

The Capture of Hajipir Pass 1965

Pakistan joined Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in September 1955 and greatly benefited from the mutual defence treaties sponsored by US. Between 1954 and 1965 Pakistan received \$ 1.5 billion worth of military aid. The equipment included Patton tanks, Sabre jets, F104 Star Fighter aircraft, M1 rifles, Universal machine guns, mortars, recoilless rifles, guns etc. Thus,

By 1965, Pakistan had completely modernised its armed forces with new equipment received from the United States. It had also been able to upgrade the so-called Azad Kashmir forces in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Pakistan had also signed a treaty of co-operation in military and economic affairs with China. General Ayub Khan became the new president of Pakistan by taking over the Pakistan Government after a military coup in October 1958 and by 1965, Pakistan was ready for another war with India. ¹ In 1965, Pakistan infiltrated into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), with multi-directional infiltration under Operation Gibraltar and then the planned capture of Akhnoor Bridge under Operation Grand Slam.

The Main objectives of the infiltration operations, which were in furtherance of the political aim of annexing Jammu and Kashmir, were:

- (a) To establish bases for future operations in J&K with the help and support of anti-Indian elements.
- (b) To use the bases commit sabotage and violence, to terrorise peaceful and loyal citizens and to provide support to pro-Pakistan elements.
- (c) To attack civil and military personnel and government institutions by in J&K by destruction of bridges and disruption of lines of communication, raids on ammunition dumps and supply dumps, raids on Indian formations and unit headquarters, and ambushing of convoys and patrols. This was aimed to disperse the Indian army and the police forces.
- (d) To create tension and unrest in Jammu and Kashmir and instigate lawless activities with a view to paralysing the administration and projecting picture of internal revolt in the State.
- (e) To facilitate the induction of increased numbers of armed forces from Pakistan.

Having carried out the above, the infiltrators were to merge with the local population and await further orders. ²

The major infiltration routes are shown below. ³

¹ Col. Bhaskar Sarkar, Outstanding Victories of the Indian Army, 1947-1971 (Spantech & Lancer 2000)

² Government of India, 1992, Official 1965 War History

³ Lt. Gen. P.C. Katoch (2015): Battle of Haji Pir: The Army's Glory in 1965, Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 9, No. 3 July-September 2015, p. 53-74



The Indian reaction to the infiltrations was swift and included the capture of the strategic Haji Pir Pass at a height of 2,637 metres or 8,652 feet on the formidable Pir Panjal Range that divides the Srinagar valley from the Jammu region.⁴



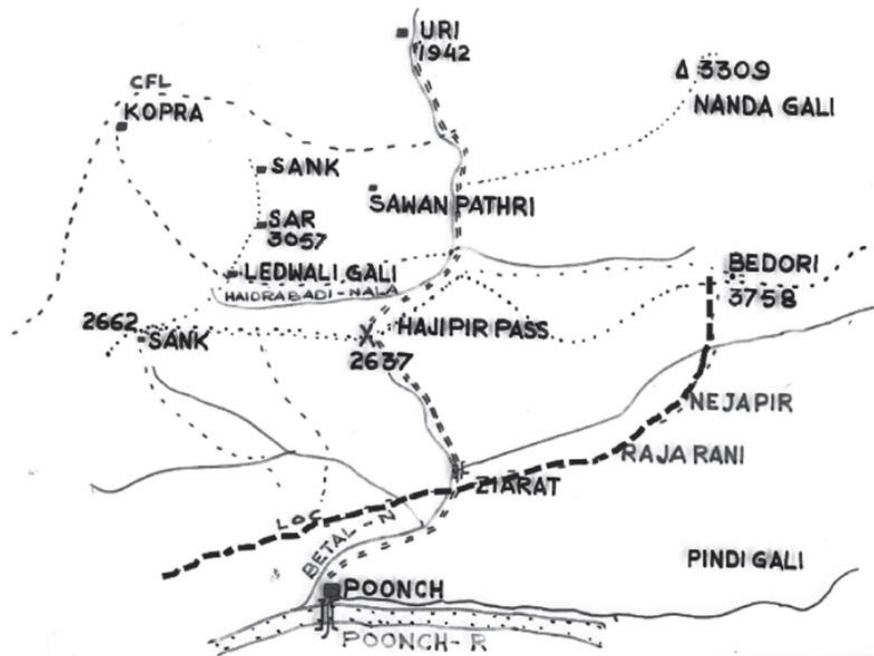
Staging areas and routes of infiltration in the vicinity of Haji Pir pass

The Haji Pir Pass is around 20 km by road from Uri. The distance from Uri to Poonch via recently revived Mughal route linking Shupian in Kashmir Valley to Bafliaz in Poonch Valley across the Pir Panjal range is

⁴ Lt. Gen. P.C. Katoch (2015): Battle of Haji Pir: The Army's Glory in 1965, Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 9, No. 3 July-September 2015, p. 53-74

around 200 km. The earlier route was 511 kms. ⁵ However the road that runs through the Haji Pir Pass connecting Uri to Poonch is of strategic importance as the distance between Uri with Poonch via this road is only 56 Km's and it also provides access to much of PoK.

The Pass is dominated by three neighbouring hill features - on the East by Bedori (3760 metres high), on the West by Sank (2895 metres) and Ledwali Gali (3140 metres) to the South-West. It was considered essential to seize these Posts before proceeding to the Haji Pir Pass (2637 metres). Bedori is situated 14 km South-East of Uri and 4 km South of the cease-fire line. Haji Pir Pass is about 10 km South-West of Bedori. ⁶



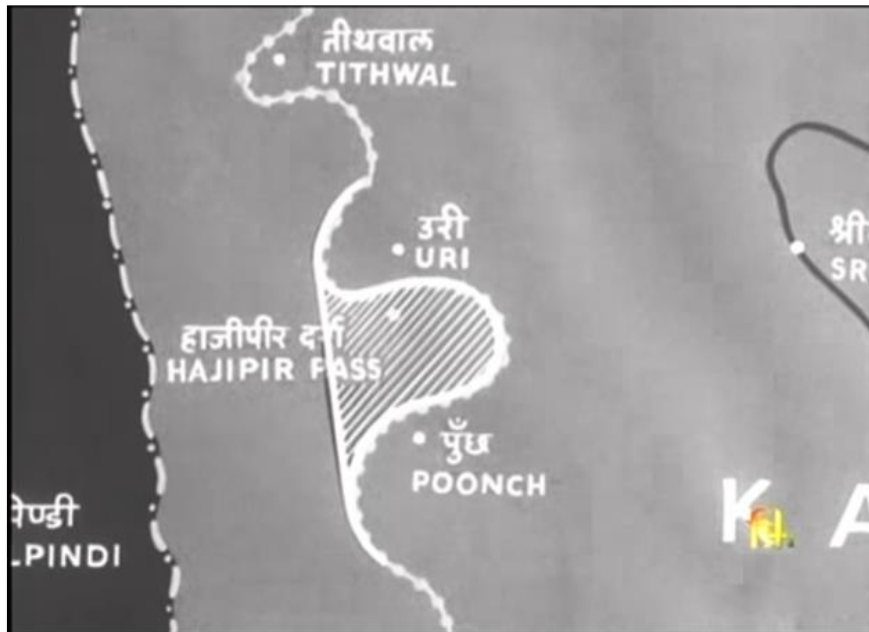
Sketch shows Haji Pir pass in relation to Uri, Bedori, Raja Rani, Poonch and Sank. ⁷

Haji Pir was a desolate spot, but one of strategic importance. As a result of the operations the Haji Pir or Uri Poonch bulge was straitened to seal the gateway that the infiltrators were using as the main route of infiltration.

⁵ Maj. Gen. Raj Mehta, *Militarily Won; Diplomatically Lost – The Haji Pir Sagau*, Scholar Warrior, Centre for Land Warfare Studies AUTUMN 2015

⁶ Government of India, 1992, *Official 1965 War History*

⁷ Lt. Gen. P.C. Katoch (2015): *Battle of Haji Pir: The Army's Glory in 1965*, *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 July-September 2015, p. 53-74



The task of capturing Hajipir Pass and the Bulge was by launching of a pincer movement consisting of an offensive along the general axis Uri-Haji Pir Pass. This was given to 19 Infantry Division commanded by Major General SS Kalaan and the Corps reserve of 68 Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier ZC Bakshi was placed under it's command. The operation was code named OP BAKSHI.⁸ The link-up action from the South via the Punch-Kahuta approach was to be undertaken by 93 Infantry Brigade of the 25 Infantry Division, using a minimum of two Battalions and was designated as OP FAULAD.⁹ The link-up between these forces would cut off all routes of approach into the crucial area of the bulge.

The troops placed under command 68 Infantry Brigade for this action were:¹⁰

- (a) 1 PARA.
- (b) 19 PUNJAB.
- (c) 4 RAJPUT.
- (d) 6 JAK RIF.
- (e) 4 SIKH LI.
- (f) 164 Field Regiment less one battery.
- (g) 144 Mountain Battery.
- (h) B Troop 39 Medium Regiment.
- (i) 18 Field Battery.
- (j) One Section 4.2-inch mortars.

The estimated enemy strength facing the 68 Infantry Brigade were fourteen Rifle Companies or three and a half Battalions, including 20 Punjab Battalion, Pakistan Army. Approximately one Battalion was holding the area opposite the Indian picquet on Point 8370. Enemy defences were well-prepared and properly coordinated. It was also known that the enemy had a large number of LMGs and MMGs.¹¹

The two-pronged pincer was to advance on the Haji Pir Pass was:¹²

- (1) Right Arm: Uri - Sank - Ledwali Gali - Haji Pir Pass.

⁸ Col. Bhaskar Sarkar, Outstanding Victories of the Indian Army, 1947-1971 (Spantech & Lancer 2000)

⁹ Government of India, 1992, Official 1965 War History

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

(2) Left Arm: Uri - Bedori - Kuthnar Di Gali - Kiran - Haji Pir Pass.

The operations of the right and the left pincers were thus entrusted to 1 PARA (Punjab) and 19 PUNJAB respectively.

The entire operation was planned in three Phases: ¹³

Phase I

(a) Capture of Ring Counter and Pathra by 19 PUNJAB by 0100 hours on 25 August.

(b) Capture of Sank Ridge upto Ledwali Gali and Sawan Pathri by 1 PARA by 0500 hours on 25 August.

Phase II

(a) Capture of Bedori and Kuthnar Di Gali by 19 PUNJAB by 0600 hours on 25 August.

(b) Securing the ring counters and capturing Haji Pir Pass by 4 RAJPUT by 1200 hours on 25 August.

Phase III

(a) Mopping up by 19 PUNJAB less Company with on Company 4 RAJPUT under command.

(b) 4 SIKH LI and 6 JAK RIF were to provide troops for the firm bases.

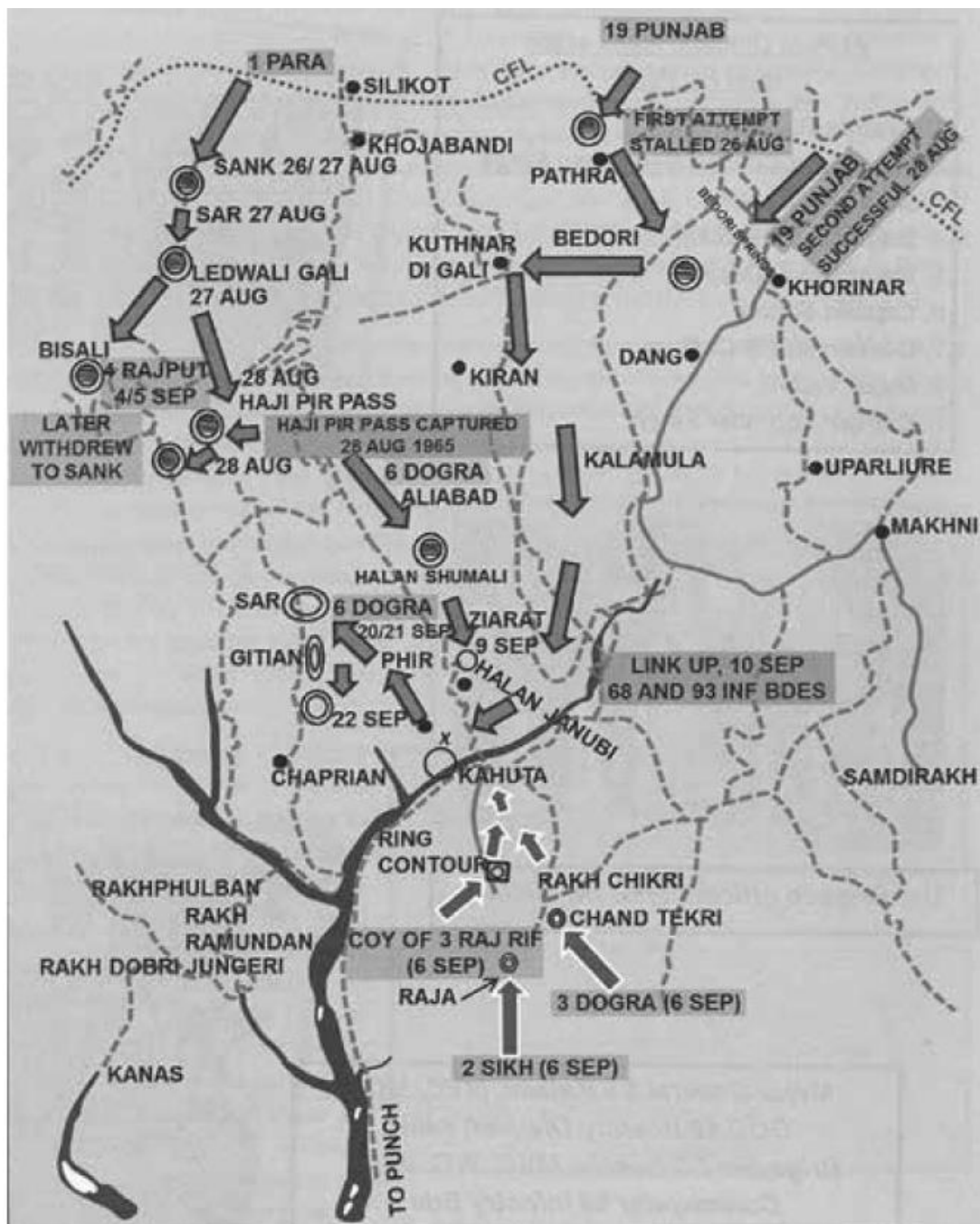
H Hour Not before 2000 hours on 24 August 1965

1 PARA and 19 PUNJAB were holding position in the Uri sector were to be relieved by 4 SIKH LI and 6 JAK RIF on 23/24 and 22/23 night respectively for the initial attack to begin at 2150 hours on 24 August 1965. The 19 PUNJAB was relieved by 6 JAK RIF on 23rd night as per plan but owing to heavy rains , 4 SIKH LI could not relieve 1 PARA on time. This necessitated the postponement of operation by 24 hours.

4 RAJPUT, which was to follow the 4 SIKH LI on its way to Uri, had to pass through village Lagma. Unfortunately, heavy rains flooded Uri nullah and made it impassable on foot. The Brigade Commander, realising that the news of advance of 4 RAJPUT towards Sank must have been communicated to the enemy by his agents in the Lagma village, changed his plan slightly. The Rajputs instead of being moved behind 1 PARA in Sank area, were shifted to the area behind 19 PUNJAB. ¹⁴

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.



The Haji Pir Operation ¹⁵

Operation Bakshi commenced at 2150 hours on 25 August 1965 with Brig Zoru Bakshi himself following the Western thrust.

At Sank, 1 PARA faced a strongly entrenched and coordinated company of 6 Azad Kashmir Battalion supported by heavy weapons. The battle continued within 45 metres of the fenced trenches of the enemy till 0930 hours on 26 August when it was called off owing to heavy casualties. A second attack led by Maj RS Dayal ('B' Company) followed by Maj AS Bacchar ('D' Company) launched at 2230 hrs on August 26 succeeded by 0430 hours on 27 August. Sank, could not be secured owing to, menacing fire from Sar, therefore 'D' Company was tasked to capture it and then went on to capture Lediwali Gali. Meanwhile 'B' Company captured Sawan Pathri and Agiwas. By 1800 hours on 27 August, Lediwali Gali had been secured.

¹⁵ Maj. Gen. Raj Mehta, *Militarily Won; Diplomatically Lost – The Haji Pir Sagau*, Scholar Warrior, Centre for Land Warfare Studies AUTUMN 2015

Attack on the Bedori axis by 19 PUNJAB was stalled due to an unapproachable path. The only approach was from Bedori springs in the North-East, however this would have delayed the capture of Bedori by 36 hours. Attacks by one Company of 7 BIHAR and an attempt by 4 RAJPUT from the North on 27 August were also foiled.

The CO 1 PARA, Lieutenant Colonel Prabhjinder Singh was granted permission to capture Haji Pir Pass at 1400 hours on 27 August. A small, self-contained, mixed Company Group from 'A' and 'D' Companies was formed group under Major RS Dayal for this task. The column started descending, at 1530 hours on 27 August, from Ledwali Gali into the Hyderabad nullah along the Spur. Two intermediate objectives to capture Ring Contours 1194 and 1094 one after another were also tasked. About 1730 hours, it started raining heavily making the going very difficult. By 1900 hours the Company Group reached Hyderabad nullah. It was now completely dark and Major Ranjit Dayal decided to climb the Pass. On the way, the Company surrounded a house and captured one LMG and nine rifles with ten personnel of Azad Kashmir militia.

At 0430 hours, the Company hit the old Uri-Punch Road, about 10 km below the Pass. Here the troops were given a much-needed rest for two hours in a very cold and bitter morning before the final assault. At 0700 hours, the column was again on the march. Moving alongside the road, it reached 700 metres short of the Pass by 0900 hours.

The men again came under fire, leaving a Platoon in contact along with the Forward Observation Officer to keep the enemy tied down. Major Dayal ordered the two Platoons to climb up on to the Spur and assault enemy from the Western side of the pass and then roll down to eliminate the LMGs on the Pass. The enemy could not stand this daring day-light attack and withdrew in confusion to a feature to the west of the pass. By 1000 hours on 28 August, 1 PARA had taken the objective.

Major Ranjit Dayal repulsed the expected, fierce counterattack on 29 August, surviving a LMG burst in close-quarter-combat that pierced his web equipment but left him unscathed.

19 PUNJAB less 'A' Company started at 0500 hours on 28 August and reached Heman Buniyar by 0715 hours in transport. Then it moved to Bedori Springs, already secured by 7 BIHAR. At 0330 hours on 29 August, the troops crossed the FUP for assault on Bedori, 3,760 metres above the sea level and 610 metres higher than the FUP. The feature was captured by 'B' and 'C' Companies of 19 PUNJAB by 0600 hours. The Battalion again moved to Kuthnar Di Gali and further on to Kiran. A link-up with 1 PARA was effected on 1 September 1965.

Under Operation Faulad 93 Infantry Brigade planned to achieve the Punch-Haji Pir link-up by capturing these picquets en route to Kahuta. Of these the most important were the formidable bastions of Raja and Chand Tekri picquets. The total enemy estimated was a Battalion less a Company, supported by 2x3.7-inch howitzers and 2x81 mm Mortars. The Pakistanis were entrenched in shell-proof shelters with automatic weapons.

After an initial setback, the final assault Northwards to establish the link-up was undertaken. On night 05/06 September 1965, a simultaneous attack was launched on Raja and Chand Tekri by 2 SIKH and 3 DOGRA. They were met by heavy automatic fire and wavered momentarily, bewildered by the intensity of enemy fire. However, inspired by bold leadership, the leading troops quickly recovered to dash through the mines and wires and were soon locked in a grim hand-to-hand battle for over two hours before the picquets fell. The Pakis fought with determination. The garrison at Raja picquet fought to the last man. The casualties on

the Indian side were heavy too. Amongst the dead were Major GC Verma and Captain GS Bawa, of the Dogras, who fell while personally leading the assaulting wave. The CO of 2 SIKH, Lieutenant Colonel NN Khanna, was also fatally wounded as he led his battalion into the attack. For this act of bravery Lieutenant colonel NN Khanna 'was awarded the MVC. The final link-up was completed with the capture of Kahuta on 10 September 1965 and closed the mouth of the Bulge. ^{16 17}

Brigadier ZC Bakshi (IC1510) was awarded an MVC. The 1 PARA earned one MVC, which was awarded to Major Dayal (IC4004), one Vir Chakra and four Sena Medals, along with the Battle Honour of Haji Pir and the Theatre Honour of Jammu and Kashmir 1965.

During the Tashkent talks between Indian and Pakistan, held in the Soviet Union, India agreed to return Haji Pir Pass, Point 13620 which dominated Kargil town and many other tactically important areas. ¹⁸ The final Agreement for the withdrawal of troops was signed by them in Lahore on 29 January 1966. By 30 January, the first phase of the withdrawal of the Indian and Pakistani forces was completed.¹⁹

¹⁶ Government of India, 1992, Official 1965 War History

¹⁷ Maj. Gen. Raj Mehta, Militarily Won; Diplomatically Lost – The Haji Pir Sagau, Scholar Warrior, Centre for Land Warfare Studies AUTUMN 2015

¹⁸ Maj Gen Sheru Thapliyal, Return of Haji Pir Pass in 1965 Myth and the Reality, Indian Defence Review, Net Edition, 23 Aug 2023

¹⁹ Government of India, 1992, Official 1965 War History