

ANUJ

RACHNA BISHT RAWAT

July 05, 1999

7 am

It is a cold morning in the wind lashed Mushkoh Valley. On the barren brown mountain, where temperatures have dipped to two degrees even in peak summer, Col Umesh Singh Bawa, Commanding Officer (CO), 17 Jat, stands facing 23-year-old Captain Anuj Nayyar, the icy wind whipping their unwashed hair and sunburnt faces. Anuj has been tasked with leading a platoon of men to reinforce Delta Company that has captured the Whale Back feature but is facing ferocious counter-attacks by the enemy. Maj Deepak Rampal, Company Commander, has sent a desperate message that ammunition has almost run out and Anuj is being sent to help.

“An opportunity to go for war comes to the most fortunate soldiers, Anuj,” Col Bawa tells his young officer, who stands before him, his arms ramrod straight



by his side. “You are very lucky it has come to you so early in your life.” Looking into Anuj’s eyes, Col Bawa rests an arm on his shoulder, “You have a chance to be remembered forever, don’t miss it. Either you can be brave and be remembered forever; or you do not do your job and are called a coward for life. This is your chance to create history. Go and make a name for the battalion.” Courage is stamped on Anuj’s handsome face. His young eyes sparkle. They show no fear. But he slips

off his engagement ring and takes his wallet out of his pocket. For a second, he opens it and looks at the picture of his fiancée—a pretty schoolmate he fell in love with at Army Public School, Dhaula Kuan, between bunking classes and playing basketball. She is smiling up at him. He looks at her tenderly and then hands both his ring and wallet to his CO. “Will you please keep these for me, Sir?” he asks.

“Wear the ring, Anuj. It will inspire you to fight with even more courage,” Col Bawa tells him but Anuj is adamant. “I don’t want these to fall into the dirty hands of the enemy. Please keep them,” he says. Col Bawa, who is from Delhi just like Anuj and has met the young bride to be when Anuj brought her over one evening, gets sentimental. “Nothing will happen to you, my boy,” he tells Anuj. “You will come back to us. Go and do your duty. I shall keep your belongings safe.” Talking to me, nearly 20 years later, Brig US Bawa VrC, SM, who has retired and is now settled in Gurugram, says Anuj probably had some kind of premonition about what was to come but none of them realised it then.

That morning, Anuj leads 35 men of Charlie Company to Whale Back. He covers the distance from the base camp to the post in just two hours, ensuring that he wastes no time in reaching the soldiers helpless without ammunition. By 10 am he has reached his comrades. They find that Delta Company has managed to beat back an enemy counter-attack at 8 am but more than 30 enemy soldiers can be seen regrouping for another attack. It comes around 1 pm. By then, ammunition has been distributed, Light Machine Guns (LMGs) have been loaded and 17 Jat is ready for the enemy. The two officers and their men put up a strong fight and the attack is beaten back. Around 5 pm, the enemy makes one more attempt to take back the post but is once again beaten back. Finally, night falls and the enemy soldiers give up and retreat. Whale Back has been captured. It is a big win for the Indian Army but Anuj’s moment of glory is yet to come.

The Last Battle

July 06, 1999

8 pm

Feature Whale Back

Charlie Company has been tasked with attacking the feature Pimple 2. Company Commander Maj Ritesh Kumar is leading a platoon of around 35 men. Anuj is right behind him. The soldiers have been surviving manpack for two days. They only have *shakkarparas*, *mathis* and stale *puris* in their backpacks. Anuj is hungry

and asks for something to eat. The soldier with him hands him some cold *puris*. “*Ye mujhse nahi khayi jaayengi yaar,*” Anuj tells him with a wry smile. He gropes in his own backpack and pulls out a packet of biscuits, sharing it with those around. “*Chalen?*” he then asks and, slinging his rifle behind his back, starts climbing. Just 800 metres (m) short of the objective, the soldiers are spotted by the enemy who starts shelling them. Ritesh gets splinter injuries on his legs besides four other soldiers who are also injured.

When this is communicated to Col Bawa on the radio set, he asks the injured men to return and get treatment at the regimental aid post. Col Bawa speaks to Anuj and asks him to take charge. As the men move up further, they meet stiff resistance. Four machine gun positions on the ridge right in front of them are not letting them move up. They bravely go on to neutralise three machine gun positions one by one, but the fourth continues to stay out of their reach, despite multiple efforts. An exasperated Anuj crawls forward on his arms and knees and manages to throw a grenade inside the loophole but the deadly machine gun keeps blazing.

Around 5 am on June 7, Col Bawa, who has been following the battle on his radio set, suddenly loses contact with Anuj. Every time he tries to contact the young officer, he is met with a deafening silence. A worried Col Bawa orders Maj Punia, who is the reserve for Charlie Company, to take 30 men and contact Anuj. Punia leaves from Whale Back immediately. Around 7.30 am, he calls Col Bawa. His voice is heavy with grief. “Sir, I have very bad news. Anuj is no more,” he says, “I can see him and four soldiers fallen on the ground,”. A devastated Col Bawa asks him to retrieve the men. “Drag them behind cover. May be they are alive,” he says desperately. “No Sir, I can see them clearly. They are dead. The enemy is firing continuously. He is not letting us reach the bodies,” Punia tells him. With a heavy heart, Col Bawa asks Punia to pull back. “I don’t want to lose more men. The enemy is sitting at a height and he has spotted you,” he says.

Col Bawa decides against launching another attack that night because he realises that the enemy will be waiting for it. Instead, he keeps bombarding the enemy position through the night, ensuring that the Pakistani soldiers do not get any chance to sleep. The next morning, July 08, he orders an attack in broad daylight, soon after breakfast time, assuming that the enemy soldiers who have been awake all night would have their guard down since they would be expecting the Indians to attack only in the night. Exhibiting extreme daring and courage, two platoons of 17 Jat—led by Maj Deepak Rampal and Maj RK Singh—climb up from two different directions and manage to reach Pimple 2 undetected around

the same time. They launch simultaneous attacks at 1 pm, surprising the enemy completely. A fierce battle ensues till 4 pm and the enemy post is finally captured on the evening of July 8.

The deaths of their men have been avenged but there is sadness all around at the big losses they have faced. The battalion's first task is to retrieve the bodies of its martyred soldiers, including Capt Anuj Nayyar. Soldiers in Anuj's attack team then tell Col Bawa that Anuj had fought very bravely. There has been a surprise hero in the battle as well. It is Havaldar Kumar Singh, a unknown soldier of the unit who had never done anything remarkable in his career. He was one of the soldiers who had to give promotional cadre exams from Havaldar to Naib Subedar. Just before the unit had left for the battle, on July 1, Col Bawa had called all the Havaldars and had told them; "From my side, I am promoting all of you without taking any exams. Now, it is your turn to prove that you are worthy of it. You have to show the battalion that you deserved your promotion." Havaldar Kumar Singh fought fearlessly and with extreme daring and proved himself in war to all the soldiers who were with him. He was martyred while clearing the third bunker on Pimple 2.

Anuj had also honoured his CO's wishes. Col Bawa later learnt that he had led his men with complete disregard for his own life. He had been standing near a boulder, taking respite in a moment of peace in the midst of the battle. He had probably been planning his next move, aware of the fact that the dark sky was slowly turning orange, with dawn breaking over the tall barren peaks. That was when a rocket propelled grenade had come and hit him on the neck. Shocked that death had come to him before he could complete his next task, Anuj had looked up for a second to try and see where the treacherous fire had come from but for the first time, he could not get his body to obey his mind. He had fallen to the ground and his eyes had shut forever, leaving unfulfilled his dreams of capturing Pimple 2, of a new car he had asked his parents for on his birthday on August 28, and marriage to his school sweetheart in September. Anuj Nayyar was dead. He was only 23. Four other soldiers were also martyred that morning at the same position.

For its outstanding performance in the war, 17 Jat was awarded the Chief of Army Staff Commendation on the spot, the Battle Honour Mushkoh and Theatre Honour Kargil. The battalion received 41 awards that included a Maha Vir Chakra for Capt Anuj Nayyar; four Vir Chakras for Col US Bawa, Maj Deepak Rampal, Capt SB Ghildiyal and Havaldar Kumar Singh; six Sena Medals, 20 Mention-in-Despatches and 10 Commendation Cards. The

battalion suffered the highest casualty for a unit in the Kargil War. They lost Captain Anuj Nayyar, Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) Harphul Singh and 34 Other Ranks (ORs). Looking back at the war, 20 years later, this is what Col Bawa had to say, "It is the dream of every soldier to go to war. When we were sent to battle, I was excited at the opportunity. I thought I would have stories to tell my grandchildren. But after the war, when I saw the coffins of my boys, when I saw my soldiers maimed and disabled in hospitals, when I met grief-stricken parents and young girls widowed so early in life, my heart was full of sadness. I never want to see another war in my life. Wars only bring misery. They cannot solve any problems."



Nearly 20 years after the Kargil War, I also met Mrs Meena Nayyar, Anuj's mother, over coffee in Delhi's South Extension. We spent more than an hour together and with great affection and moist eyes, she told me about the young son she had lost. When I asked her if she had ever gone to see the War Memorial at Kargil, her son's last battlefield, she said no. "I never wanted to. There is nothing for me there. My son is gone," she told me, her voice grief-stricken and I felt guilty I asked. She smiled talking about the day Anuj (then a student of Army Public

School, Dhaula Kuan) missed his school bus and decided to walk home all the way to Janak Puri, where the Nayyars lived in a joint family. "He was in Class 7. He didn't know the way but he followed the same route that the bus used to take and reached home," she says. "His father and I had gone out for lunch so we didn't even know he had missed the bus. *Aisa hi tha Anuj. Bas apne man ki karta tha,*" she said talking about the son who will always stay 23 years old for her. She remembered how he fractured his foot in school and was advised by the doctor not to strain the leg. "*Par wo kahan kisi ki sunta tha.* He started playing football in school. When I noticed his dirty shirt and scolded him for not listening to the doctor, he just started removing his shirt on the playfield so that I wouldn't find out he was still playing. When I noticed that his vest stayed dirty, he removed even that and started playing bare-chested; putting on his clothes before returning home so that I never knew what he had been up to," she laughed.

One memorable morning, Anuj told his parents that someone special was coming to see them. Soon after, the doorbell rang and a pretty young girl walked in. It was his schoolmate from Army Public School, Dhaula Kuan, the daughter of an Army officer. *“Choti si ladki thi per wo toh apna rishta khud hi lekar aa gayi,”* Mrs Nayyar remembered with a gentle smile. “After she left, we asked Anuj if he was serious about her. He coolly said, *“Tabhi toh aap se milwaya hai”*. His father and I were happy about that too. We had never said no to anything to Anuj,” Mrs Nayyar says. “Though sometimes I wish I had said no to him more forcefully when he had decided to join the Army.”

Mrs Nayyar remembers how she and Anuj’s fiancée ran around getting goodies to send to him with an officer who was flying down to his location at the time of war. “We bought packs of juices and chips and hastily bound them in a parcel. I added an envelope with some money as *shagun* for Anuj and another for the young officer who was going for war. Anuj never got to see that because he never came back from that operation,” she says. “The parcel was returned to us with his coffin, his engagement ring, his watch and wallet.”

Young Anuj Nayyar, the boy who was the first in his family to join the Army that he was exposed to as a career after joining Army Public School, ended up becoming one of his school’s most famous alumni. He might not have returned from war but soldiers never die on battlefields. They continue to live in the memories of their comrades and their countrymen. And if we look at it that way, Anuj shall also live forever in our hearts.

Captain Anuj Nayyar’s Citation

On July 06, 1999, Charlie Company was tasked to capture an objective, which was a part of the Pimple Complex on the Western Slopes of Point 4875, in the Mushkoh Valley. At the beginning of the attack, the Company Commander got injured and the command of the company devolved on Captain Anuj Nayyar. Captain Nayyar continued to command his leading platoon into the attack under heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. As the platoon advanced, the leading section reported location of 3 to 4 enemy positions. Captain Nayyar moved forward towards the first enemy position and fired a rocket launcher and lobbed grenades into it.

Thereafter, the section, along with Captain Nayyar, physically assaulted and cleared the position. The enemy, which was well entrenched, brought a heavy volume of automatic fire. Captain Anuj Nayyar, unmindful of his personal safety, motivated his men and cleared two more enemy positions. While clearing the fourth position, an enemy rocket propelled grenade hit the officer killing him on

the spot. This action led by Captain Anuj Nayyar, resulted in killing nine enemy soldiers and destruction of three medium machine gun positions of the enemy. The success of this operation after a brief setback was largely due to the outstanding personal bravery and exemplary junior leadership of this daring officer. Captain Anuj Nayyar displayed indomitable resolve, grit and determination and motivated his command by personal example acting beyond the call of duty and made the supreme sacrifice in true traditions of the Indian Army.

Mrs **Rachna Bisht Rawat** is a prolific writer who has authored a number of books on the Indian Army's heroic and famous battles besides a book on PVC awardees. She is a 2005 Harry Brittain fellow and winner of the 2006 Commonwealth Press Quarterly's Rolls Royce Award.

This account has been recreated from conversations with Mrs Meena Nayyar, mother of late Capt Anuj Nayyar MVC; and Brig Umesh Singh Bawa (Retd) VrC, SM, who was Commanding Officer of 17 Jat during the Kargil War.