punjab and one coy Indus Rangers, supported by 81 mm mortars and MMGs. The Indian force comprising 2 coys and 5 Maratha with under command one coy 17 Madras attacked the enemy positions at 0600 hrs. The attack was successful. The objectives were captured by 1130 hrs after minor opposition, and 2 coys 5 Maratha established themselves on high ground in the vicinity of Naupatia for undertaking further operations(45).

The change of command was effected at 1200 hrs on 21 September. However, the wireless communication between this force and HQ 85 Inf Bde and its firm base had broken down. Meanwhile, at 1630 hrs, Pak troops commenced shelling Dali, and this was followed by strafing at 1730 hrs. The counter-attack came at 1930 hrs, and Dali fell at 2030 hrs, on 21 September. The Indian position held astride Naupatia was cut off and surrounded, and had to be abandoned. Due to a breakdown of radio link, HQ 85 Inf Bde was not aware of the fall of Dali till some stragglers reported there. A patrol under Maj C.K.Karumbaya was sent to Dali at 0400 hrs on 22 September. The patrol returned to base at 1200 hrs and confirmed that Dali was in enemy hands. Both the COs, i.e. CO 17 Madras and CO 5 Maratha, fell back and occupied Jessa-Ka-Par. Indian casualties at Dali were : wounded 1 Officer and 4 ORs; missing 3 Officers and 37 ORs. Indian casualties in area Naupatia were : killed 2 ORs; wounded 29 ORs; missing 3 Officers and 120 ORs(46).

Meanwhile, the Pak aircraft put in more air attacks on 85 Inf Bde positions on 21 September. The Bde had brought all its vehicles into the defences and these became easy targets for the Pak aircraft. Not much damage was, however, caused as the air attacks were generally very inaccurate throughout(47). In reply to the Pak air raids, the IAF went into action for the first time in the Barmer Sector on 22 September. As a result of IAF raids, eight Pakistani vehicles and a helicopter were badly damaged near Khinsar(48).

Pak attempt to Recapture Sakarbu

30 Inf Bde less one coy 1 Garh Rif had completed concentration, as planned, by 0700 hrs on 22 September. However, in view of the imminent cease-fire, Pak troops started on the mission of

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grabbing as much ground as possible. In a bid to recapture Sakarbu, Pak troops launched two attacks on the D coy location of 1 Garh Rif with approximately two coys, using 81 mm mor and 120 mm hy mor at 1225 hrs and 1530 hrs on 22 September. 1 Garh Rif pl enroute from Gadra City and an additional coy of 1 Garh Rif were sent to reinforce Sakarbu. Two tps of tanks were also ordered to come up to Khadin. Thus both the attacks by Pakistani troops to recapture Sakarbu were foiled. In this action Pak troops suffered about 25 men, killed and approximately 50 wounded, while 1 Garh Rif casualty was 4 ORs wounded. It ws one of the big set-backs that Pakistan suffered in this Sector.

The Div Comdr, who arrived at the Bde location in the morning on 22 September, idscussed the plans for the capture of Munabao with Comdr 30 Inf Bde. Orders to capture Munabao by the first light on 23 September were issued. Meanwhile, report came in that Sakarbu had fallen and 1 Garh Rif coy was falling back, severely mauled. This information later proved to be incorrect. At this stage, the Bde Comdr informed the Co 1 Garh Rif that the attack on Munabao had been called off, as he had received orders that there was to be no further offensive in view of the cease-fire announcement(49).

Following the receipt of fresh operatinal instructions by the Bde Headquarters from higher authorities, plans were modified(50) and a coy of 1 Garh Rif alongwith a coy of 3 Guards were ordered to attack and capture Maratha Hill and Sand Dunes by 0300 hrs on 23 September. But during the night, both the coys lost their way and could not reach the objective. At 0300 hrs when cease-fire came into effect, both the coys were ordered to firm in wherever they were.

Assessment

As the main fighting during the 1965 operations was concentrated in the Punjab and the Jammu and Kashmir theatres, neither India nor Pakistan was in a position to reinforce its troops in the Rajasthan Sector. India's aim in opening the new front in the Rajasthan Sector on 8 September with a Division strength was to tie down maximum Pakistani forces in Sind area. Army HQ had no specific offensive plans here. Before opening this front, India had, of course, appreciated that in view of the initial Pak offensive in Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan's posture in the Rajasthan theatre, with her limited forces available there, would be essentially defensive. However, there was the possibility of a Pak advance along the Munabao - Barmer axis in battalion group

strength with a view to capturing some Indian territory. General Chaudhuri also explained later that Indian thrust in Rajasthan was but a diversionary move.

In the vast desert terrain, Indian troops had a lot of logistical problems. Most of the troops had no practical training in desert warfare. 1 Garh Rif had undergone intensive training in the NEFA jungles and mountains for about three years prior to its arrival in Rajasthan and its totally different terrain. There were hardly any 'pucca' roads or proper tracks for vehicles to carry supplies. Sand storms were frequent and tracks were prone to be covered by Sand. There was also acute water shortage. The only source of water was from wells, which were situated 25 to 50 km away from each other. The inhospitable desert terrain also posed the problems of navigation due to lack of land-marks, and the mobility of the vehicles and troops was hindered due to loose sand, shifting sand dunes and sand storms. Tanks and vehicles were often bogged down in the sand and rendered unserviceable. However, the problem of navigation was solved to a great extent by deploying 'pagis' (local guides). Despite all these problems, the vast open terrain provided an excellent ground of manoeuvring.

The Pak Air Force entered the Rajasthan theatre on 9 September with a series of air attacks. Air strafing by Pak aircraft after this became a routine matter. India had only two air-fields in Rajasthan in 1965 - Jaipur and Jodhpur. IAF Hunters had limited range to fly to the border and back. Hence, much needed air support could not be provided to the Indian troops by the IAF. Indian troops also lacked an efficient communication system. Wireless sets were inadequate and they often failed to work.

As regards operations, Indian troops initially succeeded in capturing Gadra City, where a weak battalion of Indus Rangers did not offer much fight. But, the Indian area of Munabao fell into Pak hands on 9 September, and efforts to recapture it did not succeed. Indian tanks could not reach the objective, and were bogged down in the sand near Sakarbu. The first raid to capture Dali could not materialise. However, Indian troops of 13 Grenadiers succeeded in penetrating deep into Pak territory and blowing up the railway line between Khokhropar and Nayachor. Pakistani troops succeeded in occupying Panchla Post on Indian territory, on 13 September, which was held by RAC under Delhi and Rajasthan Area. Though the RAC coy had put up a good fight, it fell back due to enemy superiority in strength. But the Pak position at Jessa-Ka-Par was captured by 1 Garh Rif without any opposition, and a subsequent attempt by Pak troops to recapture it was repulsed. Dali was captured by a

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mixed force of 5 Maratha and 1 Garh Rif on 18 September without any opposition, as the Pakistanis had anticipated this move and withdrawn to Khinsar. A Combined force of two coys 5 Maratha with under command one coy 17 Madras captured objectives in Naupatia area, after minor opposition, on 21 September. But after heavy shelling and air strafing by PAF, Dali fell into Pakistani hands. Finally, the plans for the capture of Munabao by 1 Garh Rif had to be called off in view of the ceasefire agreement on 23 September 1965. For either side, it was a mixed record of successes and failures.

Immediately after the cease-fire, Pak columns of regular troops, Indus Rangers, Mujahids and dacoits violated the cease-fire agreement and resorted to large-scale infiltration into Indian territory and occupied areas where there were no posts. The Pakistan Army extended its area of infiltration by capturing Miajlar, Sato, Chohtan, Udisyar, Dedusar, Baori, Kelnor, etc. Sodhi column, Hammer Force and Bull Force, formed to clear the Pak infiltrators from the Indian villages, succeeded in their mission to a great extent. 1 Garh Rif and 4 Maratha with attached troops attacked Miajlar on 16 November and captured it, despite tough resistance by Pak troops. In the Rajasthan Sector, the Battle of Miajlar was the first well-planned, well-executed and gallantly contested action in which Pak troops had to yield after much loss of men and material. The Pak forces, especially the Indus Rangers, fought boldly.

Pakistan's intention, it appears, was to capture as much Indian territory as possible in the Rajasthan Sector and to create panic and disorder in the area. At the time of cease-fire, India held about 390 sq km of Pak territory across the Barmer border, whereas, Pakistan had only occupied a small Indian outpost at Munabao. There was no other territory in Rajasthan under Pakistani occupation. Besides, a large number of police out-posts, which were occupied after the cease-fire by the Pak infiltrators, were ultimately vacated after the Tashkent Agreement.

Although the Rajasthan operations had no significant influence on the fate of the Indo-Pak War of 1965, due to lack of plans and preparations on either side, nonetheless they offered some good training to the Indian troops in desert warfare. The next generation of Commanders should have got the lesson that here was the area through which a major well-planned offensive could be successfully launched in future, because, this highly tankable area did not have water obstacles, hard lines of defences or defence canals. On the other hand, it offered great scope for manoeuvre to both armour and infantry(51). These operations also highlighted the great efficacy of airpower in the open desert. But the events of the 1971 war showed that neither side had fully absorbed the lesson of the 1965 war in the desert.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Gupta, Hari Ram, Vol.I, p.19.
2. Sharma, M.L., p.1.
3. Jai Singh, Lt Col, SM, p.169.
4. 'Pagis' are the local guides who know the terrain well.
5. The height of sand hills might differ from 3 to 30 metres, and in some places even more than 60 metres.
6. Jai Singh, Lt Col, SM, p.173-174.
7. From Official Records.
8. Ibid.
9. Report of Interview with Lt Gen Moti Sagar, AVSM(Retd), former GOC-in-C Southern Command, held on 22 May 1987.
10. From Official Records.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ahmed, Brig Gulzar (Retd), p.157.
14. From Official Records.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid. However, it was mentioned that no enemy was located there except for some Hindu population.
28. From Official Records.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
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.

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47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Report of Interview with Lt Gen N.C. Rawlley, the then GOC 11 Inf Div, held in New Delhi on 30 November 1989.

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