



रक्षा मंत्रालय  
MINISTRY OF  
**DEFENCE**



**MAJOR GENERAL Salim Caleb (Then LIEUTENANT COLONEL)**

<b>SERVICE NUMBER</b>	IC-881
<b>RANK</b>	Major General (then Lieutenant Colonel)
<b>NAME</b>	Salim Caleb
<b>SON OF</b>	Shri J Caleb
<b>RESIDENT OF (Village/District/State)/ DOMICILE</b>	230, Cecil Hotel, Annexe Simla
<b>UNIT/REGIMENT/CORPS</b>	3 CAVALRY
<b>SERVICE</b>	Indian Army
<b>DATE OF ENROLMENT/ COMMISSION</b>	02 September 1944
<b>AWARD/DATE OF ACTION</b>	Maha Vir Chakra / 10-09-1965
<b>WAR/BATTLE/OPERATION</b>	1965 Indo-Pak War
<b>OTHER AWARDS WITH DATE</b>	



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Major General Salim Caleb was born to Shri J Caleb on 03 November 1924 in Lahore, Pakistan. He was commissioned into the 3 Cavalry on 02 September 1944. After partition the family settled in Ferozpur, Punjab, and he spent his final years of life in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. Major General Caleb was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra on 10 September 1965.

The 3 Cavalry Regiment was formed from two older Regiments, the 7th Irregular Cavalry which was raised in 1841 at Bareilly and the 17 Cavalry which was raised at Sultanpur in 1846. In 1921, the decision to reduce the number of cavalry regiments in India was taken, and as a result of this 39 Regular Cavalry Regiments were reorganised into 21 Regular Cavalry Regiments. 5th Bengal Cavalry and 8th Bengal Cavalry were amalgamated and redesignated as 3 Cavalry in 1922. The Regiment was one of the first to be Indianised in 1932 and in 1940 it shed its horses and was mechanised and equipped with armoured cars. In World War II, it was allotted the role of Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment of 11th Indian Division in Malaya where it fought all the major battles of Jitra, Gurum, Kiran, Slim River, Sungei Pattani and in the Defence of Singapore. In 1956, the Regiment converted to Centurion tanks and it with this invincible fighting machine that it took part in the 1965 Indo-Pak War 'Op Riddle' at Asal Uttar, covering itself with glory.

The Battle of Asal Uttar, regarded as one of the largest tank battles in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, took place from 8 to 10 September 1965. During this conflict, the Pakistan Army launched a major offensive, deploying tanks and infantry into Indian territory, resulting in the capture of the town of Khem Karan, located approximately 5 km from the International Border. However, the Indian troops swiftly responded, engaging in intense combat that lasted for three days. Ultimately, the battle concluded with the Pakistani forces being decisively repelled near Asal Uttar. Several factors contributed to this outcome, including the determined resistance exhibited by the Indian Army, the conditions of the plains, the implementation of superior Indian tactics, and the successful execution of a well-planned Indian strategy."

The genesis of the Indo-Pak conflict can be traced back to the year 1947. The bone of contention between India and Pakistan are the attempts by Pakistan to annex the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir by any means. The ceasefire line in Jammu and Kashmir and our frontiers with Pakistan have remained a sensitive zone for years. Pakistan has on and off resorted to firing, incursions and intrusions at several points of these frontiers, compelling India to adopt defensive measures. These attempts of Pakistan have been met by the Indian Armed Forces with commendable bravery and steely resilience, but always with great restraint to not escalate the conflict. The Indo-Pak war of 1965 was the second war fought between these two bordering countries. While India was still recovering from the Sino-India war of 1962, Pakistan saw it as an opportunity to acquire Jammu and Kashmir with might, presuming India to be weak in terms of defence preparation. The war



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began on 24 April 1965, when the Pakistan Army attacked Indian territory in the Rann of Kutch and penetrated six to eight miles inside the Indian territory. This act of illegal occupation of Indian territory constituted violation of the Indo-Pak Border Agreement, 1960 and the international law as per the United Nations Charter. The Pakistani forces subsequently intruded in Kashmir with the launch of Operation Gibraltar. The 1965 war was fought in various sectors including in Asal Uttar under Lt Col Salim Caleb.

Asal Uttar, a village in Punjab's Tarn Taran district, bears witness to the Battle of 1965 through its collection of memorials. These structures, both grand and modest, dot the landscape, serving as the sole remnants of the fierce tank battle fought between Indian and Pakistani armies. Each monument holds stories of courage, camaraderie, and sacrifice—a poignant testament to those who defended their homeland against insurmountable odds. They stand as eternal reminders of the legacy of the Battle of Asal Uttar, forever etched in history's pages.

The battle of Asal Uttar unfolded when Pakistani forces captured Khem Karan town, only to be pushed back by the 4 Mountain Division and ultimately decimated by the 2nd Armoured Brigade of the Indian Army in a decisive battle between September 08 and 10.

On 08 September, Pakistani 11 Division captured Khem Karan. 1 (Pak) Armoured Division also started moving forward and was ready to break out. The aim behind unleashing this force was to capture the Indian territory to the West of the Beas. According to their plan, Pakistan aimed to capture Harike and the Beas bridges on the Beas River, and if this had been accomplished, would have turned the defences of own 11 Corps and cut off Amritsar from rest of the country. 4 Mountain Division and 2 (Independent) Armoured Brigade stood in their way at Asal Uttar.<sup>1</sup>

On 08 September 1965, Lieutenant Colonel Caleb, anticipating the urgency of the situation, took the initiative to move his Regiment towards Asal Uttar even before receiving orders. Recognizing the importance of halting Pakistan's advance and restricting their manoeuvrability, he understood the need to confront the enemy at the earliest. Over the radio, Major PS Belvalkar, the Commander of B Squadron of 3 Cavalry, motivated the tank crews with a resolute message: "Press hard and get them before they turn and run back." The first tank Commander to destroy two Pattons in quick succession was Dafadar Wasan Singh.

On 09 September, 1965, Lieutenant Colonel Salim Caleb engaged in deep discussions with his Squadron Commanders, strategizing for the battle. He firmly believed that the enemy, equipped with fresh armoured Regiments, would attempt to breach the defences of the 4 Mountain Division

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<sup>1</sup> The Battle of Asal Uttar and Khemkaran, Sainik Samachar, Vol 62 No 17 2015  
[https://sainiksamachar.nic.in/uploads/sainik\\_samachar/2022/03/index-149.pdf](https://sainiksamachar.nic.in/uploads/sainik_samachar/2022/03/index-149.pdf) p. 7



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at Asal Uttar by encircling the position from both the East and the West. Lieutenant Colonel Caleb was resolute that the enemy should not be allowed to expand their bridgehead beyond the Chima-Dholan line.

His objective for the day was to maintain contact with the enemy, restrict their movement, and channel them into predetermined areas where Indian tanks, positioned in tactically advantageous locations, could annihilate them effectively. The ensuing action saw CQMH (Company Quarter Master Havildar) Abdul Hamid of 4 GRENADIERS displaying extraordinary valour. Using his 106mm Recoilless Rifle (RCL) gun, he single-handedly destroyed four Patton tanks. For his brave act, CQMH Abdul Hamid was posthumously honoured with the *Param Vir Chakra*. Pakistan made no significant efforts to launch a coordinated attack or outflank Asal Uttar from the west that day, leading to a relatively peaceful time.

On 10 September, the third day of the battle, Lieutenant Colonel Salim Caleb implemented strategic adjustments within his Squadrons. Anticipating the Pakistan armoured columns' desperate attempts to break through the Indian anti-tank defensive network, he devised a new deployment plan. C Squadron, with the exception of one Troop, was positioned in the Lakhna-Dholan and Mahmudpura area, while B Squadron secured the main axis along Chima-Dibbipura. This defensive formation extended further North, with A Squadron, minus two Troops, stationed at Algun, one Troop at Madar, and the fourth Troop to the North of Dibbipura.

The RHQ (Regimental Headquarters) troop took its position at the Rohi Nala Bridge on the Khem Karan-Bhikkiwind axis. The Adjutant, Captain Dileep Kundu, was given strict instructions to allow the enemy to cross only "over his dead body." Additional personnel from HQ Squadron, including tradesmen, were mobilised to assist in various tasks, including replacing injured tank crews. Reconnaissance Sections were deployed to cover the flanks at Lakhna and Valtoha. Lieutenant Colonel Salim Caleb established his Tactical Headquarters at Dibbipura, from where he oversaw and coordinated the operations.

3 Cavalry was deployed in a formation resembling two concentric semicircles or horseshoes, with the open-end facing South towards the enemy. This meticulous plan was devised by Lieutenant Colonel Salim Caleb, in a calm, composed, and calculated manner. In the early hours of 10 September, the Reconnaissance Section reported the movement of enemy tanks North of Bhura Karimpur towards Dholan.

Colonel Salim Caleb's voice resonated over the radio, "Hold fire till they are in certain killing range." When the enemy tank column approached within 1200 yards, the order to engage was given. Over the next fifteen minutes, the troops executed their orders with remarkable precision, effectively neutralising the enemy threat. Nine Patton tanks and two Recoilless Rifles (RCLs) were



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destroyed, leaving the enemy helpless and unable to retaliate. The Patton were helpless and did not even manage to get off one shot against the Indian tanks.

The enemy was so overwhelmed by the intensity of the fire from the Indian side that they abandoned the tanks they were accompanying and hastily ran back. As darkness enveloped the battlefield, the fighting on 10 September drew to a close. Lieutenant Colonel Salim Caleb's pivotal decision to mobilise his Regiment and take action without waiting for official orders proved to be one of the most significant and game-changing choices of the entire 1965 war. His swift and resolute leadership played a decisive role in halting the enemy's advance and turning the tide of the battle.

In recognition of his exceptional and succinct leadership, Lieutenant Colonel Salim Caleb, the Commandant of 3 Cavalry, was bestowed with the prestigious *Maha Vir Chakra*. This accolade celebrated his unwavering determination and instrumental role in the success of the Battle of Asal Uttar.

Colonel Caleb passed away at the age of 90 on 28 January 2015, his last rites were carried out in the Annandale cremation ground in Shimla.



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### CITATION

Lieutenant Colonel Salim Caleb (IC-881), 3rd Cavalry.  
(Effective date of award - 10 September, 1965)

On the 10th September, 1965, Lt Colonel Salim Caleb was in command of a cavalry battalion which was engaged in tank battle with Pakistani tanks near Khem Karan. Despite heavy enemy fire for long spells, he exercised his command with calmness and fortitude and inspired his officers and men to fight against the enemy fearlessly. In this action 15 enemy Patton tanks were destroyed and 9 others which were in good working condition were captured. His cool courage, leadership and foresight contributed greatly to this outstanding success.



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1. *The Patton wreckers: An account of the actions of 3 cavalry in the battle of Asal Uttar - September, 1965.* Khutub A. Hai and Arjun Singh. (2015): Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. New Delhi.

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3. The Monsoon War: Young Officers Reminisce, by Amarinder Singh and T.S. Shergill, New Delhi: Lustre Press, Roli Books, 2015, pp. 528
4. Indian Army After Independence By Major K.C. Praval, New Delhi : Lancer International, 1990, p 465



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## MEMORIALS

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<https://www.facebook.com/Indianarmy.adgpi/photos/10-september-1965-lt-col-salim-caleb-was-in-command-of-3-cavalry-which-was-engag/540887529441214/>

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<https://www.instagram.com/p/CToFbOPIRu5/?hl=en>

<https://salute.co.in/Phillora-and-asal-uttar-two-historic-tank-battles-of-the-war/>

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<https://twitter.com/adgpi/status/1171345001072214016>

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