



Havildar Hangpan Dada, Ashok Chakra

V Ganapathy

Badluram Ka Badan zamin ke neeche hai....aur humko uska ration milta hai...

Regimental Song of the ASSAM Regiment

Introduction

*B*adluram Ka Badan zamin ke neeche hai....aur humko uska ration milta hai... goes the traditional song, which talks of Badluram's body under the ground, while his entitlement of rations continues to be drawn!! Based on a true story, now a legend, the song immortalizes Badluram, a soldier of ASSAM regiment in the World War II, who had died in the Burma Theatre while fighting with the Japanese. A smart quartermaster continued to draw Badluram's rations leading to adequate surplus which in later months proved to be a god send when the Regiment was surrounded by the Japanese and cut off, thus saving the besieged soldiers survive almost certain death. Just as Badluram and his body are legend, Havildar Hangpan Dada, of the same illustrious regiment, who was martyred in

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the icy heights of nNorth Kashmir in May of 2016 while preventing an infiltrating column of militants, will surely go into regimental lore.

Havildar Hangpan Dada

Havildar Hangpan Dada was born on an auspicious day, 2 October 1979, in the village of Borduria, Khonsa of Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh in the far east of the country. During his early years and childhood he was known to be mischievous; however he had endeared himself to his entire village being full of life and spirit. As a young boy he had in fact saved one of his friends from drowning. Known for his physical fitness right from his younger days, he found his calling when he attended a recruitment rally of the Army at Khonsa and was selected to enroll into the prestigious 3rd Parachute Regiment on 28 October 1997 at a tender age of 18. After his initial training at the Parachute Regimental Centre, he served with the Parachute Regiment till June 2005. He then reverted to his parent ASSAM Regiment. After serving with the Assam Regimental Centre till January 2008 as a weapons training instructor, he was posted to his parent battalion, 4 ASSAM. He went on to serve with them for 8 years in Barrackpore, Kargil, Lucknow and Manipur, before he was transferred on deputation, on 11 March 2016, to 35 Rashtriya Rifles (ASSAM) to the chilly heights of nNorth Kashmir where he served till he was martyred on 26 May 2016.

Terrain of the Area of Operations

Operation Sabu Dada, for that was the name of the operation, derived its name from the forward army post along the Line of Control (LoC), named Sabu and the surname of Havildar Hangpan. The Operation took place in the high reaches of the mountains of north-west Kashmir in Kupwara district in the immediate shadow of the Shamshabari Ranges. The Shamshabari Ranges are the high mountain ranges which line the northern borders of Kashmir and are very close to the LoC separating Kashmir from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). They form a natural barrier to infiltration of terrorists from PoK. These ranges are above 9,000 feet and receive heavy snowfall and the higher

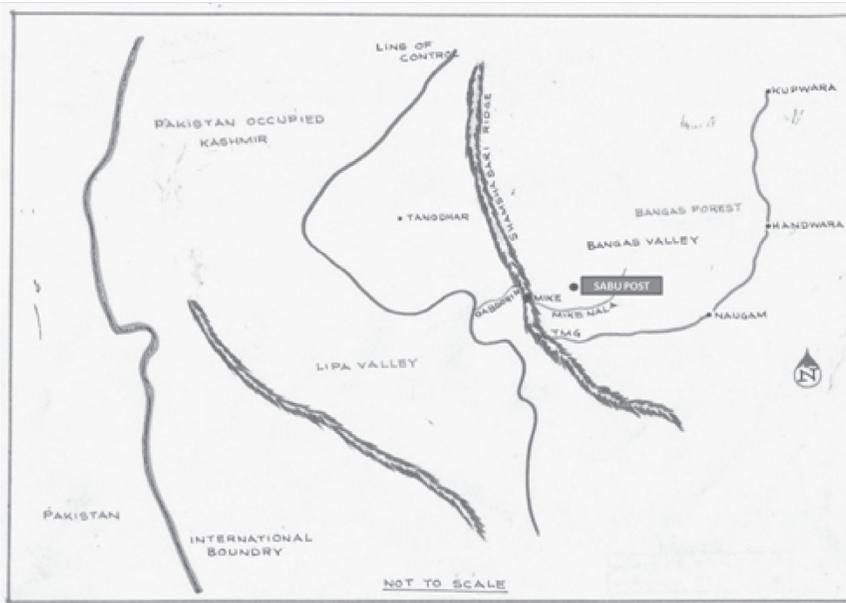
reaches remain snow bound from October to July. Large areas astride the Shamshabari are avalanche prone. Forest cover ends at approximately 10,000 feet with moderate to heavy undergrowth. The average height of the Shamshabari Ranges in the area of operations is 13,000 feet or 4,000 metre above mean seal level. During the month of May, the temperature ranges from a maximum of 5 degrees to a minimum of minus 10 degrees celsius. The slopes emanating from the Shamshabari both to the east and west are steep, and with limited vegetation at such great heights, offering limited cover. Large boulders, however, do offer some cover both from observation and fire of weapons.

Snow aids observation on a clear day providing the required contrast to spot movement; however, frequent low clouds tend to obscure visibility limiting observation sometimes to less than 50 metre. The LoC runs north-south in this sector approximately 3-4 kilometre west of the alignment of the Shamshabari Range. The specific area of operations was in the Bangus Valley that is a few kilometers east of the Shamshabari and south of Gabdori Nala. It is in the Tut Mari Gali (TMG) sector, which lies west of Naugam in Kupwara and south of the Tangdhar sector. The Gabdori Nala separates the Tangdhar and the Tut Mari Gali sectors. Leepa Valley in PoK Kashmir lies opposite this sector.

Despite the forbidding, difficult, guarded and fenced terrain, Pakistan's attempts to push in terrorists across the LoC is never-ending. Heavy snowfall in the area reduces the chances of infiltration during the winter months to almost or minimal possibility, the same weather which necessitates vacation of certain forward posts in the thick of winter as continuing to occupy them becomes untenable; however, these posts are re-occupied as soon as the snow starts to melt, during the period of May to June, depending on the residual level of snow. During this period the opportunistic enemy is always looking for a gap and vacuum to push in terrorists.

The Operation

In the third week of May 2016, intelligent inputs received from various agencies indicated that a group of terrorists would attempt to infiltrate



infiltration along the Gabdori Nala around the time period of 22/26 May 2016 through the Bangus Valley. The inputs were generic in nature. Assessments carried by 35 RR, the battalion which was charged with guarding the borders in the sector, pointed out that the infiltrating group would pass through one of some the forward posts of some of the companies of 35 RR on the Shamshabari (Map 1). Accordingly, the companies were warned and some hitherto unoccupied posts, including the post Sabu, were occupied on 22 May 2016.

The terrorists had two options. Option One, under cover of bad weather, mostly fog and rain, cross the LoC and the Shamshabari the same night and merge into the populated valley; Option Two, cross the LoC the first night, harbour between the LoC and the Shamshabari the first night and then cross over to the valley the second night. The former, though more challenging to the terrorists, was concluded to be more likely; spending a day trying to remain undetected between the LoC and the Shamshabari is not an easy proposition. On receipt of intelligence and after evaluating likely course of action of terrorists, surveillance, patrolling,

area domination, and the number of ambushes were increased to choke all infiltration routes which the terrorists could possibly take.

At 6.15 AM on 26 May, one jawan at Mike Post on the Shamshabari Ridge reported footprints on the snow; it was immediately not clear whether they were of humans or wild animals. The Shamshabari is also abode to leopards and bears. However, immediate action was taken to search the trail and alert posts falling in the likely route and direction further to the east from Mike Post. By 8.15 AM, movement of two terrorists was noted in an area of boulders east of Mike Post and west of Sabu Post. This was a sort of confirmation of presence of terrorists in the general area. Based on these developments, tactical small teams called STOPS, to cut off movement of terrorists, were established to cordon off the area. Havildar Hangpan Dada led and established one such STOP with eight soldiers along the Sabu Ridge, a spur emanating from Sabu towards Mike Post to the west. Besides this, a number of other STOPS and search parties were activated. Now all they had to do was wait for the terrorists to show and launch for the kill!!

At 9.30 AM, a Medium Machine Gun was fired in the direction of the assessed target location in a bid to provoke movement of the hiding terrorists. On being fired upon, the terrorists, who were indeed hiding behind boulders, split into two groups and started running downwards; there were four terrorists observed. One party of two ran down towards Sabu from the direction of Mike Post, and the other two along Mike Nala, a Nala coming down from Mike Post, south of Sabu. Havildar Hangpan Dada moved his party to cover the escape of the terrorists along the Mike Nala. Noticing Havildar Hangpan Dada and his team and finding themselves cut off, these terrorists too ran towards Sabu and took cover behind large boulders. Around 10.00 AM, when Hangpan and his team closed in on the area of boulders, they drew fire from the two terrorists hidden behind the boulders. The fire was responded to by the team of Hangpan Dada and the terrorists ran into a re-entrant, now cornered but still dangerous. While this was on, the other two terrorists surfaced, and running along the Mike Nala, fired at Hangpan and his party. Havildar Hangpan gave chase to the two running terrorists, who

went and hid behind large boulders. Hangpan was the closest to these terrorists. He sensed not only an opportunity to encounter them but also the responsibility to cut them off and prevent them from firing at the other soldiers of his detachment. Showing great courage and initiative, and under fire from the terrorists, Hangpan closed in, assumed a good firing position close to the terrorists and shot one terrorist dead in a close quarter engagement. The second terrorist replied with heavy volume of fire from behind a rock and also lobbed a grenade, pinning down Hangpan. Once again, undeterred, all his training and cool composure to the front, Havildar Hangpan Dada, crawled to another firing position 15 metre from the second terrorist and shot him dead. Two terrorists were down!! He had prevented two terrorists from melting away into the thick forests of Bangus on the lower slopes.

Havildar Hangpan's party then took stock of the situation and the bodies of these two terrorists were recovered and handed over to a cordon party, and then Dada moved with his team towards the boulders along Mike Nala to resume the search for the other two terrorists who were last observed hiding in. The company commander meanwhile carried out tactical re-adjustment of the soldiers to enable cornering and elimination of the balance two terrorists. Two parties, one led by Havildar Hangpan and the other by the company commander, Major Amirtha Raj now closed in in the area where the third and fourth terrorists had taken refuge. At about 3.30 PM, Havildar Dada's team again drew fire as they searched the boulders, and were pinned down. However, once pinned, Dada realised that the terrorists would try to escape using the cover of approaching darkness, if he did not act. He inched himself toward a flank, and once again, carefully assuming a firing position, in the face of oncoming fire, engaged and killed a third terrorist. However, no sooner had he done that, he met with a volley of fire from the fourth terrorist, who had managed to remain evasive amongst the boulders. Havildar Hanpan, who had dropped three terrorists, was now fatally injured. Injured and near the fourth terrorist, it was difficult to approach and retrieve him. The company commander further divided his party and was after two hours able to close in and corner and shoot down the fourth terrorist around 6 PM. All

four terrorists who had been initially observed had now been eliminated. Havildar Hangpan Dada, who was now recovered, lay martyred in the high mountains among the boulders. The search of the entire area carried on till the next day when at 11.30 h, Operation Sabudada, was called off.

Ashok Chakra

Havildar Hangpan Dada's conspicuous bravery, eliminated three terrorists in an engagement at close quarters and enabled elimination of the fourth, foiled the infiltration bid, and ensured the safety of his men. On



26 January 2017, he was honoured posthumously with the highest gallantry award during peacetime operations, the Ashok Chakra, on the eve of the Republic Day. Havildar Hangpan Dada is the first recipient of the Ashok Chakra in the ASSAM Regiment. The Assam Regimental Centre, which celebrated its Platinum Jubilee in November 2016, has named its main office block office in honour of Late Havildar Hangpan Dada. Immortalised, in an epic act of bravery,

Havildar Hangpan Dada's story is one of a true hero's; one who staked his life, well-knowing the dangers that were presenting during his actions, in the truest tradition of setting the highest standards of bravery for future generations of brave soldiers of his Regiment and the Indian Army to live up to. In the truest tradition of Lord Thomas Macaulay's, 'And how can a man die better than facing fearful odds for the ashes of his fathers, and the temple of his Gods?'

