

The Battle of Badgam

Background

The invasion of Kashmir valley by the tribals from Pakistan led to the first major war between two newly independent countries- India and Pakistan in 1947-48. The tribal invasion backed by the regular Pakistan Army under the code name of Operation Gulmarg was designed to achieve few major objectives:

- Delink the Northern territories by force depicting the raiders as locals under the garb of a popular uprising against the Maharaja, Sri Hari Singh.
- Enter the Kashmir Valley with a mixed grouping of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) tribals, bolstered by Pakistani soldiers 'on leave', masquerading as tribesmen, thus drawing out the small state forces to garrison the borders in penny packets to begin with.
- Back the Tribal Lashkars (formations), equip them with mortars and machine guns, and assist them in liberating their 'kinsmen', with a regular army formation following up to restore normalcy, and coerce the Maharaja into acceding the state to Pakistan. ¹



Raiders armed with axes; swords & guns backed by Pakistan Army attacked Jammu & Kashmir.

Source: <https://twitter.com/adgpi/status/1319104160675999745/photo/3>

¹ Major Operations, Kashmir, Indian Army, Government of India
<https://indianarmy.nic.in/Site/FormTemplate/firmTempSimple.aspx?MnId=wHif2mYGfCVlrMMMyCy+RSA==&ParentID=2Qexs1talLc+hahihFvhlQ==>

The broad thrust of the operational plan was for six Lashkars to advance along the main road from Muzaffarabad to Srinagar via Domel, Uri and Baramula, with the specific task of capturing the aerodrome and subsequently advancing to the Banihal Pass. Two Lashkars were to advance from the Haji Pir Pass direct on to Gulmarg, thereby securing the right flank of the main force advancing from Muzaffarabad. A similar force of two Lashkars was to advance from Tithwal through the Nastachhun Pass (now known as Sadhna Pass or Sadna Top) for capturing Sopore, Handwara and Bandipur. Another force of 10 Lashkars was to operate in the Punch, Bhimbar and Rawalkot area with the intention of capturing Punch and Rajauri and then advancing to Jammu.²

India's Response

Before accession to India, the military set up of the State Force in Jammu and Kashmir comprised of an Army HQ at Srinagar and four brigades. The Army HQ was headed by Brigadier Rajendra Singh, Chief of Staff of the J&K State Force. The four brigades were the Jammu Brigade, the Kashmir Brigade, the Mirpur Brigade and the Punch Brigade. These four brigades, between them had only eight infantry battalions.³

On 22 October, 1947 the main column of the raiders crossed the border and attacked Muzaffarabad, followed by an attack on Domel. On the same day, Domel was captured. On 23 October, 1947 the intruders in large numbers entered Uri. The first clash with the enemy took place on the morning of 23rd October, when the column was half a mile short of Garhi. After an intense fight, Brigadier Rajinder Singh kept his forces withdrawing first to Hattian, 4 kilometers further back, then to Mahura, and finally the state force rushed past Baramulla to take up a position between Baramulla and Pattan⁴. The force was running short of ammunition and it feared encirclement. Despite all the shortcomings, State Force under the command of Brigadier Rajendra Singh, Chief of Staff held on their defensive position and withstood the attacks in Uri from 23rd October 1947 to 26th October 1947. They gallantly forced back waves of enemy attack and stood until the last bullet.⁵ Brigadier Rajendra Singh lost his life during the battle and was decorated with Maha Vir Chakra posthumously. The raiders entered Baramula, only 50 Kms away from Srinagar on the night of 26 October 1947.

By the time the Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession with India and asked for Indian military assistance, the invaders had by then reached Badgam, close to Srinagar.

The first batch of Indian troops landed at Srinagar on 27th October, 1947. In Phase I, 1 SIKH landed at Srinagar airfield and secured it. It established a blocking position East of Baramulla, which had to be pulled nearer to Srinagar once the tribals began to outflank it. The situation

² S.N. Prasad, Dharm Pal, Operations in Jammu & Kashmir 1947-48, History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India P. 18-19.

³ Partition and Indo Pak War 1947-48, The Indian Army, Government of India, <https://indianarmy.nic.in/Site/FormTemplate/firmTempSimple.aspx?MnId=nBI530uuw6o8TtBHK52a0A==&ParentID=JaH47ZEoulbGlegh3kqjg==&flag=8CKP966uzg96kLov0aWdfQ==>

⁴ Rajinder Singh's Last Battle, Major (Retd.) Dr. K. Bramha Singh, Bharat Rakshak <https://www.bharat-rakshak.com/ARMY/his2ry/1948war/426-rajinder-singh-s-last-battle.html>

⁵ Unsung Heroes Detail, Brigadier Rajinder Singh Jamwal, Azadi ki Amrit Mahotsav, <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/unsung-heroes-detail.htm?53>

was critical, as the large raider-horde was being held by only two platoons of State Forces, and if they were overrun, the road to Srinagar would be open to the raiders.



Troops of 1 SIKH, the first Infantry contingent of Indian Army, landed at Srinagar Airfield and commenced operations

Source: <https://twitter.com/adgpi/status/1320907462766030848/photo/1>

The 1 SIKH defending the Srinagar passed the night of 27/28 October in vigilance in their hastily dug positions east of Baramulla. But no attack took place that night. The next morning, Rai himself went forward to the front-line trenches with two more companies of 1 SIKH. He even contemplated attacking Baramulla and throwing out the raiders in short order. But soon after his arrival, the raiders began a big attack in order to push through and reach Srinagar. Bitter fighting took place and the attackers were held. When the enemy began to encircle his position, Rai went back and selected another defensive position 8 km nearer to Srinagar. After this reconnaissance, he returned to his men and ordered them to withdraw to the new positions. Quietly and skillfully the men fell back. While seeing off the last of the rearguard, a stray bullet hit Rai in the head and he instantly died.⁶

Later, HQ 161 Infantry Brigade with 1 KUMAON was airlifted on 29 October. By end of October, 4 KUMAON, 1 MAHAR and 6 RAJ RIF were also in Kashmir. Soon a squadron of 7 CAVALARY was moved from Jammu to Srinagar.⁷ Brig L P Sen arrived at Srinagar on 02 November and took over the command of 161 Infantry Brigade from Col Harbakhsh Singh, who became his Deputy Brigade Commander. Colonel Harbakhsh Singh had reached Srinagar a day before and had taken over the command of 161 Infantry Brigade. Amongst the troops that were airlifted to Kashmir, one Company of 1/2 PUNJAB took up positions on the ridge east of Gandarbal. Another Company was placed between the Anchar Lake and the Baramulla-Srinagar Road. Patrols that were sent out could obtain no information about any enemy parties

⁶ S.N. Prasad, Dharm Pal, Operations in Jammu & Kashmir 1947-48, History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India p.31

⁷ Operations in Jammu and Kashmir, Indian Army, Government of India, <https://indianarmy.nic.in/Site/FormTemplete/frmTempSimple.aspx?MnId=riY7yvCdGbtOilWv7laCJA==&ParentID=8Qd5ThhzoNnJwDtcj9Dd4g==&flag=8CKP966uzg96kLov0aWdfQ==>

in the areas of Sumbal or Gandarbal, but heard from various sources that raiders were moving through the countryside towards Badgam 14 km south-west of Srinagar. ⁸

Battle of Badgam

Badgam was a small village less than an hour away from the Srinagar airfield, any access to the airfield by the raiders was detrimental to the overall security of the region and would have cut off the air support provided by the Indian Air Force. On 02 November, the report came into the Brigade Headquarters that there was a concentration of many tribal raiders near Badgam. ⁹

On 03 November 1947, a force of three Companies under command of Major Somnath Sharma was dispatched to the Badgam area. It consisted of one Company of 1 (Para) KUMAON and two companies of 4 KUMAON. The Company of 1 (Para) KUMAON took up positions on a ridge near Badgam while one Company of 4 KUMAON returned towards Srinagar at 1230 hours. The force had moved out before midnight and, bypassing all inhabited area, and had reached the high ground above Badgam before first light on 03 November. Patrols were immediately sent out to comb the village and the surrounding areas. Other than a large group of “Kashmiri refugees”, camping in a nullah close by, the patrols reported that all was clear. ¹⁰



Indian Army's Troops Disposition during the Battle of Badgam

Source:

https://m.facebook.com/Indianarmy.adgpi/photos/a.1168639249999369/1485125158350775/?type=3&source=57&refid=52&_tn_ =EH-R

⁸ S.N. Prasad, Dharm Pal, Operations in Jammu & Kashmir 1947-48, History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India p.36

⁹ Nishtha Badgamia, Battle of Badgam: "A fight to the last man, to the last round," The Defence Archive, Jul 31, 2021 <https://www.thedefencearchive.com/post/battle-of-badgam>

¹⁰ Captain Amrinder Singh, Remembering the Battle for Srinagar, The Tribune, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/comment/remembering-the-battle-for-srinagar-156151>

The company of 4 KUMAON was suddenly attacked by raiders at 1400 hours on 03 November 1947 at a point just North of Badgam. The enemy, estimated at 700, attacked the Company position with 3 inches mortars, Light Machine Guns and rifles. Completely outnumbered and with accurate fire being brought to bear on its position from three sides, the Company began to sustain heavy casualties.¹¹

Fully realising the gravity of the situation and the direct threat that would result to both Srinagar and the aerodrome if the enemy attack was not held until reinforcements could be rushed to close the gap leading to Srinagar via Hum Hom, Major Somnath Sharma urged his Company to fight the enemy tenaciously. He kept rushing across the open ground to his Sections exposing himself to heavy and accurate fire urging them to hold on. He at the same time, skillfully directed the fire of his Sections into the ever-advancing enemy. He repeatedly exposed himself to the full fury of enemy fire and laid out cloth air strips to guide Indian aircraft into their targets in full view of the enemy.¹²

However, on receiving information about the battle condition in Badgam, 161 Infantry Brigade immediately sent one Company of 1 (Para) KUMAON with spare ammunition to help the defenders. Meanwhile 1 PUNJAB was ordered to move immediately from Magma to the Badgam area and to occupy a defensive position in the area of Hum Hom-Badgam in order to seal off the route to Srinagar. Raiders route to Srinagar was blocked by 1 PUNJAB.¹³ Seven air strikes were also launched at the same time to hold up the raiders' attacks. These air attacks had a very salutary effect and succeeded in killing a large number of the raiders, but the Company of 1 (Para) KUMAON sent as reinforcement did not succeed in throwing the enemy back. At the end of the battle the Indian casualties were 15 killed, including Major Somnath Sharma, and 26 men wounded. One of the ammunition trucks was also looted by the enemy, but the enemy attacks were beaten back.

The battle of Badgam inflicted heavy damages to the raiders who were rushing forward to capture the town of Srinagar and the airfield. The losses incurred by the raiders forced them to abandon their advance.

¹¹ Acts of Bravery and Photographs, Indian Army, Government of India, <https://indianarmy.nic.in/Site/FormTemplete/frmTempSimple.aspx?MnId=oqhdGw6r3JZwsrA+pE36qw==&ParentID=9VSXWqkLdQjLFzuKo0TJGg==&flag=8CKP966uzg96kLov0aWdfQ==>

¹² Acts of Bravery and Photographs, Indian Army, Government of India, <https://indianarmy.nic.in/Site/FormTemplete/frmTempSimple.aspx?MnId=oqhdGw6r3JZwsrA+pE36qw==&ParentID=9VSXWqkLdQjLFzuKo0TJGg==&flag=8CKP966uzg96kLov0aWdfQ==>

¹³ LP Sen, Slender Was the Thread: Kashmir Confrontation, Orient BlackSwan P. 75-76