NAIK MAHABIR THAPA

SERVICE NUMBER	5030815
RANK	Naik
NAME	Mahabir Thapa
SON OF	Shri Birkhe
RESIDENT OF (Village/District/State)/ DOMICILE	Village Baralekh, Dailekh, Nepal
UNIT/REGIMENT/CORPS	3/1 GORAKHA RIFLES
SERVICE	Indian Army
DATE OF ENROLMENT/ COMMISSION	3 December 1942
AWARD/DATE OF ACTION	Maha Vir Chakra (Posthumous) / 16 September 1961
WAR/BATTLE/OPERATION	UN Mission in Congo
OTHER AWARDS WITH DATE	

Naik Mahabir Thapa was born on 3 December 1923 in a small village called Baralekh in Dailekh district of Nepal. He enrolled in the prestigious 3/1 Gorkha Rifles of the Indian Army on 3 December 1942.

The first battalion of the Gorkha Regiment was raised in April 1815, after the Anglo-Nepalese War. At the time of Indian independence in 1947, 3/1Gorkha Rifles was transferred to the Indian Army as part of the Tripartite Agreement signed between India, Nepal and Britain. Prior to independence, the regiment was known as the 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles. In 1950, the regiment's title was changed to 3 Gorkha Rifles. Since 1947, the regiment has participated in a number of wars and conflict situations including the 1947-48 and 1971 wars between India and Pakistan. The regiment has five battalions – 1/1 GR, 2/1 GR, 3/1 GR, 4/1 GR and 5/1 GR. 3/1 GR was part of the 99 Infantry Brigade Group which marked Indian presence in the United Nations Peacekeeping operation called the Opération des Nations Unies au Congo (ONUC) in 1961-62. The battalion's motto is "Kayar Hunu Bhanda Marnu Ramro" (Better to die than live like a coward).

The Republic of Congo (now Democratic Republic of Congo) gained independence from its colonial master, Belgium, in 1960. However, the newly independent nation soon descended into a series of conflicts. The Congolese government appealed to the United Nations (UN) for aid and assistance of a multilateral force to contain the violence and maintain peace in the strife-torn country. The ONUC was established on 14 July 1960 under the United Nations Security Council Resolution 143. The initial mandate of ONUC was to ensure the withdrawal of Belgian forces from the Republic of the Congo, assist the Congolese government in maintaining law and order, and provide technical assistance. Subsequently, ONUC became embroiled in a chaotic internal situation of extreme complexity and had to be converted into an UN peacekeeping operation which allowed limited use of military force. The Force was designed to protect the Congo from outside interference, particularly by evacuating foreign mercenaries and advisers from Katanga and preventing clashes and civil strife, by force, if necessary, as a last resort. In 1961-62, secessionist gendarmes under the command of foreign mercenaries clashed with the UN Force. At its peak, ONUC had 20,000 troops, including a brigade from India. In February 1963, after Katanga had been reintegrated into the national territory of Congo, ONUC began to be phased out. It was finally dissolved on 30 June 1964.

On 16 September 1961, Naik Mahabir Thapa was commanding a section of the rear-guard platoon of the relief force that was withdrawing from Lufira Bridge. His platoon was tasked to prevent the enemy from closing on the withdrawing force. During the action, Naik Thapa had been wounded even before he reached the road block. However, he deployed his section boldly and engaged the enemy with fire while maneuvering towards flank of the enemy ambush. In doing so, he was severely wounded by an enemy machine gun fire. Undeterred by the injuries, he continued to lead his section and engaged the enemy fiercely. Naik Thapa's section withdrew only after every one of the retreating forces had safely crossed the ambushed area. He was the last man to leave the area and shortly afterwards he succumbed to his injuries.

Naik Mahabir Thapa was awarded nation's second highest gallantry award Maha Vir Chakra for showing leadership and courage of highest order, posthumously.[1]

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[1] Stories of Heroism: Param Vir Chakra and Mahavir Chakra Winners. History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India. (pg no. 375)

CITATION

No. 5030815 Naik Mahabir Thapa, 3 Bn. 1st Gorkha Rifles (Posthumous).
(Effective date of award – 16th September 1961)

Naik Mahabir Thapa was section commander of the rear-guard platoon of the Relief Force withdrawing from Lufira Bridge in the Congo. The force was ambushed a few miles from Elisabethville. The road had been mined by the enemy and the ambush site covered with mortar, medium machine guns and anti-tank weapons. Nk Thapa's platoon had been ordered to ensure that the enemy did not close in on the withdrawl force. Although wounded even before he reached the road block, Nk Thapa deployed his section boldly and engaged the enemy fiercely with fire while manoevering to get to the flank of the enemy ambush. He was mortally wounded by machine gun bullets. Despite this, he continued to lead his section and engage the enemy. Naik Thapa's section withdrew after every one of the retreating forces had a safe passage over the ambushed area. He was the last man to leave the area and a little later succumbed to his injuries.

During the operation, Naik Thapa showed leadership and courage of the highest order. His gallant devotion to duty saved many lives and made an orderly withdrawl of the force possible.

Reference: Gazette of India, Notification No._____ dated_____

REFERENCES

1. Stories of Heroism: Param Vir Chakra and Mahavir Chakra Winners. History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Portraits of Valour: India's Highest Gallantry Awards and Their Recipients. The Defence Review. 2006.

2. Stories of Heroism: Param Vir Chakra and Mahavir Chakra Winners. History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India.

3. '3 Gorkha Rifles' (Accessed on 7 March 2022)
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