



रक्षा मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE

1947-48 INDO-PAK WAR: THE FIRST WAR OF KASHMIR

INTRODUCTION

The first Indo-Pak war fought between the independent countries of India and Pakistan began in 1947. The bone of contention between India and Pakistan were the attempts by Pakistan to annex the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir by any means. In 1947, on the map of India, the state of Jammu and Kashmir appeared as a somewhat rectangular projection in the extreme North-West corner of the sub-continent. In size it was the largest of the Indian 'Princely States' during the pre-independence era. It was 222,870 sq km or roughly double the area of Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg combined.¹ The state was important because of its strategic location. Even before the birth of Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir was surrounded on almost three sides by foreign states. Today, its importance has been accentuated by recent international developments. To the East lay Tibet; to its North lies Chinese Turkestan or Sinkiang (Xinjiang); to West is Afghanistan; to South-West and South was Pakistan; and to the South and South-East lay the states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh of India.² Wakhan corridor, a narrow strip of territory in Afghanistan, extending to China and separating Tajikistan from Gilgit-Baltistan lies to the North West.



Indian Soldiers during 1947-48 Indo-Pak war.

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

¹ Operations in Jammu and Kashmir S.N. Prasad. Dr. Dharam Pal (2005). Natraj Publishers and Ministry of Defence, Government of India

² Ibid (pg no. 01-11)



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INDEPENDENCE OF INDIA



Pangs of Partition

Source: indianarmy.nic.in

The Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir agreed to have a Standstill Agreement with both India and Pakistan and to postpone making a decision regarding the issue of accession. On 12 August, 1947, the Maharaja sent telegrams to both India and Pakistan that contained an offer of a standstill agreement. However, the state only signed a Standstill Agreement with Pakistan; the Indian government did not sign any agreement before the state joined the Indian Union on 26 October 1947.

The cordial relations between the countries became worse as an unprecedented wave of racial unrest began in August and spread throughout the whole Punjab. In West Punjab and the North West Frontiers Province (NWFP), thousands of Hindus and Sikhs were killed, and women were kidnapped; thousands of Muslims had the similar fate in East Punjab. In massive columns, millions of refugees poured out of both countries. The victims of either side initially found refuge in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Muslim migrants fleeing to the west and Hindu and Sikh refugees fleeing to the east used the state as a corridor. But, these refugees did not fail to excite their co-religionists in the state by their stories of sufferings, and even tried to wreak their vengeance within the state on the co-religionists of those who wronged them.



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THE TRIBAL INVASION

The Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir, received a telegram on 29 August 1947 from Raja Yakub Khan on behalf of the people of Hazara alleging attacks on Muslims of Punch and threatened “We are ready to enter the state equipped to fight with your forces. You are requested to ease the situation soon, otherwise be ready to bear the consequence.” On 04 September 1947, the commander of Units of the State’s army, Major General Scott, informed the state government at Srinagar, ‘Reliable reports state that on 02 and 03 September 1947, a band up to 400 armed Sattis-Muslim residents mainly in Kathua Tehsil of Rawalpindi district- were infiltrating into the state over the river Jhelum from Pakistan in the area Owen, eleven miles east of Kathua. Their purpose is looting and attacking minority communities in the state.’ From 06-17 September, intrusions from the Pakistani Army was reported and were countered by State’s armed forces. In the areas of Punch also, trouble continued and the state forces were compelled to deal with it with a heavy hand.³

THE INVASION PLAN

The Pakistani invasion into Kashmir valley was planned with meticulous care. The plan was to first split up the state’s army into tiny groups by the means to hit-and-run attacks all along the long frontier with Pakistan. In trying to control these apparent and uncoordinated attacks, the defending force was compelled to distribute itself into garrisons of platoon strength spread very thin indeed along the entire southern frontier. The terrain was hilly and the communication was primitive, so this distribution of the state army into innumerable tiny garrisons meant it ceased to exist as a strong cohesive force.

According to Indian military sources, the Pakistani Army prepared a plan called Operation Gulmarg and put it into action as early as 20 August 1947. The plan was accidentally revealed to an Indian officer, Major O S Kalkat serving with the Bannu Brigade. According to the plan, 20 lashkars (tribal militias), each consisting of 1000 Pashtun tribesmen, were to be recruited from among various Pashtun tribes, and armed at the Brigade Headquarters at Bannu, Wanna, Peshawar, Kohat, Thall and Nowshera by the first week of September. They were expected to reach the launching point of Abbottabad on 18 October, and cross into Jammu and Kashmir on 22 October. Ten lashkars were expected to attack the Kashmir Valley through Muzaffarabad and another ten lashkars were expected to join the rebels in Poonch, Bhimber and Rawalakot with a view to advance to Jammu. Detailed arrangements for the military leadership and armaments were described in the plan.⁴

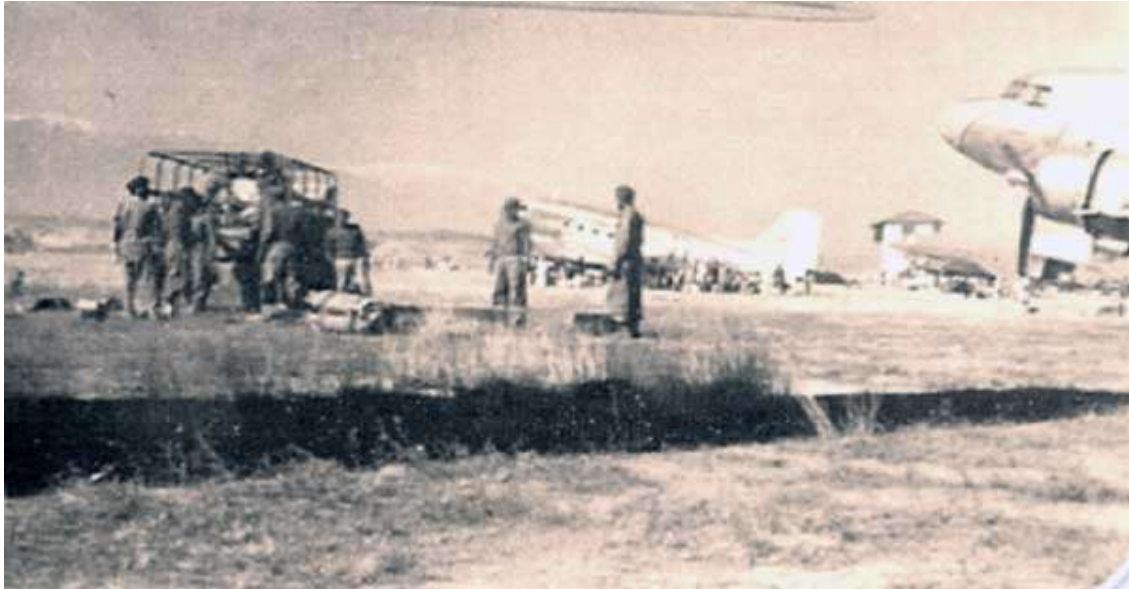
³ Ibid (pg no.16-17)

⁴ Ibid (pg no. 18-21))



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INDIA TO RESCUE



On October 27, 1947, the Indian Army landed in Srinagar airport and thus began what is historically referred to as the Indo-Pakistan War, 1947-48.

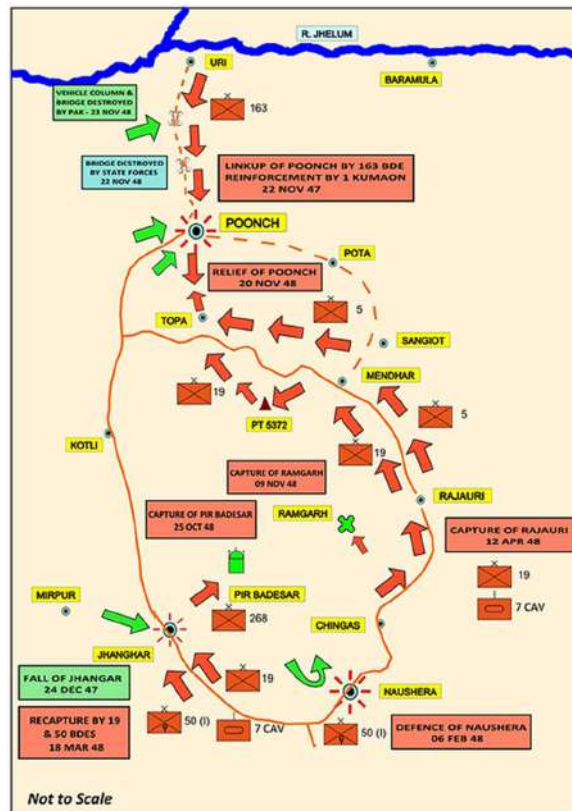
Source: <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/>

Due to the crisis that had now erupted in Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh was bewildered. While the Government of India was keeping a close watch on the developments in the state. It was only on 24 October 1947; the Government of India received the first news of the invasion of Kashmir. Then on the same night at 1100 Hours an urgent request was received from Maharaja Hari Singh, specifically requesting Indian Government to send Indian troops to Kashmir to protect it from the invaders. The Defence Committee of the Cabinet discussed the situation and the urgent pleas of the state of Kashmir and popular leader Sheikh Abdullah for military assistance to halt the raiders in Kashmir. After several rounds of discussions, it was decided that Indian troops would be sent to Kashmir only after formal accession to India. VP Menon (Secretary, Ministry of States, Government of India) flew to Jammu in the afternoon of 25 October 1947, and brought back Instrument of Accession, signed by Maharaja Hari Singh. **With the acceptance of this legal document by the Governor-General of India on the evening of 26 October 1947, the state of Jammu and Kashmir became an integral part of India dominion, legally, morally and constitutionally.** Once the state of Jammu and Kashmir had acceded to India, Pakistan as a friendly neighbour should have accepted the decision and stopped the invading forces. However, a desperate Pakistan continued to provide the invaders with all possible help. Soon after signing of Instrument of Accession, the Indian Armed Forces



came into action and on the morning of 27 October 1947, one battalion 1 SIKH which was located in Gurgaon was flown to Srinagar to save the state from invaders.⁵

WESTERN SECTOR



Sketch showing the various areas of the state where the Indian Forces were stationed

Source: <https://www.thedefencearchive.com/post/recovery-in-sight-naushera>

The Indian rescue operation was beset with obvious difficulties from the very beginning. Srinagar was over 480 km from the nearest point on the Indian border. Troops in East Punjab were engaged in dealing with the refugees and maintaining law and order. Hence, air transport was the only way out. Worse still, the airport at Srinagar was hardly fit to land fully laden transport planes. But that was the only option available and it had to be taken. The rescue mission was code-named, Operation Jak. The first regiment to move in was 1 Sikh, stationed at Gurgaon at the time and commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Dewan Ranjit Rai. The troops were transported in four Dakota planes that took off from Safdarjung Airport, Delhi at 0500 hour on 27 October and reached Srinagar by 0830 hour the same day. The first engagement

⁵ Ibid (pg no 25-41)



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with the enemy started on 27 October. On landing at Srinagar he learnt that the enemy had reached the outskirts of Baramulla and hence immediately rushed his first Company there to reinforce the defensive position of the Dogra troops of the J&K State Forces. The raiders were four thousand strong, Lt Col Rai was the first Indian officer to fall at Baramulla in the battle of liberation of Jammu and Kashmir. He was the first recipient of the Maha Vir Chakra, which was awarded to him posthumously for his heroic exploits, initiative, courage and exemplary leadership. The move of troops forward had saved Srinagar. By the recapture of Uri area on 13 November 1947, the threat to Srinagar was removed. The invaders had seized a considerable stretch of territory close to Pakistan border.⁶ The raiders had also left a trail of rape, loot and plunder in fact their lust and greed had slowed their momentum.

Some of the significant battles that took place in Jammu and Kashmir were, the Battle of Badgam, capture and recapture of Jhangar, battle of Naushara, the advance to Tithawal, the relief in Punch and the fight of Chhamb to Tithwal.

The Battle of Badgam- On 03 November, three companies of 4 KUMAON were deployed in the Badgam area on patrol duties. At approximately 1430 Hr, Major Somnath Sharma's D Company was fired upon from the local resident houses in Badgam. Suddenly, a tribal lashkar of 700 infiltrators approached Badgam from the direction of Gulmarg. Under heavy fire, and outnumbered by a ratio of seven to one, he urged his company to fight bravely. By the time a relief company, from the 1 KUMAON, reached Badgam, the position held by the company had been overrun. However, the 200 casualties suffered by the tribal infiltrators caused them to lose the impetus to advance.

The Fall of Jhangar and recapture Jhangar: Jhangar was captured by the enemy on 24 December 1947. It gave the enemy a tremendous advantage. It was, hence, vital to Indian strategy to recapture Jhangar. Operation Vijay was launched to recapture Jhangar. By March 5th, Ambli Dhar was secured and the enemy had been cleared from Kaman Gosha Gala as well. It was now time for the final assault on Jhangar. Operation Vijay was to be completed in two phases.

In the first phase, the 19 Independent Brigade, consisting of 1 RAJPUT, 4 DOGRA, 1 KUMAON and ancillary units, was to secure Pt. 3327 and 3283. In phase two, the 50 Para Brigade Group, consisting of 3 (Para) MARATHA LI, 3 (Para) Rajput, 1 Patiala and ancillary units, was to secure Pt. 2701, Jhangar, Pt.3399 and Pt. 3374. 7 Cavalry was also employed during the operation. One of the vital strategic points was Pir Thil held by the enemy. On 15 March, 3 MARATHA LI was sent on offensive reconnaissance. By March 17th, the Pir Thil Nakka was captured and the way was clear for the final attack on Jhangar. The offensive started on 18 March. That day, the 3 (Para) RAJPUT captured Pt. 3477, following which the 50 Para Brigade, the 3 MARATHA LI and the 1 Patiala concentrated at this feature.

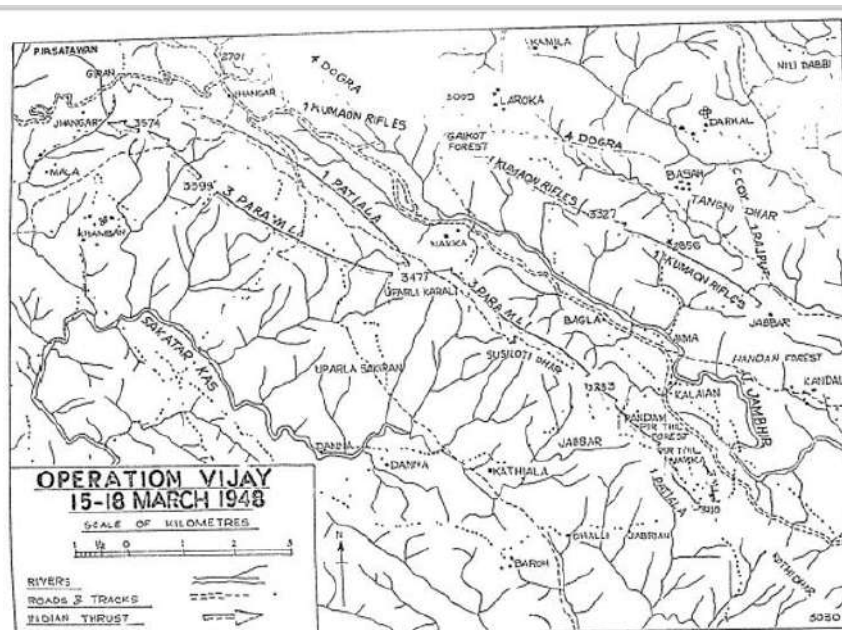
⁶ Defending Kashmir (Written by Official History of the Jammu & Kashmir Operations)
<https://www.bharat-rakshak.com/ARMY/today/254-defending-kashmir.html>



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Victory at Naushera - The battle of Naushera on 06 February 1948 was decisive and paved the way for the recapture of Jhangar later on. Lt Col R G Naidu, CO of 2 JAT, was put in command of Operation Satyanas for clearing the enemy from the area around Beri Pattan. The troops occupied Tung on 23 January and crossed the Thandapaniwali Tawi the next morning. In the early hours of 25 January, as they advanced to attack Siot and Pt. 2502, they came under heavy enemy fire and had to make a retreat, but not before inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy, estimated to be 100 dead and wounded.

The Battle of Tithwal- was one of the fiercest and longest battles fought during conflict in 1947-48. During initial stages, Pashtun tribal militia had crossed the border and occupied strategically important village of Tithwal on Indian side. Their primary aim was to capture the Richhmar Gali located South of Tithwal and Nastachun Pass, East of Tithwal which was held by Indian Army. A massive attack was launched by Pakistan Army on 13 October 1948 hoping to capture the posts held by Indian troops but failed miserably with heavy casualties due to undaunting courage and valour displayed by Indian troops. The indomitable spirit and determination of Indian Army helped India in retaining the post of Tithwal. The battalions involved were 1 SIKH, 1 MADRAS, 6 RAJPUTANA RIFLES. On 18th July 1948, CHM Piru Singh of 6 RAJUTANA RIFLES was tasked to attack and capture an enemy occupied hill feature at Tithwal. For exhibiting the most conspicuous valour, indomitable gallantry and for making the supreme sacrifice during the operation, he was awarded the Param Vir Chakra (Posthumous).

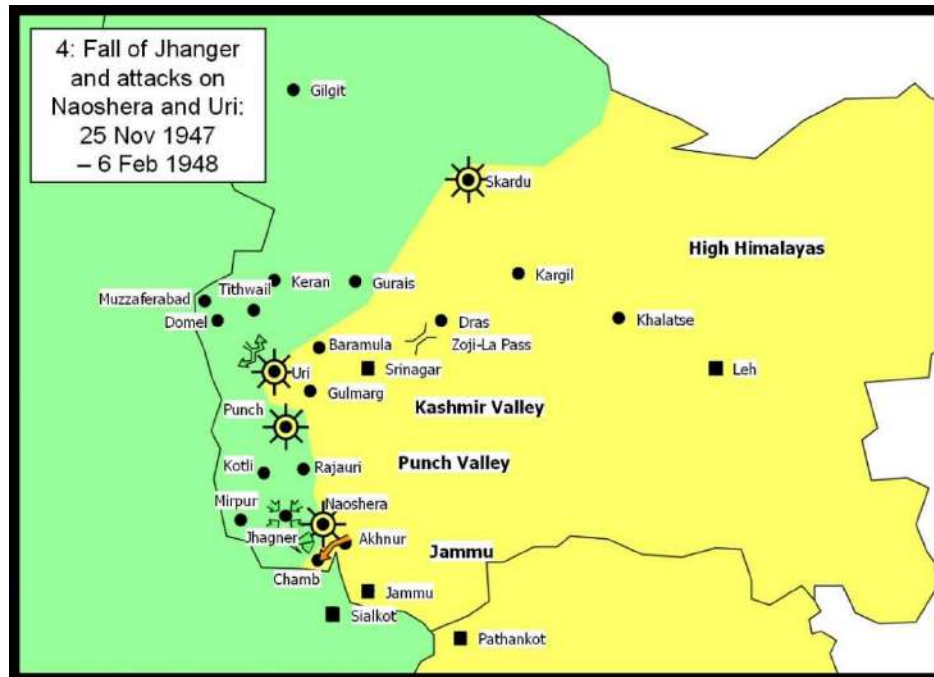


A sketch of Op VIJAY launched to Recapture Jhangar

Source: <https://www.thedefencearchive.com/post/recovery-in-sight-naushera>



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Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

NORTHERN SECTOR

To its North and North-West, central Kashmir Valley is separated from the Gilgit and Baltistan region, by the Burzil Mountains, a part of the Nanga Parbat range of the Great Himalayas. Across these mountains through the Burzil Pass at a height of 4,000 metres runs the ancient caravan route between Srinagar and Gilgit.

Originally this Western most part of the Ladakh province was under Dogra rule till the early part of the twentieth century; it was thereafter leased to the British by Maharaja Hari Singh and was seen as a defensive high-altitude buffer between British India and the Russian Empire as the ‘Great Game’ unfolded in the region.

The Northern front of the Kashmir campaign included the Sectors of Gurais, Skardu, Dras and Kargil, and Leh. From November 1947 to August 1948, the enemy achieved impressive successes in the region. Emboldened by the initial success in the South and egged on by extremist propaganda that the tribal laskhars played a prominent role in orchestrating a coup in Gilgit on 31 October 1947. Reinforced by large sections of the Gilgit Scouts, a Regiment with a local Shia Muslim majority and a part of the J&K state forces, the force was led by a British officer named Major Brown. This was but one of many instances in which British officers of Pakistan Army were believed to have actively assisted the raiders, and later, the regular Pakistan Army during the subsequent stages of the conflict.

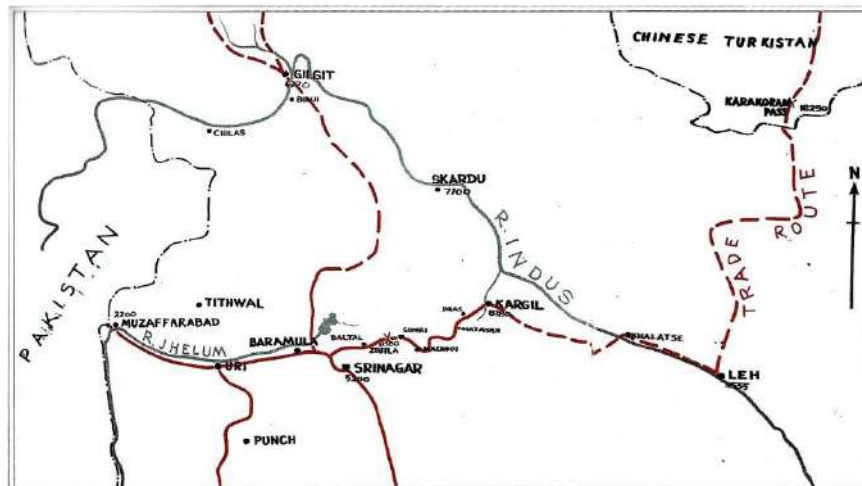


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Equally impressive was the valour of the Indian troops who held their positions against all odds. Of particular importance was the siege of Skardu. It was at Skardu that the true spirit of a typical Indian soldier was first demonstrated. After the fall of Gilgit to the enemy in November 1947, it fell on Lt Col Sher Jung Thapa and his men of 6 J&K Infantry to defend Skardu. The troops reached Skardu on 03 December and positioned themselves inside a fort. With a total strength of about 285 men, Lt Col Thapa defended his picket against a 600-strong enemy who was equipped with modern rifles, 2" and 3" mortars and was led by professional fighters.

The enemy attacked on 11 February 1948, from that day till 13 August 1948, when Skardu finally fell to the enemy, after holding out for six months against overwhelming odds it was a saga of defiance, gallantry and determination.⁷

The Ladakh Valley itself is at a base height of around 10,000 feet. Settlements are sprinkled at heights between 12,000 and 15,000 feet and mountain heights vary from 17,000 to 25,000 feet. Srinagar to Leh via Zoji La Pass is about 360 km and Skardu to Leh is a similar distance. Therefore, in tactical terms, it was a race to Leh between the raiders and the Indian Army. Forty intrepid Lahaulis led by Captain Prithi Chand and his cousin Captain Kushal Chand from 2 Dogra Regiment, which had come in to reinforce 161 Brigade, set out from Srinagar in mid-February 1948 to try and breach the 16,000-foot high Zoji La Pass.



A sketch of Op of the Battle of Zoji La

Source: Book, Zoji La (Pass of Blizzards) 1 November 1948

⁷ Defending Kashmir (Written by Official History of the Jammu & Kashmir Operations)
<https://www.bharat-rakshak.com/ARMY/today/254-defending-kashmir.html>



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Kashmir Infantry troops of the Kargil garrison and together with the Leh garrison of a few troops, managed to organise defences ahead of the town to foil repeated attempts by the raiders as they advanced past Dras and Kargil to assault Leh in the beginning of May. Despite the organised defences, the situation turned precarious by the third week of May and the only way that Leh could be saved was by reinforcing it from the air.

On what was red-letter day for military aviation in India, Air Commodore Meher Singh along with Major General Thimayya landed at Leh on 24 May 1948. This feat was a precursor to subsequent missions of four and six aircrafts landing in Leh over the next two weeks inducting a Company of 2/4 Gorkha Rifles. Air Commodore Meher Singh was one of the four pilots to be decorated with the Maha Vir Chakra for his daring feats of transport flying and inspirational leadership. Subsequently, troops of 2/8 Gorkha Rifles were inducted.

As the raiders tightened their grip on the areas around Kargil and Dras in the summer of 1948, reports came in of the mass murder of Buddhist monks in Kargil by the Gilgit Scouts and Pakistan Frontier Rifles. The lama of Ganskar Padam monastery was shot dead and the Rangdom Gompa, the second largest monastery in Ladakh, was desecrated and razed to the ground.

After repeated attempts by 77 Para Brigade's infantry assaults to retake Zoji La Pass failed in August – September 1948, General Thimayya planned an audacious operation, which involved the stealthy movement of Stuart light tanks of the 7th Light Cavalry Regiment from Jammu to Srinagar in mid-October 1948. From Srinagar, these tanks were dismantled and transported to Baltal, about 80 km from Srinagar. They were admirably assisted by two companies of engineers of the Madras Engineering Group (MEG) under Major Thangaraju, who not only paved the way for the movement of the tanks from Jammu to Srinagar across weak wooden bridges, but also created tank-friendly tracks from Baltal all the way up to Zoji La Pass, braving enemy fire as they laid the last few yards of the road. While the track was being laid the regiment under Lieutenant Colonel Rajinder Singh Sparrow acclimatized for a few days, before surprising the enemy in freezing condition.

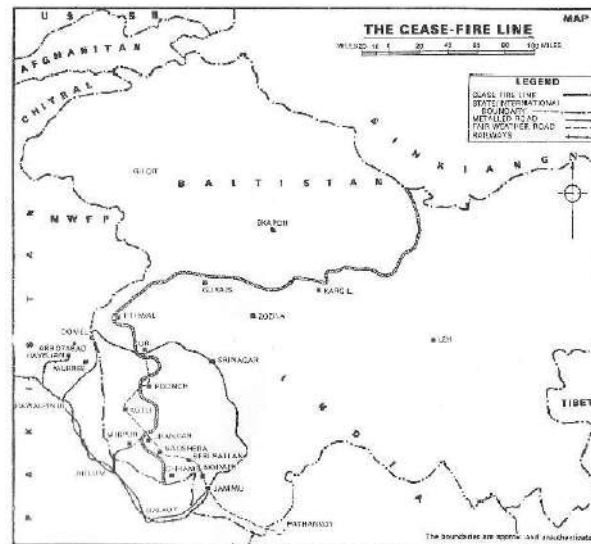
On 01 November 1948, Zoji La Pass was cleared of Pakistani raiders who were surprised by a combined arms assault by tanks and fighter aircraft over the next two weeks. Kargil and Dras would be recaptured by the Indian Army after ferocious hand-to-hand fighting.



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CEASE FIRE ENFORCEMENT: A HOPE TOWARDS PEACE

After protracted negotiations, both countries agreed to a cease-fire. The terms of the cease-fire, laid out in a UN Commission resolution on 13 August 1948, were adopted by the commission on 05 January 1949. This required Pakistan to withdraw its forces, both regular and irregular, while allowing India to maintain minimal forces within the state to preserve law and order.



Source: Book 'Without Baggage – A personal account of the Jammu & Kashmir Operations' by Lt Gen E A Vas, PVC M'

CONCLUSION

The conflict was to widen along the entire length of the border of the State and it was into this explosive situation that the Indian Army was rushed forth to stem the tide. It was timely intervention, Srinagar was saved and then followed grim battles to regain lost territory.⁸

The Army had had traversed the hard road during the operations over fifteen months which involved saving Srinagar, and recapturing Baramulla, Naushera, Jhangar, relieving Poonch and capturing of territory in Rajauri and Mendhar. In the Northern areas too an equally serious situation had developed, the raiders had invested Skardu, the Indus Valley route to Leh was open so too was the vital Zoji La Pass which lay on the Srinagar – Leh route.

⁸ General VP Malik in 'Zoji La 01 November 1948'



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Though India's initial military response was delayed in every Sector due to the distance, road communications and lack of air assets, its professional soldiers and airmen were better organised, committed and lead which enabled success in recapturing large areas.

The battles fought during this conflict epitomised all the essentials of the Indian soldier, physical and mental courage, professionalism, dedication, determination, commitment, and the will to overcome all adversities which included the adverse and harsh weather conditions. The fighting spirit of our soldiers made the nation proud.

Major Somnath Sharma, 2/Lt Rama Raghoba Rane, Naik Jadunath Singh, L/Nk Karam Singh and CHM Piru Singh were awarded with Param Vir Chakra for their conspicuous courage and unparalleled devotion to duty. Their sacrifice and valour remain highly regarded.

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