

AUDACIOUS



Three brave men across three theatres of operation, bound together by their audacity and good fortune. Each of them survived to personally play a significant role in ensuring ultimate victory for the country, providing decisive leadership at critical junctures. It was as if fortune was actually watching over them, indulgently placing a protective hand to keep them from harm's way, knowing their sheer audacity would prevent them from looking out for themselves.

The correlation between ability to toil and corresponding returns in terms of better fortune was aptly put by Hollywood producer Samuel Goldwyn when he said, "The harder I work, the luckier I get". In the case of soldiers this concept is better epitomised in the adage "Fortune favours the brave". Reading the exploits of some of the heroes of the 1965 Indo-Pak War, I came to a conclusion that while there is a lot of wisdom in these words, there is room for slight modification. In a battlefield with bullets flying thick and fast, shrapnel from a hundred projectiles seeking their unfortunate prey to kill or maim, difference between finding the bullet with your name on it and giving it a skip is often a matter of chance and probability. But to actually cheat the projectile even after it has been delivered to the correct address can be attributed to nothing but pure luck. Bravery in war is so commonplace that lady luck is probably too hard pressed to serve every instance. But there are some notable instances during that war when she did manage to reach on time.

Major (Later Lt Gen) Ranjit Singh Dayal, became a household name after leading 1 Para attacks on successive enemy held features over three days, ultimately capturing the vital Hajipir Pass. Beginning on 25 August 1965, this was the first large-scale foray by Indian Forces across the Ceasefire Line (CFL) at a time when war had not been formally declared. Pakistani infiltrators had been coming across in large numbers, supported and augmented by their regular troops, in a repeat of the tribal invasion of 1947. The

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capture of Hajipir Bulge including the pass of the same name was meant to strike at the infiltration bases and send a strong message to deter Pakistan.

Victor Of Hajipir Pass

Major Dayal led the action from the front all along the way. He lost many men during those fateful days, but remained unscathed himself despite tantalisingly tempting fate several times. It was after the most critical battle was over and Hajipir Pass captured that the bullet with his name finally traced him. The Paras were in the process of consolidating their hold over the pass by occupying heights around it when Maj Dayal was hit by a burst from an enemy automatic weapon. It hit the housing of his sten gun and pierced through his Denison Smock (the iconic loose coverall jacket worn by paratroopers) without wounding him. He was subsequently awarded the *Maha Vir Chakra*, lived to serve his country for another 49 years, retired as an Army Commander and subsequently served as a Lt Governor of Puducherry and the Andamans.

Pak Counter-attack In Chamb

As a reaction to the loss of Hajipir, Pakistan upped the ante, launching a full scale attack into the adjoining Chamb Sector. On 1st September 1965, two Pakistani armoured regiments crossed the CFL and the International Boundary (the junction of the two lies in this sector) with almost a division worth of Infantry following in their wake. Pakistani plan was simple but daring – to head for Akhnoor and capture the solitary bridge on Chenab River there. They could then reinforce this success by capturing Jammu and cutting off Indian access to Kashmir completely. Preponderance of armour in composition of this force meant that the Indian Infantry Brigade deployed ahead of Chenab could be bypassed or overwhelmed with impunity. The only Indian elements that could pose any deterrence to Pakistani tanks were one squadron of light tanks and the few anti-tank weapons of the infantry battalions. Besides, of course, the indomitable spirit and courage of Indian troops manning these.

Major Bhaskar Roy was commanding the squadron of 20th Lancers located in the sector, equipped with French AMX-13 tanks. The 13 tonne light tanks, favoured for that sector since they were the only ones which could be taken across the Akhnoor Bridge, were no match for the 40 tonne *Pattons* which had a bigger gun, longer range and much thicker armour. Yet, undeterred by the overwhelming odds, Maj Roy and his squadron fought a valiant battle to halt the tide of enemy armour for as long as they could. Maj Roy, mounted on his tank, was in the thick of the very first engagement with enemy *Pattons* near the border village of Burejal. The shorter ranged AMXs

had waited, hidden in turret down positions, allowing the larger *Pattons* to come nearer. As they came within range, Maj Roy ordered his tank gunner to open fire on a selected tank target and the other tanks followed suit.

Saved By Cigarette Case

An intense tank vs tank battle ensued, with both sides taking several direct hits. The doughty crew in lighter tanks gave as good as they got, notching up several *Patton* kills and denting the cocky self-confidence of their adversaries. During this battle Maj Roy's tank took a hit and a piece of shrapnel came whizzing and struck him on his chest. The impact was hard and would have been fatal, but for the silver cigarette case in his chest pocket. It was a present from his father and Maj Roy generally carried it on his person – that day it saved his life; possibly one of the few occasions when the habit of smoking was responsible for doing so to someone. His gunner wasn't as lucky and succumbed to another splinter. The battle continued for better part of the rest of the day, with the AMXs falling back to successive positions to contest enemy, delaying their advance.

Though the enemy tanks did ultimately succeed in advancing substantially, but the actions of this solitary squadron led by the audacious and lucky squadron commander ensured that they didn't have the free run-up to Akhnoor that they were hoping for. The delay gave time for Indian forces to build-up across the river and reinforce their positions, preventing the execution of the Pakistani plan. Maj Roy fought out the rest of the war without any major incident and was awarded the *Maha Vir Chakra* for his role in stopping the Pakistani advance. He died three years later in an unfortunate road accident.

Frittered Opportunity

The Indian Government considered the violation of International Boundary in Chamb Sector by Pakistan as an act of war and gave the Army the go ahead to take necessary actions accordingly. The Army's plans in such a contingency were to launch offensives into Pakistani Punjab, threatening Lahore and Sialkot, forcing them to withdraw their armour and artillery from Chamb to protect these vital



Lt Col Rohit Agarwal (Retd)

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towns. This was put into action on 6th September and as part of this offensive 3 Jat under Lt Col (later Brig) Desmond E Hayde was tasked to capture a Pakistani village called Dograi. The village lay on the Grand Trunk Road between Amritsar and Lahore. Over the next 17 days, 3 Jat fought some of the fiercest battles of the war, capturing Dograi not once but twice. The first time was on 6th September itself, when the Indian offensive caught the Pakistanis ill-prepared and the Jats brushed aside minor opposition, rushing headlong and capturing their objective within 8 hours of crossing the International Boundary. Due to a series of unfortunate miscommunications or lack of adequate communications, they were ordered to fall back closer to the International Boundary, frittering away the territorial gains.

The Jat's next tryst with Dograi was on 21st September, when they attacked and captured it yet again. This time around it was a much tougher nut to crack, since it had been reinforced by an adequately warned and well-protected enemy. But Col Hayde led his battalion to the capture of Dograi for the second time, just before the war came to an end with the ceasefire being declared on 23rd September.

Brushes With Death

During both the battles for Dograi and in the actions during the intervening period, Col Hayde continued to have the uncanny knack of being wherever the fighting was thickest. His utter disregard for personal safety led the Jat troops to label him as a *Bawla* (Mad) CO. Fate did take up the temptations he offered on several occasions and he had a couple of narrow brushes with death. The first two were on 6th September, the very first day of operations, when he suddenly came face to face with the enemy and his own carbine failed to fire. But Lance Naik Kunwar Lal, Col Hayde's orderly, disposed the enemy soldier off with a well-aimed shot

before he could fire at the CO. A little later Col Hayde narrowly missed being shot down by enemy aircraft which strafed their position, though his second in command, Maj Marwah, wasn't as lucky.

The next incident took place on 8th September, after the battalion had fallen back from Dograi and taken up position on the Upper Bari Doab Canal halfway between the border and Dograi. They had dug shallow trenches and the CO was sitting on the edge of one such trench when their position came under attack by enemy tanks. One tank shell landed very close to where he was sitting, killing Lt KP Singh, the Intelligence Officer, instantly. A shrapnel struck Col Hayde in the small of the back too and would have been fatal but for the fact that it hit his water bottle, causing a minor injury in his back instead of cutting through his spine. His lucky run didn't end there. The impact knocked him into the trench and moments later another shell landed precisely where he had been sitting. Two such narrow escapes within a span of a couple of minutes do show that Col Hayde's luck must have been working overtime. He survived, to lead the battalion to glorious victory at Dograi and was also awarded the *Maha Vir Chakra*, retiring as a Brigadier years later.

Three brave men across three theatres of operation, bound together by their audacity and good fortune. Each of them survived to personally play a significant role in ensuring ultimate victory for the country, providing decisive leadership at critical junctures. It was as if fortune was actually watching over them, indulgently placing a protective hand to keep them from harm's way, knowing their sheer audacity would prevent them from looking out for themselves. So, while there were many brave men in that war, not all of them were similarly favoured by fortune. I therefore like to believe that fortune may not always favour the brave, but it does do its bit for the audacious. **DSA**