CHAPTER III

INDIAN ARTILLERY: ARMY’S FORCE MULTIPLIER IN MOUNTAINS

Historically large numbers of conquerors have traversed through Himalayan passes to India. Yet it is the Himalayan mountain ranges which have stood as eternal wall for the security of the Indian subcontinent. Mountains thus have been intrinsic to India’s military history. In military, mountains are often described as regions of immense challenges requiring large quantum of troops to defend. India faces its both principal adversaries, China and Pakistan, along its northern borders. It may not be incorrect to state that future wars that India may have to fight could well be mountain centric. Artillery operates in most challenging terrain conditions has always been main stay of all the battles fought by the Indian Army in mountains. The latest example is that of Indo-Pak conflict in Kargil region during summer months of 1999.

The role of artillery in high mountains becomes even more important due to the difficulties being faced by the infantry. Employment of artillery in the Siachen Glacier and Kargil epitomizes the reach and power of the Indian Artillery to dominate the battlefield. Pakistani incursions in Siachen Glacier and Kargil have been a challenge to our sovereignty. The actions by the infantry and artillery are case studies that exemplify the power of the Indian artillery in winning battles.

Siachen Glacier

Siachen Glacier is the highest battlefield in the world. It is 76.4 kilometer long having heights ranging from 12000 feet to 24000 feet. The winter temperature drops to as low as minus 35 degree Celsius. High velocity blizzards of up to 150 knots per hour regularly lash the area aggravating the wind chill factor acutely.1

The genesis of Siachen problem dates back to 26 October 1947 when the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir merged with the Indian Union. Pakistani government laid a claim on the area and included it in their maps. To the north of the Siachen Glacier lies the Shaksgam valley, an Indian Territory area of approximately 5000 sq km illegally ceded by Pakistan to China in 1983. To the east lies the Depsang plains and Aksai Chin areas, now under Chinese occupation since 1962. The area thus has strategic importance for India and stands as a barrier to any Pakistani and Chinese threat to Leh.
Pakistani cartographical depictions have been displaying the area as part of Pakistan. To legitimate its stand Pakistan started approving international mountaineering expeditions to the region. The matters came to a head resulting in Indian decision to send army in the area.

The first serious call for duty for the Indian Artillery came during May 1982 when 246 Mountain Regiment equipped with 75/24 Pack Howitzer were tasked to move from Leh to Base Camp of Siachen glacier to support 4 Kumaon and other infantry units which were sent to the glacier under code name Ibex Hunt. The first skirmish took place on 25 April 1984 when a Pakistani patrol opposite Bilafond La massif attacked 4 Kumaon post with small arms and automatic weapons. Over a period of time 246 Mountain Regiment prepared itself to take on the enemy with the newly inducted 105 mm Indian Field Guns. So when Pakistani troops launched an attack on our Bilafond La defences on 20 June 1984 at a height of 18,500 feet, artillery guns of 246 Mountain Regiment started engaging the enemy. Such was the losses on the attacking Pakistanis that it had to stage a withdrawal not only from the attack but also from their defensive posts at Ali Brangsa post at 16,000 feet and areas stretching upto six to seven km west of Bilafond La. With this success artillery became the major force multiplier and decision maker in any operations in this super high altitude battlefield. Artillery fire was also instrumental for victory in battles like Operation Rajiv on 26 June 1987, at an altitude of nearly 21,000 feet, which was launched by the Indian troops. The operation aimed to capture Pakistani post ‘Quaid’ at a height over 17,000 feet. The Indian attack was supported by the artillery guns of 313 Field Regiment, 282 Medium Regiment and mortars. The battle was intense; Indian artillery fire caused unacceptable damage on the enemy. Pakistani ‘Quaid’ Post which controlled their operations in the region was captured and renamed ‘Bana’ Post, after Naib Subedar Bana Singh who had led the attack. Naib Subedar Bana Singh was awarded the Indian highest gallantry award, Param Vir Chakra for his heroic deeds.

In a similar manner Indian artillery guns were instrumental for success of Operation Vajra Shakti during the third week of September 1987, followed by Operation Ibex which was fought at an altitude of over 19,000 feet during May 1989. Operation Trishul Shakti fought near Chulung La in Southern Glacier sub-sector during July and Aug 1982 turned out to be success due to successful artillery fire support by the guns of 96 Field Regiment, 158 Medium Regiment and 121 Light Regiment. The battle took place between the heights of 18,000 feet and 21,000 feet.
INDO-PAK CONFLICT: KARGIL 1999

[Siachen Glacier Area Map]

[Map of Jammu and Kashmir, showing实际控制线 (Line of Actual Control) with China]
The success of battles in the sector have at many occasions been dedicated to the Indian Artillery as it not only increased the battle winning power of the infantry units, *it also became synonymous with increased comprehensive military power in the sector.*

Kargil lies between Zoji La pass and Leh in the high altitude region of Ladakh. As a part of its grand strategy to deny Indian winter stocking of Ladakh during the summer of 1999 and to administratively isolate our forces in Ladakh during winters, Pakistani army had occupied the heights overlooking the vital Srinagar – Leh National Highway 1A (NH 1A), the lifeline for Ladakh and Siachen areas. The design also included finding fresh and safer routes of infiltration through Mushkoh Valley.

The area of intrusions encompassed vital areas of Turtuk, Chorbat La, Khalubar, Jubar, Kaksar, Tololing and Tiger Hill. It included such heights like Muntho Dhalo, Point 4100, Point 5284, Kukarhang, Point 4927, Point 5285, etc. The extent of intrusion varied from four to five km to a maximum of seven to eight km. On an average each major ridge line was held by 30 to 40 Pakistani Northern Light Infantry (NLI) soldiers, under command of an officer. To camouflage, NLI soldiers were dressed in local tribal dress so that they could pass off as indigenous Kashmiri freedom fighters. In all, the intruders were estimated to have numbered between 1400 and 2000.

Operation Vijay conducted by the Indian Army in these most inhospitable high altitude terrains is a testimony of infantry-artillery synergy when it undertook the onerous task of evicting Pakistani troops who had infiltrated into Indian territories between Mushkoh and Batalik and occupied unheld high altitude mountain peaks and ridges. He crisis developed when these Pakistani troops, mainly from their Northern Light Infantry (NLI) and Special Services Group (SSG), the commando force, ensconced in Batalik, Kaksar, Drass and Mushkoh valley subsectors started interdicting the vital NH 1A. Infantry and artillery was called in to evict the infiltrators, duly supported by the other wings of the army, IAF and above all ‘the people of India’. Artillery unleashed its massive firepower to support the infantry operations as also to destroy infiltrators defences, lines of communication, administrative bases and gun areas which gradually affected broke enemy’s defensive capability and its will to fight. In fact Indian artillery provided such close support to infantry that has no parallel in the chapters of modern warfare.

The going for the Indian Army was difficult since the intruders were equipped with battalion support weapons like heavy and medium machine guns, rocket launchers and
automatic grenade launchers. Some of the posts were also given mortars, anti-aircraft weapons capable of being used on ground role, shoulder fired Stinger and Unza surface to air missiles. The intruders had also laid large number of antipersonnel mines along expected approaches to the ridge lines.

The infiltration had taken place during the heavy snowfall months of January to March. As the weather improved, the intruders extended mule tracks from its bases in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) across Line of Control and established forward administrative bases and helipads into Indian Territory. Subsequently they moved artillery mortars inside the Indian Territory while medium and field guns were moved close to the Line of Control, to provide close support to troops operating inside Indian Territory. The first reports of unidentified personnel occupying defences came to an army unit in Kargil sector from local people on 6 May 1999. Reconnaissance patrols were expeditiously despatched to investigate. It took some time to get a full picture of the level of intrusion. It was then realised that the re-capture of each of the ridge lines occupied by Pakistani forces would be an extremely difficult and costly military operation. Infantry assaults would have to be along narrow, high altitude approaches under effective enemy fire from several directions. It was also felt that maximum available artillery firepower would be required before infantry battalions could launch physical assaults to regain each position. Formation commanders emphasised the necessity of destroying the enemy’s prepared positions through coordinated preparatory bombardment, to reduce the combat potential of the posts and to break enemy morale.

Indian army’s military strategy in Operation Vijay was to contain, evict and deny. It meant that the Indian army was to immediately contain and limit the intrusions upto the areas already affected, then evict the Pakistani soldiers from the Indian side of the LC and, finally, deny any future intrusion by physical domination and surveillance. It was to undertake patrolling and deployment, where necessary, to ensure that the Pakistani Army is denied the opportunity of launching such a venture again. The areas of Tiger Hill and Tololing complex in Drass subsector dominated the Srinagar-Leh highway and hence it was given highest priority for eviction of the intruders. Next in order of priority was Batalik-Turtuk sector as it provided access to the Ladakh-Siachen region. Then came the Mushkoh Valley and Kaksar subsectors as the intrusions in these areas had comparatively lesser tactical significance.
Battle of Tololing

Point 5140 Feature
In addition to 3 Infantry Division which was responsible for the sector, additional troops from 8 Mountain Division, engaged in counter insurgency operations in the Kashmir valley, were inducted into Kargil sector. While 3 Infantry Division remained responsible for the Batalik, Kaksar, and Turtuk areas, responsibility for conduct of operations in Drass and Mushkoh valley subsectors was assigned to 8 Mountain Division. Additional infantry battalions, artillery regiments and engineer units were inducted from other sectors in Jammu and Kashmir on an ‘as required’ basis. Artillery regiments were also inducted from others parts of India. The military aim was clearly to achieve a preponderance of artillery firepower for a quick success. Logistics plans were fine-tuned to sustain the additional forces. Early opening of Zoji La Pass in May 1999 assisted the build-up.

While build-up of additional resources and acclimatisation was underway, the artillery used this interlude to prepare main, secondary and alternative gun positions, to carry out forward survey and to register targets. Plans for high-intensity fire assaults were drawn up and coordinated with infantry commanders. Counter-bombardment and counter-mortar plans were made and fine-tuned. Maximum use was made of aerial photographs to accurately locate enemy gun positions and other key targets deep inside enemy territory. These were then fired upon and attempts were made to carry out damage assessment through aerial reconnaissance. Meanwhile Pakistani troops holding defence on the Indian side of the line of control were allowed no rest and were kept constantly on the edge by firing detailed, skillfully evolved, harassing artillery fire assaults. All these were achieved in the face of heavy and accurate enemy shelling and counter bombardment of artillery gun areas.

**Battle of Tololing**

8 Mountain Division decided to first re-capture Tololing due to its domination of NH 1A. The area fell within operational responsibility of 56 Mountain Brigade commanded by Brig Amar Aul. 197 Field Regiment was in direct support to this brigade. 2 Raj Rif was tasked to capture the Tololing feature.9

By 9 June 1999, 18 Grenadiers had engaged the enemy in a series of bloody skirmishes in the vicinity of Tololing in which they lost their second-in-command, Lt Col R Vishwanathan. However the battalion had encircled the Tololing feature and forced the enemy to retreat. 2 Raj Rif thereafter, made use of the firm base provided by 18
Grenadiers to progress the operation further. Simultaneously 18 Garhwal Rifles was tasked to capture Point 5140 from the North.10

The attack was two directional. One company of 2 Raj Rif advanced from the southeast along the Bimbat Ridge towards Tololing while another company advanced from the southwest direction towards Point 4590 Complex and Barbad Bunker area. The attack was to commence at 2330 hours on 28 May. Artillery Observation Posts (OP) for these operations were provided by 197 Field Regiment, 41 Field Regiment, and 1889 Light Regiment. The fire units available for the operation included nine batteries of 105mm field guns, batteries from 108, 158 and 253 Medium Regiments and 1392 Medium Battery, two batteries of 244 Heavy Mortar Regiment and one of 212 Rocket Regiment. Fire Plan Nischay Vijay, prepared jointly by Col Alok Deb and Col GK Mediratta of 1889 Light Regiment, was fired throughout the night which culminated with heavy fire assaults just prior to the final assault. The company of 2 Raj Rif which assaulted from Bimbat Ridge direction on 12 June was led by Maj Vivek Gupta. The company soon closed in with Tololing Top and the adjacent Flat locality. The company at this stage was engaged in fierce fire fight by the enemy. Maj Vivek Gupta himself led the reserve platoon of his company to launch an assault on Tololing Top from a different direction as the capture of Flat had provided a new opening. The officer was grievously wounded at this stage but continued to lead his men and made the supreme sacrifice but not before the enemy had been evicted from Tololing Top. Capt Mridul Kumar Singh, a young artillery officer accompanying the attacking force, took over the company at this critical hour, rallied the men and set about deploying the troops on the objective to ward off the inevitable counterattacks. The Pakistani troops reacted with a vengeance. The loss of Tololing was a major setback for them. By 0130 hours on that night, ‘C’ company 2 Raj Rif now led by the young artillery officers had beaten back three fierce counterattacks by skilful and courageous infantry actions and accurate artillery fire. Tololing was in our hands once again.

The story of the Tololing battle would not be complete without the mention of the stellar role played by Maj Amrinder Singh Kasana, the battery commander from 41 Field Regiment. Though he was deputed with 18 Grenadiers for a gruelling period of three weeks, he volunteered to continue with 2 Raj Rif and 13 JAK Rifles during their assaults on the enemy posts. He participated in four consecutive attacks on Tololing, Hump, Rocky Knob and Point 5140. During these operations, Maj Kasana displayed exceptional valour.
and dedication to duty and very effectively directed artillery fire, causing heavy casualties to the enemy and degrading its defences. Throughout the operations, Maj Kasana was a bundle of energy, always cheerful. On one occasion, displaying nerves of steel and with utter disregard for personal safety, he entered a minefield laid by the enemy and successfully retrieved infantry mine casualties at Tololing feature on the night of 12 June, saving many lives and the limbs of his injured comrades. His act of exceptional courage boosted the morale of infantry soldiers going into the assault. The pulverisation of enemy defences by accurate and professionally directed artillery fire by this officer facilitated the capture of Tololing feature, Hump, Rocky Knob, and Point 5140. For his exceptional fighting spirit, personal valour beyond the call of duty and immense contribution to the success of four major operations, Maj Amrinder Singh Kasana was awarded the Vir Chakra.\footnote{11}

**Battle of Point 5140**

A brigade attack by 56 Mountain Brigade was planned for the capture of Point 5140. 13 JAK Rifles was tasked to capture it on the night of 19 June. Simultaneously, 1 Naga was tasked to capture Area Pyramid and Black Tooth. 18 Garhwal Rifles was tasked to approach Point 5140 from the north.

Artillery Observation Posts for this attack were provided by 41 Field Regiment, 197 Field Regiment, 1889 Light Regiment and 244 Heavy Mortar Regiment. Fire Plan Golabari consisting of 16 fire units was fired prior and during the attack.\footnote{12} While the fire plan was being fired, enemy retaliated with heavy counter-bombardment fire. Gunners continued to provide full support to the assaulting infantry, notwithstanding own losses. 244 Heavy Mortar Regiment’s mortar position too was engaged by enemy counter-bombardment due to which one of its mortars was put out of action. This mortar was quickly repaired and soon rejoined the fire plan. 1 Naga captured Pyramid locality by first light on 20 June but Black Tooth feature could be captured only on the night of 23 June due to determined enemy resistance.

**Battle of Black Rock**

2 Raj Rif was tasked to capture Knoll and Lone Hill. The CO decided to capture these two features with one company each. Simultaneously Black Rock was to be subjected to direct fire of two 155mm Bofors guns. One enemy bunker at Knoll offered
stiff resistance and had to be destroyed by direct fire. The second company advanced towards Lone Hill but came across heavy enemy resistance. As the attack progressed, artillery officers with the attacking team brought artillery fire as close as 40m to 50m ahead causing enemy had to withdraw due to heavy casualties. The Knoll was cleared by the reserve company of 2 Raj Rif by 0800 hours on 29 June. Lone Hill was captured by 1500 hours the same day with artillery support.\textsuperscript{13}

**Battle of Point 4700**

18 Garhwal Rifles plan was to capture enemy held Point 4700 and Tommy positions from the south with one company each. Subsequently, the Rocky Knob position was to be captured by advancing along the ridgeline, followed by re-capture of Sangar position. Thereafter, Point 5100, known as Junction, was to be tackled along the ridge line. In order to provide intimate support, 1889 Light Regiment deployed its mortars right under the nose of the enemy. Both Tommy and Point 4700 were captured by 0400 hours on 29 June. One enemy bunker located on the saddle between Point 4700 and Tommy was blasted by direct fire of Bofors on 29 June and occupants were killed in hand to hand fighting. Sensing success, 18 Garhwal Rifles launched a day attack on Rocky and Sangar positions. The enemy vacated the post quickly leaving behind a large quantity of arms and ammunition. Both Rocky and Sangar positions were captured by 30 June. Enemy Junction locality fell on the night of 1 July. Artillery observers for attack on Black Rock and Point 4700 were provided by 41 Field Regiment, 139 Medium Regiment, 197 Field Regiment, 1889 Light Regiment and 244 Heavy Mortar Regiment. The artillery support was provided by the fire of 16 artillery batteries. Two 155mm Bofors guns were used for direct engagement of enemy positions. Maj NV Punde, BC of 1392 Medium Battery was awarded Sena Medal for his courageous actions during the battle for capture of Point 4700.\textsuperscript{14}

**Battle of Tiger Hill**

Tiger Hill is a cone-shaped feature which stands out as one of the most dominating heights in the Drass subsector. It is located north of Zoji La – Kargil road, approximately nine km northwest of Drass. The hill top stands at a height of 5062m (over 15000 ft) and is flanked by Sando Nala in the east and Tingel to the west. By virtue of its configuration Tiger Hill was a difficult feature to assault. It was found that Pakistani intruders located on
the Tiger Hill were directing precise artillery fire on the NH 1A, thereby restricting move of our convoys. It was learnt that the enemy had deployed one section strength of infantry and an artillery observer on the top of the feature. Adjacent areas had nearly two infantry sections, medium machine gun detachments and other heavy calibre infantry support weapons.\(^5\)

192 Mountain Brigade of 8 Mountain Division, commanded by Brig MPS Bajwa was entrusted the task of capturing Tiger Hill. The task was further sub-allotted to 18 Grenadiers and a company of 8 Sikh. 41 Field Regiment was placed in direct support of 192 Mountain Brigade for the capture of Tiger Hill.\(^6\)

As a preliminary operation, on night of 26 June, a fire plan formulated by CO 41 Field Regiment for degradation of Tiger Hill complex was fired by three field regiments, two medium regiments less one battery, a heavy mortar regiment, a light regiment and a troop of multi barrel rocket launchers (MBRL) each having forty firing tubes. A battery of Bofors guns was used on direct firing role from Drass gun area under Lt Col MS Nigania, second in command of 158 Medium Regiment (SP).

Capture of Tiger Hill was an arduous task for 18 Grenadiers. They followed the most difficult route—through the sheer cliff to the east and the northeast that the intruders least expected Indian troops to climb. On the night of 3 July, 18 Grenadiers started its operations at 2100 hours, in three prongs from the most unexpected sides and reached areas Collar and Tooth by 0200 hours after a strenuous climb, without suffering any casualty. By now the clouds and snow had started enveloping Tiger Hill Top. Taking advantage of the poor visibility the infantry inched forward during final stages of steep climb and finally established a foothold on Tiger Hill Top by the early morning of 4 July.\(^7\)

On subsequent nights of 4 and 5 July, a company strength of 8 Sikh was successfully interposed on the western ridge of Tiger Hill. It managed to occupy areas known as India Gate and Helmet, without meeting any opposition. The enemy made a determined counterattack on the Helmet area with 30 to 40 soldiers led by Capt Karnal Sher of SSG. However before they could gain any foothold, the elements of 8 Sikh led by Maj Ravinder Parmar effectively repulsed the attack and established a firm control over the entire western ridge.

Artillery units namely 41 Field Regiment, 197 Field Regiment, 315 Field Regiment, 1889 Light Regiment, 244 Heavy Mortar Regiment, 158 Medium Regiment,
253 Medium Regiment, two batteries of 108 Medium Regiment and one battery of 139 Medium Regiment, took part in the Battle of Tiger Hill and its neighbouring enemy localities. Six guns of 108 Medium Regiment, two guns of 158 Medium Regiment and one multi barrel rocket launcher troop of 212 Rocket Regiment were used in direct firing role. Severe punishment meted to the Tiger Hill complex was an awesome sight which was caught by the television crew and telecast across the nation. Bofors shell and MBRL rockets landing on Tiger Hill became a rallying point for the nation. Gradually the objective was degraded to an extent that infantry could move up without having to resort to firing their heavier weapons and captured the objective. The artillery observers displayed exceptional courage and devotion to duty, they contributed immensely by directing accurate artillery fire. For the record, over 5000 shells and rockets were fired for the battle of Tiger Hill on the night of 3 July. In this operation the enemy lost two officers, Capt Karnal Sher and Capt Nasir and 31 other ranks. The unwavering faith of infantry in the gunners was once again reaffirmed, a near impossible task accomplished and the nation’s expectations upheld by the combined might of artillery and the infantry.

The Battle of Tiger Hill, perhaps for the first time, exhibited the power of artillery to enhance the comprehensive military power of the army through the electronic media.

**Battle of Point 4875 (Gun Hill)**

Point 4875, the most dominating feature in the entire Drass Sector was strongly held by the enemy. This feature dominates the entire Mushkoh Valley and provides observation from Mugalpura to Drass. It is a huge hill complex comprising Whale Back, Pimple I and Pimple II to the west and Ledge, Twin Bumps, Saddle, Rocky Knob and Tiger Hill towards north and east. Enemy had occupied Point 4875, Pimple II and Tiger Hill very strongly. It had also occupied nearby features with lesser strength.

79 Mountain Brigade was tasked to capture Point 4875 complex and adjacent features. In turn, 13 JAK Rifles was given the responsibility of capturing Point 4875, 17 Jat was assigned the capture of Pimples I and II, while 2 Naga was to capture Twin Bumps. One company of 12 Mahar was given the task of establishing a brigade fire base at Point 4540 and Tekri. One team from 21 Para (SF) was nominated to establish a block along Safaidona Nala.

The artillery fire plan for the battle of Point 4875 and the adjacent features was made by 315 Field Regiment. This unit was placed in direct support of 79 Mountain
Brigade. Coordination of the fire plan was personally undertaken by Brig Lakhwinder Singh, Commander 8 Mountain Artillery Brigade. The concentrated firepower of 18 artillery batteries was employed for this attack with devastating results for the enemy. Of these, 15 batteries were employed in the traditional ‘indirect’ fire role and three batteries were employed in the ‘direct’ fire role that had paid handsome dividends in earlier battles.

The direct firing of seven 155mm Bofors guns and a troop (three launchers) of 122mm MBRL from the Matayan gun position was controlled by Col P Ranjan, CO, 108 Medium Regiment and that of eight Bofors guns from the Huliyal gun position by Lt Col MS Nigania, second-in-command, 158 Medium Regiment (SP). Col NA Subramanian, CO 315 Field Regiment and Col AK Mishra, CO, 158 Medium Regiment (SP) positioned themselves as anchor OPs to personally manage the artillery battle for the assaults launched by 17 Jat and 13 JAK Rifles, respectively.22

13 JAK Rifles concentrated in Mushkoh Valley by 0800 hours on 1 July. The battalion began its planning and preparation for the battle from that day itself. Detailed reconnaissance was carried out and attack plans were finalised. Lt Col YK Joshi, the CO, gave his orders for the attack on 3 July. Maj Dhirendra Faujdar, the BC from 244 Heavy Mortar Regiment, who was affiliated with 13 JAK Rifles made the artillery attack fire plan involving a massive firepower punch from 21 artillery fire units. Maj Ganesh Bhat from 1889 Light Regiment and Capt BS Rawat from 244 Heavy Mortar Regiment, registered each target one by one with live artillery fire. An adhoc column of fighting porters from 13 JAK Rifles carried the ammunition forward and dumped it at the location selected for the establishment of the battalion fire base. The troops were briefed and the battalion moved forward to the area of the fire base on the night of 3 July.23

Though the enemy could not observe most of the movements of 13 JAK Rifles as these were confined to the hours of darkness, it remained active throughout the preparatory period of the attack and brought down speculative artillery and infantry mortar fire on the expected approach routes to Point 4875 and the adjoining features and succeeded in imposing caution and resultant delay. Keeping in view the overall situation it was decided to launch the assault on 4 July at 2100 hours. Accordingly, the artillery fire plan began at 1900 hours on 4 July. As dusk began to melt into night, the targets were lit up by hundreds of flashes as the shells exploded on contact. The deafening thunder of hundreds of simultaneous explosions rent the air, rumbled over the mountains and then
echoed back and forth till the next volley arrived and the cycle was repeated. Soon the
direct firing Bofors guns joined in. These were controlled from the fire base by Lt Col MS
Nigania who was in a better position to observe the enemy’s bunkers. Each direct hit by
the artillery shells brought forth spontaneous cheers from the spellbound troops manning
the fire base. The gun positions of the artillery regiments of 8 Mountain Artillery Brigade
were the scene of frenetic activity, most of which involved carrying heavy shells and
cartridges from the ammunition pits to the guns in a steady stream so that the required rate
of fire could be maintained and at no time our infantry should look back for fire support.

For two hours the gunners carried on relentlessly with their Load-Lay-Fire drill to
decimate the enemy. Even under most trying circumstances when enemy artillery shells
were falling on them, no gun position officer requested permission to move to an
alternative position to avoid enemy artillery fire. It is a matter of ultimate commitment that
if such permission had been sought, it would not have been granted as traditionally a
programmed fire plan is fired right till the stipulated time, no matter how extenuating and
compelling the circumstances. It is a tradition the gunners are proud of! At the end of the
fire plan, the barrels were red hot and the gunners at the gun positions had blisters on their
hands. It was a trial by fire for the enemy and a morale boosting dose for the troops of 13
JAK Rifles lying in wait to launch their assault.24

The attack began with ‘A’ Company under Maj SV Bhaskar assaulting along the
eastern slopes of Point 4875 and ‘C’ Company under Maj Gurpreet Singh assaulting along
the western slope of South Spur, with a view to eventually capture Flat Top. Initial
progress was slow as it was a pitch dark night and the terrain was rugged and stony. After
the artillery stopped firing, infantry medium machine guns from the fire base fired tracer
rounds to assist the assaulting companies to maintain direction. Although some casualties
were suffered due to enemy artillery fire, both the assaulting companies reached near the
objective at 0030 hours. From here ‘A’ Company moved to the east and ‘C’ Company to
the west. By attacking along two directions the enemy’s attention was divided.

‘A’ Company advanced steadily up to Rocky Knob 200 metres short of Point 4875
Top and secured it by 0430 hours. It could not progress beyond this point as it was pinned
down by enemy accurate small arms and medium machine gun fire from Point 4875 and
Flat Top. ‘C’ Company secured South Spur by 0400 hours. Here too, its advance was
stalled by a heavy volume of enemy fire from Flat Top. Despite several valiant attempts
by both the companies, they could not make further progress and, when daylight came, they found themselves strung out on the mountain in the open.\textsuperscript{25}

It was time for a change of tactics. The potency of artillery firepower was employed to break the impasse. Capt BS Rawat and Maj Ganesh Bhatt the artillery officers with the attacking infantry carefully ranged individual artillery guns on to the enemy bunkers that were holding up the assault. The two enemy localities were simultaneously with an intense dose of shelling for several hours. At 1030 hours, the infantry CO directed the fire of Faggot missiles at the bunkers on Flat Top. The firing was extremely effective. The first missile itself scored a direct hit. At this time, 17 Jat, a battalion on a nearby Whale Back feature reported to 13 JAK Rifles that some Pakistani soldiers could be seen running back. It became clear that the destruction caused by the combined weight of artillery fire and infantry Faggot missiles had taken a heavy toll of the enemy. The situation was now ripe for exploitation.\textsuperscript{26}

By 1300 hours on 5 July, 13 JAK Rifles had ensured that Point 4875 and the adjacent Flat Top were back in Indian hands. However, holding on to these objectives, which the enemy too considered important, was as difficult as capturing them. Throughout the day the troops were subjected to enemy artillery shelling and intermittent medium machine gun fire by the enemy. Soon after last light our defences on the re-captured features were reinforced by reinforcements. Heavy exchanges of fire continued during the night as well and the enemy’s attempts to launch counterattacks were beaten back. Accurate artillery fire contributed immensely towards warding off the counterattacks and kept the enemy at bay. At about 0445 hours on 6 July, Capt Nagappa reported that he was running out of ammunition. Ammunition re-supply was promptly arranged and additional reinforcements were sent under Maj Vikas Vohra and Capt Vikram Batra.\textsuperscript{27}

It became clear that the enemy locality immediately to the north of Point 4875 would have to be evicted quickly. Capt Vikram Batra volunteered to undertake this difficult task. At 0630 hours on 7 July, this brave officer who had by then become a household name with his \textit{Yeh dil maange more} comment to a TV reporter after the capture of Point 5140 on 20 June, now personally led an assault on area Ledge. He identified the most dominating and dangerous enemy bunker just short of the Ledge feature and pounced on it, firing from the hip with his AK-47. He killed all the intruders inside but suffered grievous injuries himself. After successfully capturing the enemy locality, this gallant
officer made the supreme sacrifice in the service of the motherland. He was awarded Param Vir Chakra for his gallantry.\textsuperscript{28}

Another major group of proud soldiers whose sustained enthusiasm and untiring devotion to duty made victory at Point 4875 possible comprised the officers, JCOs and jawans of 8 Mountain Artillery Brigade. In recognition of their unique contribution to ultimate victory, Point 4875 was re-named Gun Hill in their collective honour. They had more than lived up to their regimental motto: Sarvatra—Izzat o Iqbal (Everywhere—with Honour and Glory). They were truly everywhere—no intruder could hope to escape the shells, bombs and rockets of the Indian gunners.\textsuperscript{29}

17 Jat had been inducted into the Mushkoh Valley on 26 May. On 29 May, the battalion had captured Point 4540 but its attempts to capture Point 4875 had to be shelved because of much stronger enemy defences on this feature than had been anticipated. Col Umesh Singh Bawa, the CO, now planned to launch his battalion in two phases. In Phase 1 he decided to capture Pimple I from the southwest and the Whale Back feature from the south. In Phase 2, the plan was to capture Pimple II and exploit up to North Spur. The battalion was allotted 12 artillery batteries for the attack. In addition three 155mm Bofors guns were placed in the direct firing role. Maj Rajendra Kumar, battery commander, 315 Field Regiment made the fire plan for the attack. Capt SB Ghildyal of the same regiment and Capt SK Panda of 108 Medium Regiment registered targets and went into attack with the companies of 17 Jat as FOOs.\textsuperscript{30}

The assault was launched against stiff resistance with two companies on the night of 4 July. The advance of the brave troops of 17 Jat was vehemently opposed by the well-prepared enemy every inch of the way. Accurate artillery fire and heavy volumes of small arms fire were arraigned against them. But the Jats refused to relent and carried on resolutely. After some extremely bitter fighting, ‘A’ Company captured Pimple I by 0500 hours on 5 July, fortunately without any fatal casualty. The Company recovered one medium machine gun and a large quantity of ammunition. The enemy withdrew to Pimple II.\textsuperscript{31}

The battalion spent a day and a night consolidating its position and in preparation for the launch of Phase 2 of the attack. Casualties were evacuated and more ammunition was brought up. The interlude was also utilised to deliver a lethal firepower punch on Pimple II and the positions occupied by the enemy on adjacent features. Artillery FOOs directed accurate fire on the Phase 2 objectives and systematically degraded their fighting
potential. The CO went around and rallied his men. By the evening of 6 July, the battalion was ready to launch an assault on Pimple II. It was led by ‘B’ and ‘C’ Companies from the direction of Whale Back and was launched at 2000 hours after extensive preparation of the battlefield by a preponderance of artillery fire.

During the move towards the objective, the company commander of ‘C’ Company was seriously injured and had to be left behind. Bad luck, it is said, comes in droves. Capt Anuj Nayyar, the company second-in-command, then took over command of the company and personally led the assault. After three enemy sangars had been cleared, Capt Nayyar was hit by an enemy rocket propelled grenade and made the supreme sacrifice. At this critical juncture during the attack, Capt Shashi Bhushan Ghildyal, the artillery FOO with the company, took over the reins of the company. Capt Ghildyal’s action was in the true tradition of many FOOs before him who had risen to the occasion under similarly daunting circumstances. He rallied the shaken Jat soldiers and personally led the assault up to the objective even as he was simultaneously engaged in discharging his primary responsibility of bringing down accurate artillery fire to destroy the enemy’s sangars and will to resist.\textsuperscript{32}

While leading the assault on an enemy bunker, Capt Ghildyal sustained gun shot wounds but continued to push forward. Finally, after some bitter fighting against a determined enemy, ‘C’ Company, 17 Jat, led by this valiant gunner, succeeded in wresting part of the Pimple II objective from the enemy. Capt Ghildyal exhibited a high sense of responsibility towards the brave soldiers of ‘C’ Company, 17 Jat and single-minded dedication to the task at hand. For his sterling qualities of leadership amidst daunting odds and indomitable courage in the face of the enemy, despite being seriously injured, Capt Shashi Bhushan Ghildyal was awarded the Vir Chakra.

Further progress was held up due to the heavy volumes of artillery and automatic fire being brought to bear on the attacking troops by the enemy. Reinforcements were sent up and the company consolidated its gains under ‘B’ Company Commander on the night of 7 July. Along with one platoon each from ‘A’ and ‘D’ companies, a broad daylight attack was launched on Pimple II and it was finally captured at 1600 hours on 8 July, soon after 13 JAK Rifles had cleared Ledge feature in a simultaneous attack.\textsuperscript{33}

The Capture of Twin Bumps

2 Naga was tasked to launch an assault only in Brigade Phase-II, the battalion had thus some more time to complete its preparations. Maj A S Oberoi, of 41 Field Regiment
made the artillery fire plan for the battalion attack. The targets were registered by Capt R Jerry Prem Raj from 158 Medium Regiment (SP) and Maj UC Yadav from 253 Medium Regiment had joined in as artillery observers for the attack. The Twin Bumps were comprehensively bombarded with the entire might of the artillery firepower available in the Drass and Mushkoh Valley subsectors over a prolonged period. Extensive damage was caused to the enemy’s defences. As a result when the assault of 2 Naga went in on the night of 5 July, enemy resistance was not as heavy as had been anticipated. The brave Nagas made steady progress and charged the objective amid cries of Jai Durga Naga. The sangars that were encountered were destroyed and the momentum of the assault was maintained. However, due to the long and arduous climb involved, the Nagas were ‘daylighted’ and had to fight through the last remaining resistance during the hours of daylight.34

Early morning the enemy launched a fairly determined counterattack but it was beaten back by accurate artillery fire. By then infantrymen everywhere in the Kargil Sector had come to lean heavily on the ‘gunners’ as they had closely seen the havoc that well-directed artillery fire could cause to enemy defences and, in turn, to enemy morale. They had seen direct hits from medium guns completely destroy enemy bunkers and the weapons and equipment inside them. They had also observed first hand that over 60 to 70 per cent of the dead bodies left behind by the fleeing enemy bore splinter injuries from bursting artillery shells. They had also been witness to the tenacity and courage with which the artillery observers with the infantry had fought shoulder-to-shoulder with them through thick and thin and suffered the same hardship and privations.

Capt R Jerry Prem Raj was one such artillery officer with 2 Naga during the battalion’s assault on Twin Bumps. During the assault, Capt Prem Raj took the initiative to identify enemy positions that were interfering most effectively with the attack and directed artillery fire onto them accurately and with devastating effect. While doing this, he willingly exposed himself to enemy fire so that he could get to a vantage position to better observe the enemy’s defences.

In this endeavour, Capt Prem Raj was hit by enemy sniper fire. Undeterred, he refused to be evacuated and continued to bring down effective artillery fire on enemy positions. Sometime later, he was again hit by a volley of enemy machine gun fire. Though he was now gravely injured, he continued to direct artillery fire on to the enemy, inflicting heavy casualties and assisting in the capture of the objectives with minimum casualties to
own troops. He was also instrumental in beating back a determined enemy counterattack but soon after this he succumbed to his injuries and made the supreme sacrifice in the highest traditions of the Indian Army and the Regiment of Artillery. For displaying gallantry of a very high order well beyond the call of duty, remarkable tenacity of purpose and tremendous professional acumen under daunting circumstances, with total disregard for his own safety despite being seriously injured, Capt R Jerry Prem Raj was posthumously awarded the Vir Chakra.35

By 1200 hours on 6 July, Twin Bumps had been captured and the enemy had been effectively evicted from the positions close to NH 1A in the Mushkoh Valley subsector. The determined Nagas went on to exploit their success further and consolidate their gains. Besides a successful raid on an enemy mortar position on 8 July, the exploits of the Nagas included the capture of areas Rocky Knob, Hump and Tips further to the north.36

By now Pakistani resistance in Drass subsector was all but over. The enemy attempted to launch some counterattacks but these were resolutely beaten back primarily due to artillery fire. Mopping up operations continued for several days and, simultaneously, the Srinagar-Leh highway was once again thrown open to civilian traffic. With the lifeline to Leh once again safe, the army could concentrate on other areas that had been relegated to lower priority.

Victory in the battle for Tiger Hill and Gun Hill marked the turning point in Operation Vijay. Brigade, Divisional and Corps Commanders acknowledged and profusely appreciated the sterling role played by the gunners for capture of the strategic features and the close support provided by the artillery – much beyond the call of duty.

Battles in the Kaksar Subsector

121 (Indep) Infantry Brigade Group of 3 Infantry Division was responsible for operations in Kaksar subsector. 141 Field Regiment was placed in direct support to this brigade. Initially 14 JAK Rifles was tasked to clear the intrusions in this subsector. Capt PV Vikram of 141 Field Regiment was de-inducted from Batalik subsector and was grouped with 14 JAK Rifles as an artillery observer. He along with his radio operator AK Bhai established an observation post at Point 5299 after negotiating the extremely rugged and glaciated terrain and commenced interdiction of enemy localities, causing considerable damage. The enemy retaliated with heavy artillery fire on Capt Vikram’s location for four days continuously. Despite being in the open with no cover Capt Vikram
continued to direct own artillery fire on the enemy until he came under heavy enemy counter-bombardment and made his supreme sacrifice on 2 June. He was awarded Sena Medal posthumously. In this subsector Gnr Parminder Singh was deployed as part of an observation post at Point 5299 under Capt Sanjay Barshilia of 286 Medium Regiment. On 21 June Gnr Parminder Singh volunteered to undertake repair of telephone lines which had snapped by enemy shelling. While undertaking this task under enemy shelling Gnr Parminder was fatally wounded by an enemy shell. He laid down his life in the best traditions of Indian Army.\(^{37}\)

Gradually 141 Field Regiment was joined in by other artillery units like 4 Field Regiment, 15 Field Regiment, 114 Medium Regiment, 153 Medium Regiment (SP), 158 Medium Regiment (SP), 286 Medium Regiment, 1861 Light Regiment and a subunit of 244 Heavy Mortar Regiment for operations in the subsector. They supported 1 Bihar, 5 Para, 10 Para (SF), 12 JAK LI, 14 JAK Rifles, 21 Para (SF), 1/11 Gorkha Rifles and Indus Wing of Ladakh Scouts in Batalik/Yaldor/Chorbat La subsectors as well. Artillery mortars being mule and human transportable, 1861 Light Regiment had the distinction of deploying its mortars in Chorbat La, Batalik and Kaksar subsectors at altitudes varying from 9000 to 15,500 feet. In Yaldor subsector the artillery observers operated at altitudes between 17000 to 18000 feet in support of Ladakh Scout operations. Another operation saw Maj Indrajeet Ghoshal of 1861 Light Regiment being helilifted and inducted to an altitude of 15,500 feet along with Ladakh Scouts unit on 29 May. The officer effectively used medium guns and mortars to destroy the enemy found scaling and trying to occupy features in the areas of Sonam Ridge, Flag Hill, and an area known as Tent area. In yet another operation Capt AK Kulshrestha of the unit went for four attacks as artillery observers with Indus Wing (Ladakh Scout) in Yaldor sector, at altitudes between 16000 to 18000 feet, which resulted in capture of Point 5000, Dog Hill and Padma Go feature and Stangba Ridge.\(^{38}\)

**Battles in the Batalik Subsector**

The terrain in Batalik subsector was much tougher and the enemy ensconced far more strongly. The containment battle itself took over a month. Operations in this subsector were conducted by 3 Infantry Division. 70 Infantry Brigade of the Division was inducted into the Kargil Sector on 8 May to take charge of the Batalik subsector. In this sector, Pakistani 5 NLI had intruded almost eight to ten km from the line of control in an unheld and remote area east of Batalik and west of the Chorbat La. In the Batalik
subsector, the line of control cuts across the Indus River between Batalik and Marol and then runs roughly along the Chorbat La watershed in Ladakh Range at heights well above 5,000m (16,500 feet) till it dips again towards Subsector Haneef astride the Shyok River. Pakistani soldiers had occupied the four ridgelines jutting southwards like the fingers of a hand from the palm along the Chorbat La watershed. These ridgelines—Jubar, Kukarthang, Khalubar, Point 5203, and Churubar Po—varied in height from 4,500 to 5,200m (15,000 to 16,800 feet) and had extremely steep slopes with sharp spines and jagged peaks and shoulders. The brigade group arrived just in time to ensure that the enemy was not allowed to extend their intrusions further southwards so as to be able to dominate the Leh-Batalik-Kargil road. 

Artillery Fire Direction Centre at Batalik, under arrangements of 4 Field Regiment, was tasked to provide dedicated fire support to 70 Infantry Brigade. Initially one battery of 4 Field Regiment deployed at Biamah gun position was placed in direct support to 70 Infantry Brigade. Later 255 Field Regiment, 1142 Medium Battery and subunits of 305 and 307 Medium Regiment joined in. All the BC/OP parties of the regiments moving in the subsector were allotted quickly to the infantry battalions like 1 Bihar, 3 Punjab, 5 Para, 10 Para (SF), 17 Garhwal Rifles, 1/11 Gorkha Rifles and Indus Wing of Ladakh Scouts. The counter-bombardment organisation also came up quickly and began neutralising enemy guns.

One of the first operations in the subsector was undertaken by 10 Para (SF) (Para Commando) and 5 Para battalion. They were tasked to capture enemy Bump II and III localities with a view to cut off the maintenance routes of intruders occupying Jubar heights, Point 4927, Tharu and Kukarthang. 4 Field Regiment provided artillery observers for these operations. Lt S Pandey and Nb Sub Nedunchezian proceeded with the infantry as observation officers. Maj Naresh Kumar established an artillery observation post at a vantage point known as Tent locality. The operations commenced on 18 May. At 2030 hours 4 teams of 10 Para (SF) and a company of 5 Para moved forward towards Bump-III locality. The troops while on move came under very heavy and effective fire from enemy artillery and mortars. The leading team of 10 Para (SF) accompanied by artillery officer Lt S Pandey and his buddy Sajeev Gopala Pillai came under intense and accurate direct fire from the enemy localities at Bump-I, Bump-III and Point 5285. Lt S Pandey and Pillai suffered serious injuries from enemy’s small arms fire. Notwithstanding his personal injuries Sajeev Gopala Pillai moved to a vantage position and started engaging the enemy
with his own battery thus pinning down the enemy. He also continued to use his rifle effectively to return enemy fire. In the thick of the battle, he was hit by a rocket propelled grenade leading to serious head injury. He was later evacuated to a military hospital where he succumbed to his injuries on 15 July. For displaying indomitable courage in the face of the enemy, firm determination and exemplary dedication to duty despite being gravely injured, Gunner Sajeev Gopala Pillai was posthumously awarded the Vir Chakra.41

The Khalubar ridgeline dominated the area up to Junk Longpa in the east, Gragrio Nala in the west, the Kukarthing feature to its southwest and Muntho Dhalo, the administrative base of the enemy to its northwest. It was the hub of the enemy, defences in the Batalik subsector and its early re-capture was bound to render large parts of their defences untenable. Hence, a plan was prepared to launch a simultaneous brigade attack on the feature at several points. 12 JAK LI was given the task to capture Point 4812 complex at the southern extremity of the Khalubar ridgeline.

Col Bhalotia, CO of 12 JAK LI, planned to launch a multi-directional attack on Point 4812 so as to simultaneously deploy the full combat potential of his battalion against the enemy and fix them in place on all sides. He planned to launch an assault with two columns of ‘C’ Company under Maj DK Pathak and Capt KC Nongrum from the north and east, respectively and a column of ‘B’ Company led by Capt Sanjeev Dhiman from the south. Two columns, one from ‘D’ Company under Maj TS Bhandari and the other from ‘A’ Company under Maj Rupinder Singh were nominated as reserves. Two fire bases were established, one each under Maj Vikas Mehta and Maj VS Shivrain.42

Once again the guns of 3 Artillery Brigade rained death and destruction on the objectives for the attack and on the targets that were identified as likely to interfere. The assaulting troops set out at 2030 hours on 30 June. By 0300 hours on 1 July, the attacking columns had reached their respective positions. From here on the going got tough but, like the saying goes, the tough got going. The enemy opened up with everything they had at their disposal. Deafening explosions rent the air. Machine gun bullets whizzed past the ears of the JAK LI jawans. Those which they did not hear were either too far out because of the effects of plunging fire in the mountains, or those that hit them and stopped them in their tracks. However, the men would quickly tie a bandage on each other’s wound and keep going.43

By first light on 1 July, 12 JAK LI had secured a tenuous foothold on the ridgeline south of Point 4812 and had a small column holding on by the skin of the teeth to the
north behind the enemy position. Besides Capt Nongrum, seven brave soldiers made the supreme sacrifice during the attack. For two more days the battalion hung on to its hold but could not make any further progress. Indian artillery kept the enemy’s head down and covered the battalion’s stay in the open. Then, reinforced by the two reserve columns led by Maj TS Bhandari and Maj Rupinder Singh, 12 JAK LI launched fresh assaults, under intense artillery covering fire, on the feature from the southeast and the south. After a gruelling three hour climb, the attacking party captured Point 4812 and the Indian Tricolour at the dawn of 3 July.44

Khalubar was re-captured on 6 July, after a daring assault led personally by the CO of 1/11 Gorkha Rifles, despite having been wounded. The enemy was also evicted from Points 4812 and 5000 in operations directed personally by Brig Devinder Singh, the same night. The might of field artillery played havoc on the enemy in these operations, softening the defences and destroying the enemy’s battalion headquarters and logistics infrastructure at Muntho Dhalo.45

With the fall of Khalubar, Point 4812 and Point 5000, enemy resistance in the Batalik subsector crumbled completely. In subsequent assaults the Jubbar heights and Point 4268 were re-captured on 7 July. Points 5280 and 4957 were also re-captured on 8 July. Wireless intercepts revealed that the morale of NLI troops in Batalik subsector had touched rock bottom due to sustained and intense artillery fire and they were no longer capable of putting up organised resistance. It was acknowledged by all that the artillery had systematically and inexorably broken the enemy’s will to fight. Subsequent days saw further attacks on Pakistani posts in the subsector which fell in quick succession. Thus, Pakistani misadventure to pose threat to Ladakh through the Batalik subsector ended ignominiously for them.46

**ARTILLERY AND COMPREHENSIVE MILITARY POWER**

**IN KARGIL OPERATIONS**

Major highlights of all the operations in Operation Vijay was comprehensive destruction of enemy defences and suppression of enemy artillery forcing them to vacate their defences, leaving behind a large cache of arms, ammunition, equipment and stores. The suppression of enemy small arms and artillery fire reduced our casualties considerably. The infantry battalion commanding officers, company commanders, platoon
commanders and men did not mince words in expressing their gratitude to the gunners. The role of Artillery in the battlefield, as a destructive and decisive arm was indeed written in golden letters in Operation Vijay.

While Operation Vijay was in progress, intense diplomatic effort saw Pakistan being isolated in the international community. The last nail in this regard was driven during the Clinton-Nawaz Sharif meeting in Washington. Soon thereafter at the request of the Government of Pakistan, a meeting was held between India’s Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) and Pakistan’s DGMO at the Attari (Wagah) border outpost near Amritsar on 11 July to work out a time frame for Pakistani forces to withdraw from Indian territory. The Pakistani DGMO agreed to complete Pakistani withdrawal by first light on 16 July. As always, Pakistan failed to keep its commitment and sought extension, which was rather magnanimously granted. Ever after the extended deadline, Pakistani intruders remained entrenched in some pockets in Drass, Mushkoh Valley and Batalik subsectors. These pockets of resistance were cleared by physical assaults preceded by heavy concentrations of artillery fire forcing the intruders to abandon their posts and flee. By the end of July the area of operations had been cleared of the enemy.

However, the guns did not fall silent in the Kargil sector as Pakistani artillery continued to target the innocent civilian residents of Kargil town and did not cease to interdict the short stretches of the Srinagar-Leh highway that are visible to their OPs from across the LC. Unfortunately for them, now Indian Artillery OPs had reached the LC and could directly observe Pakistani lines of communications deep inside POK. Retribution was swift and voluminous. Several Pakistani gun positions were subjected to massive counter-bombardment. Pakistani administrative and logistics bases were specially targeted. Slowly but surely, the supremacy of Indian Artillery’s firepower forced the Pakistanis to recant and the guns once again adopted a mode of maintaining a silent vigil over the LC in Kargil sector.

India’s victory in Operation Vijay was not achieved without major sacrifices. 30 officers, 16 junior commissioned officers (JCO) and 405 other ranks (OR) made the supreme sacrifice in defence of the motherland. 64 officers, 63 JCOs and 1161 OR were wounded, many of them maimed for life. Three valiant officers and 32 brave soldiers of the Regiment of Artillery laid down their lives in the true spirit of the Indian Army. Pakistan lost an estimated 69 officers and 772 OR. Over 1000 Pakistani soldiers were wounded.
In the final analysis, while all arms and services contributed significantly to the concerted effort to evict the Pakistani regulars from Kargil sector, the victory belonged to the indomitable courage and selfless devotion to duty of the Indian infantryman and the overwhelming firepower of the artillery and the Indian Air Force.

The young company commanders and artillery’s observers with the attacking force led from the front by personal example and thus motivated their troops to perform outstanding acts of gallantry. For their exceptional and exemplary valour and grit in heroic battles in Kargil, the Chief of the Army Staff honoured 11 Infantry battalions, three units of Regiment of Artillery namely 141 Field Regiment, 197 Field Regiment and 108 Medium Regiment and two Reconnaissance and Observation Squadrons of the Army Aviation with the special award of Chief of the Army Staff Unit Citations.47

By honouring these regiments the army acknowledged the immense part played by all the units of the Regiment of Artillery in the gallant fight to re-capture Indian Territory from Pakistani intruders. Despite the controversy over its induction, 155mm FH 77-B Bofors performed remarkably well and was mainstay of artillery in the operations. Its maximum range of 30 km enabled deep strikes on the enemy’s gun positions, administrative installations, ammunition dumps, and headquarters, besides neutralising forward positions held by the intruders. By moving up these guns, 105mm field guns, 160mm and 120mm Mortars and 122mm GRAD BM 21 MBRLs into forward gun positions for ‘direct’ fire on enemy localities, literally under the nose of the enemy and thereby inviting certain enemy artillery fire onto themselves, the gunners exhibited unparalleled courage in battle. The gun positions came under heavy enemy counter-bombardment from time to time, many a times causing serious casualties. But the gunners there stood fast and continued to respond to the requirements of the artillery observers with the forward troops. Such was the intensity of firing that all the 18 guns barrels of 286 Medium Regiment wore out their life in 25 days since Operation Vijay commenced. They continued to fire as extensively with newer guns that they received from 163 Medium Regiment while operations were on.48

The Kargil conflict once again established beyond doubt, that artillery plays a major part in achieving victory on the modern battlefield. Accurate artillery fire reduces the enemy’s defences to rubble. Sustained artillery fire gradually wears the enemy’s resistance and ultimately breaks their will to fight. By systematically degrading the enemy’s fighting potential before a physical assault is launched, the artillery helps to
reduce the casualties suffered by assaulting infantrymen. It has been estimated that more than 80 per cent of the casualties on both sides of line of control were caused by artillery fire. Overall, Indian artillery fired approximately 2,50,000 rounds of ammunition in less than two months in the conflict. Throughout the offensive phase of Kargil conflict, artillery was called upon to respond to emerging situations and it did so with alacrity and telling lethality. The infantry battalions involved in the fighting were the first to acknowledge the immense debt of gratitude that they owe to their artillery comrades.

The then Chief of the Army Staff, Gen VP Malik had to comment later:

_The Gunners have a glorious tradition of the pursuit of professional excellence and immense dedication. In Kargil they have added further to their traditionally exacting standard with systematic and methodical planning and superb innovation. The gunners overcame all hazards and challenges. Their heroic courage, their indomitable resolve to deliver and the supreme sacrifice made by many gallant martyrs in the highest traditions of the Indian Army are indeed laudable._

_The Gunners fought shoulder-to-shoulder with the infantry. The exemplary affiliation and synergy between two arms was a major battle winning factor. The contribution of the artillery to the victory in Kargil will always be remembered._

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3 Ibid, pp. 199 and Editor, Major General (Retd) Ian Cardozo, _The Indian Army – A Brief History (Siachen – Quaid/Billa Operations)_ , Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, United Service Institution of India, 2005, pp. 165-166.
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