

Galwan: A Lost Story

1962 War Series



Towards Galwan

Establishment of Galwan post as termed by the Chinese was an attempt of cannibalisation by the Indian government. Galwan is one of the most used terms by the general public during the past three years of India–China stand-off in Ladakh. Though both posts of 1962 and 2020 are located at different positions. Here is the story of the actual gunfight that happened at Galwan in 1962.

Audacious Alpha

The day was 18 April, Alpha company of the 5 Jat left Uri for Leh under the command of Major Srikant Sitaram Hasabnis. The unit began moving in the direction of Chushul after adjusting. The Corps Commander, Lt Gen Bikram Singh, visited the Alpha when it arrived at Chushul in mid-May. The company was busy conducting routine tasks and building defences. It received a directive in August to take the reins of ITB Hill from the Gorkhas.

After spending a month and a half in Chushul, the CO, Lt Col Bakhtawar, ordered A company to move to Hot Springs. It walked along the banks of the Pangong Tso to Phobrang before continuing on to the hot springs. Next came the climb up the pass to Marsimik. At 18300 feet, Marsimik La was a difficult ascent. Alpha arrived at the hot springs after navigating the pass and turning into the Chang Chenmo River valley to the north.

At Hot Springs, A company was to replace a company of 1/8 GR led by Major Modak. Alpha took control of the Hot Springs Company's defence during the following few days. The Gorkha company now started to withdraw in small detachments to Chushul. Major Ajit Singh led the Bravo company of the 5 Jat to the hot springs. Major Ajit Singh's company was to proceed and take over the post of Galwan from the Gorkhas, as per an order from CO Lt Col Bakhtawar Singh.

Galwan

Galwan complex was situated at an altitude of 17000 feet, approachable by foot via Jinan pass. It was established when higher officials decided to establish an isolated post deep within the Galwan Valley in June 1962. On July 4, CO 1/8 Gorkha Rifles, Lt Col Hari Chand, MVC, established a platoon sized post opposite the Chinese post at Samzungling on orders from Army Headquarters. On July 10th, around 300 Chinese surrounded the Galwan post, which was manned by Naib Subedar Jang Bahadur and 30 other ranks of 1/8 GR. The Chinese had left the surrounding area the next day, but they were still close to the post. They continued to demoralise the troops with propaganda slogans. Major VP Bhasin of the 1/8 Gorkhas arrived a few days later with a reinforcement column to strengthen the post. The Chinese used to cut off the supply route through the patrol base. Once they stopped a platoon sized Yak loaded supply patrol and insisted the patrol return to the base immediately. No fire was exchanged during the incident. After three months at this post Jats were asked to relieve Gorkhas.

Lt Col Bakhtawar reached Hot Springs one day and ordered that Major Ajit relocate to Galwan, but due to some sensitive factors and his assertion that moving to Galwan would be a suicide mission, Alpha company was instead asked to do so. Everyone was taken aback by this decision because Alpha was consistently handed the most challenging assignments.

The remaining 60 soldiers of A company were to enter Galwan by helicopter while a platoon from the company was assigned to seize control of the Gorkhas' minor outposts north of the Chang Chenmo River. Captain HN Paul, a doctor, was assigned to Alpha for the post in Galwan.