

50 Years after Operation Cactus Lilly



PT-76s and Su-7s in The battle for Kushtia

December 2021 will mark a half century after the decisive action in (then) East Pakistan when both history and geography were made. The blitzkrieg advance into the riverine country that was to become the new nation of Bangladesh and total surrender of Pakistan's forces there, was surely the 'finest hour' for the Indian Armed Forces. This is the first of a series of articles on battles fought, in the words of those who led from the front. In this account, Major General Pramod K Batra (ret'd) writes about a 'Battle Honour, a Tactical Blunder and Historic Moment' when he was commanding 'A' Squadron 45 Cavalry deployed in West Bengal under 4th Mountain Division. In his words,

I was fortunate to command A Squadron of PT-76 tanks (*Chariots of the Lesser Gods*) during the Bangladesh War 1971. A brief introduction to this tank would be appropriate for *Vayu* readers. This tank was essentially designed by the Russians for operations in continental Europe to cross network of rivers/canals. PT stands for *Plavushi Tanka*, meaning a tank that can swim or float and 76 is the calibre of its gun. The tank's ground pressure is equivalent to that of an infantry soldier and it can carry 22 combat soldiers/RCL mounted on jeep on its deck with the water current not exceeding 3 knots or so to cross a water obstacle. Being amphibious the PT-76 is light weight, does not have sufficient armour protection and was therefore not suitable



Pair of Sukhoi Su-7s of the IAF