

A SUPERB BURMA 'HILL 170' M.M. AWARDED TO AN NCO IN THE 2/2ND PUNJAB REGIMENT FOR THE BATTLE OF KANGAW IN JANUARY 1945 WHEN THE 51ST "ALL INDIAN BRIGADE" IN SUPPORT OF 3RD COMMANDO BRIGADE FOUGHT WHAT LORD MOUNTBATTEN WOULD DESCRIBE IT AS "THE BLOODIEST BATTLE OF THE ARAKAN"



MILITARY MEDAL, G.VI.R. '15133 HAV MIAN MOHD PUNJAB R.'

M.M. *London Gazette* 21 June 1945. The recommendation for the award of the Immediate award Military Medal states:

"29th Jan 45 – KANGAW – hill feature MELROSE.

Hav. MIAN MOHD was in command of the leading Platoon in the assault on MELROSE of 29th Jan. During the advance to the F.U.P. across shell and MMG swept paddy and at the F.U.P. itself under heavy fire, Hav MIAN MOHD by his coolness and skilful control was responsible for saving his platoon from considerable casualties and for bringing his platoon to the F.U.P. punctually. His leadership of his PL. during the attack was exemplary and his skilful dispositions of his men enabled them to clear the crest of the feature with a minimum of casualties from enemy fire. From the crests he again directed a successful attack on three enemy bunkers which were sweeping the crest with fire, showing complete disregard for his personal safety and ensuring that his men were in the best posn. to consolidate the feature. The enemy repeatedly launched savage and determined counter attacks on the posn., during which Hav MIAN MOHD continually visited his section posns. directing and controlling their fire with calmness and accuracy. It was largely due to his inspiring example and the

excellence of his fire discipline which he maintained that his platoon was successful in repulsing the counter attacks with heavy casualties to the enemy. To add to his difficulty 2 of his 3 bren guns were put out of action by hostile shelling but by organising his remaining fire power effectively his platoon continued to repel and destroy the enemy. "

The recommendation by Lt. Col S.P.P. Thorat, Commanding Officer of the 2/2 Punjab Regiment on the 16 February 1945 was for an Immediate award of the I.D.S.M.. However he was awarded Immediate M.M. instead.

2ND BATTALION 2ND PUNJAB REGIMENT AND THE BATTLE FOR HILL 60

The 2nd Battalion, 2nd Punjab Regiment formed part of the 51st Indian Infantry Brigade, also known as the 'all Indian' Brigade. This was due to the fact that it was first Indian Brigade in the history of the Indian army in which all the Battalions were commanded by Indian Officers.

On 25 January 1945, the 51st (all Indian) Infantry Brigade, consisting 2/2nd Punjab, 8/19th Hyderabad and 16/10 Baluch Regiment embarked on landing craft at Akyab, being landed at Mybon later that day. The following day the Brigade went into action in support of 3rd Commando Brigade during the battle for Hill 170. During the battle, also known as the battle of Kangaw, which lasted between 22-31 January 1945, 3rd Commando and 51st Brigade gained an extremely hard fought victory against a well positioned and dug in elements of the Japanese 54th Division:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Hill_170

<https://www.keymilitary.com/article/black-mud-green-berets-burma-commando-part-ii>



Lord Louis Mountbatten would describe it as *"the bloodiest battle of the Arakan"* and General Christison, Commander of XV Indian Corps would state that *"The Battle of Kangaw had been the decisive battle of the whole Arakan campaign."*

Years later, Lt Colonel Thorat would describe the part 51st Brigade and in particular his Regiment played:

Thus We Fought

I WILL tell you a little about officers and men of the 2/2nd Punjab Regiment, whom I had the honour of commanding during the Second World War. They were brave soldiers and fine men—the finest I have known. To the memory of those who fought and fell, I fold my hands in silent tribute.

I intend to give you an idea of what happens on a battle-field. So I will give you a brief account of the battle of Kangaw which we fought against the Japanese in January 1945.

Lord Louis Mountbatten, the then Supreme Commander of the South East Asia Command, has described it as 'the bloodiest battle of Arakan'. It certainly was bloody—the bloodiest in which I have taken part. In this one battle alone nearly 3000 Indians and Japanese were killed or wounded.

Fighting a Lion

At the end of 1944 the Japanese started pulling out their forces into Southern Burma. This did not suit the Supreme Commander who wanted them to be destroyed. He, therefore, ordered a Force to make a deep thrust into the enemy-held territory, block their route and inflict maximum casualties on them. To us of the 51st Indian Infantry Brigade who were selected for this task, it seemed very much like a suicide mission, for it meant fighting the lion in his own den.

The odds were overwhelmingly against us and there was little doubt that even if we were successful in our mission, not many of us

would return alive or unscathed. But the 51st Brigade readily accepted this challenging assignment for they had a name to keep. They were then known as 'The All Indian Brigade'. For the first time in the long history of the Indian Army, all the three battalions of the Brigade were led by Indians—the 8th Kumaon were commanded by Lt.-Col. Thimayya, who was later to become Chief of the Army Staff, the 16th Baluch were led by Lt.-Col. Sen and I had the honour of commanding the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Punjab Regiment who are now known as 1st Battalion of the Guards. Brig. Hutton, our commander, was a seasoned soldier. He had full faith in Timmy, Sen and me; we had complete confidence in our men, and the Jawans themselves were anxious to settle old scores with the Japanese.

When the orders came to concentrate in the port of Akyab at the N.W. tip of lower Burma, we started off in good spirits. On the way, we had to clear Japanese outposts in the Mayu range of mountains. It involved a few sharp actions but did not delay us unduly and we reached Akyab, I think, on the 25th of January 1945. From there, we were bundled into all manner of sea-craft and were landed at a place called Mybon which was to be our firm base for the main offensive. On the 27th January 1945 the 8th Kumaon attacked and captured a feature called 'Dunns', but were immediately counter-attacked and forced to withdraw. The next day the 16th Baluch mounted an attack on a fea-

ture known as 'Melrose'. This was a long, narrow hill which dominated the route which the Japanese were following and was therefore of vital tactical importance to them. The Baluch captured a portion of this hill but they too were counter-attacked and thrown back. That night, I was ordered to attack and capture 'Melrose' the next morning.

The Baluch attack had revealed the extent of the enemy position. This valuable information led me to believe that if I could get

By Lt.-Gen. S.P.P. Thorat

round the position and attack from behind, the chances of success were better. The flaw in this plan was that it entailed crossing about 200 yards of open and fire-swept ground before reaching the start-line for the attack. I was in a dilemma, but after weighing the pros and cons, I decided to take a calculated risk and attack the hill from behind. My fire plan included covering fire from land-based as well as naval guns and also bombing and strafing runs by the Air Force.

As soon as the advance started, enemy machine guns began to sweep with machine-gun fire the open ground through which we had to advance. Anticipating this, I had ordered a smoke screen to be fired by the artillery. This helped. The wind was favourable and a fairly good screen was put between the machine-guns and our troops. Under cover of this we crept on our bellies through the open ground and concentrated in the forming-up-area without much damage. The artillery bombardment which was a part of my fire-plan

came down as planned but the Air Force could not join the battle owing to climatic conditions. This was bad news, but the die was already cast and I decided to go ahead without air support. The Japanese had already opened heavy artillery, mortar and small arms fire on us, but undeterred, the Jawans pressed forward in short rushes till they reached the foot of the hill. Here they encountered the enemy outposts which were cleared after some sharp fighting. Casualties were mounting at an alarming rate but the Jawans' blood was up and the advance continued.

Fortunately, just then the Air Force came into action and started bombing the main hill. That gave us the opportunity we needed. We rushed forward till we could actually see the enemy above us who were pouring murderous fire into our ranks. Men were dropping like flies. Our advance began to falter and my heart stood still. The situation was critical for, had the troops wavered the attack would certainly have failed. Suddenly, the air was rent by the Sikh and Dogra war cries of 'Sat Sri Akal' and 'Mataji Ki Jai'. What an electrifying effect it had! It thrilled me to the core.

The Charge

That was the turning point and high above the din of battle rang the sharp orders of the platoon commanders to 'Charge'. "Charge Charge" the Jawans screamed and the faltering momentum of the attack was regained. What happened then can best be described as a mad rush up the hill. In place it was so precipitous that we had to climb on all four

but the scramble continued till we reached the enemy trenches. Then the men went crazy with the lust to kill and yelling and cursing, pouncing on the enemy. The Japanese were no cowards. They met the charge with equal ferocity. Men were shot at point blank range; they were stabbed and slashed by bayonets and many a skull was cracked by a rifle butt. One could hear nothing but the screams of the wounded and moans of the dying. I have yet to see a more savage action than the one which was fought on top of the hill. No quarter was asked and none was given.

The Japanese fought like the brave men that they are and the fate of the battle swung backwards and forwards, sometimes in our favour, sometimes in theirs. The Jawans knew that it was now or never and jumped into enemy trenches like infuriated tigers. The Japanese fought magnificently, but began to reel under the ferocity of our attack and started falling back. Exultant with the promise of victory, the Jawans chased them out of their trenches and soon the air was ringing with the full-throated war cries of the victors. Within a minute a wireless message went on the air that the 2/2 Punjab had captured their objective.

We had captured it no doubt, but we knew full well that we would be counter-attacked very soon. So, feverishly we began to dig trenches which alone would save us. While going round, I saw a Jawan digging with only one hand. I cursed and asked why the hell he was not using both hands. The boy simply lifted the

other arm and I got a lump in my throat when I saw that it was smashed by a shrapnel. "Go and get it bandaged," I said, "Yes Sir", he replied with a smile, "but let me do my share of digging while I can". I looked at the mangled arm, I looked at the boyish face which was flushed with victory—I passed on. It was a good example for the others.

The battle-field was strewn with the dead but there was no time to mourn for them. The immediate need was to reorganise and re-inforce the mutilated units, replenish expended ammunition and to plan a properly defended position. I had not yet had an opportunity of assessing my losses but I knew that they were very heavy. I fought back the feeling of sadness which was creeping on me, for there was much work to do. The officers and men were dog-tired. But I could not allow them even a minute's rest. Nor could I permit them to brood over dead comrades. In any case, they were gone and if the defences were not immediately prepared, the rest would go the same way. Ruthlessly, I drove the officers and men, made them work like slaves on strengthening the position before the counter-attack came.

It came in no uncertain fashion. It was preceded by one of the heaviest artillery bombardments I have gone through and under cover of it came a determined counter-attack. The Japanese knew that they were doomed unless they kicked us out of the hill which dominated their route. They stormed us in wave after wave. We fought with our backs to the wall. I issued the

order that it was a fight to the last man and last round. I had to. Having captured the hill, I was determined to hold it at all costs. How magnificently the officers and men responded! Thanks entirely to their blind devotion to duty and courage that we were able to push back the Japanese. This attack was followed by half a dozen more attempts but we hung on like grim

death and fought it out the whole night.

Dawn found the sleepy, hungry, thirsty officers and men of the 2/2nd Punjab Regiment crouching in their trenches, ready to meet any challenges. Deep down in every heart was a dull ache for dead comrades but their faces were aglow with a sense of duty well done—and capacity for still more.

Courtesy AIR Poona

Defence Expenditure

WHILE the Indian Army ranks fourth in strength among the major countries of the world, the expenditure incurred on it is far less compared to the other countries. China has a standing Army of 25 lakhs, the USSR 20 lakhs, while the strength of the US Army is 18.24 lakhs. The respective expenditure incurred by those countries is: China 7,250 million Dollars, USSR, 42,140 million Dollars and USA 78,475 million Dollars. The Indian Army which has an authorised strength of 8.28 lakhs spent 1,473 million Dollars (Rs. 1,105 crores) during 1969-70.

The strength of the Indian Army has been kept at the minimum possible level after considering the threat to our sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the last seven years the country has been the victim of aggression on three occasions from two of our neighbours. Despite the fact that India has always worked for international co-operation and the peaceful resolution of all outstanding problems, the relations with our neighbours has not been normal and it is necessary to maintain the present level of our Armed Forces.

The pace of modernisation of the Armed Forces cannot remain stagnant particularly in view of the fact that Pakistan, after the 1965 conflict, has acquired T-54 and T-55 tanks. MiG aircraft, IL-28 bombers, Mirage IIIE aircraft, air-

to-air, surface-to-air and anti-tank missiles, Midget Submarines, 130 mm guns, tank and artillery ammunition and material for ordnance factories from various sources.

REHABILITATION OF ECOs

THE Government of India have been extending help to Emergency Commissioned Officers to start small-scale industries. An officer on special duty has been appointed in the Directorate General of Resettlement to provide information and guidance about sources and facilities for starting these industries. The State Governments have also been requested to extend all facilities including finance, technical know-how and raw materials to the released Emergency Commissioned Officers. They are particularly given encouragement to start their own co-operatives in the industrial sector.

There is also a proposal to grant loans to Emergency Commissioned Officers who want to undergo professional training, management training or higher educational studies within the country. These loans will be given from the central special fund for reconstruction and rehabilitation of ex-Servicemen.

The Coordination Committee of the custodian of public sector banks are simultaneously being asked to consider the question of reserving a percentage of vacancies in those banks for recruitment of released Emergency Commissioned Officers.



Condition VF, with original ribbon and pin fitting as worn. An extremely fine fighting citation for this bloody but decisive battle