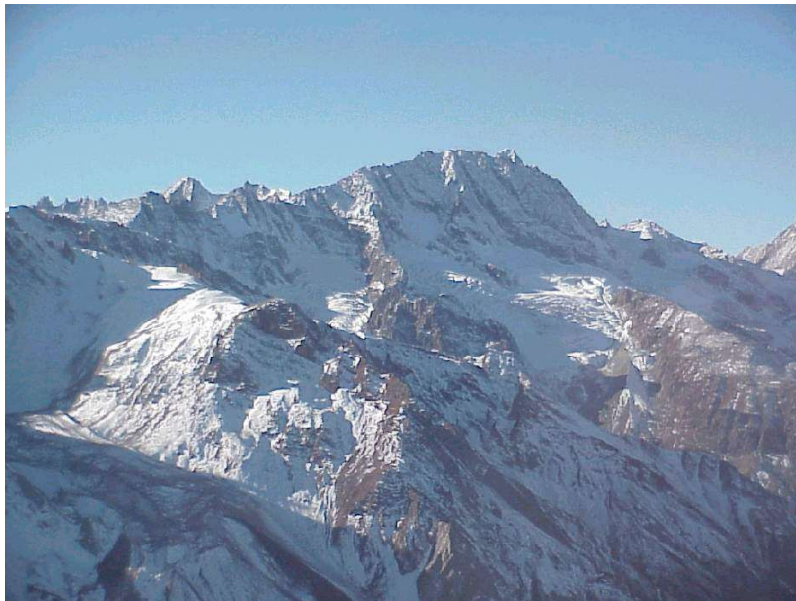




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## GLORIOUS AND UNPARALLELED HIMALAYAN VICTORY OF THE INDIAN ARMY IN KARGIL<sup>1</sup>

Kargil was a small town with a mix of huts, mud and stone houses on the National Highway from Srinagar to Leh in the Himalayas until the war broke out in the summer months of 1999. The town of Kargil is located 205 km from Srinagar, facing the Northern Areas across the LC. The resultant focus on it brought it out into prominence and has turned it into an internationally known township now.



*View of a snow-covered mountain from Kargil*

Photo by: Col SC Tyagi

By 1999, the Pakistan sponsored proxy war in Kashmir was successfully getting contained by the Indian Army. Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then Prime Minister of India, had recently successfully concluded his inaugural Lahore Bus Yatra during which he was received by

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: The views in this article are that of the author alone. The Ministry of Defence and Gallantry Awards Portal do not certify the veracity of information and are not responsible for any errors, factual or otherwise, in the article. The content is in no way promoting or branding any individual or organization.



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PM Nawaz Sharif at Wagah border for Lahore Summit. Unfortunately, Sharif had no clue what was happening right under his nose and what his Generals were up to.

Gradual return of normalcy in Kashmir was troubling the Pakistani military establishment and they perceived that the Kashmir cause was getting diluted. Therefore, the Pakistani Army conceived a plan to occupy peak after peak to dominate and reach up to the National Highway 1A. To ensure deniability the intruders wore *salwar kameez*, a dress which terrorists wear. Unfortunately for us, it was not detected before they got well entrenched in the bunkers; fully armed and stacked up with ammunition and ready to fire.

It was a shepherd who noticed the presence of some intruders in the area of Batalik on our side of the LC. A flurry of activities began to dislodge the intrusion, but it turned out that intruders were occupying several peaks on a stretch of 170 Km along the LC right from Kargil to Turtok. Initially, the Indian Army suffered a large number of casualties before finally prevailing upon them and recapturing them and restoring the LC on the entire front in the Himalayan landscape.

Kargil was the fourth round of war between India and Pakistan not counting the ongoing proxy war. Beginning in the month of May, it lasted the entire summer months of the year 1999 until 26th July when a ceasefire was declared. It was a manifestation of continuing India-Pakistan hostility over Kashmir. The Kargil misadventure by Pakistan was planned by a group of senior military officers under the tutelage of Army Chief Musharraf.

The military planners in Pakistan had visualized that occupation of un-held peaks in Kargil would choke up the defences in Ladakh in general and Siachen in particular. They, thus, planned to cut off the National Highway from Srinagar to Leh via Kargil. The courage and spirit of Indian soldiers in fighting against all odds came in to the rescue. Pakistan Army lost the gamble and paid a heavy price and suffered heavy casualties. The Indian Army supported by the Indian Air Force, recaptured a majority of the positions on the Indian side of the LC. Facing international diplomatic opposition, Pakistani forces withdrew from the remaining Indian positions along the LC.



*Victorious Indian troops at Point 4875*

Photo by: Col SC Tyagi



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The tide turned against Pakistan, when 2 RAJ RIF captured Tololing peak by mid-June. It was one of the toughest and fiercest battles ever fought on the icy heights of Himalayas. Indian troops had to launch attack upwards in the high altitudes covered with snow. The first success came with very heavy casualties to the own troops but it did not deter them to keep on fighting without a pause. All the efforts were focused on this ridgeline overlooking the National Highway near Dras to clear of the enemy first before shifting to the other areas like Batalik and Yaldor. Artillery guns were pooled in and were, for the first time in the military history, used in the direct shooting role very successfully. The Air Force pounded the hideouts on the peaks. A series of successes were the result and the Indian Army captured all the Pakistani occupied posts along the entire ridgeline in Dras right up to the LC.



*2 RAJ RIF soldiers resting after the capture of Tololing*

Photo by: Col SC Tyagi

Tiger Hill was surrounded from all the directions but it was only attacked after the focus once again shifted back from the other areas. History was once again written; Captain Sachin Annarao Nimbalkar and Lieutenant Balwan Singh captured part of Tiger Hill peak in a surprise attack using ropes behind the enemy defences to climb up a near vertical face of the mountain. Pakistan Army tried to take the post back by launching several counter attacks but failed miserably.

Similar attacks were launched in the area of Batalik, Yaldor and Chorbatla and the Pakistani troops were driven back from all the posts occupied by them after suffering heavy casualties. The Indian Army, supported by the Indian Air Force, had recaptured a majority of the positions on the Indian side of the LC. Facing international diplomatic opposition, Pakistani forces withdrew from the remaining Indian positions along the LC. A final ceasefire was announced on July 26 July 1999. Tri-color flew atop all the posts along the LC once again.



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In a candid admission, Mr Nawaz Sharif had admitted over 4000 casualties as against Indian losses totalling to 527 dead and 1363 wounded. It is said that “Soldiers do not die in the battlefield but become immortal. They die the day nation forgets them”. We celebrate Kargil Vijay Diwas on 26th July every year with this spirit and it reminds us of the courage, extreme valour and brave actions of our soldiers.

There were a number of soldiers who laid down their lives like Captain Vikram Batra, popularly known as Shershah whose victory signal was “Dil Maange More”, Lieutenant Manoj Kumar Pandey, Major Rajesh Singh Adhikari, Major Padmapani Acharya, Major Vivek Gupta , Captain Saurabh Kalia, Captain Anuj Nayyar, Lieutenant Keishing Clifford Nongrum, Lieutenant Vijayant Thapar, Captain Neikezhakuo Kenguruse, Subedar Randhir Singh, Havildar Tsewang Rigzin, and many more such brave hearts remain the shining example of brave Indian soldiers and their names evoke a reverential response and continue to inspire future generations.

Pakistan visualized occupation of un-held peaks in Kargil would choke Indian defences in Ladakh in general and Siachen in particular and therefore planned to cut off the National Highway from Srinagar to Leh via Kargil. Armed conflict fought between India and Pakistan from May to July 1999, is known as Operation Vijay. The war was fought in extreme high-altitude areas of the Himalayas and in adverse weather conditions. Initially, the Indian Army suffered a number of casualties before prevailing upon the Pakistani intruders and recapturing the areas and restoring the LC on the entire front.

Names like Tololing, Tiger Hill, Batalik and Chorbitla have come to be known all across the country. The courage and spirit of Indian soldiers while fighting against all odds stands out as a shining chapter in the Indian military history.

#### **About the Author:**

**Col SC Tyagi**, an Infantry Officer, is a veteran of IPKF in Sri Lanka and Kargil war. He raised a Corps Battle School in Kashmir prior to volunteering for Kargil. He prepared the first-hand official account of Kargil war for HQ 15 Corps in August 1999 immediately on return from Kargil and has authored several books thereafter. His latest book is “*The Kargil Victory: Battles from Peak to Peak*” which is based on his personal experiences during the Kargil War. His next book on Kargil is due shortly. His articles are published in various newspapers, magazines and journals regularly. He can be reached at [tyagisc14@gmail.com](mailto:tyagisc14@gmail.com)

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## MEMORIES FROM KARGIL 1999

Photo by: Col SC Tyagi



*Ladakh Scouts at Muntho Dhalo Peaks*



*Brig Devinder Singh Pakistani PoW*



*Artillery ready for action*



*Bofors in action*



*18 Grenadiers after the capture of Tiger Hill*



*The victorious troops with General VP Malik*