

Going Down the Memory Lane: Recalling Invasion of Kashmir: Oct. 1947

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The Kashmir landings by the Indian Army in Dakota aircrafts commenced on 27 Oct. 1947 from Palam airport at Delhi, with the urgent task of protecting J&K State from being forcibly annexed by Pakistan with the help of thousands of raiders supported by their regular troops. The landings were spearheaded by 1 SIKH, now 4 MECH INFANTRY (SIKH), under the command of Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai. The first and second wave of Dakotas carried C Coy under Capt. Kamaljit Singh and D Coy under Maj. Harwant Singh MC, respectively. The Commanding Officer travelled in the leading aircraft. The Battalion was seen off at Palam airport, among others, by Maj. S.K. Sinha (now Lt. Gen. (Retd.) and Governor of J&K State), who also handed over operation order from Headquarters Delhi and East Punjab Command to the Commanding Officer. Airlift went off smoothly except for one Dakota carrying Battalion Signal Platoon and wireless equipment, which force-landed at Jammu and joined the Battalion in another aircraft after three days.

Every year since, 27th October is commemorated as 'INFANTRY DAY' by the Indian Army to pay homage to its gallant martyrs and also highlight the role infantry plays in war particularly in mountainous and high altitude areas where some other arms are unable to operate or are not fully effective.

Capt. Amarinder Singh, the present Chief Minister of Punjab, who is known for his keen interest in service matters and welfare of troops, recently decided to attend Infantry Day – 27th Oct. 05 – with troops in the Kashmir Valley, and pay homage to the martyrs who gave their lives to protect Kashmir during Oct. – Nov. 1947 and subsequent operations. In addition to staff officers from his Secretariat, the Chief Minister included in his entourage Col. Harwant Singh MC (Retd.), D Coy Commander 1 SIKH during Kashmir landings, Maj. Shivjeet Singh Sher Gill (Retd.) grandson of late Lt Col Dewan Ranjit Rai, Commanding Officer 1 SIKH in Oct. 1947 and Brig. D S. Sidhu AVSM, VSM (Retd.) who had first visited 1 SIKH battle sites in the Kashmir Valley as a school boy in 1949.

Remembrance:

The Chief Minister's entourage reached Srinagar airport from Chandigarh in a special aircraft on 26 Oct (FN) 2005. From there Capt. Amarinder Singh, Lt. Gen. S.S. Dhillon AVSM, VSM, GOC 15 Corps and Maj. Gen. Harwant Krishan, GOC 19 Infantry Division flew to 16 SIKH forward location in 19 Infantry Division Sector in an aviation helicopter, and reached 2 SIKH Tactical Headquarters location at Lokut Bangas by noon. The remaining members of the entourage flew straight to Lokut Bangas in a private helicopter and were received by Col D Gupta, SC Commanding Officer and Sub-Maj. Joginder Singh. All available officers, JCOs' and men from the Battalion had gathered for a special Sainik Sammelan, followed by *Barakhana* for the troops and lunch for the officers in a makeshift Officers Mess under beautifully decorated shamianas. During the Sainik Sammelan the Chief Minister praised the troops for maintaining their glorious traditions of devotion to duty and self-less service. He gave several gifts to the Battalion and, also handed over to the Commanding Officer five cheques of Rs 2.5 lakhs each to be given to the families of five gallant soldiers of the Battalion who were killed in a land slide while providing relief to victims of the earthquake which struck the hilly tracts of the Valley on 08 Oct. 05. A galaxy of senior officers, which included Lt. Gen. Deepak Kapoor SM, VSM, GOC – in – C Northern Command, Lt. Gen. S. S. Dhillon AVSM, VSM, GOC 15 Corps, Maj. Gen. Harwant

Krishan, GOC 19 Infantry Division, Brig. V.K. Naik, KC Commander 79 Infantry Brigade had also flown to Lokut Bangas to visit 2 SIKH and meet the Chief Minister over lunch.

Picturesque:

Lokut Bangas is a picturesque place located at a height of about 10,000 ft. It resembles Gulmarg and has wide open meadows surrounded by thick pine forests and gentle flowing streams. The troops despite living under field conditions appeared cheerful, smart and well turned out. The presence of the Chief Minister of their home state boosted their morale. After sumptuous lunch, and before the clouds started gathering the Chief Minister and his entourage bid farewell to 2 SIKH and flew back to Srinagar. The Army Commander and other senior officers also flew back to their respective Headquarters.

Next day, 27 Oct. 05, there were wreath laying ceremonies to honour the martyrs in Baramula at Dagger Division War Memorial and 1 SIKH Memorial followed by commemoration ceremony at Maqbool Sherwani Community Hall. The wreaths were laid at the above memorials by Governor, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S. K. Sinha, PVSM, Capt. Amarinder Singh, and other senior army officers. The SIKH Memorial at Baramula was initially a large yellow board with suitable inscription installed by 4 SIKH on 01 Dec 1950 on the hill side, where free India's first battle was fought and a small stone obelisk erected in memory of Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai where he was killed on the evening of 28th Oct. 1947. At the initiative of Chief Minister of Punjab, and with help of Headquarters Northern Command, 15 Corps and 19 Infantry Division, the Memorial was redesigned and renovated a few years back. It now looks very impressive and is being well maintained by the local civil and military authorities. The War Memorial has now become an important land mark of Baramula.

War Heroes Honoured:

The Chief Guest at the commemorative ceremony in Sherwani Community Hall was the J&K Governor, Lt. Gen. (Retd) S. K. Sinha, PVSM. Other high dignitaries, present included Chief Minister of Punjab, two senior Ministers of J&K Govt., Lt. Gen. S. S. Dhillon AVSM, VSM, Maj. Gen. Harwant Krishan and senior local politicians. The large hall built by the Dagger Division in memory of Sherwani was full with a civilian and army audience. After a short cultural programme by local students, talks by two senior J&K Government ministers followed. The Ministers were highly appreciative of the role played by the Army in Oct. – Nov. 1947 in protecting the Valley against the raiders and driving them out beyond URI – 65 miles from Srinagar. After that a short film was shown on the death and destruction caused by the raiders in Oct./Nov. 1947 in Baramula and places like Uri, Mahura Power House and other places on their way. Photographs of three Army officers and a civilian who had played significant roles for the defence of Srinagar and the Valley in Oct./Nov. 1947 were projected on the screen. They included: (a) Late Brig. Rajinder Singh, MVC, Chief of Staff J&K State Forces, who had played a key role in delaying the raiders advance by destroying an important iron bridge over Uri Nala East of Uri, and was killed while fighting a rear-guard action in Dewan Mandir in Bunyar on 24th Oct. 47. He was awarded India's first major gallantry awarded MVC posthumously, (b) Late Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai, MVC, Commanding Officer 1 SIKH, who rushed his available troops, comprising approximately 120-130 men, with a section of 3 inch Mortars to Baramula (a hill feature astride Mile 32) to hold the raiders well away from Srinagar despite orders to stay put at Srinagar airport. He was, unfortunately, killed at 1730 hrs on 28th Oct. while fighting a rear guard action in an open area astride Mile 32, East of Baramula. He was posthumously awarded the MVC for gallantry. (c) Late Mohammad Maqbul Sherwani, a social worker of Baramula, who was mercilessly killed by the raiders when he refused to cooperate with them. The Sherwani Community Hall at Baramula stands to perpetuate the memory and supreme sacrifice of

this great son of Kashmir. (d) Major (later Col.) Harwant Singh MC (Retd.), who was D Coy Commander and had taken over Officiating Command of 1 SIKH after Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai was killed in action. During Night 28th/29th Oct. when the operational situation was very fluid, the youthful officer controlled the situation calmly and with courage. He was praised for his wise and tactically sound decision to move the Battalion from Shalateng Spill Channel 4 ½ miles from Srinagar to area Mile 17 near Pattan, almost half way between Srinagar and Baramula, and thus caused the much-needed 48 hours, delay on the raiders to enable our troops build up at the airport. He had successfully commanded the Battalion at that critical juncture and fought tough battles in hilly areas of Mile 17 and 18 East of Pattan on 29th Oct. 47, inflicting heavy losses on the raiders. To the delight of the civil and army audience in the hall Col. Harwant Singh MC (Retd.) and Maj. Shivjeet Singh Sher Gill (Retd.), grandson of Late Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai, were introduced to them by Maj. Gen. Harwant Krishan.

Capt. Amarinder Singh also addressed the audience and highly lauded the role played by 1 SIKH in saving the Valley in the critical period of last week of Oct 47/first week of Nov. 1947. He also singled out and praised the gallant performances of three above mentioned officers and Mr. Maqbool Sherwani of Baramula.

After the address of Capt. Amarinder Singh, The Governor Gen. S. K. Sinha addressed the audience and lauded the role of our troops in saving the Valley during the critical period of last week of Oct. – first week of Nov. 1947. He expressed his admiration for the gallant roles played by late Brig. Rajinder Singh MVC; late Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai MVC; late Mr. Maqbool Sherwani of Baramula and Col Harwant Singh MC (Retd.). He recalled his personal experiences of emergency airlift of 1 SIKH on 27th Oct. 47 and other troops that followed as he was GSO 2 (Ops) at Army HQ, responsible for arranging Dakotas for the airlift. He had seen leading elements of 1 SIKH take off from Delhi Airport for Srinagar at 0500 hrs on 27th Oct. 47, had handed over Army HQ Operational Order to Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai and had found him in high spirits. He also narrated an anecdote pertaining to the airlift. Since he was responsible for ordering civil airlines Dakotas to Delhi for airlift of troops to Srinagar, the airlines, after completion of the operation, presented him a bill of several crores of rupees for payment!

Adieu:

On 28th Oct. 05, Capt. Amarinder Singh, accompanied by Mr. Farooq Abdullah, former Chief Minister of J&K State and his party flew back to Chandigarh. It was a memorable visit for all the members of the team. It was most heartening to learn that sacrifices made by our gallant service personnel to throw raiders out and protect Kashmir have not been forgotten. Their sacrifices are commemorated every year on 27 Oct. Infantry Day.

