

The Chinese attack on Sirijap complex consisting of three posts, Sirijap, Sirijap-1 and 2, commenced at around 0600 hrs on 21 October 1962. The Chinese carried out heavy shelling of Sirijap-1 for nearly 2½ hours. They then attacked this post with light tanks, against which the post had no weapons. The ferry point near Tokung had a small Indian post and it was possible to observe the battle from there. Soon after the shelling started the posts at Sirijap went out of communication. A patrol under an NCO Nk Rabilal Thapa reached as close as 1000 yards from Sirijap-1; after observing the post the NCO came back and reported that the entire post including the company commander Major Dhan Singh Thapa had died in the attack. After capturing Sirijap-1, the Chinese turned their attention to Sirijap-2 and captured it after fierce resistance. Very few escaped from this battle. The returning soldiers also narrated that after collecting the wounded the Chinese lined them up and shot them dead. Yula complex of posts had begun the process of consolidating all the personnel at Yula-2 and 3 by evening of 21 October. By 22 October the Chinese were in complete control of the Northern bank of Pangong lake and maintenance of Yula posts by boats became difficult as Chinese were firing with MMGs on boats. Decision was taken on 22 October to withdraw troops from Yula complex to a high ground north of Gurung hill(35).

On 21 October, Indian transport aircraft flying in the area reported seeing a two mile long column of Chinese vehicles proceeding towards Spangur gap. The troops deployed in area also confirmed move of vehicles that alarmed brigade headquarters who thought that threat to Chushul was imminent. The entire front of nearly 60 km from Changchenmo to Dingtai had only one weak battalion. 13 Kumaon battalion which was located in Leh was ordered to move to Chushul on 21 October. In the meanwhile a platoon of 1 Mahar that was equipped with medium machine guns, was also ordered to Chushul. XV Corps took energetic action and airlifted one battery (8 guns) of 25-pounder guns to Chushul. The Chushul defences were now strengthened and the airlift of stores and ammunition continued. The Chinese did not launch an immediate attack and the lull period set in after 22 October in Chushul sector. The quick build up served the purpose of averting an immediate danger. The Chinese were to attack the area later.

THE INDUS VALLEY

The Indus valley sector lies south of Chushul. Dingtai was an important location from where a road

went north to Chushul, west to Leh and south along the Indus to Demchok. The Indus river valley south of Dungti is a flat open area flanked by low hills on the east and high mountains of Zanskar range to the west. The International boundary followed the eastern hills. These hills had several passes opening to Tibetan plateau. Vehicular movement along the valley presented no problems and excellent airfield existed at Fukche. The road communications on the Chinese side were not well developed and the only approach was from the south. The Chinese were estimated to have had a battalion located in Tashigong.

On the Indian side 7 J&K Militia was responsible for the defence of this sub-sector with its headquarters at Koyul with one company, company worth at Dungti and the rest of the troops being deployed along the passes and bottlenecks along the International border. The Chinese attacks in this sector started on 27 October. Chinese attacked simultaneously at Changla, Jarala, New Demchok and High Ground (north west of Demchok).

The Chinese plan of attack in this sector followed the pattern established elsewhere. They launched simultaneous attacks on Changla and Jarala posts that held the line of low hills on eastern side of Indus valley. Once having tackled these posts they then infiltrated between Fukche and the extreme southern posts of New Demchok and High Ground, thus making these untenable. Once having occupied the Kailash range that dominated the eastern banks of the Indus valley, they in effect denied its use by the Indians.

Changla post was well dug-in with wire obstacles around it. It was defended by 17 men of 7 J&K Militia under a JCO. In the early hours of 27 October, the Chinese approached the vicinity of the post in 30 odd vehicles. The vehicles were mounted with machine guns, which opened fire on the Indian post. The response from Indians was quick in coming using 2-inch mortar, two Chinese leading vehicles were set on fire. The men held their fire till the Chinese came close and within their rifle range. The two light machine guns effectively engaged the attacking Chinese. After nearly three hours of fire fight, the vastly outnumbered post commander decided to withdraw his men. Nearly 300 Chinese soldiers had surrounded the post. The post commander divided his party in two and while one party moved, he himself gave covering fire with LMG. Most of the men could thus withdraw safely to Fukche but the post commander laid down his life while covering the withdrawal of his men.

danger of being isolated. In addition, the threat to *Dungti* and *Koyul* needed to be averted and therefore the troops in conjunction with those at High Ground were asked to carry out a withdrawal by night 27/28 October. The withdrawal was successfully completed by 2330 hrs. The defenders successfully evaded the Chinese road-block under the cover of darkness and arrived in *Koyul* in good spirit.

The newly established 3 Himalayan Division as well as XV Corps gave a serious thought to order withdrawal from *Koyul* as well, but in the end left the decision to the commander on the spot, Lt Col R.M. Banon. He preferred to stay put and strengthen the defences rather than withdraw. The Indians continued to occupy these positions. There was some confusion regarding outposts at *Hanle* and *Zarser* and *Chumar* lying to the south west of this sector. These posts were held by CRP/ITBP and went out of communication on 27 October. These were also presumed to have fallen to the Chinese. But by 31 October it transpired that all these posts were intact.

At the end of the fighting on 28 October, the Chinese had established control of the eastern hills flanking the Indus valley. The road that passed through the valley was being dominated by them and could not be used by the Indians. The Chinese appeared to be satisfied with this gain and there was no further fighting in this sector(36).

THE LULL : 28 OCTOBER - 18 NOVEMBER

On the 20 October 1962, once the Chinese launched their well co-ordinated attack in Ladakh and NEFA, the basic assumption underlying the 'Forward Policy' ceased to exist. The Western Command, which all the while had been pleading for deployment based on 'military logic', now put into action its own plan for defence of Ladakh. The earlier operating injunction about not withdrawing resources and troops facing Pakistan was revoked, and between 20 October and 30 October, nearly a division worth of troops were inducted in Ladakh.

It was a feat achieved in the face of heavy odds. To augment the meagre transport resources, even the first line transport from units and formations was withdrawn to form ad hoc motor companies to facilitate induction. Divisions facing Pakistan were milked for battalions. The Air Force transport fleet also rose to the occasion and flew much beyond its normal capability(37).

Basically the induction was for defence of *Leh*. The outer and inner ring plan has already been discussed earlier; it was this plan that was implemented. The strength in the forward

The post at Jarala was attacked at the same time as Changla. This post was also held by 17 men under a Havildar. The Chinese 200 in number surrounded the post from all sides and opened machine gun fire on Indians. The Indian post also replied with 2-inch mortar and LMG. The fire fight continued right through the day. Around dusk the post commander decided to break out of the encirclement and rejoin the battalion main defences at Koyul. Using the tactics of fire and movement he successfully carried out a withdrawal by night.

In the south at New Demchok post that was on the eastern bank and High Ground that was on the western bank, it was a different story. High Ground was a formidable position held by 5 platoons, well dug in. Selective mine-laying had also been carried out. Besides the Infantry weapons, this post had two sections of 3-inch mortars and two medium machine guns also. Indeed a formidable combination. The Chinese approached the post in the early hours of 27 October, under the cover of darkness with a strength of around 200 to 300. The Chinese tried to attack the post from the nallah in south. There, the Chinese came under the devastating fire of mortars and machine guns. The Chinese suffered heavy casualties and had to beat a hasty retreat. Then onwards from 1100 hrs till 1700 hrs, the Chinese did not attempt an assault but confined themselves to firing at the post only. The post returned the fire and inflicted further casualties on the Chinese who were caught in the open while the Indian troops remained in trenches. This post could have been held on indefinitely but for the fact that fall of Changla, Jarala and New Demchok, cut the route of withdrawal as well as maintenance of the post. Reluctantly the battalion ordered the withdrawal of this post at 1930 hrs on 27 October and the men were redeployed at Fukche.

New Demchok post across the Indus was not tactically sited but was mainly a 'Forward Policy' post on the International border. Initially it had only a section strength, but as tensions mounted it was beefed up by two platoons which were deployed in the historic Zorawar fort area. The Chinese approached the post from the Jarala side on the morning of 27 October. The fire from Zorawar fort came as a nasty surprise for them and the nearly 400 Chinese who had come in for the attack suffered heavy casualties. In the meanwhile some Chinese crossed the Indus and positioned themselves in the area of old Demchok on the western bank between High Ground and New Demchok. This move by the Chinese as well as their road-block further north created a situation where the southern positions of 7 J&K Militia were in

most posts' was increased only marginally. Most deployment was in the rear areas well away from the immediate Chinese attack.

Major General Budh Singh, MC, raised the 3 Himalayan Division on 26 October 1962 at Leh. The 114 Brigade Headquarters was moved to Chushul and was responsible for Chushul and Phobrang sectors. Brigadier R.S. Grewal, MC, arrived in Leh with 70 Infantry Brigade Headquarters on 25 October and took over responsibility of the Indus Valley sector. By 3 November it was established at Dungti and later at Asale in the rear. On 24 October Delta sector was raised out of existing troops to look after the Northern sector, with its Headquarters at Thoise. 163 Infantry Brigade arrived in Leh to look after the close defence of Leh proper. The Western Command had been pleading for the induction of a division since 1961, and the troops did materialise in the midst of the conflict. The new formation did not have any immediate operational problems, as 114 Brigade was being commanded directly by XV Corps. Aware of the need to maintain continuity, the 3 Div left the existing structures intact and interfered very little in the fighting, burnt of which was being borne by 114 Brigade. Significant addition to the fire power of troops in Ladakh was the induction of 13 Field Regiment equipped with 25-pounder field guns. One battery was already in Chushul. By 3 November another battery reached Dungti. The third battery was located in Leh along with the regimental headquarters. 114 Heavy Mortar battery equipped with 4.2 inch mortars was inducted in Chushul between 26 October and 31 October. One troop was sent to Lukung to support 5 Jat and the rest of the battery was sent to Dungti. The Indian Air Force achieved a major feat when the AN-12 aircraft airlifted a troop of AMX-13 tanks to Chushul on 25 October. The troop belonged to 20 Lancers.

In the meanwhile new Infantry battalions were also being inducted, and included 9 Dogra, 3/4 Gorkha Rifles, 3 Sikh LI, and 1 Jat. The troops were being airlifted in small groups and were being deployed post haste to plug the various gaps in the defences. Visualizing the likelihood of the road of Chushul garrison being cut off, the Army engineers were ordered to construct an alternative route via Karu, Changla, Tangtse and Tartar Camp.

The Commander XV Corps informed the Army Commander on 30 October 1962 that he was not asking 3 Div to make any plan for withdrawal from Chushul. He felt this would have only adverse effect on the morale of the troops defending Chushul and Dungti. Both

these positions were to be defended to the last man. He also urged him that provision of close air support would be of immense help in the defensive battle.

All the possible routes to Leh were now held in strength. In the north, D Sector with a strength of nearly 2 battalions held the Saserla, Sultan Chushku, Shyok, Galwan-Shyok river junction. The route passing over Changla was defended at the pass itself, as well as at Dorbuk. Giving depth to the Changla defences were the troops deployed at Phobrang and Chushul with some artillery support. In the Indus Valley sector, a whole brigade blocked the axis at Dingt, Chumathang and areas further back. In Leh proper there was nearly a battalion worth of troops to defend the surrounding hills. The newly inducted troops were thus placed in a reasonable position to defend Leh. Only one battalion, 1 Jat, was deployed in Chushul area. On 27 October itself, request for further troops for defence of Chushul, made by 114 Brigade Commander, was turned down by the Corps Commander, his mind being made up that Leh must remain secure at all costs(38).

BATTLE OF CHUSHUL

The lull period was utilised by the Chinese to build up their strength in the Spangur area. Indian troops in the Gurung hill and Yula III area kept a vigilant watch on these activities. In the absence of long range weapons and decision not to use Air Force, the Chinese build up continued unhindered(39). The Indian build-up also was proceeding at the same time, yet as a matter of deliberate decision, it was decided not to put the newly inducted troops in threatened areas like Chushul. The emphasis on the Indian side was on defence of Leh.

Once 3 Himalayan Division was raised, 114 Brigade moved to Chushul on 27 October as already stated, defence of Chushul was now the sole responsibility of the brigade. In the Chushul area the brigade had 1 Jat, looking after Tokung, Yula III and Lukung with a company each. The rest of the battalion was at Gompa Hill. 1/8 GR was deployed to cover the Northern flank of Spangur gap. Nearly two companies were on Gurung hill, and a company to the North of Pt 5167. The fourth company was located in the Spangur gap itself. The battalion headquarters was located at the airfield with an ad hoc company as reserve. 13 Kumaon looked after the Southern flank with two companies on Muggar Hill, a company with section of 3 inch mortars at Rezangla and battalion headquarters with one company at Track Junction. Tsakala also had a company of 5 Jat. The brigade was