

MARCH TO DHAKA

While 2 Corps and 33 Corps were smashing forward into the Bangladesh districts west of the Jamuna-Padma river system, the 4 Corps based in Tripura had started its operations which led it finally into Dhaka.

OPERATIONS OF 4 CORPS

The Pak forces deployed opposite 4 Corps at the beginning of the war were as under:- (1)

14 Inf Div (Maj Gen Qazi Abdul Majid Khan)

HQ	- Ashuganj area.
31 Fd Regt	- Sylhet-Shamshernagar-Brahmanbaria area.
Elements 53 Fd Regt	- Comilla-Feni area.(2)
88 (Indep) Mortar Battery	- Sylhet
171 (Indep) Mortar Battery	- Comilla
34 Punjab less two Coys	- Brahmanbaria-Comilla.

202 Inf Bde (Brig Salimullah)(3)

HQ	- Sylhet
31 Punjab	- Chattack-Sylhet-Jaintiapur-Charkhai area
91 Mujahid Bn (less two Coys)	- Sunamganj-Sheola area
Two Coys 12 AKRF Bn	- Sylhet
Khyber Rifles,) Thal Scouts) Tochi Scouts) (Mixed with) regular Bns)	- In the whole area.

313 Inf Bde (Brig Iftikhar Rana)

HQ	- Maulvibazar
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22 Baluch - Kulaura-Juri area
 30 Frontier Force - Srimangal-Shamsher Nagar-Kamalpur area
 Two Coys 91 Mujahid Bn - Fenchuganj-Sherpur area
 Elements Tochi Scouts - Barlekha area

27 Inf Bde (Brig Saadullah Khan)

HQ - Brahmanbaria
 Two Troops Tanks (Chafees) - Akhaura area
 33 Baluch - Kasba-Saidabad-Kuti area
 12 Frontier Force - Gangasagar-Akhaura -
 - Paharpur-Fakirmura area

39 Inf Div (Maj Gen Rahim Khan)

HQ - Chandpur (was under process of raising, but remained incomplete due to commencement of operations).

53 Fd Regt - Comilla-Feni (4)

53 Inf Bde (Brig Mohd Aslam Niazi)

HQ - Feni
 15 Baluch - Feni area
 39 Baluch - Laksham-Mian Bazar Chauddagram
 23 Punjab - Mian Bazar-Parikot
 21 AK Bn - Laksham-Feni

117 Inf Bde (Brig Sheikh Mansoor Hussain Atif)

HQ - Comilla
 Sqn Tanks (Chafees) - Comilla area
 30 Punjab - Saldanadi-Bibirbazar
 25 FF - Lalmai-Mynamati-Laksham

12 AK Bn (less two Coys) - Comilla

91 Inf Bde (Brig Mian Taskin-ud-Din)

HQ (under raising) - Chittagong

24 FF - Ramgarh-Karerhat-Zorarganj-Chittagong

97 Inf Bde (Brig Ata Mohd Khan Malik)

HQ - Chittagong

48 Baluch (Garrison Battalion) - Chittagong

2 Cdo Bn - Rangamati-Kaptai

60 Wing) Chittagong-Ramgarh-
Rangers) Karerhat area,
61 Wing) - with one Coy at
Rangers) Cox's Bazar.

Against the above, 4 Corps of the Indian Army was deployed as under:- (5)

HQ 4 Corps (Lt Gen Sagat Singh) - Teliamura near Agartala

Elements of Arty,
Engrs, Sigs, ASC,
Med, Ord, EME etc.

8 Mtn Div (Maj Gen Krishna Rao) - Badarpur-Karimganj Dharmanagar area.

59 Mtn Bde (Brig Quinn)

4/5 GR (FF)
9 Gds
6 Rajput

81 Mtn Bde (Brig Apte)

3 Punjab
4 Kumaon
10 Mahar

Under Command of 8 Mtn Div

BSF Bns
84

86
87 (less two Coys)
104 (less two Coys) and
93

1 EB Bde with

1 & 8 EB Bns.

23 Mtn Div (Maj Gen R.D. Hira) - Kamalpur-Mynamati area

83 Mtn Bde (Brig B.S. Sandhu)

2 Rajput
3 Dogra
8 Bihar

181 Mtn Bde (Brig Y.P. Bakshi)

6 Jat
9 Kumaon
14 Kumaon

301 Mtn Bde (Brig H.S. Sodhi)

14 Jat
3 Kumaon
1/11 GR

Under Command

90 BSF (Coy)
2 & 9 EB Bns
Four MF Coys.

57 Mtn Div (Maj Gen Gonsalves) - Tripura-Mizo Hills

61 Mtn Bde (Brig K.P.(Tom) Pande)

2 Jat
7 Raj Rif
12 Kumaon

73 Mtn Bde (Brig Tuli)

14 Gds
19 Punjab
19 Raj Rif

311 Mtn Bde (Brig R.N. Mishra)

4 Gds
18 Rajput

10 Bihar

Under Command

BSF Bns
90 (Coy)
91
104 (Two Coys)

EB Bns

11
MF Coy

Yankee Force

31 Jat
32 Mahar less Coy
4 & 10 EB Bns
92 BSF
38 CRPF
6 MF Coys
Mujib Bty, etc

Tasks

Besides the defensive task of protecting the Indian territory from Badarpur in Assam in the north to the borders of Tripura and Mizoram in the south, opposite Chittagong Hill Tracts, 4 Corps was to destroy Pak forces east of the Meghna and occupy Comilla, Chandpur, Feni and Chittagong(6).

The main aim was to unhinge and isolate the Pak force in area Comilla-Lalmal by advancing swiftly to the line of the river Meghna. For this, the Corps' plan was first to capture Akhaura to block the Pakistani Brigade at Brahmanbaria, capture southern portion of Lalmal heights to obtain the road line of communication, keep the Pak 53 Inf Bde at Feni and Ramgarh engaged, and contain 117 Pak Inf Bde at Mynamati, and then to make a swift advance to capture the river ports of Chandpur and Daudkandi and cut off Sylhet by capturing Maulvibazar town, Sherpur and Sadipur ferries(7). For implementing these tasks, the three Mountain Divisions were suitably deployed, with separate tasks allotted to each of them(8).

8 Mtn Div Operations

This Division, which was to operate in Sylhet district, north of general line Ajmiriganj-Maulvibazar had the following tasks: (9)

Phase I

- (a) To advance along axes Dharmanagar (RH 4106) - Kulaura; Brahman Bazar (RH 1823) - Maulvibazar; and Kailashahar-Shamshernagar-Maulvibazar;
- (b) to capture Maulvibazar and Sadipur/Sherpur ferries (RG 8737), thereby isolating Sylhet from the south by D plus 6;
- (c) to contain Charkhai by one Bn group and clear all area south of R. Surma to ensure safety to Karimganj (RH 6264) and Badarpur Rail Br.(248565);
- (d) to capture Shamshernagar Airfield by D plus 3;
- (e) to develop subsidiary threat along road Muktapur (RC 3400)- Sylhet with one Inf Bn group;
- (f) to protect road and rail communications between Dona and Kamalpur;
- (g) to push Echo Force from Meghalaya down to Sylhet(10).

Phase II

- (a) To be prepared to capture Brahmanbaria (RM 2555);
- (b) to capture Sylhet, if possible by D plus 14.

With the breaking out of open hostilities, 8 Mtn Div commenced Operation "Grand Slam" as part of the general offensive of the Eastern Command. However, against the normal complement of three brigades, 8 Mtn Div consisted of two regular brigades and some BSF and Niyomito Bahini battalions. Keeping in view its tasks, the extent of the area of offensive operations, four widely separated axes of advance and the Pakistani strength opposing this Division, the formation had a hard task before it(11).

On the capture of Shamshernagar town and the airfield, the interrogation of prisoners revealed that the Pak commander was holding in strength the area Munshibazar (RH 0409), ahead of his main defences at Maulvibazar (RH 9618). The task of its capture was assigned to 3 Punjab(12) of 81 Mtn Bde. There were in this area one Coy of 33 FF and some EPCAF personnel. 3 Punjab commenced advance in the evening of 4 Dec,

carried out a cross-country manoeuvre from the north-eastern direction and assembled in area Durgapur (RH 0610) at approximately 0200 hrs on 5 Dec. After occupying Gobindapur (RH 0510) by a swift action, they attacked Munshibazar from the northern side and captured it by 0830 hrs against stiff Pak resistance with MMGs and mortars. Indian artillery engaged all the targets effectively and neutralised them. The fight lasted till 1735 hrs that day, when the remnant of the Pak troops ultimately gave up. The Pak casualties totalled 22 killed, including one officer of 30 FF, and 31 ORs taken prisoner(13). The battalion cleared all pockets of resistance along the river Dhalai during night 5/6 Dec and occupied Daurachara Tea Factory(RH 0012) by the evening of 6 Dec(14).

Advance to Maulvibazar(15) : Advance to Maulvibazar, a communication centre and Pak stronghold of tactical significance on the route of Sherpur/Sadipur ferries and Sylhet, was resumed on 6 Dec. As per earlier information, the Pakistanis were holding this area with two Coys. On 7 Dec, 10 Mahar and 4 Kumaon kept moving forward towards Maulvibazar by leap-frogging until they were within a thousand metres of the Pak troops, but no contact could be established with them. Reports were received that they were gradually pulling out from Maulvibazar. On 8th, Maulvibazar was still subjected to heavy Indian artillery shelling and air attacks, followed by a ground attack on night 8/9 Dec by 10 Mahar and 4 Kumaon. On 9 Dec the Indians entered the area, but found no Pak troops except a few Razakars here and there. The air attacks on Maulvibazar had apparently unnerved 313 Inf Bde which had withdrawn from there in a hurry.

Advance to Sherpur/Sadipur ferries and Sylhet(16) :

During the night of 9/10 Dec, a Coy of 3 Punjab advanced along the Sylhet road and occupied Kazirbazar (RG 9023) without any opposition. 3 Punjab then advanced to Sherpur ferry and secured it by 1330 hrs on 10 Dec. En route, one bridge (in sq RG 7828) was found destroyed by the fleeing enemy. A diversion had to be prepared, which took about six hours. By using country boats at Sherpur, 3 Punjab crossed the Kusiara on the morning of 11 Dec and secured area Sadipur Ferry by 1015 hrs. Large dumps of ammunition, supplies, and POL were found in well-defended positions between the two ferries. It appeared that the Pakistanis had planned to give a stiff fight at these two natural obstacles, but for some reason, they

withdrew to Sylhet.

The 4 Kumaon followed up, and by the morning of 12 Dec, 3 Punjab had built up south of Sadipur, and 4 Kumaon south of Sherpur. The timely build-up across Sherpur/Sadipur ferries was made possible by the Engineers who constructed a class 5 raft and repaired the civilian ferries which had been destroyed by the Pakistanis earlier. 3 Punjab then resumed the advance towards Sylhet, and at 1330 hrs on 13 Dec it contacted the Pak troops in area Mile 2 (RH 0564). An attack was mounted on this position swiftly and the Pakistanis retreated to Sylhet without putting up much of a fight. At this point the 3 Punjab was placed under 59 Mtn Bde for the capture of Sylhet, and 81 Mtn Bde less 3 Punjab was ordered to concentrate at Agartala as Corps reserve.

HQ 59 Mtn Bde was given the task to capture Kulaura (RH 2525) and then advance to Sylhet via Fenchuganj (RH 1544). After the capture of Ghazipur (RH 2820) by 4/5 GR(FF) on 4 Dec, the battalion was ordered to probe further forward up to Kulaura. It moved into Kulaura at 1000 hrs on 6 Dec, found no Pak troops, and immediately occupied it without any opposition. Similarly, 6 Rajput, after establishing road blocks on roads Kulaura Pritampasha (RH 1912) and Kulaura-Brahman Bazar (RH 1922), commenced advance to Brahman Bazar on 6 Dec and occupied it without any opposition by 2100 hrs(17). 9 Guards moved from Kapna Pahar (RH 3526) via Ghazipur and concentrated at Kulaura by 7 Dec 1971. The Pakistanis were holding defences in the Halaichara (RH 1823) area with approximately two mixed platoons and some Razakars. 6 Rajput assaulted and captured the area on 7 Dec(18). The Pakistanis withdrew, leaving behind a large quantity of arms and ammunition.

As wireless intercepts had indicated that the Pak troops were pulling out from this sector and concentrating in area Brahmanbaria, 59 Mtn Bde (less 4/5 GR(FF)) was sent to Kailashahar for subsequent move to Agartala. However, on 10 Dec the Bde Gp (less 4/5 GR(FF)) was ordered to advance to Sylhet along axis Kulaura-Fenchuganj-Sylhet.

Airlift to Sylhet:

As information had been received by GOC 4 Corps on 7 Dec that the Pakistanis were withdrawing from Sylhet, it was decided to airlift 4/5 GR(FF) of 59 Mtn Bde and land it near Sylhet. On 7 Dec, Comdr 59 Mtn Bde accompanied by Gp Capt Chandan Singh and OC 4/5 GR(FF) flew over Sylhet in a helicopter, reconnoitred the area and selected suitable landing sites(19).

The heli-lift of 4/5 GR(FF), ex Kulaura, started at 1500 hrs on 7 Dec. By 1800 hrs that day, a Coy had been airlifted to the site, south-east of Sylhet, across the Surma river(20). The Pakistanis detected the move and the Gurkhas came under fire immediately after landing. The second phase of the airlift started at 0300 hrs on 8 Dec, and the complete Bn less some elements of the Bn HQ were landed in Sylhet by 0800 hrs. During the initial landing, Pak fire was moderate, but in the subsequent landings the Pak troops opened fire from all directions, and there was constant Pak shelling of the landing site whenever Indian helicopters brought troops.

The Gurkhas established a firm base in a grove near Mirapara (RH 0866) in Sylhet. Now, it was discovered that the Pakistanis had built up considerable strength in the area and had taken up positions all around. The earlier information that the Pak troops were pulling out of Sylhet proved incorrect; in fact the Pak 202 Inf Bde was very much in Sylhet and the surrounding area at that time. After the fall of Maulvibazar, 313 Inf Bde also joined the Sylhet garrison. Thus the town was held by the remnants of 31 Punjab, 30 FF, 22 Baluch, and a Bn each of Tochi, Khyber and Thal Scouts. The garrison was supported by 171 Mortar Bty (120 mm) and 31 Fd Regt (105 mm How). From the day of landing of 4/5 GR(FF) in Sylhet till 15 Dec 71, the Pakistanis kept on engaging the battalion's firm base with intense SA, mortar and artillery fire. However, a number of Coy attacks were launched by 4/5 GR(FF) and the Pakistanis were cleared from some of the locations around them. Some ambushes were also laid on Sylhet-Jaintiapur road and casualties inflicted on Pak troops and vehicles. A number of air attacks were also directed against Pak positions. As Indian positions were also well-registered artillery targets, collection of air drops and evacuation of casualties had to be undertaken under fire. 4/5 GR(FF) casualties in Sylhet were 12 dead and 40 wounded.

At the time of the landing of 4/5 GR(FF) in Sylhet, it was appreciated that E Sector troops on Axis Jaintiapur (RH 3489)-Sylhet would effect an early link-up with 4/5 GR(FF). However, till 10 Dec 1971, E Sector troops could only advance up to Hemu (RH 2580), approximately 16 miles away from Sylhet. The Pakistanis had carried out effective demolition of roads and bridges, and the Indian advance could not proceed as fast as expected. Under these circumstances, 59 Mtn Bde (less one Bn) was ordered on 10 Dec to advance along the Axis Kulaura-Fenchuganj-Sylhet and capture Sylhet.

The 6 Rajput, commencing advance from Kailashahar on 10 Dec, reached the Dak Bangalow area (RH 158444) of Fenchuganj in the morning of 11 Dec 1971 without any opposition(21). The Pak troops appeared to have withdrawn in haste on the evening of 10 Dec. Operations were launched at 0500 hrs on 11 Dec 1971 to secure the northern bank of the river Kusiya. Crossing the river on a flank, 6 Rajput launched an attack at 1500 hrs. After severe fighting the Rajputs captured the north bank of the river and later cleared the area upto Illaspur Ferry (RH 138465). The Pakistanis lost 8 killed, and a number of others were wounded. Six, all ranks, were captured by Indian troops, along with a large quantity of arms and ammunition.

The 6 Rajput then commenced advance to Magla Bazar (RH 1156) on the morning of 12 Dec. The Pakistanis were holding small pockets all along the route of advance and kept on firing intermittently. However, a flanking manoeuvre from the west and an assault on the Pak positions, launched at 0330 hrs on 13 Dec 71, forced the Pakistanis to pull out. Advancing from Magla Bazar at 1100 hrs on 13 Dec, the battalion encountered opposition in area Mullergaon (RH 0860) during night 13/14 Dec. Further move along this approach was then found impossible due to marshes and nullahs, and the attack for that night was called off. On the morning of 14 Dec, the position was assaulted and area Kola Bil captured by 1100 hrs. The Pakistanis left behind 15 dead bodies and some weapons. 9 Guards then established a block on Rd Kola Bil-Sylhet, behind the Pak positions, and the withdrawing Pak troops were trapped. One vehicle carrying an officer and eight wounded ORs, and 45 other Pak troops were captured.

Siege of Sylhet: (22)

For the all important task of capturing Sylhet, 3 Punjab ex 81 Mtn Bde was placed under the command of 59 Mtn Bde and the Bn arrived in area Kitta (RH 0564) on 13 Dec. Meanwhile, 9 Guards, which had followed 6 Rajput upto Magla Bazar, resumed advance on 13 Dec along Axis Chhabdalpur (RH 0555)-Kitta and contacted the Pak troops in area Daadpur (RH 0664). 3 Punjab and 9 Guards put in an attack and captured the position the same evening. Pak casualties were 10 regular troops and 7 EPCAF killed and 7 regular ORs wounded. 9 Guards and 3 Punjab then attacked Sylhet Railway Station area on the night of 13/14 Dec. The Pakistanis, approximately one Coy, fought throughout the night, but the Railway Station was captured by 0645 hrs. After suffering casualties of 17 regular ORs and 12 EPCAF men killed and 4 ORs of 22 Baluch and

10 ORs of EPCAF captured, the Pakistanis withdrew to the northern bank of Surma river. Five ORs of 9 Guards were killed and 1 Officer, 1 JCO and 14 ORs wounded in this battle. The southern bank of the Surma was secured by morning on 14 Dec. Meanwhile, Echo Force, consisting of 5/5 GR(FF) and some Mukti Bahini Coys, advancing south from Dauki (RC 2304) to the north of Sylhet under the command of 8 Mtn Div, moved along axis Jaintiapur (RH 3489)-Darbasth (RH 3288)-Sylhet,(23) and captured Sarighat (RH 3492), Darbasth (RH 3288), Chandghat (RH 2579) and Haripur (RH 2579) and invested Sylhet from the north-east. 1 East Bengal Bn had advanced cross-country from Kanairghat (RH 5081) to Chiknagul (RH 2377) and joined up with 5/5 GR(FF) on 12 Dec. The following day, they encountered stiff opposition at Balipara (RH 2679). One Coy 86 BSF and a platoon of MF assaulted the position and captured it. The Pakistanis suffered 20 killed and 10 wounded, and 2 ORs of 31 Punjab were taken prisoner. The Pak position at Khadimnagar (RH 1473) - just to the north-east of Sylhet was contacted on 15 Dec. Here the Pak troops had taken up defences on small hills with approximately two Coys of mixed troops supported by HMGs, mortars and artillery. After a bitter fight, 5/5 GR(FF) captured Khadimnagar at 1020 hrs on 16 Dec and then pursued the withdrawing Pakistanis into Sylhet. The Sylhet gas company complex was captured and later one Coy 86 BSF captured the Radio Station intact. The Pakistanis suffered 11 killed and 14 wounded in this action(24). The BSF also played a creditable role in this sector. By 7 Dec 1971, Latu (Pak) (RH 4856), Juri (RH 3532) and Barlekha (RH 4245) were occupied by a Coy each of 84 BSF and 87 BSF(25). 104 BSF Bn secured areas Srimangal (RG 8996), Shaistaganj (RM 6292) and Habiganj (RG 5805)(26).

Surrender of Sylhet Garrison:

From 9 Dec onwards Sylhet garrison remained surrounded and isolated from the rest of the Pak formations(27). Although no infantry attack was made on Sylhet town, fifty-six IAF sorties were made over Sylhet between 8 and 15 Dec, as a result of which some buildings held by Pak troops were destroyed(28). In the early hours of 16 Dec, the Pak Army Garrison Comdr in Sylhet sent a team of two officers and a few men, carrying a white flag, to 4/5 GR(FF), offering to surrender. A meeting was held between the opposing Commanders near the Sylhet bridge at 1500 hrs on 16 Dec. Later, another meeting was held by Comdr 59 Mtn Bde with the Pak Garrison Comdr and Comdr Pak 313 Inf Bde on 17 Dec, when Dhaka had already surrendered. Plans for the laying down of arms by the Pak forces in Sylhet were finalised. 107 Officers (including three Brigs and one Col), 219 JCOs and 6,229 ORs, i.e. a total of 6,555 all ranks of Pak forces at Sylhet, surrendered to the Indian Army at 1500 hrs on 17 Dec 71(29).

23 Mtn Div Operations

The Plan: The 23 Mtn Div operational area lay from Comilla (RR 3194) in the north, to Chauddagam (RR 4765)-Laksham (RR 2666) track and Laksham-Chandpur (RQ 7364) railway line in the south, and upto the Meghna on the west. In this area Chandpur, Comilla, Laksham and Daudkandi (RL 8001) were the important nodal points. All major roads from Tripura to Chandpur on the Meghna passed through Comilla but there was a minor road to Chandpur passing through Laksham and Lalmai (RR 2980) via Chauddagam, dominated by Pak troops at Laksham in the south and Lalmai in the north. While Daudkandi was linked with Comilla via Mynamati (RR 2497) by an east-west road, Chandpur was linked with Comilla and Laksham via Lalmai village. A number of tracks converged on Comilla (RR 3194) from west linking it with Mynamati-Jafarganj (RM 1706) and Mynamati-Daudkandi roads. On the other hand, Laksham, which was connected with Tripura by a motorable road upto Chauddagam, was linked with Noakhali (RR 2415) and Comilla by road and with Chittagong (RX 0558), Noakhali, Comilla and Chandpur by rail. It was developed into a defensive fortress by the Pak Army. As Chandpur and Daudkandi were major river ports between Chittagong and Dhaka, they were important tactical objectives, besides Mynamati and Lalmai. While Pak 117 Bde under Brig Atif was concentrated in Comilla-Laksham area, Pak 53 Bde defended Laksham-Feni (RR 5738) area, and Maj Gen Rahim Khan GOC 39 Inf Div had his HQ at Chandpur for the security of the whole area from Comilla in the north to Feni in the south. The area north of Comilla remained the responsibility of Pak 14 Inf Div under Maj Gen Abdul Majid Khan.

Lt Gen Sagat Singh, the GOC 4 Corps, was always aware of the formidable Pak fortress at Lalmai, the southern parts of which were only 6 km away from the strong Pak force at Laksham. Mobile Pak army patrols dominated the gap between these two Pak defence areas and the narrow corridor could be easily pinched off. Hence, it was dangerous to push any large force through this gap towards Chandpur. But, as by 3 Dec 23 Mtn Div had already cleared Belonia buldge of Pakistani troops, Brig Niazi, Commander Pak 53 Inf Bde, was led to think that India's main thrust would be towards Feni, and moved forces there from Laksham. This small enemy mistake was enough for the hawk-eyed Rajput General. Taking advantage of the Pak reaction, Sagat Singh decided that Lalmai and Laksham were left with no mobile forces to dominate the gap, and hence there would be no serious threat to his forces trying to by-pass Laksham for advance to Chandpur. On the night of 3/4 Dec, he revised 23 Mtn Div's tasks and

issued orders that 23 Mtn Div (Fighting Cock) was to contain the Pak defences at Lalmai Height, Mynamati and Laksham, and push a Brigade through the gap to capture Chandpur(30). One Squadron of PT-76 tanks and the Corps reserve (61 Mtn Bde) were allotted to 23 Mtn Div for the first phase of its operation, i.e. for containing Lalmai Height and Mynamati. The Corps Commander's aggressive plan evoked the offensive spirit and optimism of the subordinate commanders, who, in their turn, displayed boldness and initiative. 23 Mtn Div allotted the following tasks to the brigades under its command:- (31)

(a) 61 Mountain Brigade

To provide firm base by securing FDLs from Sonamura (RR 4195) to Nirbhaypur (RR 4481) by first light D day. To secure northern flank of 301 Mtn Bde Gp by blocking the road Dhaka-Chittagong in general area south of Suagan (RR 3882).

(b) 83 Mountain Brigade

To infiltrate with two battalions north and south of Road Chaudagram-Laksham and secure area mile 27 by first light D+1, and then liquidate Pak pockets left behind.

To isolate and reduce Parikot (RR 3964) defences by establishing a block in area Bangodda (RR 3864) by first light D+3.

To advance along the axis and assist 181 Mtn Bde in reducing Laksham by light D+5.

To secure the southern flank of the Division.

(c) 301 Mountain Brigade

One battalion group to infiltrate along northern approach to establish a road block and secure Majlispur (RR 3578) by first light D+1.

One battalion to infiltrate south of the central approach to secure Kashinagar (RR 3675) by first light D+1.

To secure Bhuschi (RR 3271) by first light D+2.

To clear all Pak localities between the border and the blocks supported by 1 Independent Armoured Squadron.

(d) 181 Mountain Brigade

To advance along central approach behind 301

Mtn Bde upto Bhushi, establish firm base there and then isolate Laksham by first light D+3.

To reduce Laksham by first light D+5.

61 Mtn Bde Operations: On night 3/4 Dec 1971, 61 Mtn Bde under Tom Pande captured Suagan and reached Majlispur (RR 3578). In the morning of 5 Dec, it occupied Pipulia, south of Comilla, when orders were received for its reversion as Corps reserve under HQ 4 Corps. The Brigade had cut the Comilla-Chittagong road, before being relieved by 9 EB Battalion and a battery ex 57 Mtn Regt. On 6 Dec, it was asked to move north to contain Mynamati(32). After crossing the river Gumti, Pande's troops (12 Kumaon) captured Rajapur (RM 2807) and Burichang (RM 2605), north of Comilla. By first light on 7 Dec, the whole Brigade and a troop of PT-76 tanks built up south of the Gumti in the Jafarganj (RM 1706) area. Resuming advance they established road blocks at Chandina and Jafarganj, and captured both these places. When a Pakistani Coy came in vehicles from Mynamati to dislodge the Indian troops, they were fired upon and dispersed. Hearing of a massive Indian build-up north and west of Mynamati and the fall of Chandina, Brig Atif of Pak 117 Inf Bde got alarmed about the defence of Mynamati itself, which was held by only one battalion at that time. Consequently, he pulled the rest of his brigade, which was deployed in Comilla and Lalmai hills, back into Mynamati. This hasty withdrawal of Pak troops from Comilla and Lalmai hills allowed the advancing Indian troops to use the road from Laksham. The Pakistani Commanders fell in utter confusion, and Comilla was vacated and captured by Indian troops on 9 Dec. Of the Pak troops which tried to fall back on the Mynamati defences, about 500 were taken prisoner. This was the first major Pak surrender during this war. The remainder of the Pak brigade at Mynamati was surrounded by 61 Mtn Bde from the north and west. Pande pushed one battalion towards Daudkandi via Elliotganj, and secured it by 9 Dec, brushing off minor resistance. From 12 Dec onwards Brig Pande came under the command of 23 Mtn Div for the reduction of Mynamati fortress. Pakistani troops withdrew from Laksham towards Mynamati, leaving behind their heavy weapons and vehicles, and moving on man-pack basis. The bulk of these troops were taken prisoner by Indian forces, while only about 200 Pak troops under Brig Niazi could join 117 Bde at Mynamati. The main column under Lt Col Nayeem surrendered to Brig Pande near Chandina on 12 Dec(33). Although, 61 Mtn Bde less one battalion mounted successive attacks on Mynamati from the north and west, this formidable Pak fortress continued to resist till cease-fire.

181 Mtn Bde Operations: The brigade was to advance along Himmatpur (RR 4576)-Bhuschi (RR 3271)-Sasanpur (RR 2971)-Laksham, and isolate Laksham by first light D+3 and then reduce it by first light D+5(34). On 4 Dec, 181 Mtn Bde advanced along the axis Himmatpur-Bhuschi. Next day, 9 Kumaon after cutting road and rail links at Bhora (RR 2571) reached area Harishchar-Bhora Khalilpur. By night 5/6 Dec, they established a road block near Gazaria (RR 2870) by cutting the Comilla-Laksham road. Meanwhile, 6 Jat firmed at Ramchandrapur-Bhakarda (RR 2268) and cut rail link Laksham-Mudafarganj. Thus, by first light on 6 Dec they isolated Laksham from north and west. That day a brisk fight took place between 14 Kumaon and Pak troops in area Dighi (RR 2468) in which the Indian battalion suffered some casualties. On the same date, 6 Jat also came under fire from Pak troops, west and south of Laksham, and suffered 3 ORs killed, and one Officer and 4 ORs wounded. Pak casualties were approximately 75 killed(35).

At this stage it was discovered that Laksham complex was well-defended by about a brigade group, and hence, it was decided not to attack it. Instead it was subjected to intensive air strikes and artillery shelling from 6 Dec onwards. As on 7 Dec, reports were received that Baghmara (RR 2877), situated on the southern part of Lalmai hills, had been vacated by Pak troops, 9 Kumaon less two companies moved on road Laksham-Comilla towards Lalmai and occupied the southern tip of Lalmai hills the next day (36). On 10 Dec, 9 Kumaon and 14 Kumaon entered Laksham from railway station side in the north and, after a little resistance, captured it. The bulk of the Pak troops had abandoned the town on the night of 8/9 Dec, leaving behind huge quantities of arms and ammunition. Pak troops suffered 150 killed here, and the rest withdrew for Mynamati and south of Chandpu in groups of 30 and 40 persons. On night 12/13 Dec, the brigade less 14 Kumaon was deployed for capturing Mynamati, and on 13 Dec, the Brigade HQ shifted from Baghmara to Chaudari Kholā (RR 2685). On night 13/14 Dec, 9 Kumaon captured Mustafapur complex (RR 2592) and repulsed two Pak counter-attacks. Pak casualties were 12 ORs killed and 48 all ranks wounded. On night 14/15 Dec, 6 Jat occupied the Pak position of Alipur (RR 2493) and Budhair (RR 2393). On 15 Dec, due to heavy Pak shelling at Alipur, 2 Officers, 4 JCOs and 11 ORs ex-6 Jat were injured and 3 ORs killed. On night 15/16 Dec, in the midst of intermittent Pak firing, 14 Kumaon, which had come under 181 Mtn Bde on 14 Dec, firmed in area (RR 2590) from Lalmai south. At 1100 hrs, next day, they attacked Mynamati complex from the south (Mustafapur side). As the attack

progressed, Brig Mohd Aslam Niazi, Commander Mynamati garrison, surrendered to Brig Y.P. Bakshi, Commander 181 Mtn Bde, at 1230 hrs on 16 Dec. The formal surrender ceremony, however, took place at 1000 hrs on 17 Dec, and the following Pakistanis were captured: (37)

- (a) Officers - 92 (Brig 2, Lt Col 5, Maj 28, Capt 39, and Lt 18).
- (b) JCOs - 181
- (c) ORs - 4,025
- (d) Civilians - 162 (including 13 women and 18 children).

83 Mtn Bde Operations

Under the revised plan, 83 Mtn Bde under Brig B.S. Sandhu, was ordered to advance along the Chauddagam-Laksham road and to isolate Laksham from the south. After infiltrating across the border, the Brigade established all its road blocks by first light on 4 Dec 1971, and captured Chauddagam at 1000 hrs next day after a fight(38). Indian casualties were 5 ORs killed and 25 wounded (including one officer), while Pakistan suffered 77 killed and 12 prisoners taken from 23 Punjab. Remainder of the Pak troops fled towards Laksham, leaving behind all their heavy weapons, and blowing up the bridge on the Dakatia Nullah near Parikot. Brig Aslam Niazi, Commander 53 Inf Bde (Pak), had been ordered on 4 Dec to move back from Feni to Laksham with 15 Baluch, 39 Baluch, and two Coys 21 AK Bn. This Pak Bde managed to reach Laksham by rail on the night of 5/6 Dec. After clearing Kadba (RR 3664), Parikot (RR 4064) and Dombaria (RR 3064), Indian troops established block at Katiachar (RR 2763), south of Laksham, on 7 Dec. After air, artillery and Grad P rocket attacks, 83 and 181 Mtn Bdes cleared Laksham on 9 Dec(39). Next, 83 Mtn Bde was ordered to carry out offensive towards Chittagong in collaboration with Kilo force, commanded by Brig Anand Sarup.

Operation Trump Card: 83 Mtn Bde was given the task to capture Chittagong quickly in conjunction with Kilo Force(40). Under command were 2 Rajput, 3 Dogra, 8 Bihar, 60 Field Company, supported by 57 Mtn Regt less Battery, and 1832 Light Regiment. Kilo Force, operating ahead of 83 Mtn Bde prior to launching of the operation, was deployed as under:-

- (a) 32 Mahar - In contact with Pak troops at Sitalpur (RW 9572).

- (b) 31 Jat - Area Kumira (RW 9378)
- (c) 4 EB Bn - In contact with Pak troops at Nazirhat (RX 0294).
- (d) 10 EB Bn - In square 9977 blocking lateral road-track Kumiraghat-Hathazari (RX 0378).
- (e) Six MF Coys - Employed with regular infantry Bns.

On 13 Dec, 83 Mtn Bde HQ, 3 Dogra less Coy, 2 Rajput less 2 coys, 8 Bihar, 57 Mtn Regt less Bty, and 1832 Lt Bty, concentrated at Sitakund (RW 8793). The overall strength of the Pak troops in area Chittagong was about two battalions with other garrison troops and administrative units. Their known dispositions were:- (41)

- (a) Sitalpur (RW 9572) - Approximately one company plus
- (b) Area North of Bhatiari (RW 9868) - Approximately two companies plus.
- (c) Fauzdarhat (RW 9868) - Strength not known.
- (d) Nazirhat (RX 0294) - Approximately two companies.

Kilo Force advanced from Sitakund and on the night of 13/14 Dec, captured Kumiraghat, held by two coys of Pak troops - ex 15 Baluch and 25 FF, and Fatikchari (RS 0100), held by one platoon regular troops. On 15 Dec, Kilo Force occupied Sitalpur and Nazirhat without much opposition(42). At last light on 15 Dec, 2 Rajput less coy and 3 Dogra less coy of 83 Mtn Bde advancing from Sitalpur through the hills, east of the road Sitalkund - Chittagong, arrived at Bulako (RW 0070) by mid-day on 16 Dec, when cease-fire talks were in progress(43). Hence, the battalions were ordered to concentrate there. Next day, 2 Rajput and 3 Dogra took surrender of the Pak troops at Fauzdarhat (RW 9767) and Chittagong cantonment respectively. 8 Bihar was deployed in Chittagong to maintain law and order(44).

301 Mtn Bde Operations: While the operations described above were important, the deadliest thrust of 23 Mtn Div was delivered through its 301 Mtn Bde. At last light on 3 Dec, when the war was only a few hours old, all the three battalions of the Bde infiltrated across the border. 3 Kumaon (Rif) cleared

Pak troops from area Chandari (12 r RR 4180) and Chandul Diggi (RR 4279) at 0645 hrs(45). On 4 Dec, they despatched one coy to area Majlispur (RR 3578), and established the rest in the area (RR 4179) covering Dhaka-Chittagong road. They cleared Mian Bazar (RR 4277) in conjunction with 1 Indep Armd Sqn by 1200 hrs. While the Pakistani troops were withdrawing from Mian Bazar, they were engaged by 3 Kumaon (Rif). In the operation, 3 Kumaon (Rif) suffered 2 killed and 2 wounded, while Pakistanis suffered 50 killed and 17 captured. However, the Pakistanis destroyed 3 Indian tanks by A/tk mines, inflicting casualties of 1 OR killed, and 2 Officers, 2 JCOs and 6 ORs wounded on 1 Indep Armd Sqn(46). And 14 Jat could occupy Lalgah (RR 4273) only after two unsuccessful attacks on 4 Dec. The same day, 1/11 GR occupied Kashinagar (RR 3676), Padua (RR 3973) and Gandasa (RR 3974), inflicting casualties of 15 to 16 killed(47). They also captured 6 Pak officers, 8 JCOs and 202 ORs/NCsE of 25 FF, including the commanding officer, while they were trying to escape from area Mian Bazar-Bangalmuri(48). Thus breaking the back-bone of the Pak defence at Kashinagar, the Gorkhas secured Bhuschi (RR 3272) and Sasanpur (RR 2971)(49). On 6 Dec, 1/11 GR cleared Mudafarganj (RR 1769) and secured intact both the bridges at Mudafarganj. In this action, the Pakistanis suffered casualties of 17 killed. One Indian soldier was wounded(50). Pak troops attacked Mudafarganj thrice on night 7/8 Dec, and again incurred heavy casualties. On 8 Dec, the brigade captured Pak positions at Inayatpur (RR 9967)-Rajapur (RR 0067), and Hajiganj (RQ 9568). Indian troops suffered 3 killed and 17 wounded, including one officer(51).

In the north, 14 Jat with one Mtn Bty, 197 Mtn Regt ex 301 Mtn Bde, and 9 EBR were ordered to clear the airfield and Comilla town(52). Advancing from Bhuschi on 7 Dec, they captured Gazaria (RR 3383), Lakshmipur (RR 3487) and the Comilla air field without much effort(53). Advance beyond the airfield was led by a captured Razakar, and fighting for Comilla took place from bunker to bunker on 8 Dec, but it was captured the same day. Indian casualties were six killed and 11 wounded whereas Pak troops suffered 43 dead and one Officer (Maj) and 31 ORs captured(54).

Gen Sagat Singh was continuously monitoring by helicopter the operations along his wide front. It was he, it is claimed, who reced the area, came to Inayatpur on 9 Dec, intimated that Chandpur had been vacated by the Pak troops and ordered the Bde to move immediately. As such, Brig Sodhi of 301 Mtn Bde advanced with tanks and 2 Coys of 3 Kumaon (Rif) towards Chandpur. Brig Sodhi's plea has been that

Chandpur could be reached only after the demolished bridges at Hajiganj and west of it were repaired by the Engineers. As at this time a message was received from 181 Mtn Bde about the Pak withdrawal from the southern Lalmai defences, 301 Mtn Bde could now move forward its guns by the road, which was till then dominated by the Pak forces in southern Lalmai. Meanwhile, Maj Gen Rahim Khan, who had his 14 Div HQ located at Chandpur, realised his helpless condition as he had no reserves to stop the advancing Indians. Therefore, on 8 Dec, he asked Dhaka for permission to withdraw from Chandpur. Lt Gen Niazi sent a gun boat to Chandpur to evacuate Gen Rahim, his HQ and the few remaining Pak troops. This gun boat was, however, hit by the IAF in the morning of 9 Dec. The same day, at noon, Sodhi's troops entered Chandpur. Although some of the Pak troops were killed in this air raid, Rahim reached Dhaka with minor injuries(55). The dead body of his GSO I was later recovered from the river. As one Pak steamer was seen on the Meghna, 1500 yds to the west, carrying troops, it was engaged by tank fire and blown out of the water. None survived. Two more launches carrying Pak troops approaching Chandpur unsuspectingly were also destroyed(56)

By 9 Dec, the Indian Army had captured all the three key towns on the eastern bank of the Meghna-Ashuganj, Daudkandi and Chandpur and secured the Meghna bulge. Although, Lt Gen Sagat Singh's allotted task to reach the eastern bank of the Meghna was accomplished, he, now initiated moves for crossing the mighty river to advance towards Dhaka(57). Unfortunately, there was no river craft available at Chandpur for the crossing and the Meghna was three miles wide. Sagat Singh ordered Maj Gen Hira to reduce the Mynamati defences with 181 and 61 Mtn Bdes, while Sodhi's brigade was sent from Chandpur to Daudkandi for crossing the Meghna under the command of 23 Mtn Div. Once 301 Mtn Bde had crossed to the west bank of the river, it would come under direct command of 4 Corps(58).

On 11 Dec, Brig Sodhi was given the task (Operation Trump Card) to concentrate his 301 Mtn Bde at Daudkandi by first light 16 Dec, commencing it on 12 Dec, for crossing the Meghna later. However, the operational picture of the fast moving battle at the Corps level had undergone a sea change with the successful crossing of the Meghna river near Ashuganj, and the race for Dhaka was on. It was on 13 Dec when Maj Gen Hira told Brig Sodhi that Lt Gen Sagat Singh wanted him to cross the Meghna that very night(59). This made him unhappy, as he had no idea of the Pak strength on the other side of the Meghna, had not even an up-to-date map of the area, nor sufficient means to

effect the crossing. Moreover, his brigade at that time consisted of only 14 Jat, 1/11 GR less a coy, 3 Kumaon less two coys and a platoon, and 197 Mtn Regt.

Sodhi's troops reached Daudkandi at 2130 hrs on 13 Dec and found two steamers (capacity 150 each), one vehicle tug (capacity 6 vehicles) and some country boats (capacity 50 each)(60). It was decided to send 14 Jat by rivercraft on 14th morning and the remainder of the brigade by helicopters when they became available. At 0500 hrs on 14 Dec, in the pre-dawn darkness, 14 Jat left by the river convoy of steamers and the boats along with the vehicle tug carrying a battery (minus its vehicles) of 197 Mtn Regt, prepared to fire in case of any enemy opposition. During the crossing, one steamer got grounded on an island for a short while, while the other experienced engine failure and had to be abandoned, with its load redistributed among the country boats, towed by the steamer and the vehicle tug. This strange flotilla ultimately reached Baidya Bazar (RL 7015) at 0900 hrs, and found it free of Pak troops. Local people rushed forward to unload the vessels and render all other help. By the afternoon, 14 Jat was deployed west of Baidya Bazar.

Meanwhile, the fleet of Mi-4 helicopters had arrived at Daudkandi. One Coy 14 Jat, a few administrative echelons and one Coy 12 Kumaon ex 61 Mtn Bde were ferried across to Baidya Bazar by the first wave of the helicopters at 0930 hrs. On 14 Dec and 15 Dec, 121 helicopter sorties carried 1209 fully armed troops and 38,100 kg of stores from Daudkandi to Baidya Bazar.

On 15 Dec, it was decided to contain the Pak troops at Nabiganj (RL 5814) with 14 Jat and cross the river Sitalakhya at Lakshamnkhola (RL 5916), while 1/11 GR occupied Kuripara the same day. 14 Jat cleared Nabiganj, Bandar and Madanganj (RL 6223) by first light next day. Casualties suffered by 14 Jat were 9 ORs killed and 21 wounded as against 50 Pak troops killed. By noon on 16 Dec 1/11 GR effected crossing of the Sitalakhya; at 1400 hrs came the news of surrender of the Pak Army in Dhaka. Hence, 57 Mtn Div ordered 301 Mtn Bde to concentrate at Dhaka immediately.

During the whole operation, 3 to 16 Dec, 1971, 301 Mtn Bde suffered total number of casualties - 28 killed and 83 wounded(61). 20 Officers, 35 JCOs and 908 ORs of the Pak Army were captured by this brigade(62).

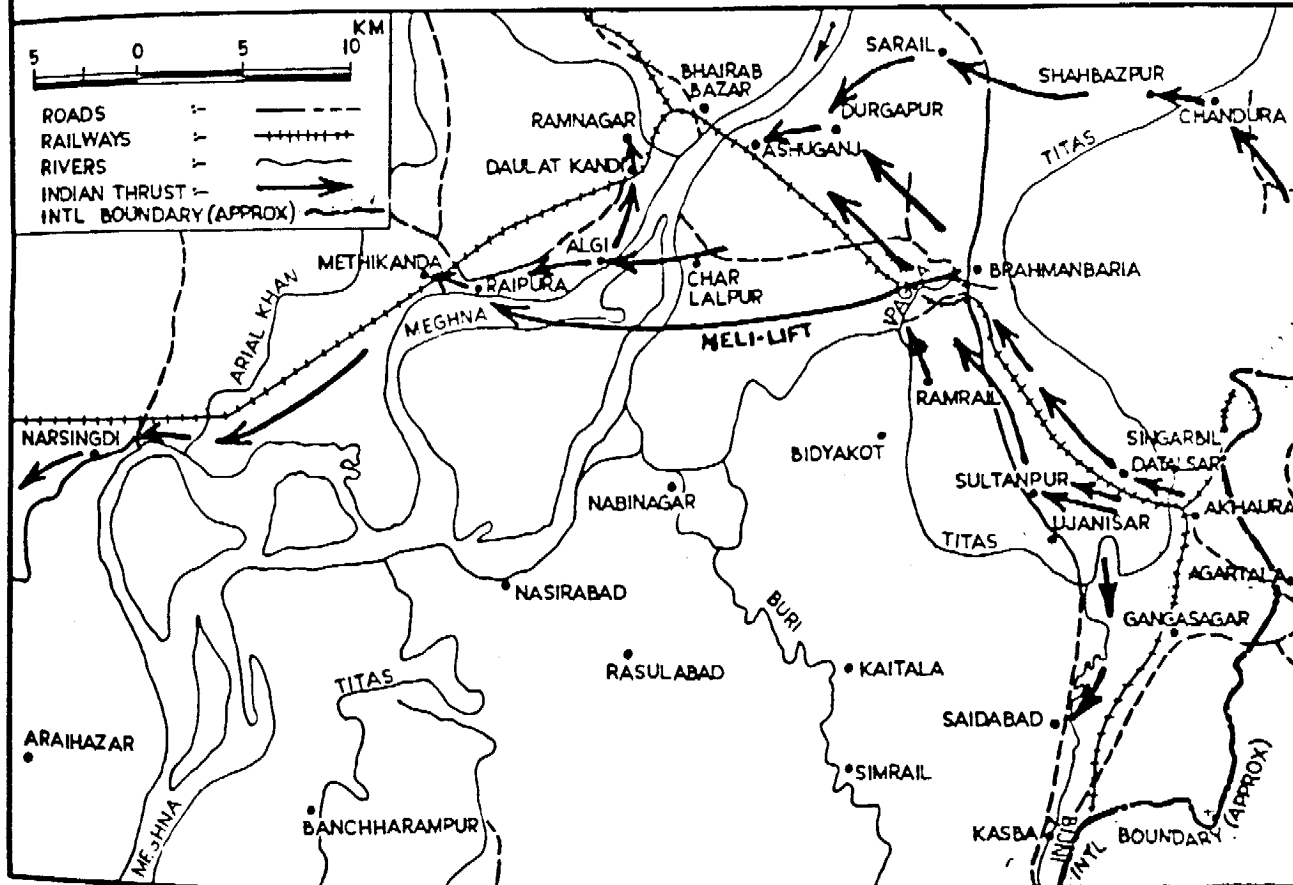
57 Mtn Div Operations

The operational orders required 57 Mtn Div to defend Agartala from any Pak incursion and also to go on the offensive and capture Akhaura, Daudkandi and Feni, in that order. This was in a way complementary to the operation of 61 Mtn Bde, operating directly under 4 Corps which was planned to be employed on the task of crossing the river Gumti, eventually closing in on Mynamati from the west, and helping in its reduction in conjunction with a brigade of 23 Mtn Div. It has been described in a previous chapter how 73 Mtn Bde of 57 Mtn Div captured Gangasagar on 3 Dec, thus sealing off the Pakistani approach to Akhaura from the south; 311 Mtn Bde had penetrated upto Kodda, west of Akhaura, by 2 Dec, and 'S' Force had secured Rajapur and Singarbil jetty to the north on 2 Dec, thus preparing the ground for the capture of Akhaura.

"Akhaura was a well prepared and strong position held by three companies of 12 FF, one coy 21 POK Bn and one coy of EPCAF"(63). While 19 Raj Rif and 'S' Force kept exerting pressure from the north, the main attack was commenced at 2200 hrs on 4/5 Dec from the south. 18 Rajput pushed ahead and captured intact the rail bridge over the Titas river, north-west of Akhaura, in the morning of 5 Dec. Akhaura fell the same day(64). In this action, 1 Indian Officer and 27 ORs were killed, and 4 Officers and 104 ORs wounded, as against 5 Pak PsOW alongwith 2 PT-76 tanks captured(65). Once Akhaura had been captured, 4 Corps diverted 57 Mtn Div from its original task and ordered it to capture Brahmanbaria and then advance to Ashuganj. This was done in order to cut off all routes of withdrawal of Pak garrisons at Sylhet and bottle up 202 Inf Bde and 313 Inf Bde(66).

The task of advancing to Brahmanbaria on the railway line, north-west of Akhaura, was entrusted to 73 Mtn Bde. In the meanwhile, 311 Mtn Bde was ordered to exploit upto Sultanpur, 5 km south of Brahmanbaria. After 18 Rajput had cleared Datalsar on 5 Dec, next morning 4 Guards established themselves astride the Comilla-Brahmanbaria road, south of Sultanpur, and trapped 7 Pak vehicles and killed approximately 70 Pak troops retreating towards Brahmanbaria. The Rajputs secured Sultanpur, the area of the concrete bridge, and Saidabad bridge by 1800 hrs. The Pak troops had abandoned the positions, leaving behind a large amount of arms and ammunition. The capture of Datalsar on the rail track linking Brahmanbaria with Akhaura, and Sultanpur on Brahmanbaria-Comilla road, facilitated the advance of 73 Mtn Bde on the two axes, road and rail, to Brahmanbaria. Again, the securing of Saidabad on the Brahmanbaria-Comilla road to the south-west of Sultanpur further isolated Brahmanbaria.

57 MOUNTAIN DIVISION OPERATIONS



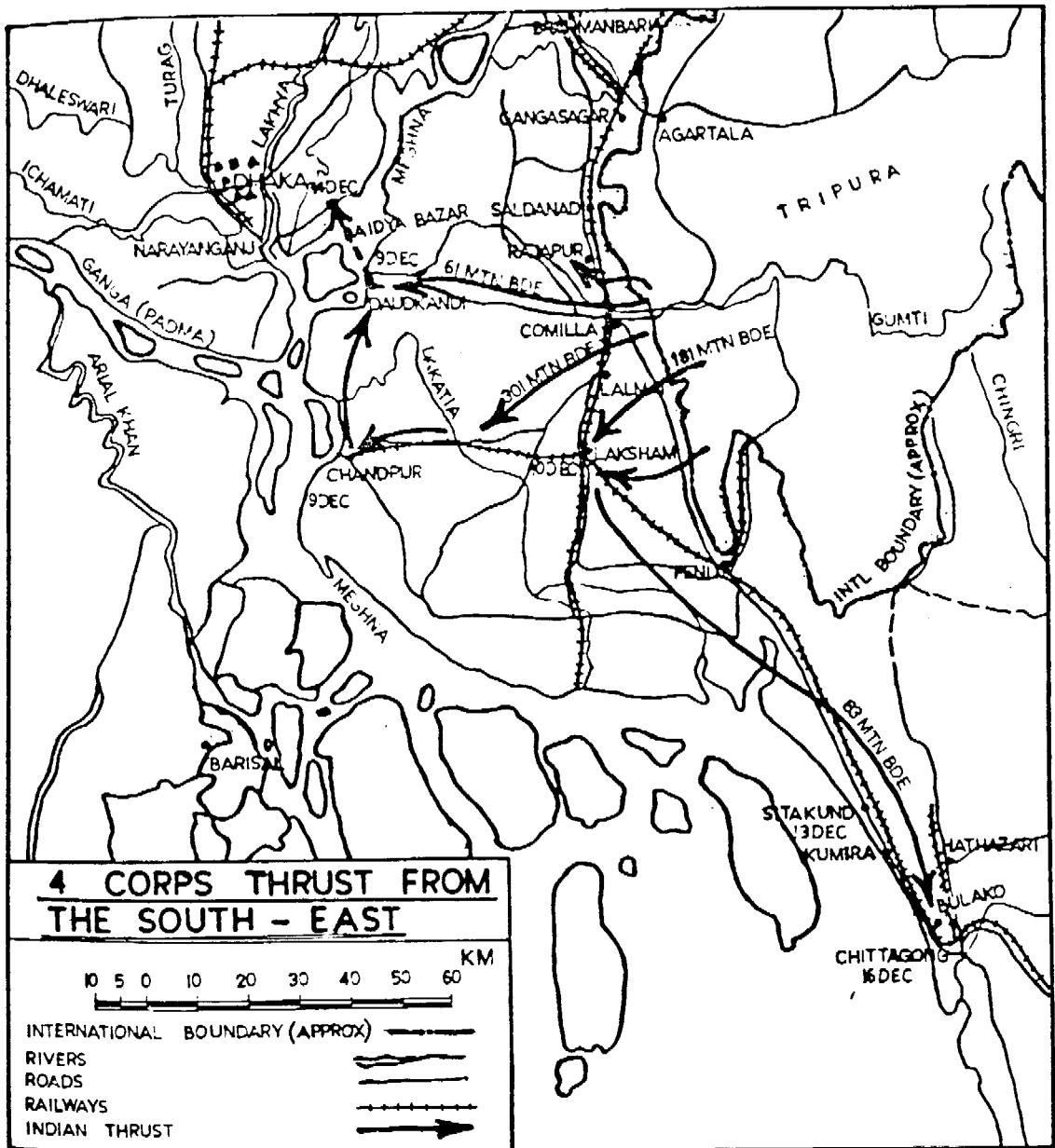
At 0600 hrs on 6 Dec, 73 Mtn Bde began the advance towards Brahmanbaria on the two axes of rail and road. While 19 Punjab and 19 Raj Rif reached the east bank of the Pagla river, Sierra Force had secured Chandura (RM 3756) to the north-east of Brahmanbaria by 1300 hrs on 7 Dec. Now, 14 Guards were ordered to cross the Pagla river. Scared by these enveloping moves, the Pakistanis slipped away from Brahmanbaria. However, it had already been visualised that the Pakistanis would try to pull out of Brahmanbaria towards Bhairab Bazar, and plans had been laid to cut off this withdrawal. 10 Bihar of 311 Mtn Bde was ordered to strengthen the Sierra Force at Chandura to carry out the enveloping move to Shahbazzpur-Sarail-Ashuganj in the north. Elements of 10 Bihar moved to Chandura via Agartala at 0130 hrs on 7 Dec. By 1300 hrs on 9 Dec, 18 Rajput along with elements of 10 Bihar had reached the outskirts of the built-up area of Ashuganj. The Pakistanis had hastily blown up the bridge at 1030 hrs on 9 Dec, even though considerable elements of their 27 Bde together with the Brigade commander had been left behind on the east bank of the river. These Pakistani elements fought desperately against 18 Rajput and 19 Bihar, and forced them to withdraw after inflicting heavy losses, including four tanks. The Indian casualties were 2 Officers, 3 JCOs and 39 ORs killed; 3 Officers, 2 JCOs and 92 ORs wounded and 5 ORs missing. Twenty-three Pak dead bodies were counted on the ground. However, by about 1630 hrs on 9 Dec, the Indian units were able to stabilise the situation. The Pakistanis retreated from Ashuganj crossing over to Bhairab Bazar by boats, and 18 Rajput occupied the place on 10 Dec.

The great river Meghna had now been reached at Ashuganj, Ludkandi as well as Chandpur. Gen Sagat Singh had carried out in full the order given to him in less than a week. But obviously Dhaka itself was the final objective, and he had quietly made plans and preparations for crossing the great hurdle when the time came. Hardly any rivercraft were available and the dozen helicopters under Gp Capt Chandan Singh offered the only possibility. The successful heli-lift at Sylhet a few days earlier had proved the feasibility of such a move, and given confidence to the pilots as well as the troops. The great risk was the likelihood of an attack by Pakistan's 14 Inf Div from Bhairab Bazar, which would have overwhelmed the Indian heliborne force while it was being built up.

A recce report clinched the issue for Sagat Singh. The Corps Commander, constantly hovering over the battle areas in his helicopter, (67) learnt that a Pak Bde was withdrawing from Bhairab Bazar north towards Sylhet and not south towards Dhaka, marching out of the war in effect!

The die was cast, and the Indian forces swarmed across the Meghna. First, 4 Guards of 311 Mtn Bde and a troop ex 82 Lt Regt were heli-lifted to Raipura. They then sent a reconnaissance patrol to Methikanda towards Bhairab Bazar and found Methikanda abandoned. In the meanwhile, 19 Punjab of 73 Mtn Bde, which had moved from Bhatpara to Charlalpur (RH 0956) on 9 Dec, crossed the Meghna by country boats, collected from local fisherman. While they now contained the Pak force at Bhairab Bazar, 4 Guards advanced to Narsingdi at 0730 hrs on 10 Dec. The battalion reached the railway bridge before Narsingdi and kept engaging the Pakistani defenders there, preventing them from destroying the bridge. 19 Raj Rif of 73 Mtn Bde also completed the crossing of the Meghna by 0300 hrs on 11 Dec, and reached Raipura (9856) by 1300 hrs, and came under command 311 Mtn Bde. The same day, 10 Bihar along with one troop of 82 Lt Regt and 65 Mtn Regt were lifted by helicopters and lodged south of Satirpara in the Narsingdi complex. Two coys of this battalion moving south secured the road and rail crossing across the river on the out-skirts of Narsingdi and linked up with 4 Guards who had secured the jetty area earlier in the day. Meanwhile, Sierra Force (2 EB) after crossing the Meghna on 11 Dec was also advancing towards Narsingdi. On 12 Dec, 59 Mtn Regt less troop was also heli-lifted to Satirpara to join the other units of the Div in the Narsingdi area. By 0800 hrs on 12 Dec, 4 Guards had captured Narsingdi after moderate fighting against a determined EPCAF platoon, and then moved to Bulta and Barpa, only 8 miles short of Dhaka. Next day, they established contact with the Pakistanis at Kamarghor east of Dhaka on the east bank of the Lakhya river, and 10 Bihar moved to area Naogaon, while 19 Raj Rif captured intact the Ghorasal rail bridge on the line Narsingdi-Tungi across the Lakhya river. On 14 Dec, learning that there were no more Pakistani troops between the Lakhya and Balu river, Sierra Force (2 EB) along with elements of 10 Bihar crossed to the other side of Lakhya and secured the area between Rugganj and Demra ferry (RL 5625), while 73 Mtn Bde with 19 Raj Rif in the lead moved towards Tungi, to the north of Dhaka and contacted the Pakistani positions at Pipulia at 1600 hrs(68). Now, 65 Mtn Regt under 311 Mtn Bde successfully brought up its guns and on evening of 14 Dec fired into the heart of Dhaka for the first time. Medium guns had also started arriving, mounted on rafts, and towed by motor launches along the river Meghna.

That night a ban on firing on Dhaka was imposed, to last till 0900 hrs next morning. However, during night 14/15 Dec, 2 Coys of 19 Raj Rif, sent behind the



DHALESWARI

TURAG

LAKHNA

MT SHINA

GANGASAGAR

AGARTALA

TRIPURA

ICHAMATI

NARAYANGANJ

SAIDYA BAZAR

SALDANADI

RAJAPUR

GANJA (PADMA)

9 DEC

61 MTN BDE

GUMTI

ARIAL KHAN

DAUDKANDI

COMILLA

181 MTN BDE

LAKATIA

LALM

INTL BOUNDARY (APPROX)

CHINGHI

CHANDPUR

9 DEC

301 MTN BDE

LAKSHMA

SURESHINA

BARISAL

STAKUND

13 DEC

KUMIRA

HATHAZARI

BULAKO

CHITTAGONG

16 DEC

88 MTN BDE

Pak defences at Pubail, had a fierce engagement with Pak forces before the latter's withdrawing to Tungri. The Pak troops suffered heavy casualties. Even on 16 Dec, the Pakistanis held on to the position at Tatki and Nagarkachpur (5821) inspite of repeated probes by 4 Guards.

Though there had been indications even from 15 Dec night that the Pakistanis were going to surrender nothing was certain, and hence, in the morning of 16 Dec, HQ 4 Corps issued fresh orders for the capture of Dhaka(69). These were not implemented when Pakistani forces in Dhaka and the rest of Bangladesh agreed to surrender.

The casualties incurred by the various units (including 59 Mtn Regt, 73 Mtn Bde signal coy, 65 Mtn Regt, and 82 Lt Regt) of 57 Mtn Div during the period, 3-15 Dec 1971, (70) were :-

	<u>Officer</u>	<u>JCO</u>	<u>OR (including NCsE)</u>
Killed	5	6	124
Wounded	19	13	387
Missing	-	-	17

Pak casualties were 398 killed, 166 wounded, and 4,958 taken prisoner(71).

Assessment

The 4 Corps operations had fulfilled in more than ample measure the tasks allotted to the Corps. The Meghna line had been reached on a very wide front from Ashuganj to Chandpur. Not content with this, the Corps had crossed the big river with the help of clever improvisations, and advanced within artillery range of Dhaka. In only about 5 days, the following forces had been built up on the western bank of the Meghna:

HQ 311 Mtn Bde

1. Troop PT-76 tanks
2. 65 Mtn Regt less one battery, battery 82 Lt Regt, 4 medium guns and two Kraz tractors
3. 4 Guards, 10 Bihar, 18 Rajput and 2 EB Bns.

Tac HQ 01 Mtn Bde

1. 197 Mtn Regt, one troop of 23 Mtn Regt
2. 14 Jat, 1/11 GR less a coy, 3 Kumaon less 2 Coys.

73 Mtn Bde Units

1. 5 Independent Armd Sqn less 1 troop
2. 59 Mtn Regt, 1 troop 82 Lt Regt.
3. 19 Raj Rif, 19 Punjab and 14 Guards.

This Force, totalling more than nine infantry battalions supported by elements of Armour, Artillery and Engineers, was ready to assault Dhaka from the North-East, East and South-East.

The Corps had surprised every one by its sudden and spectacular crossing of the Meghna. Commanders at all levels, showed exemplary initiative and boldness. Lt Gen Sagat Singh emerged as the outstanding Corps Commander in the entire sub-continent, including the Pakistan Army. It was his initiative, drive, and bold decisions backed by meticulous preparations, supported by Eastern Command, which brought his Corps to the gates of Dhaka in sufficient strength.

OPERATIONS OF 101 COMMUNICATION ZONE AREA (72)

The 101 Communication Zone Area Composite Force based on Tura in Meghalaya was raised on ad hoc basis, by borrowing units from outside formations, and only later, during the course of the operations, it almost doubled its strength with additional troops and resources. Opposite it, the following Pak forces were in position in Mymensingh and Tangail districts on the eve of the war: (73)

93 Inf Bde (Brig Abdul Qadir Khan)

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| HQ | - Mymensingh |
| 83 Indep Mor Bty | - Kamalpur-Mymensingh |
| 33 Punjab | - Mymensingh-Phulpur-Haluaghat (74) |
| 31 Baluch | - Jamalpur-Rajendraganj-Hathibanda-Diwanganj-Tangail |
| 70 Wing Rangers | - Mymensingh-Kishoreganj |
| 71 Wing Ranger | - Jariajhanjail-Shibganj-Biri Siri-Bijaipur |
| Para-military Forces | - 5,000. (including the above Rangers, EPCAF and Razakars) (75) |

The newly created Pak 36 ad hoc Division under DG, EPCAF, Maj Gen Jamshed, with his HQ located in

Dhaka, was entrusted with the protection of Dhaka and its northern areas including Tangail and Mymensingh districts, which had a 185-km frontage from the eastern bank of the Jamuna to the western border of Sylhet district. (76)

Against the above, the Indian strength was grouped as under on 4 Dec 71 :- (77)

HQ 101 CZ Area (Maj Gen G.S. Gill) - Tura

HQ 95 Mtn Bde (Brig H.S. Kler) - Tura

56 Mtn Regt (76 mm Yugoslav guns)

852 Lt Bty (120 mm)

13 Guards

1 Maratha L I

13 Raj Rif

94 Fd Coy

F-J Sector (Brig Sant Singh, MVC) - Tura

851 Lt Bty (Four Mors 120 mm)

6 Bihar

83 BSF Bn less one coy (for offensive operations)

15 Companies of MF/FF

2 Para Bn : (to operate in infantry role under 101 CZ, after being dropped north of Tangail on D+7) (78)

The formation did not have "adequate resources in Engineer, troops and equipment, signals, provost and recovery. This posed considerable problems right through the operations" (79)

It was allotted the task of launching an offensive for destroying Pakistani forces in Tangail and Mymensingh districts of Bangladesh in the event of war, in addition to the Line of Communication duties and protective role.

The following schedules were laid down for the advance of 95 Mtn Bde Gp from Tura :- (80)

- (a) Capture of Kamalpur (QE 8613) by D plus 2.
- (b) Capture of Bakshiganj (QE 8602) by D plus 3.
- (c) Capture of Jamalpur by D plus 6/7.
- (d) Para drop and securing Poongli Bridge (QP 9296), north of Tangail by 2 Para Group on D plus 7.
- (e) Capture of Tangail by D plus 8.

(f) Contacting Dhaka defences by D plus 12/13.

A subsidiary thrust by FJ Sector towards Mymensingh was planned as under:- (81)

(a) 6 Bihar Group - To operate on axis Dalu Razo - Haluaghat - Phulpur - Mymensingh.

(b) 83 Bn BSF (less four companies) - To operate on axis Baghmara-Durgapur-Jariajhanjail-Mymensingh.

95 Mtn Bde Operations

Capture of Kamalpur: The capture of Kamalpur border outpost by 95 Mtn Bde was vital for its advance to Jamalpur. It has already been discussed how this BOP was attacked by the MF on several occasions before December. The post had eight concrete bunkers scattered anti-tank and anti-personnel mines on all approaches. It was manned by about one Company 31 Baluch and a platoon of Rangers and Razakars and commanded by a courageous officer, Captain Ahsan Malik, and supported by three 81 mm mortars(82). On 3 Dec, 1971 the post was under siege by 13 Guards who had blocked all its supply routes. It was subjected to artillery fire on 3 Dec, but with no effect on the concrete bunkers. It was, therefore, decided to neutralise it by air strafing, and seven sorties of air strikes were carried out on the post in three missions the following day(83). After each mission, a letter was sent to the Post Commander through a MF volunteer, advising him to surrender. Though he ignored the first note, he asked his Battalion Commander for permission to surrender after the second strike. The permission was refused, and he was promised assistance of infantry and air strikes which however, never came. The IAF air strikes caused scare and demoralised the Post Commander, who came out at 1900 hrs on 4 Dec with a white flag and surrendered with the whole garrison. In all, 146 personnel including one officer, one JCO and 60 ORs of 31 Baluch, 43 ORs of 70 Wing Rangers and 41 Razakars surrendered. A large quantity of arms and ammunitions was also captured. The bravery and tenacity of the young Pak Commander of Kamalpur was well-appreciated by the Indian Army Chief, Gen Manekshaw, who declared: "Militarily his performance was excellent", and issued instructions that he should be shown special courtesy as POW(84)

Advance to Jamalpur

After Kamalpur, the only strong Pak position on this main axis was one Company 31 Baluch plus para

military forces at Bakshiganj. Its outer defences were based on bunkers/pill boxes on the periphery of the village (800 yds x 600 yds) and the inner defences on the built-up area(85). While 1 Maratha established a firm base of three companies at Khosalpur (QE 8202), the remaining company established a block on road Bakshiganj-Sherpur. Meanwhile, 13 Raj Rif also advanced from east of Kamalpur to encircle Bakshiganj. At 0830 hrs on 4 Dec, a company of Pakistani troops tried to eliminate the Maratha road block on axis Bakshiganj-Sherpur. But Pak troops suffered 9 killed and 3 vehicles destroyed, while only one sepoy of 1 Maratha was killed in the exchange of fire. Throughout the day on 4 Dec and on night 4/5 Dec, Pak troops unsuccessfully engaged the patrolling parties of 1 Maratha and 13 Raj Rif at long ranges with medium machine guns and mortars. At last, realising that they had been surrounded, the Pak troops abandoned Bakshiganj during the same night, withdrawing to Jamalpur. The outpost was occupied by Indian troops at 0430 hrs on 5 Dec.

While inspecting the Pak defences after the capture of Kamalpur, GOC 101 CZA, Maj Gen Gill, and Brig Kler were both injured, the former seriously, when their jeep was blown up by a Pak anti-tank mine on 5 Dec. The following day, Maj Gen G.S. Nagra, GOC 2 Mtn Div, arrived from North Assam and took over the command of 101 CZA.

On 6 Dec, Brig Kler's 95 Mtn Bde resumed advance after about 24 hours. This delay in regrouping the forces probably gave the Pak troops, withdrawing from Bakshiganj, the necessary respite and time to occupy the delaying positions. 13 Raj Rif met stiff resistance in the area of the Bridge (QK 8991) at 1030 hrs on 6 Dec. However, air strikes and artillery fire proved effective and the Pak troops withdrew to area Panchar Char after blowing up the bridge. They suffered heavy casualties and left behind 13 dead bodies. A Bailey Bridge was made ready by 0600 hrs on 7 Dec. After clearing Pak forces from Road Junction (QK 9379), 13 Raj Rif secured north bank of river Brahmaputra by 1900 hrs the same day, But the river was over 1,000 feet wide, and not 450 feet, as was wrongly ascertained earlier. Hence, Nagra asked the Eastern Command for additional bridging equipment, which, however, arrived only on 15 Dec. But somehow the Indian forces moved on.

The 1 Maratha left Bakshiganj at 1300 hrs on 6 Dec. The column, moving across country on bullock cart/man-pack basis for 22 kms, reached No.4 Char at 1900 hrs the same day(86). But it had to wait till 1100 hrs on 7 Dec to cross the river as the bullock

carts carrying heavy mortars and ammunition broke down on the way and could not catch up in time. It crossed the river in local boats in area QK 8778 by first light on 8 Dec and established blocks in area (QK 9463), south of Jamalpur, without the Pakistanis detecting its presence. 13 Guards, simulating advance on Sherpur axis on 6 Dec, met opposition in area Kurua (QK 9993). While one Company firmed in at Kurua, the rest of the battalion was withdrawn to Bakshiganj from where they moved south on 7 Dec and concentrated at area No.4 Char by 1800 hrs the same day(87). After their mortars and ammunition had fetched up at 1040 hrs on 8 Dec, the Bn Gp crossed over in the same area as 1 Maratha, and concentrated at a point (QK 9867) on road Jamalpur-Mymensingh by 0600 hrs on 9 Dec.

The information received on 8 Dec from the captured PsOW and other sources indicated that the Pakistanis had approximately 1,500 men including the complete battalion of 31 Baluch with eight 120-mm mortars, six 6-Pounder Guns, two 106-mm RCL and seventy two LMGs/MMGs holding the defences at Jamalpur(88). Their main defence system was based on the river bank in the north and railway embankment in the south, allowing for the maximum use of the built-up areas strewn with very strong bunkers, and stocked with enough ammunition and rations to last for a long time.

On 8 Dec, information was received about the allotment of 167 Mtn Bde Gp ex Rangia in Assam to reinforce the strength of 101 CZA. Advance elements of 167 Mtn Bde arrived at Sherpur at 1030 hrs on 9 Dec and 6 Sikh Light Infantry arrived in the early hours of 10 Dec 71. From 8 Dec onwards, pounding of Jamalpur defences by aircraft and artillery was continued relentlessly. After concentrated doses of air strikes and artillery fire in the afternoon of 9 Dec, Brig Kler, Comdr 95 Mtn Bde, sent the following letter to Officer Commanding 31 Baluch Regiment at Jamalpur, asking him to surrender:-

"To

The Commander
Jamalpur Garrison

I am directed to inform you that your garrison has been cut from all sides and you have no escape route available to you. One brigade with full complements of artillery has already been built up and another will be arriving by the morning . In addition you have been given a foretaste of a small element of our Air Force with a lot more to come.

Jawalpur
091735 Dec.

Dear Brig.

Hope this finds you in high spirits. Thanks for the letter.

We here in Jawalpur are waiting for the fight to commence. It has not started yet. So lets not talk and start it.

40 sorties, I may point out, are inadequate. Please ask you many more.

Your remark about your massages being given proper treatment was superfluous. Shows how you underestimate my boys. I hope he liked his tea. Give my love to the Muktis.

Hoping to find you with a sten in your hand next time, instead of the pen you seem to have so much mastery over,

I am, your most
Sincerely
Comd Jawalpur Fortress

The situation as far as you are concerned, is hopeless; your higher commanders have already ditched you.

As a soldier to soldier I give you an assurance of safety and honourable treatment when you surrender, since that is the only course now left to you. I am quite sure you will not be foolhardy in risking the lives of the men under your command for your personal ego. You may have heard the appeal of our Army Chief and I once again reiterate that if you wish to be united with your families the only course open is to surrender. We will arrive at formalities as soon as I get your reply.

It may be pertinent to point out that in case you fall into the hands of Mukti Fauj or their sympathizers, they are most unlikely to spare your lives; your colleague Capt AHSAN MALIK wisely surrendered to me at KAMALPUR on 4 Dec and he and his men have been well looked after as per GENEVA Convention.

I expect your reply before 6.30 PM today failing which I will be constrained to deliver the final blow, for which purpose 40 sorties of MiGs have been allotted to me.

In this morning's action the prisoners captured by us have given us your strength and dispositions and are in a position to let you down. They are well looked after.

The treatment I expect to be given to this civil messenger shall be according to a gentlemanly code of honour and no harm should come to him.

An immediate reply is solicited.

9 Dec 71

Brig
(H S KLER)"

The Pak Commander, Lt Col Sultan, sent a fool-hardy reply, enclosing a bullet with his letter, unaware of the fact that a whole Brigade Group was sitting behind him, south of Jamalpur(89). On the morning of 10 Dec, 6 Sikh LI of 167 Mtn Bde, which was placed under the command of 95 Mtn Bde, had crossed the Brahmaputra in country craft in area Ferry (QK 8778), and concentrated in area Dagi (QK 87)-Palbari (QK 86), west and south-west of Jamalpur, by last

light. It was ready for tackling Jamalpur defence from the west along axis Diwanganj (QK 79)-Jamalpur

On 10 Dec, the Jamalpur defences were subjected to three air strikes, at 0900 hrs, 1300 hrs and 1700 hrs, after which 1 Maratha and 13 Guards attacked Pak garrison from south and south-west respectively (90). At 1730 hrs, the Pakistanis started engaging, by very heavy mortar fire, 1 Maratha position astride Tangail road covering their escape route. Then, at 0115 hrs on 11 Dec, Pak forces again brought down heavy SA fire on the forward companies of 1 Maratha LI and sent one Coy' along road. The Marathas held fire and allowed this Coy' to get into the killing area (91). When the Company came within 25 yards of the Marathas on Jamalpur-Madhupur road, the latter mowed down Pakistani troops by medium and light machine gun fire. However, about 40 Pak soldiers, who were behind a grove ten yards away, attacked the protection section of 1 Maratha. Although the section put up a brave fight and accounted for 35 Pak troops, all the men in this section were killed. Thereafter the Pak troops assaulted in waves, and the battle raged till 0500 hrs. At 0400 hrs, when the situation had become quite grave, the excellent artillery firing by 56 Mtn Regt and 852 Lt Bty helped a great deal in repulsing the Pak assault. The cool and calm manner in which 1 Maratha LI, ably commanded by Lt Col K.S. Brahmachari, conducted the defensive battle was commendable. At 0600 hrs, when the fog lifted, one JCO and 63 Pak troops were rounded up from within the defence perimeter of 1 Maratha LI. The heavy fire power used by the Pak troops could be gauged by the fact that a total of 4 Pak medium and light machine guns were recovered from the battle ground.

While 13 Guards and 6 Sikh LI were closing in on Jamalpur to relieve the pressure on the Marathas, a Pak wireless message was picked up. Lt Iftikhar was appealing: "Hello, any Indian station! This is a Pakistani station. I want to surrender" (92). Finally, Lt Iftikhar came out waving a white flag to contact the Indian Commander. The Comdr 95 Mtn Bde, accompanied by CO 1 Maratha LI, drove into Jamalpur at 0630 hrs in the jeep captured from Officer Commanding 31 Baluch, and the appeal for surrender was accepted. Pak troops suffered approximately 300 killed in the battle of Jamalpur (93). Another 379 military personnel surrendered, which included 4 Officers, 10 JCOs, 248 ORs (mainly from 31 Baluch), para-military forces and Razakars. Indian casualties on the night 10/11 Dec were 8 ORs killed and 6 wounded (including one officer) - all of 1 Maratha. A large quantity of Pak weapons and ammunition was also captured.

It was later revealed by captured prisoners that, with the pressure building up against Jamalpur, 31 Baluch had been ordered to pull out on night 10/11 Dec by Comdr 93 Pak Inf Bde, and occupy the defences near Tangail. Pak Commander's decision to fight their way out of Jamalpur that night apparently saved Indian troops many casualties as attack by Indian troops on such heavily fortified position would have proved quite costly(94). As a result of this decision, the whole 31 Baluch was either destroyed or captured, except for a party of 100 men under their Commanding Officer, Lt Col Sultan Ahmed, who had escaped on foot without any fighting equipment, and in no position to occupy any defensive position.

Para drop north of Tangail (95)

The airborne operations of 2 para in Tangail area were planned well in advance. Towards the end of November 1971, an Indian Army Officer, Captain F.K. Ghosh, was infiltrated into Tangail area through F-J Sector(96) in order to link up and establish liaison with the famed guerilla leader Kader Siddiqui, select Dropping Zones in consultation with him, make an estimate of the location and strength of Pak troops in that area, maintain wireless communication with Eastern Command HQ, to supply necessary information on these points(97). The para operation was aimed at capturing Poongli Bridge intact on road Jamalpur-Tangail-Dhaka, and the ferry site east of Poongli Bridge on river Lohajang, in order to intercept and destroy the Pak forces withdrawing from Jamalpur and Mymensingh(98). Some 750 troops of 2 Para battalion alongwith their supplies and vehicles were dropped north of Tangail by 1650 hrs on 11 Dec. Again, the following afternoon, forty paratroopers and second line ammunition were dropped in the same area(99). Although the drop was on the whole satisfactory, one stick of 1 JCO and 18 ORs got dropped about 15 miles north of the DZ, and two heavy loads consisting of 75 mm pack (How) and a jeep were dropped 4 miles south of the DZ(100)

This airborne operation was marked by an extraordinary feat of grit and determination by a young officer, 2/Lt L.G.S. Gill. The officer, who had joined 2 Para on his first posting on 21 Nov 1971, made his first para jump here in combat without any previous parachute training(101) - a sterling achievement that reflected the pride, morale and elan of the elite regiment(102).

Interestingly enough, one paratrooper, Mahadeo Curao, was "hung up" from his C-119 aircraft's tail for about 20 minutes before he was dropped with a

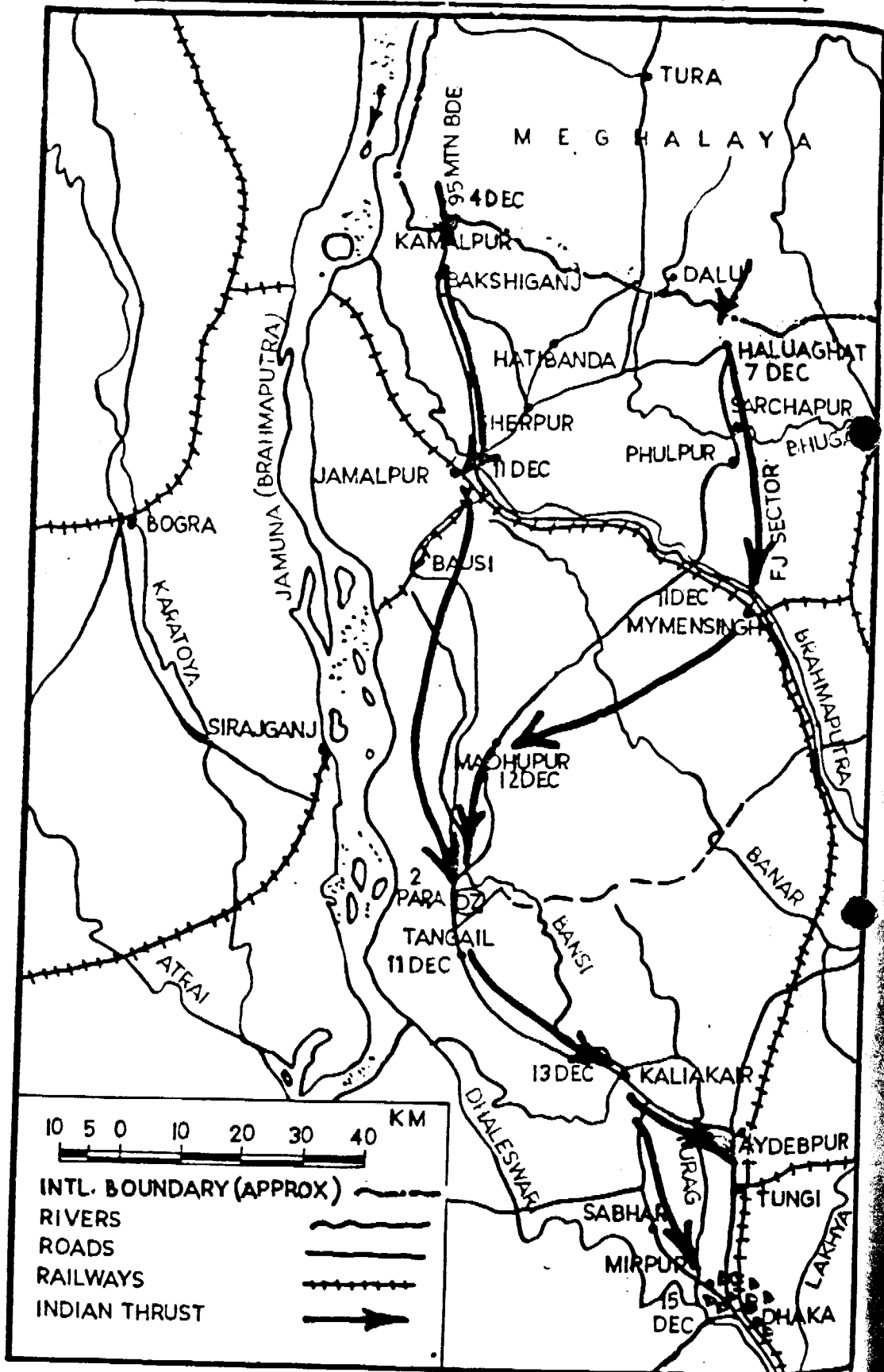
safety parachute near Sara airfield(103). He was injured during the hang-up and fired upon by Pak troops while parachuting down. But he evaded the Pakistanis, walking 10 miles with his 2" mortar and stengun. He took shelter with a local villager for three days, then joined the Mukti Bahini(104). Along with them he carried out three raids on the Razakars, and later collected his parachute and equipment after the Razakars were eliminated. His adventures ended only when he contacted HQ 165 Mtn Bde and joined his Battalion on 2 January 1972.

As a result of this dispersed paradropping, possibly due to strong winds, Kader Siddiqui could not establish contact with all the groups of paratroopers immediately, and as some of the paratroopers landed near the withdrawing Pak troops, they suffered casualties at the hands of the latter. Kader Siddiqui claims that he stopped his mortar fire against the Pak troops from 1630 hrs on 11 Dec to 0700 hrs on 12 Dec, so that the paratroopers did not suffer casualties(105).

When 2 Para Bn Gp was being dropped in the Kalihati area, about 9 km north of Tangail Brig Qadir, Comdr 93 Pak Bde, and Lt Col Sultan Ahmed, who had reached Tangail earlier, saw the air drop. "This development naturally irked Brigadier Qadir, who gallantly drew out his sten gun and emptied one magazine in the general direction of the parachute landing(106). That was his way of expressing his anger. He followed it up by ordering Major Sarwar to take his company (minus) and neutralise the enemy. Sarwar obeyed the orders, but returned within half an hour to report. "Sir, the locals say they are Chinese." But as the reality soon dawned upon him, Qadir decided to resume his withdrawal toward Kaliakair.

Coming back to the paratroopers, 2 Para Bn less D Coy attacked the Poongli Bridge and Ferry, held by approximately two regular Pak platoons and some Razakars. Both were captured by 2000 hrs on 11 Dec against minor opposition. Meanwhile, the elements of Pak 93 Inf Bde, which were withdrawing towards Tangail, attacked the Bridge to dislodge the Para Bn, but the attack was repulsed. Two more battalion-strength attacks by the Pak troops from the flanks during the night were also repulsed. Pak casualties during these attacks were 143 ORs killed and 10 ORs wounded, besides 29 others (including 2 officers) captured. Indian casualties were 3 ORs killed and another wounded. Between 0530 hrs and 1300 hrs on 12 Dec, the Pakistanis launched two more attacks with approximately 500 men consisting of regular troops and Razakars(107). As these attacks

THRUST FROM THE NORTH



were not well-coordinated, they were easily beaten back, and Pak troops suffered additional casualties of 86 ORs, 1 Sub-Inspector and 52 Razakars killed, and 10 ORs wounded, besides 11 ORs and 2 Razakars captured. The Pak troops, after suffering these heavy casualties, withdrew and dispersed to by-pass the Bridge in small groups (108). An air strike at 1245 hrs near village Elenga knocked off a few vehicles and killed some of these retreating troops. Again, Indian patrols ambushed small groups of Pak troops and inflicted casualties. Pak 93 Inf Bde ceased to exist as a fighting formation.

After the fall of Jamalpur, the advance to secure Madhupur could not be resumed till 0300 hrs on 12 Dec, because 95 Mtn Bde had to be replenished and adequate transport was not available south of the Brahmaputra. Although some Inland Water Transport (IWT) boats were put on the Brahmaputra near Dhubri for ensuring supplies to the 101 CZ force, they could not keep pace with the latter's fast advance, for fear of Pak interception. Gen Nagra has described it as an unnecessary and useless plan (109). A supply drop was arranged on the afternoon of 11 Dec to replenish 95 Mtn Bde.

Advance of F-J Sector Force

On the outbreak of war, Brig Sant Singh, MVC, Commander, F-J Sector, was asked to advance towards Mymensingh (RF 4551) on Haluaghat (RF 3793)-Phulpur (RF 3974) axis. Since he had no sufficient troops to capture Haluaghat by a frontal attack, he decided to threaten it and force the Pak troops to withdraw from there. His plan was as follows:- (110)

- (a) 6 Bihar less two companies to attack a position about 3,000 yards south of Haluaghat by infiltrating from south-east.
- (b) From further east, two companies of 6 Bihar to attack and capture Sarchapur (RF 4076).
- (c) MF/FF to encircle and isolate Pak troops stationed in the area.
- (d) Two companies of BSF to march on the axis
Baghmara (RA 7203)-Jaria (RF 7282)-Mymensingh

Accordingly, on 5 Dec, Task Force 'Pat' comprising B and C Coys of 6 Bihar, and one Coy of the Mukti Bahini left their concentration area near Gasuapara (RA 3802) and captured the Pak position at Charbangali (RF 4093), situated 3,000 yards

south-east of Haluaghat. Stiff resistance was put up by the defending Pak troops consisting of a company and a platoon, but in vain. In this attack the Pakistanis suffered 19 killed. Pak troops continued firing throughout the day on 5 Dec, but the Task Force closed with the Haluaghat defence from the east during the night. On 6 Dec, Indian troops made a vigorous attack on Haluaghat along with two air strikes and compelled the Pak troops to vacate the position on night 6/7 Dec. The Task Force then captured Haluaghat. In this action the Indians suffered 5 ORs killed and 3 ORs wounded as against heavy Pak casualties(111).

After capturing Haluaghat, Indian troops moved towards Sarchapur in the south along the Haluaghat-Sarchapur-Ghazipur (RF 3978) axis. Task Force 'Krish', consisting of A and D Coys of 6 Bihar, marine commandos with limpet mines and one Coy of FFs,(112) was ordered to intercept the withdrawing Pak troops at Phulpur (RF 4073), situated a few miles south of Sarchapur. By the evening of 7 Dec, Task Force 'Pat' came in contact with the Pak defences at Sarchapur(113). After some probing on 8 Dec, and leaving a small force on the road of the main axis, the major part of the force crossed the Bhugai river and contacted the Pak defences at Sarchapur from the eastern and western flanks. At the same time, Task Force 'Krish' threatened Phulpur. Once again, the Pak troops abandoned Sarchapur and withdrew towards Tarakanda (RF 4762), situated on river Rangsa. However, Pak troops had destroyed three bridges between Ghazipur and Phulpur. Task Force 'Pat' occupied Sarchapur in the morning of 9 Dec and linked up with Task Force 'Krish' at Phulpur the same day(114). Both the task forces, 'Pat' and 'Krish', left Phulpur and occupied Pak position at Kakni (GR 4366) and Tarakanda the following day(115). After the fall of Tarakanda, Pak troops moved towards Mymensingh after destroying two bridges between Tarakanda and Mymensingh. They also placed some mines along the track. However, seeing the Indian troops advancing towards Mymensingh on 11 Dec, they withdrew from Mymensingh also, and F-J Sector troops captured Mymensingh at 1130 hrs on the same day.

Brig Sant Singh immediately organised a Company column of 6 Bihar under his own command to pursue the retreating Pak forces. After clearing minor opposition en route, he secured Madhupur (RF 6433) road junction by 0830 hrs on 12 Dec(116). 1 Maratha leading elements of 95 Mtn Bde also reached Madhupur at 1130 hrs.

Brig Sant Singh returned with his Company to

Mymensingh, as he could not immediately move towards Dhaka without necessary regrouping and reorganisation. However, 1 Maratha continued advance south of Madhupur, and after securing Ghatail (QK 9816) at 1500 hrs, linked up with 2 Para at Poongli Bridge (QK 9417) at 1730 hrs the same day, i.e. 12 Dec. After this link-up, 95 Mtn Bde continued advance southwards and secured Tangail without any opposition. The Pak troops which had been ordered to organise defences at Tangail had either been intercepted by 2 Para at Poongli Bridge or by the Siddiqui Force. Whatever troops had got away were in no position to occupy any delaying positions as they were completely disorganised and demoralised. 95 Mtn Brigade's advance of over 56 miles in one day, without proper transport or mobile troops to spearhead it, was really praiseworthy(117).

Villagers near Tangail brought to the notice of the Indian troops the existence of an unknown landing ground near Tangail, and it was repaired with their help under the leadership of Kader Siddiqui. From 13 Dec, Indian aircraft landed there much needed supplies for 101 CZ Force and also evacuated casualties(118).

95 Mtn Bde's Advance towards Dhaka

Now 95 Mtn Bde with 1 Maratha, 6 Sikh LI and 13 Guards was ordered to capture Kaliakair (RL 2469) by last light 13 Dec. 6 Sikh LI resumed advance from Tangail at 0600 hrs on 13 Dec with two companies in vehicles, followed by the remaining companies on foot. The latter joined the battalion at 1500 hrs after having marched 20 miles. Jhamurki (RL 0374) was secured by 1500 hrs same day. The Pak troops were on the run and the battalion using outflanking tactics contacted Kaliakair at 1600 hrs. Here, Pakistani troops were holding positions based on the built-up area and bunkers astride the road. But a determined assault from the west captured the position at 2200 hrs. Pak casualties were 6 killed and 2 ORs taken prisoner, while 6 Sikh LI suffered 1 JCO and 1 OR killed and 7 ORs wounded.

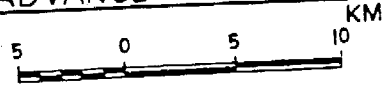
After re-organising, the advance was continued even during the night despite lack of transport and fire support. The vanguard company contacted Pak positions west of river Turag (at RL 3857), ahead of Safipur (RL 3162), at 0800 hrs on 14 Dec. It was appreciated that the Pakistanis there had approximately a Company, supported by medium machine guns. They had engaged 6 Sikh LI's leading elements by automatic and artillery fire. An engineering patrol sent to assess road ferry/bridge conditions at Dhamrai captured one Pak Major, who, on interrogation,

gave information that Comdr 93 Inf Bde, Brig Qadir, with a few more officers was hiding in a nearby jungle. A strong 6 Sikh LI patrol searched out the Pak Bde Comdr and nine other officers and took them prisoner.

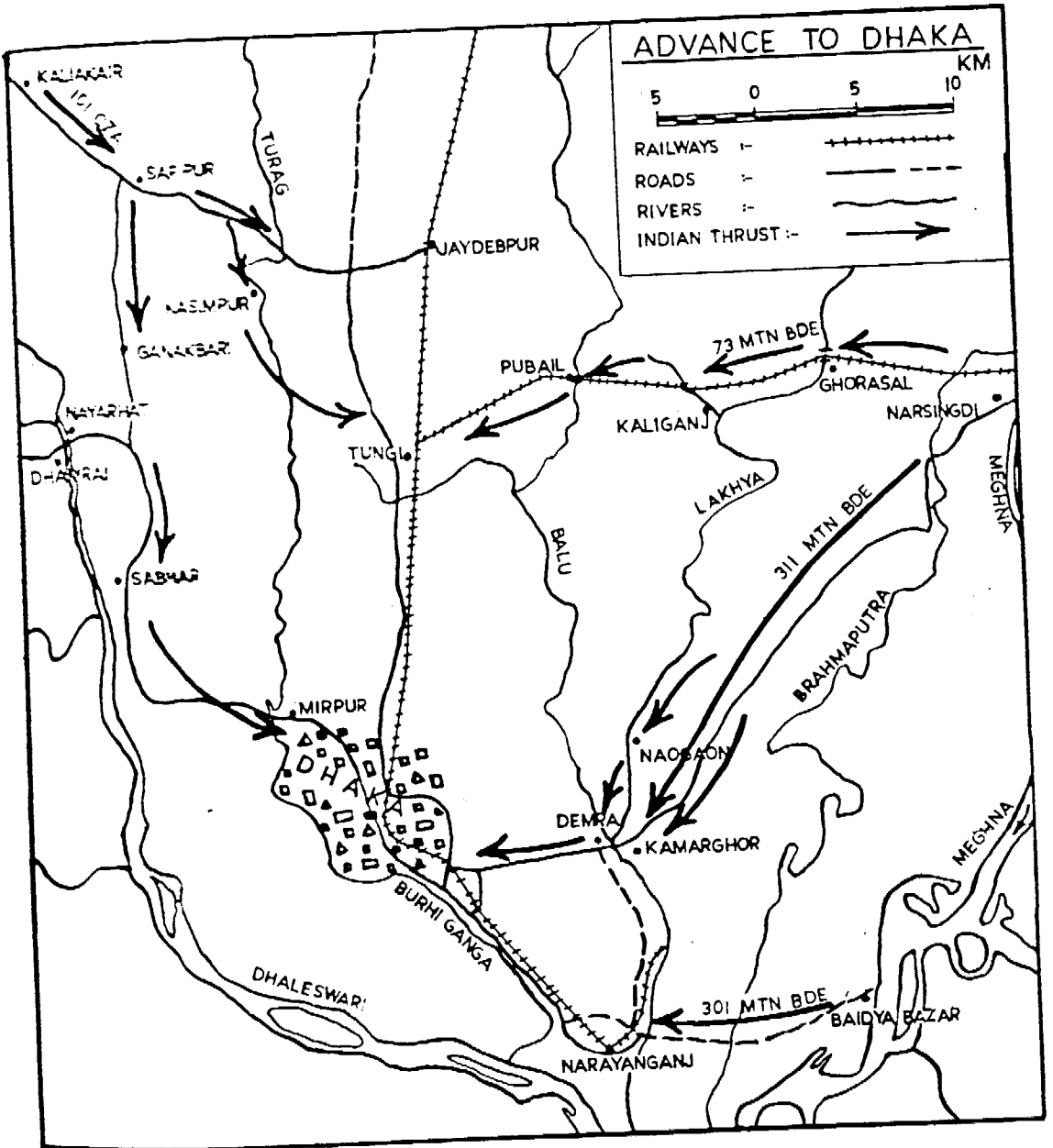
From Kaliakair two roads led to Dhaka - the main approach along the Kaliakair-Chandara (RL 2864) cross roads - Tungi (RL 4545) axis, involving the crossing of the Turag, and the second approach along Kaliakair-Dhamrai (RL 2447)-Mirpur (RL 3932) axis, involving the crossing of the Dhaleswari, east of Dhamrai, and then the Buriganga river at Mirpur. Gen Nagra decided to press on along the Tungi axis. However, the 6 Sikh LI patrol brought news that a good road, not marked on the map and not known to the Indians, a few miles west of Safipur, ran south and joined the Dhamrai-Dhaka road, east of the Dhaleswar river. This road led to the capital of Bangladesh via Sabhar (RL 2941) without any water obstacle, except at the Mirpur bridge on the periphery of Dhaka. This approach allowed the Indian troops to reach the capital without crossing the Turag or Dhaleswari.

As already stated, Pakistanis had a Company strength of troops, supported by medium machine guns, west of the Turag. They had approximately 400 men with 3 to 4 tanks east of the river with their depth positions in area of the cross-roads(119). It was clear that the Pak troops had strong, well-coordinated defensive positions on the river line and cross-roads area. The air strikes carried out on 14 Dec could not locate enemy tanks but caused some damage to his defences and vehicles. By 1300 hrs, Comdr 95 Mtn Bde had moved 1 Maratha forward and deployed it south of the road near Kashimpur Ferry (RL 3856). Knowing that the Pak force was vulnerable to out-flanking movements, one Coy each of 1 Maratha and 6 Sikh LI were sent across the Torag from north and south of the road with instructions to probe the Pak flanks and firm in east of the river, if possible. The Coys moved at 1500 hrs on 14 December but crossed the river rather too close to the road, and consequently drew accurate Pak medium machine gun and artillery fire. The Pak troops also brought up the tanks and engaged the Indian patrols, forcing them to fall back on the home bank by last light. On the morning of 15 Dec, two Companies of 6 Sikh LI were sent across the river on country crafts. Seeing these Companies making a wide-flanking move and as a result of simultaneous assault on the bridge, the Pak force got unnerved, and withdrew from the west bank, after destroying the 150-foot span of the bridge. 6 Sikh LI captured the bridge and also secured the eastern bank of the Turag by 1500 hrs on 15 Dec. 5 Pak ORs were killed against

ADVANCE TO DHAKA



- RAILWAYS - - - - -
- ROADS - - - - -
- RIVERS - - - - -
- INDIAN THRUST :- - - - - -



Indian casualties of 2 ORs killed and 3 wounded. The Indian troops could not, however, advance further as they received heavy medium machine gun and tank fire from the cross-roads where the Pakistanis were occupying strong and well-prepared defences with approximately 500 troops, supported by three tanks.

Advance by 167 Mtn Bde

Meanwhile, 167 Mtn Bde, under Brig Irani, was concentrated at Jamalpur as a reserve brigade to protect the western flank of the line of communication towards Tangail, and 13 Raj Rif was placed under its command. On 13 Dec, two companies of 13 Raj Rif cleared one platoon of Pakistanis from area Bausi (QK 840523)(120). In this action, 5 ORs of 31 Baluch, 8 Rangers and 5 Razakars were killed, and one OR and one Razakar captured, as against minor casualties suffered by the Indians. The same day, 13 Raj Rif brushed aside Pakistani opposition at Dayalpur (QK 8038), and captured a huge dump of rations alongwith some arms and equipment. Next day, they cleared Jagannathganj Ghat (QK 7735) after a fight, in which 18 Pak troops were killed, and 8 Razakars, 22 Mujahids, 61 Police and Rangers, along with some arms and a huge dump of rations were captured. On 15 Dec, after building up at Tangail, 167 Mtn Bde was ordered to resume advance and contact the north bank of the Tungi river (RL 4644). 13 Raj Rif was taken out of its command at this stage. As a Pak Battalion less two companies, supported by tanks and artillery, were occupying well-prepared, strong defences in area Road Junction RL 4256, between Joydebpur and Tungi, the brigade was ordered to clear this Pak opposition. On 15 Dec, 10 JAK Rif, with 852 Light Battery in direct support, established a road block behind the Pakistani position, observing a very strict fire control in order to maintain secrecy. 7 Bihar arrived there in the early morning on 16 Dec to reinforce the road block and deal with any Pak threat coming from Tungi.

At 0400 hrs on 16 Dec, when a Pak ammunition convoy of 9 vehicles was moving south from Joydebpur (RL 4858) towards Dhaka, it was ambushed and liquidated. Sixteen Pak personnel were killed and 3 captured, while the ammunition in the vehicles kept on exploding for over two hours. Later, a column of Pakistani troops in 20 TCVs, led by two tanks, was seen moving from Joydebpur in the north. When this was ambushed by the Indian troops, the Pakistani infantry in the vehicles dismounted and manoeuvred to occupy cover, and the two tanks brought down accurate fire on the Indian positions. An Indian MMG detachment was hit by the tank fire and one of its members was killed and two were injured. While the

Indian gunners were being replaced, the Pak tanks attempted to break through the Indian position. However, 7 Bihar succeeded in destroying one tank, and the other also had to be abandoned by the Pakistanis. The Pak infantry elements trying to close in on the Indian defences were engaged by small arms, mortars and artillery. The battle raged for two hours. By 1600 hrs the Pak troops began surrendering. In this action, the Pakistanis suffered casualties of 93 killed, 20 wounded, and 312 taken prisoner(121). A large quantity of arms and equipment was also captured. This was the last action fought by Gen Nagra's troops, leading to the first entry of Indian troops into Dhaka.

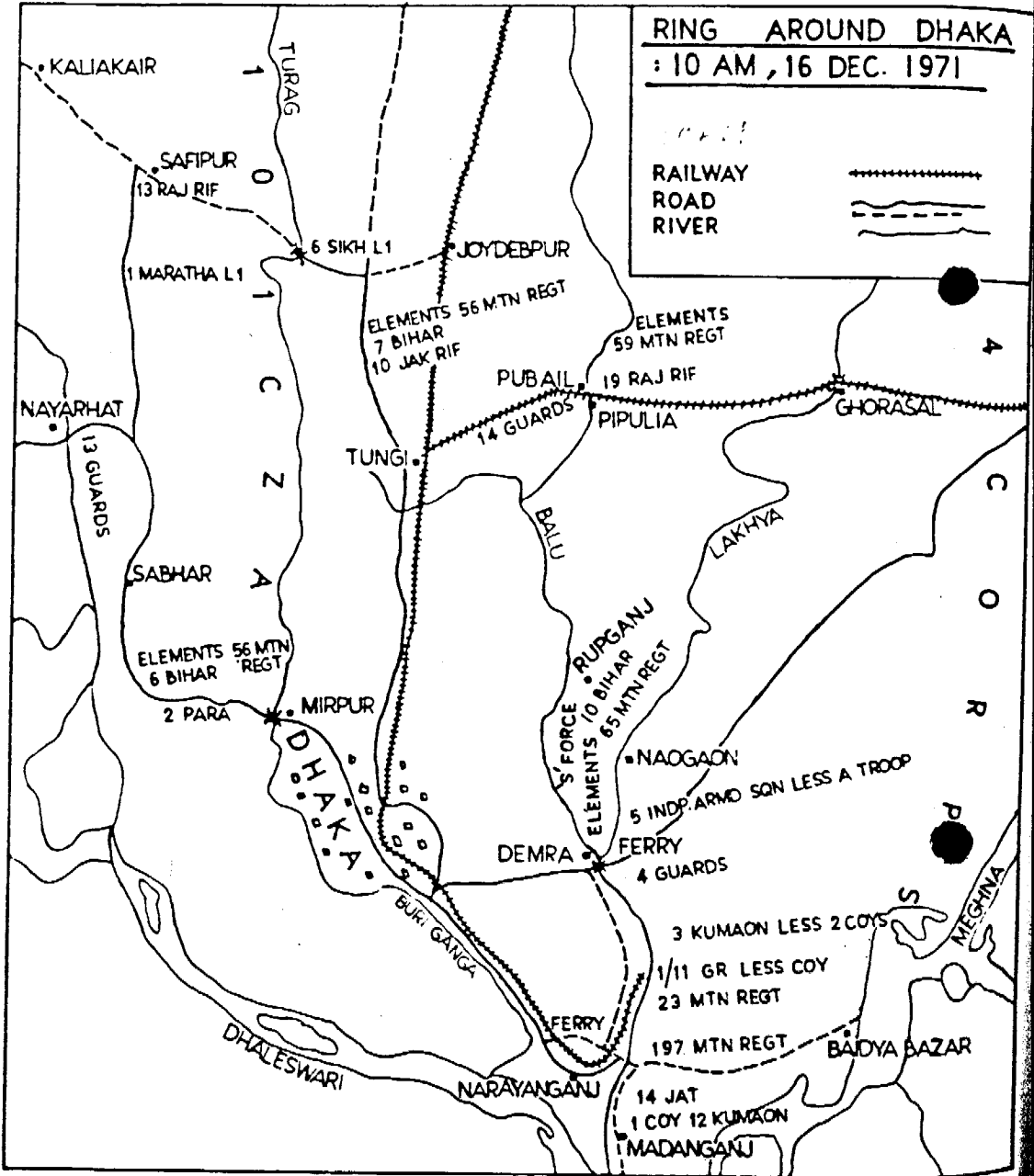
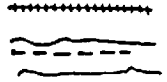
Further Advance by F-J Sector Force towards Dhaka:

Leaving one company of 13 Guards at Nayarhat (RL 2547) to cover the ferry site, the remaining forces on 15 Dec moved towards Sabhar (RL 2941). By 0400 hrs on 15 Dec(122), High Powered Transmitting Station and Military Farm at Sabhar were captured by the advancing forces. At 1100 hrs, the leading company of 13 Guards closed in on the Pak troops at Sabhar. Although the Indian Bde Comdr did not have sufficient troops with him, he took the risk of attacking the Pak positions from the rear with only one Coy. After making a very wide out-flanking move, one Coy assaulted the Pak position from the rear at 1630 hrs, while the leading Coy firmed in within 400 yards of the Pakistani Forward Defended Localities. The Pak troops stuck to their positions till the assaulting Indians closed in to 200 yards, before melting away under the cover of darkness, leaving behind 18 killed and 20 wounded. In this action, Indian troops suffered casualties of 9 killed and 14 wounded. At this place, 13 Guards captured 54 rifles, one Rocket Launcher, 6 LMGs and a large quantity of ammunition(123).

Observing the satisfactory progress of the F-J Sector Force, Gen Nagra allotted 2 Para to Brig Sant Singh for advancing further and capturing Mirpur Bridge (RL 3832) at night on 15 Dec. As there was the possibility of Pak tanks opposing the Indian advance near the Mirpur Bridge, Gen Nagra ordered the four 106-mm RCLs of 2 Para to move upto Safipur (RL 3162) and also brought the MMG-mounted jeeps from 95 Mtn Bde to Sabhar for advance towards Mirpur at night. He specially emphasised the need for a speedy advance and the subsequent digging down on the west bank of the Buriganga before the first light. At 2200 hrs on 15 Dec, 2 Para moved from Sabhar to capture Mirpur Bridge, situated just on the out-skirts of Dhaka city (RL 4523). On their way, they cleared two Pak delaying positions and contacted the Pak position near

RING AROUND DHAKA
: 10 AM, 16 DEC. 1971

RAILWAY
 ROAD
 RIVER



the western end of the Bridge at 0200 hrs on 16 Dec. After brisk fighting the Indian troops secured the western end of the Bridge at 0300 hrs and the Pak troops withdrew to the eastern side of the Bridge. Indian Commando troops with MMG-mounted jeeps rushed the bridge to capture it intact, but they had to withdraw to the western end of the bridge after suffering casualties. However, 2 Para firmed in at the western end of the bridge and dominated the entire bridge, not allowing the Pak troops to demolish it. During the assault on the bridge, Pak casualties were 26 ORs killed and 15 ORs wounded, whereas Indians suffered 4 ORs killed, and one Officer and one OR wounded. Besides, three Pak vehicles, two 2" mortars and three MMGs were destroyed(124).

At noon on 15 Dec, 101 CZA Force was placed under command HQ 4 Corps. The two formations had closed in on Dhaka from different directions, and local coordination had become imperative.

By the morning of 16 Dec, therefore, troops of 101 CZA were threatening Dhaka from the north and the west. They had reached a point near Tungi, about 20 kilometres from Dhaka, had crossed the Turag river in similar proximity, and were at the Mirpur Bridge in the western suburbs of Dhaka itself.

Assessment

Like 4 Corps, the 101 CZA Force also had achieved more than what was firmly planned or expected of it. Although it was opposed only by the ad hoc 93 Inf Bde of Pakistan comprising only two regular battalions and about 5000 para military forces with a battery of 120 mm mortars and no field guns, it should be borne in mind that Gen Nagra's force was the weakest of the Eastern Command thrusts. Nagra had started off with only one Mtn Bde and an ad hoc Bde (F-J Sector) having only one Battalion of regular troops and no guns. Another Mtn Bde came to him later. Apart from the fact that there were no major Pak forces between the 93 Inf Bde in Mymensingh-Jamalpur area and the outer defences of Dhaka, Nagra's rapid advance was greatly helped by the para drop at Tangail which caught the Pak 93 Inf Bde on the move and almost destroyed it. Maj Gen Jamshed's order to it to withdraw to Dhaka for its defence proved disastrous for the Brigade. While other Pak Commanders ignored such orders, Brig Qadir obeyed. As a result, only 900 bedraggled men reached Dhaka. An eye witness reported: "I saw them arriving; they were unshaven, unwashed and even bootless. Their faces were starved, eyes sleepless and ankles swollen. They needed at least twenty-four hours to be able to

participate in the defence of the provincial capital"(125).

The press reports that a whole Brigade had been para-dropped further helped Nagra by striking fear in the hearts of the Pak garrisons and dislocated Gen Niazi psychologically. Again, the 101 CZA thrust had the unique advantage of support by the formidable guerilla army of Kader Siddiqui(126) which had already liberated a large area around Tangail and upto only 30 miles north of Dhaka.

The operations reflected great credit on Maj Gen Gandharva Nagra, who had taken over the force in the middle of the operations and was not known to his officers or men. His Brigade Commanders, Brig Sant Singh, Brig Kler and Brig Irani proved extremely competent. Sant Singh, with MVC and Bar, had become infact as legendary figure in the area and was affectionately called 'Baba' by the guerillas and the Mukti Bahini, who were ready to follow him to hell and beyond. And yet he remained simple, modest and god-fearing, with none of the inflated ego found all too often in successful commanders. With such officers and men, the 101 CZA Force could never fail. It is only fair to add, however, that the 101 CZA had only eight battalions of regular troops,(127) and no armour or heavy guns, and so was hardly equal to the task of investing and assaulting Dhaka if that became necessary. Only 4 Corps had the size and the weight to do that.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. From Official Records.
2. Maj Gen Riza, S., pp.310 and 314
3. Salik, S., pp.167 and 169. The name Brig Asghar Hussain, as given in Official Records, appears to be incorrect.
4. Maj Gen Riza, S., p.317.
5. From Official Records.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. According to a senior officer who participated in the operations, the fear of a Pakistani attack on Agartala was prominently in the minds of the planners of 4 Corps operations. This fear was re-inforced when in one of the border skirmishes some Pak troops and razakars crossed the border near Agartala and destroyed an important bridge. The officer also testified that on or about 3 November 1971, 4 Corps plans were discussed in detail at a war game attended by Gen Aurora at HQ 4 Corps. The strategy of by--passing Pak strong points had not evolved till then, and the war game discussed things like a deliberate attack to reduce Lalmai heights. 4 Corps was to advance only upto river Meghna . - From Official Records.
9. Ibid., pp.17-18.
10. From Official Records.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
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.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Singh, L., p,213.
34. From Official Records.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. However, according to another source, 61 Mtn Bde secured this airfield. From Official Records.
54. From Official Records.
55. Singh, L., p.214.
56. From Official Records.
57. Ibid.
58. Singh, L., p.215.
59. Sodhi, pp.235-237.
60. Ibid., p.238.
61. From Official Records.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. When interviewed, Col. W.H. Grant (Retd) Col. (G.S.) 57 Mtn Div in 1971, stated that the forward posture of Pakistan's 27 Inf Bde east of the Ashuganj Bridge helped the Indian attack considerably.
65. From Official Records.
66. Ibid.
67. His chopper was hit by ground fire, but the bullets just missed him.
68. From Official Records.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. This has been wrongly spelt as Kaluaghat in the Official Record.
75. From Official Records.
76. Salik, S., p.181.
77. From Official Records.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Mankekar, D.R., p.57.

85. From Official Records.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Salik, S., p.188. Original letter reproduced opposite. p.577.
90. From Official Records.
91. Ibid.
92. Mankekar, D.R., p.63.
93. From Official Records.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Siddiqui, K., Vol.II, pp.224 and 228-229.
98. From Official Records.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid.
102. He thus upheld a glorious tradition set by his illustrious predecessor and namesake, Lt Gen IS Gill, PVSM, MC (Retd), who during the Second World War, had executed his maiden jump into the combat area.
103. Ibid.
104. Singh, L., p.149. Also From Official Records.
105. Kader, Vol.II, pp.251-252.
106. Salik, S., p.190.
107. From Official Records.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. Ibid.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid.
124. Ibid.
125. Salik, S., p.192; Khan, F.M., p.186.
126. From Official Records.
127. Namely, 2 Para, 13 Guards, 1 MLI, 13 Raj Rif, 6 Bihar, 7 Bihar, 6 Sikh LI and 10 JAK Rif.

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