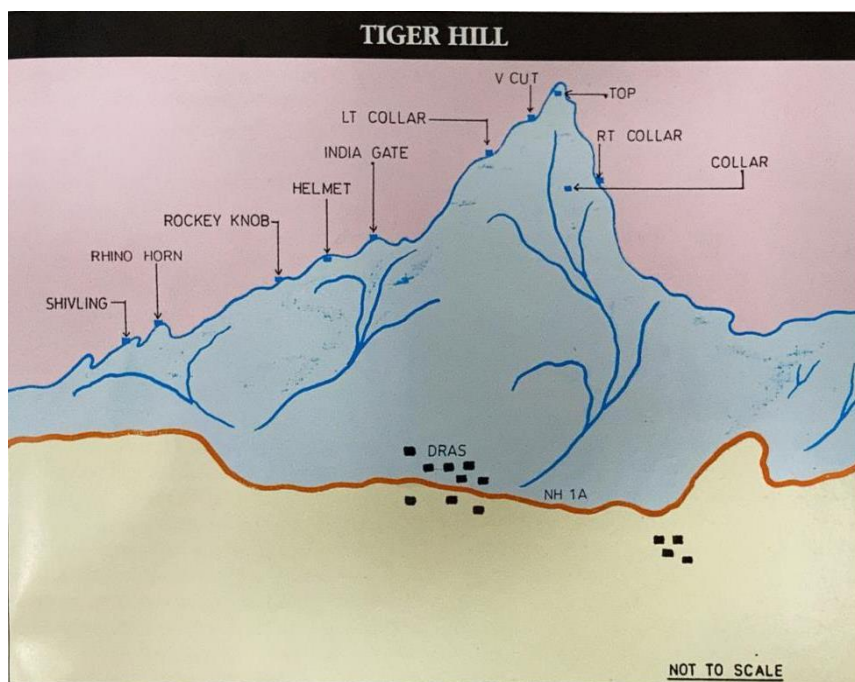


The Battle of Tiger Hill

Introduction

India fought some of the most intense battles during the Kargil War 1999, in one of the most challenging terrains in the world, where the enemy had a significant upper hand in terms of their domination of heights. India fought a very fierce battle in Tololing and successfully captured the summit. Following that the focus shifted to Tiger Hill, which had been under the control of the infiltrators. Tiger Hill gains importance from the fact that it towers above all the other mountains in its vicinity of Drass village in the Ladakh region. In the winter of 1998, Pakistan intruders occupied positions on this mountain thus dominating portions of the Srinagar-Leh NH 1A. Almost 10 Km to the north of the highway, Tiger Hills facilitated a commanding view of the National Highway which aided the Pakistani artillery Observation Post officers to direct accurate artillery fire onto the NH 1A. NH 1A is a strategic route to Siachen Glacier and connects Srinagar to Leh in Ladakh. It was estimated that the enemy had about 40 soldiers deployed on Tiger Hill and some additional troops were seen moving in the nearby areas. ¹

192 Mountain Brigade arrived in Drass from the Valley and was placed under command of 8 Mountain Division headed by Major General Mohinder Puri. 18 GRENADIERS, after their success in Tololing, were tasked to evict the enemy and recapture the peak at earliest. General Puri placed them under Headquarters 192 Mountain Brigade along with 13 JAK RIF.



Layout of the Tiger Hill

Source : Heroes of Kargil, Army Headquarters

¹ Sainik Samachar 1-15 August 2020, Volume 67, p. 10

https://sainiksamachar.nic.in/uploads/sainik_samachar/2022/03/INDEX8.pdf

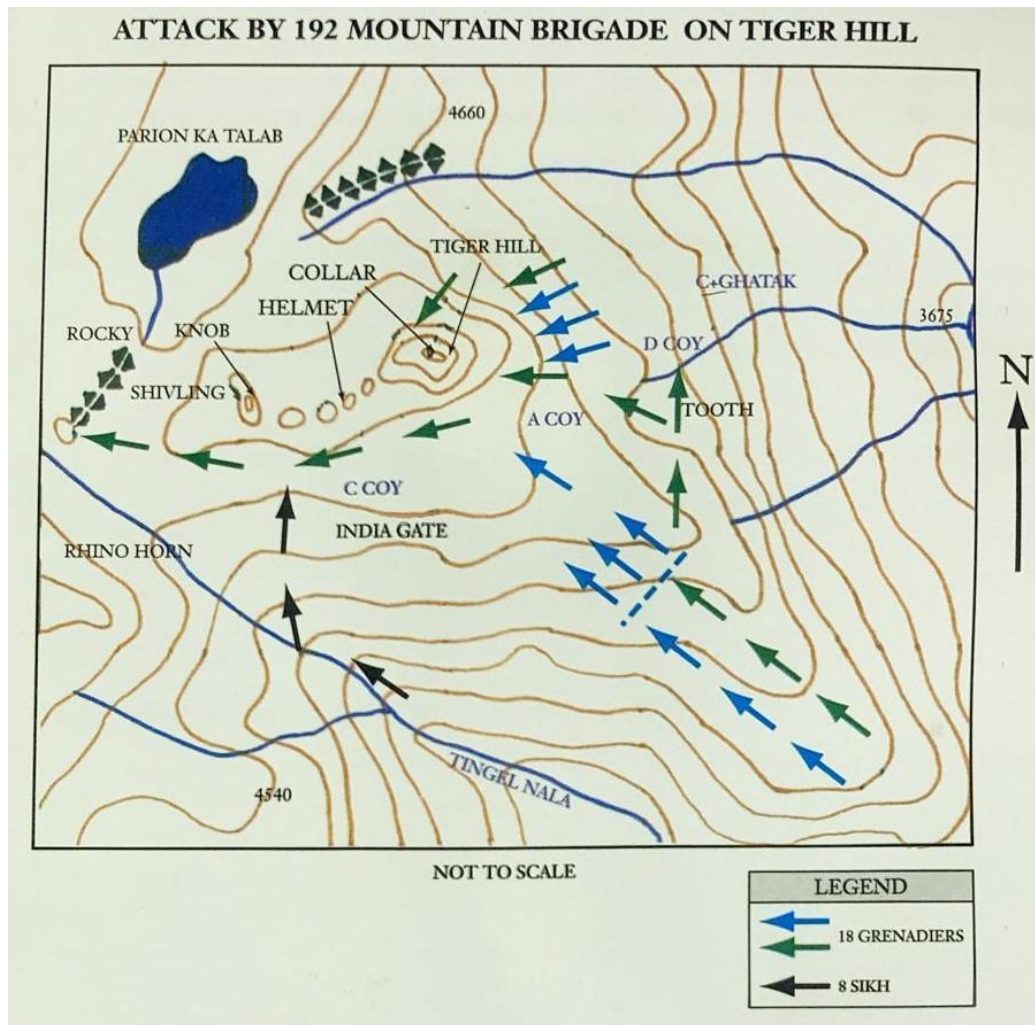
Geography

Nestled between Tingel and Sando *nala*, the daunting Tiger Hill commands attention with its steep rocky slopes. Rising to a towering height of over 16,500 feet, the mountain stands as one of the region's grandest, providing a commanding view of the Mushkoh region and partially encompassing the Matayin Bowl, with the picturesque Drass village and the vital national highway. Its snow-covered terrain presented arduous challenges, with certain areas posing exceptional difficulties for climbers. The Tiger Hill complex spans an impressive stretch, extending from Top to U Cut, encompassing a length of approximately 300 metres. At its pinnacle, the width narrows to a mere 5 metres, while notable features such as India Gate and Helmet expands to about 30 metres in breadth. Further along the ridgeline, from Rocky to Rhino Horn, Shivling, Point 5060, and U Cut, the path grows perilously narrow, testing the mettle of those who dare to traverse its jagged contours. Furthermore, Tooth, Tongue, and Collar hold particular significance because of their proximity to Tiger Hill top.

Planning and Preparation

On 15 June 1999, Brigadier MPS Bajwa received orders to relocate 192 Mountain Brigade Headquarters from Valley to Drass. Besides 8 SIKH, assigned to his command were 18 GRENADIERS, 13 JAK RIF, and 2 NAGA. Reports indicated the presence of approximately two enemy Companies in the vicinity of Tiger Hill and Point 4875. Additionally, a Platoon-sized enemy force was observed occupying the summit of Tiger Hill, while some Pakistani troops were spotted moving between Shivling and U Cut.

On 26 June, Colonel Thakur, Commanding Officer, 18 GRENADIERS attended the Operations Conference at Headquarters 56 Mountain Brigade and Headquarters 192 Mountain Brigade. Following the conference, he briefed his battalion on the current tactical situation in the sub-sector and their upcoming mission. Colonel Thakur conducted various drills encompassing attack manoeuvres and bunker destruction exercises. In light of the previous experiences encountered by 18 GRENADIERS during their commitment in the capture of Tololing, the training sessions conducted by Colonel Thakur placed paramount emphasis on incorporating the valuable lessons learned from that operation. Aiming to rectify any deficiencies, the soldiers underwent extensive and rigorous practice, ensuring their thorough preparedness for the upcoming mission to capture Tiger Hill.



192 Mountain Brigade Attack on the Tiger Hill

Source : Kargil the Impregnable Conquered 1999, Lt Gen YM Bammi

A multi-directional attack plan was devised, encompassing three strategic approaches. The North-Eastern advance would be spearheaded by Lieutenant Balwan Singh and his Ghatak Platoon. They were tasked with establishing a crucial foothold. Subsequently, Major PJ Mijar, leading C Company, would try to seize control of the summit of Tiger Hill Top, building upon the initial foothold. Lieutenant Sachin, along with D Company, would be deployed from the East to secure the hilltop. Major RS Rathore would command A Company, entrusted with the responsibility of capturing Tongue from the South, through the firm base of 8 SIKH. Meanwhile, B Company would remain poised as a reserve force, stationed within the firm bases of 8 SIKH.

The planned assault was scheduled on the night of the 03 and 04 July. In a concerted effort to bolster the operation, precision-guided bomb strikes by the Indian Air Force's formidable Jaguars were to provide crucial support to the ground forces.

The Attack

At the designated time of 2000 hours on the 03 July, the soldiers of 18 GRENADIERS embarked on their mission, departing from the firm base as per the plan. Demonstrating unwavering determination, Major Rathore skilfully led his A Company towards the designated area known as Tongue, and successfully captured it. However, their further progress was impeded by the relentless barrage of defensive fire unleashed by the enemy forces.

Meanwhile, under the leadership of Lieutenant Balwan Singh, the Commando Platoon advanced, coming tantalisingly close to the summit of Tiger Hill. They found themselves thrust into a fierce hand-to-hand battle with the enemy troops. Despite their fierce resistance, Lieutenant Balwan Singh and his Platoon were gradually pushed back, ultimately finding safety at the position held by D Company, which lay a mere 30 metres away from the pinnacle of Tiger Hill. Amidst the intense conflict, the Platoon's Havaldar, Madan Lal, displayed exceptional bravery by engaging with and eliminating two enemy soldiers, thus providing crucial cover for his Platoon's orderly withdrawal.

The setback provided an opportunity for the enemy to reinforce their stronghold atop Tiger Hill, fortifying their position.

On the night of 04/05 July, the fire bases moved forward to a position just short of Tiger Hill Top where they were grouped under Officer Commanding (OC) C Company, Colonel (then Major) Mijar. In a calculated and stealthy manoeuvre, Captain Nimbalkar, accompanied by his resolute D Company and the steadfast Commando Platoon, silently ascended the uphill terrain, successfully reaching the pinnacle of Tiger Hill.

Despite being wounded, Lieutenant Balwan Singh demonstrated strong determination and led his Platoon in the ensuing battle. However, the enemy launched a counter-attack, striking back with considerable force. The fierce confrontation persisted until 0400 hours, with both sides relentlessly engaged in combat. Despite their courageous efforts, the enemy's assault proved to be resilient, resulting in the setback of the attack.

Grenadier Yogendra Singh Yadav, the lead Ghatak, confronted the advancing counter-attack despite sustaining injuries, successfully neutralising two enemy combatants. Undeterred by his wounds, he displayed exceptional resolve. Grenadier Yogendra Singh Yadav pressed forward and reached a nearby sangar. He hurled a grenade into the sangar and swiftly entered it, successfully neutralising four additional enemy combatants with his assault rifle. However, due to his sustained injuries, he eventually collapsed. Pakistani soldiers, to make sure every soldier was dead, fired at the dead bodies. Grenadier Yadav received nine bullet wounds by now, but he was still alive and remained silent, listening to the plans of the Pakistani soldiers. In the quest to pass that information on, he crawled as he made his way through to Captain Nimbalkar's position and collapsed again. For this extraordinarily heroic act, he was awarded the highest gallantry award — the *Param Vir Chakra*.

The situation on 04 July was intense, with the enemy launching extensive artillery and machine gun fire on the GRENADIERS who were positioned on Tiger Hill Top.

Recognising the need for reinforcement, Brigadier Bajwa gave orders on 05 July for 8 SIKH to reinforce the foothold that Subedar Nirmal Singh had established on Helmet. In response, Lieutenant RK Sherawat, accompanied by a small group of men, moved up to the area on 05 and 06 July. Captain Nope Singh was also directed to join 8 SIKH, and he joined Lieutenant Sherawat on 06 July. Together, they had a strength of about seventy soldiers. These troops positioned themselves between the Top and the Tongue.

However, the situation quickly escalated as 8 SIKH came under heavy and effective enemy fire, resulting in significant casualties. Despite the losses, Colonel SP Singh, the Commanding Officer (CO) of 8 SIKH, addressed his men and delivered a rousing speech, urging them to hold their ground and maintain their positions against the enemy's assault. 8 SIKH and 18 GRENADIERS found themselves exposed and were sustaining heavy casualties. They then made a bold decision to launch a counterattack with the objective of reclaiming the Helmet. Surprising the enemy with their swift and determined action, 8 SIKH successfully recaptured Helmet, forcing the enemy to retreat to Shivling and Point 5060.

By seizing control of Helmet and Rocky Knob, the SIKH forces instilled fear and despair within the enemy ranks. A significant number of enemy soldiers were observed attempting to flee the battlefield. This notable development serves as a testament to the crumbling morale and resolve of the opposing forces in the face of the Sikh's resolute counterattack.

Despite the successful recapture of Helmet and the enemy's diminishing morale, the opposing forces still held strategic positions on the western slope and the Collar. In response, the commanding officer (CO) issued orders for all Companies to initiate attacks on their respective approaches.

On the night of 06 to 07 July, 18 GRENADIERS secured the Top and the Tongue — two key positions. The following night, between 07 to 08 July, they successfully cleared out the enemy from the reverse slopes of Top. Simultaneously, B Company was assigned the task of linking up with Top from the eastern direction.

In the South, A Company captured the area known as Collar, further expanding the control of friendly forces. Meanwhile, Captain Das Gupta, leading C Company along with the Ghataks, undertook the mission to capture Rocky Knob. With coordinated efforts, all the companies managed to link up with each other, establishing a unified front. By 0800h, the strategically significant Tiger Hill was secured.



Victory! on Tiger Hill Top

Source : Heroes of Kargil, Army Headquarters

In this arduous battle, India mourns the loss of nine valiant soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice. In the line of duty, one officer, four Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs), and thirty-two soldiers sustained injuries during the battle.

Furthermore, ten individuals were recognized for their outstanding gallantry during the battle. Grenadier Yogendra Singh Yadav was honoured with the *Param Vir Chakra*, while Lieutenant Balwan Singh was bestowed with the *Maha Vir Chakra*. Captain Sachin Nimbalker and Havaldar Madan Lal (Posthumous) were both awarded the *Vir Chakra*.



Param Vir Chakra awardees Rifleman Sanjay Kumar, left, and Honorary Captain Yoginder Yadav, centre, with Mahavir Chakra awardee Lieutenant (now Colonel) Balwan Singh, right.

Source: <https://www.rediff.com/news/special/we-had-to-throw-the-pakistanis-out/20190722.htm>

Additionally, the following soldiers received the *Sena Medal* for their exceptional bravery: Naib Subedar Chanda Jat, Naik Shakti Singh, Naik Nirmal Singh Yadav, Naik Ravi Karan Singh (Posthumous), Grenadier Udhyan Singh (Posthumous), and Grenadier Yogendra Singh Yadav (Posthumous).

8 SIKH and 18 GRENADIERS were awarded the Unit Citation by the Chief of Army Staff (COAS)

In an interview with the Indian Express, Brigadier M.P.S Bawja, Commander, 192 Mountain Brigade, said “When the Pakistani counter-attacks were taking place, I was told by one of the 8 Sikh JCOs that a tall, well-built Pakistani in a tracksuit was motivating his men for repeated assaults and this was causing a problem for them. I immediately said that he was an officer and that he should be neutralised in order to crush the attacks. Let me tell you that our troops were on the verge of being pushed off the top when with one big effort they gave a war cry, charged and killed this Pakistani officer and his companions. Thirty Pakistanis were killed in this fight and the rest retreated, giving us a famous victory. Capt. Karnal Sher Khan fought very well, rallying his men. We must appreciate this. I also told my GOC that the boy fought very bravely.”²

² Man Aman Singh Chhina, Kargil war: Eight Sikh played a pivotal role in the capture of Tiger Hill, says Brigadier MPS Bajwa, The Indian Express, July 26, 2018
<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/kargil-war-eight-sikh-played-a-pivotal-role-in-the-capture-of-tiger-hill-says-brigadier-mps-bajwa-5276535/>

Conclusion

During the battle 8 SIKH and 18 GRENADIERS demonstrated exemplary valour and conducted themselves with utmost honour. It was imperative to liberate Tiger Hill from the enemy's clutches since it dominated portions of the Srinagar-Leh NH 1A, and Pakistani artillery observation post officers could direct accurate artillery fire on NH 1A. Operational requirement demanded that army convoys continue to ply on this road; the drivers, therefore, had to run the gauntlet of enemy artillery fire every time they passed through Drass.

Through unwavering determination and unmatched collective bravery, the soldiers earned resounding glory for themselves, the Indian Army, and the nation, achieving some of the most remarkable victories in military history. Notably, these triumphs were obtained against well-armed regular Pakistani soldiers at altitudes exceeding 16,000 feet while mounting daring assaults on sheer escarpments, making their achievements all the more extraordinary.

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