Chapter VII
Planning and Conduct of Operation

Introduction
About the Bangladesh Liberation War, military historian of repute, Major General D. K. Palit writes, “Few campaigns in history have caused as much surprise and speculation as the Indian Armed Forces’ liberation of Bangladesh and with good reason.” He justifies his statement by saying that despite Indian Army’s series of combat engagements during the last twenty four years of India’s independence, “the watching world formed an image of of our (India’s) military machine – a good second class British left over .......on the wane in actual combat capability.........At best it can be considered comPARAble to the Pakistani armed forces – but , certainly in Western eyes , even that was debatable.”

Before discussing the conduct of operations, it will be prudent to carry out a brief study of both the Indian as well as Pakistan armed forces as it was in 1971 to get an overview. Both India as well as Pakistan progressively acquired better arms and equipment and raised more units and formations after independence. Both the armies improved in acquiring more tanks and artillery guns. Senior officers of both the armed forces were trained during pre-independence era; therefore, they followed the tactical concepts of Second World War. Both the countries acquired better aircrafts for their air-force. But Pakistan neglected her Navy where as India did try to build up her navy within the economic means. India procured British Sea King helicopters during 1971. Most importantly, India had an aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant, and more number of conventional warships like frigates, destroyers and cruisers which Indian navy a good edge over Pakistan navy.

In the East, India could master seven Infantry divisions for the Bangladesh campaign. Out of these seven except for one division which was originally for operation in East Pakistan; other six divisions were to be mustered from elsewhere. For example, two divisions involved in counter insurgency operations in Nagaland and Mizoram were pulled out, and three divisions deployed in looking after Chinese threat in Siliguri corridor were relocated and one division was brought from UP-Tibet border, thus
accepting calculated risks against Chinese threat. This division though could not be employed in depth in Bangladesh as it was to be quickly switched back to meet the Chinese threat if any. India had an APC Battalion (Mechanised Infantry), three armour regiments and, two independent armoured squadrons.  

Till Operation Searchlight, Pakistan had one infantry division of four brigades in East Pakistan. After March 1971 episode, East Pakistan built up the strength to five infantry divisions comprising of 35 infantry battalions and seven wings of PARA military forces by flying them from West Pakistan on emergency basis. Therefore, the divisions did not have their usual artillery and logistics compliments. There were six field regiments of artillery and couple of independent mortar and field batteries. Pakistan had one armoured regiments of Chaffee tanks and two independent armoured squadrons of Chaffee and PT-76 tanks. Between April–May 1971, Pakistan raised 35,000 armed Razakars and 25,000 recruits for the East Pakistani Civil Armed Forces. Personnel recruited for these organizations were mostly non-Bengali Muslims (Mujahirs) and collaborationist Bengali Muslims. In East, Pakistan had a small component of the air force comprising of two dozens of Sabrejet fighters and a few communication helicopters. Navy had only a good number of gun boats.

Usually in a conventional war for undertaking offensive operation, minimum ratio of the attacking force should be 3:1. But, Lt General Jagjit Singh Aurora did not have overwhelming edge against Lt General Niazi’s army in the Eastern theatre. Indian strategy and operational tactics mainly depended on speed which required higher superiority of force. But under the circumstances, “only audacity and boldness in execution would clinch the issue”

In the West, India had 12 Infantry Divisions, one Armoured Division, three Artillery Brigades, two Independent Infantry Brigades, two Armoured Brigades and one independent PARACHUTE Brigade. Against this, Pakistan had ten Infantry Divisions, two Armoured Divisions, two Independent armoured Brigades, two Independent Infantry Brigades, and a few Armoured Regiments. Thus in the West, where major battles were to be fought in the plains of Punjab and Rajasthan, Pakistan had more tanks than India which suited the mobile warfare, however they had little less Infantry than India.
EASTERN THEATRE

Pakistan’s Concept of Defence in the East

Lt Gen A.A.K. Niazi, who was the Commander of Pakistan’s Eastern Command, on the concept of defence in Bangladesh writes:

The concept of defence was based on having different layers which will augment each other. The concept envisaged imposing maximum attrition on the enemy to dissipate and weaken his forces to make him loose cohesion before he attacked the main force and made deep thrust in the area. A forward defence posture based on strong points and fortresses, which were to be stocked was decided upon.\(^5\)

The concept was formulated aligning with the mission given to Niazi by his Higher Head Quarters. Mission or the broad tasks given to Niazi were:

- Evict guerrillas.
- No territory to fall into enemy hands which they can declare as Bangladesh.
- Defend East Pakistan against external aggression.

As given below, Niazi planned for four lines of defense in East Pakistan revolving around fortresses.\(^6\)

**Border Outposts (BOPs).** A line of outposts located as far forward as tactically sound and possible near the international boundary to act as eyes and ears and to serve as buffer and delay the advancing enemy as long as possible. Regular army beefed up the important positions held by the Civilian Armed Forces (CAF). whereas rest of the BOPs was held by Razakars.

**Strong Points** These were the second line of well prepared and well stocked defence formed on the features of tactical importance, including small towns and communication centres. They were expected to give stiff resistance and inflict maximum casualties on the advancing enemy.

**The Fortresses** They were the third tier of defence around important towns and communication centres. They were well prepared and stocked and troops were expected to fight a ‘last man last round ‘defensive battle. Niazi states, “This line of defence was to be designated as the no-penetration line ……and troops were to stay there dead or alive.”\(^7\)
Defence of Capital City Dacca Final tier of defence was the defence of the gravitas centre Dacca, Government and Eastern Army’s seat of power. This was planned in the following manner:

(a) Dacca- Outer Defence Line. After fighting the battle of attrition, troops were to fall back to this line which ran from Pabna in the West to Bera then to Sirajgang to the North and to Mymensingh. Further from Mymensingh the line went South to Bhairab Bazar then in South West along the Meghna to Daudkhandi and Chandpur then ran North West along Padma and further to Madhumati and back to Pabna. Though Bhairab and Mymensingh were developed as fortresses and Faridpur and Daudkhandi were developed as strong points remaining positions were not developed.

(b) Dacca- Inner Defence Line. It was planned to have a fortress defence at Narayanganj and strong points at Kalaikar and Tongi. None was developed by December 1971.

Pakistan’s Operation Plan in East Pakistan
Pakistan always gave overriding importance to Western Wing possibly because army and the ruling elites mostly belonged to West Pakistan. Major portion of armed forces too were located there for its defence or for launching offensive operations against India. To many ruling elites and armed forces, Pakistan meant West Pakistan only. East Pakistan, the land mainly comprising the Bengalis who were perceived to be under influence of India being from the same ethnic stock, was never given equal importance. Based on this perception, it was assessed that India would not be a military threat to East Pakistan. Therefore defence of East Pakistan never merited much consideration of the Pakistan government. Almost since the creation of Pakistan about a division worth of troops (14 Division) was kept in East Pakistan: “more for keeping control on the Bengalis, rather than for effective defence of the territory”\(^8\). However, in view of the adverse development in East Pakistan, about four additional Divisions worth of troops had to be hastily moved from the West to the East. This had resulted in some imbalance in the West, in that; the offensive capabilities in the West got some what curtailed. As far as the Eastern Wing was concerned, the Divisions were initially deployed in penny packets, in
many cases down to the company level, to deal with internal situation. However, after gaining a reasonable degree of control over the situation, it was possible to employ the troops available, in a more concentrated form, for the defence of East Pakistan. The total of about five Divisions available including PARA-Military Forces was reasonably adequate to put up a fairly effective defence of the territory. The degree of effectiveness naturally depended upon the soundness of the strategy adopted and the plans evolved. In an effort to fight against Bengali guerillas and Indian Armed Forces, Niazi reorganized his army through readjustment, raisings and redeployments of forces which could be completed by end October 1971. Broadly formations were tasked as under:

1. 14 Division which earlier was located at Dacca, was assigned Mymensingh – Sylhet-Chittagong sector to defend area east of the Brahmaputra and Padma/Ganges Rivers.
2. 16 Division to defend Rangpur –Bogra – Rajshahi sector.
3. 9 Division less one brigade to defend Jessore-Kushtia –Faridpur sector.
4. 314 Brigade (New ad hoc) with EPCAF created for the defence of Khulna sector.
5. 91 Independent Brigade (new ad hoc) raised at Chittagong to defend Chittagong sector.
6. 53 Brigade to move to Dacca on relief.
7. 39 Division with 53 Brigade was raised to defend Chandpur to operate under GHQ.
8. 36 Division was created at Dacca with a new ad hoc 93 Brigade at Mymensingh.

Niazi had shortage of artillery which was proportionately distributed to the defending formations based on the assessed enemy ingress routes. It was decided that the troops would fall back on the pre-designated final lines to block the approaches to Dacca. 14 Division, 93 ad hoc Brigade from Mymensingh, and 314 ad hoc Brigade from Khulna were to fall back on Dacca area”. Niazi’s plans were approved by General Hamid, Pakistan Army Chief during his visit to Dacca in October 1971, and the Pakistan General Head Quarters (GHQ) issued changed Order of Battle. 9

Niazi was keen on launching limited offensive operation inside India. GHQ approved his proposal to launch offensive operations against English Bazar or Balurghat and also
destroy Farakka Bridge by employing SSG Commandos. So with the resources mentioned above, along with terrain and tactical considerations based on the Niazi’s overall strategy; sector wise deployment of his force and tactical plan is as given below:

a) South Western Sector
In this sector, Jessore was the most important cantonment township and communication hub. Old Calcutta to Dacca road passes through Jessore via the old Goalundo Ghat ferry. It had an all weather airfield. Khulna an important port town lay to the South of Jessore. Jhenida to the North of Jessore also lay on the route to Goalundo Ghat and Faridpur ferries. Jessore was close to Calcutta. Therefore, it goes without saying that capture of Jessore and progress of the operation further from this axis would be an obvious Indian army’s choice. Niazi, appreciating likely major Indian offensive operation in this sector, deployed 9 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. M H Ansari for the defence of Kushtia – Jhenida- Jessore and Khulna line. This Division gave responsibility to 57 Infantry Brigade for the defence of the Jhenida – Kushtia, and 107 Infantry Brigade was tasked to defend Byra-Jessore. After delaying and causing attrition to the attacking troops, this brigade was to fall back to Magura-Faridpur. One battalion was tasked to look after Satkhira – Khulana area. An adhoc EPCAF brigade which was located in Khulna to join the battle of Dacca in subsequent stage.

b) North Western Sector
Northern portion of this sector lay in proximity to Indian Silliguri corridor; therefore for Indian defence planners the sector had strategic importance in context to Chinese threat. Rangpur Cantonment Township and Bogra were important communication centres from where routes led on to the ferries at Phulchari, Siraj Ganj and Bera. Niazi deployed 16 Infantry Division under Maj Gen Nazar Hussain Shah for the defence of the Sector, with Headquarters at Bogra. This Division had 23, 107, and 205 Brigades. 23 Infantry Brigade was responsible for the defence of Dinajpur – Rangpur, 205 Infantry Brigade was deployed for the defence of Hilli. This brigade after fighting at Hilli was to fall back to Bogra to defend Bogra. 107 Infantry Brigade was deployed in depth holding Panitola,
Nawabganj and Ishurdi with a battalion each. In addition 34 Brigade was deployed for the defence of Natore.\textsuperscript{12}

c) Central Sector

This sector lies south of Indian state Meghalaya. The capital city of Dacca, Mymensingh and Tangail were the important townships and communication centres in this Sector. The general area around Madhupur-Tangail was forested and the sector was comparatively much less developed. Meghalaya being a hilly terrain, Niazi assessed that Indians may not launch major thrusts from here in the Sector. The sector was given less importance by Niazi, because he never appreciated deep penetration of Indian offensive right up to Dacca. 36 Division (Adhoc) under Maj. Gen. Jamshed Khan, with Headquarters at Dacca was to defend this sector. It did not have the formal components of a Division and was allotted limited troops. 93 Infantry Brigade was given the responsibility for the defence of the Mymensingh-Jamalpur Sector.\textsuperscript{13} However Lachhman Singh writes that, “the best geographical approach to Dacca from Indian territory was through the central sector from the north even though the eastern sector provided a much shorter approach.”\textsuperscript{14}

(d) Eastern Sector

This sector is important as many townships, ports and airports were located here. Sylhet, Comilla and Chittagong were important cantonments located in this Sector. In addition, Maulvi Bazar, Bhairab Bazar, Daudkandi, Chandpur were other important communication centre located in this sector Dacca was in the closest proximity to the Indian borders from Comilla. Suitable ferries existed at Ashuganj, Daudkandi and Chandpur had ferries which lent importance to progress of operation. There was even a railway bridge at Ashuganj. Three important ports namely, Chittagong, and on Meghna River, Chandpur and Daudkandi were located here. Notwithstanding the operational logistics problems Indian Army may face, Niazi assessed that Indians may launch an offensive operations here. Accordingly, Niazi deployed 14 Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Abdul Majid Khan for the defence of the Sythlet Brahmanbaria Sector and 39 Infantry Division for the defence of the Sylhet Sector, 313 Infantry Brigade for the
defence of Maulvi Bazar Sector and 27 Infantry Brigade for the defence of Brahman Baria and Akhaura Sector with Divisional headquarters at Ashuganj. 39 Adhoc Division under Maj. Gen. Rahim Khan was made responsible for the defence of Comilla –Feni line. He had deployed 117 Infantry Brigade was to be initially deployed at Comilla and later fall back to the Mynamati-Laksham Sector and 53 Infantry Brigade in the Feni Sector. An adhoc Brigade was given responsibility for the defence of the Chittagong Sector.

Defence of Dacca

About the defence of Dacca various historians have given varying statements about the initial deployment of Pakistani troops. General Niazi apparently had planned for two lines of defence for Dacca and tasked Maj Gen Jamshed to defend Dacca. It was decided by him that in case the forward forces become untenable then the troops will fall back to predesignate final lines to block the approaches to Dacca. Niazi states that Operational Instructions as on March 1971, spelt out that after fighting the forward defensive battles, 14 Division, 93 Adhoc Brigade from Mymensingh, and 314 Adhoc Brigade from Khulna were to fall back. In October that year Niazi made various amendments to the March 1971 plan. He did not initially cater for any troops in Dacca. One wonders whether he was ever serious about Indian Army’s capability to reach Dacca. Niazi of course claimed that:

Dacca was the linchpin. The whole defence concept was built on various lines of defence based on the rivers or other water obstacles, or on major centres of communication acting as fortresses which the enemy would have to clear before advancing any further towards Dacca.

General Krishna Rao on the Defence of Dacca highlights that no prePARAotions was made for defensive battle in Dacca. He states:

As far as the defence of Dacca was concerned, there were no troops specifically earmarked for the defence of Dacca as such, nor were any defence works constructed. As the war progressed, it was hoped that should the necessity arise, the troops could fall back from the fortresses as required. However, no detailed
plans were made nor any orders issued, for fear that these may have an adverse psychological effect on the resolve of the troops to hold on to the various fortresses.\(^{17}\)

Niazi had two courses open in planning his defence: defend Dacca strongly and the forward area lightly or the opposite. In the first option, Indian attacking force would have ingresssed without much fight but would have taken much time to capture Dacca. Possibly the time would have been adequate for international intervention for a ceasefire. In the second option of defending the border in strength, denuding Dacca with a plan of series of battles of attrition in the intermediate zone and then fall back to Dacca was preferred. However, this option does not take care of any major breakthrough by the bypassing force and the insufficient quantity of troops failed to ensure adequate reserves to deal with such situations. But Niazi opted for a compromised option of keeping a brigade worth PARAmilitary troops taking care of Dacca and waited for the withdrawing troops for reinforcing the defence of Dacca.\(^{18}\)

Having finalized the concept of defence and reorganization of units and formations Niazi gave out his final instructions on the design of the defensive battles as follows:\(^{19}\)

(a) Troops deployed in the BOPs to hold the posts until GOCs ordered them to retreat.

(b) During retreat to a fortress, troops would fight a delaying action to ‘trade space for time’

(c) The fortresses should be defended to the last to facilitate adequate time for the decisive operations in the West.

(d) On orders, units/ formations to fall back to Dacca to occupy outer line defensive positions to defend Dacca.

**Indian Operational Plan**

Theatre strategy compliments the national strategy. In Eastern Theatre strategy adopted was an offensive operation with multiple thrusts to move without pause to put relentless pressure on enemy. By pass and contain the fortresses and strong points by following Russian strategy of *expanding torrents*. “Eastern Command was given the task of
destroying the Pakistani Forces in the Eastern theatre and occupies the major portion of East Pakistan.  

During the Bangladesh campaign, it was well known that if a war was to be fought in East Pakistan, clearly it would extend to the Western Wing also. It was a foregone conclusion that Pakistan would fight the main campaign in the West as per her traditional strategy. Therefore it will be an all-out war with Pakistan. Importance of the capture of the capital city Dacca, the ultimate objective was well analysed during the preliminary planning in the Indian Army Headquarters. However, factors like non availability of overwhelming superiority of force because of two front wars, Chinese threat, obstacle ridden terrain of East Pakistan and most importantly likely intervention by the UN Security Council for a ceasefire within a short time frame during the operation were considered and objectives were set excluding Dacca initially. Major General Rajendra Nath writes:

Many months before the war, Manekshaw issued a comprehensive and thoughtful directive to the Eastern Command. He laid down strategy and tactics to be followed. The aim was to destroy the Pakistan Army in the Eastern Wing in a short and decisive campaign. ...He clearly laid down that the Indian forces were to advance as quickly as possible. The fortified places were to be bypassed ...from the flanks and deep penetration affected, thus upsetting the Pakistan plans.

Not including Dacca in the initial planning and not catering for any resources to capture Dacca has been criticized by a section of military historians including Lt General J.F.R.Jacob, Chief of Staff Eastern Command, functioning under Lt Gen J S Aurora. But people like General Krishna Rao, who was one of the divisional commanders and a decade later became COAS felt that excluding Dacca at that stage was right. He avers:

India initially planned for the capture of territory up to the major river lines. While it was necessary to keep in mind the Dacca bowl as the ultimate objective, any further planning could be carried out, depending on the progress of the operations up to the major river lines. As Pakistan had sufficient troops to offer adequate resistance to any advancing troops, any premature adventure on Dacca could prove to be unsound. India felt that full advantage could be taken of the
geographical configuration, if the land operations is launched from all the three sides.\textsuperscript{22}

**Eastern Command Order of Battle**

General Aurora, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command had three army corps, namely newly raised 2 Corps located Krishnanagar (West Bengal), 33 Corps located at Silliguri, 4 Corps located at Agartala. In addition, 101 Communication Zone Headquarter based at Shillong, which was meant for looking after operational logistics was converted to act as a fighting operational formation akin to a division.

**Troops to Tasks**

Sector wise allotment resources and broad tasks have been described below:-

- **Eastern Sector (Sylhet-Chittagong Sector)**
  4 Corps headed by Lt Gen Sagat Singh was allotted three divisions less one brigade, Kilo force had two battalions, few EBR battalions and two squadrons of armour. This sector provided nearest approach to Dhaka and the 4 Corps was tasked to clear area east of Meghna and capture Chittagong. Pakistan’s 14&39 Divisions consisting of 11 battalions were deployed in this sector.

- **Northwestern sector (Rajshahi Sector)**
  33 Corps commanded by Lt Gen M L Thapan had 20 Mountain Division with an additional Brigade, two armoured regiments less a squadron and one Engineer Brigade. 71 Mountain Brigade operated in the North. The tasks were to cut the Hilli–Gaibanda waist line and in the subsequent phase based on the progress, capture Bogra or Rangpur. Opposing this force was 16 Division of Pakistan commanded by Maj Gen Nazar Hussain Shah and 29 Cavalry.

- **Southwestern Sector (Jessore Sector)**: Newly raised 2 Corps commanded by Lt Gen T N Raina had two divisions, one PARachute Brigade less one battalion and one squadron. Initial task was to capture Jessore and Jhenida and in subsequent phase capture Khulna, Hardinge bridge, Faridpur and Goalundo ghat ferries. Pakistan’s 9 Division was confronting them.

- **Central Sector**: 101 Communication Zone. Maj Gen G S Gill/Maj Gen Gandharv Nagra was deployed in this sector which was considered a low priority sector. It
had one brigade and some PARAmilitary forces. A PARAchute drop by one battalion was planned at Tangail and reinforcement of an additional brigade was planned if situation so demanded. No armour or bridging resource was allotted.

- **Indian Navy** - In the Bay of Bengal, the main task was to deny supplies to the occupation government in Bangladesh and to prevent any enemy forces from escaping. As soon as Pakistan declared war, the Eastern Fleet went into action. By 10:30 am on 4th December the Vikrant sent out her first flight of Sea hawks to bomb Cox’s Bazar, putting the airfield out of action. Steaming north, the Vikrant was within bombing range of Chittagong by early afternoon. Her aircraft attacked both the harbor and the airfield. IN strategy and operation has been covered separately.

- **IAF** had total air superiority after they damaged only airfield at Dhaka on 6th December 1971. One squadron of Pakistan Air Force remained grounded and inoperational. IAF strategy and operation has been covered separately.

- **BSF** helped Mukti Bahini in carrying out raids in the border and posts; supported them logistically and later when the course of the battle changed they were helping the Indian Army in ground operation. BSF was also used to guard the line of communications and ensure maintenance of law and order in the rear areas.
Map.No.7-Bangladesh Liberation War-1971: Operation Plan of the Opposing Forces

North Western Sector: The Offensive Operation by 33 Corps

**Area of Operation**
This sector lay north of Padma and Jamuna. The North Western Sector is bounded by River Teesta and its tributaries to the North, Jamuna River to the West and the River Ganga to the South. River Atrai and Karatoya, and many other rivulets flow through the entire area. The main communication centres to the North are Thakurgaon, Dinajpur and Rangpur, while in the South half were Rajshahi and Bogra. The Balurghat salient juts out along the line Hill-Goraghat. The main broad-gauge railway line connected the border towns with an alignment of north to south from Hardinge Bridge via Ishurdi- Hilli-Saidpur. Metregauge rail network connected Dinajpur with Lalmunirhat. This sector covered approximately one third area of East Pakistan.

**Pakistani Deployment**
Gen Niazi having understood the importance of this sector was all set to give a proper fight to the offensive force. 16 Infantry Division under Maj Gen Nazar Hussein Shah was made responsible to defend this sector. Thakurgaon, Dinajpur and Rangpur were held with a brigade; Hilli and Goraghat area with the second brigade and Rajshahi, Ishusdi and Naogaon are with the third brigade.
Indian Operational Plan (33 Corps)

33 Corps with its Corps HQ at Silliguri was commanded by Lt Gen M .L.Thapan was tasked to launch offensive operation in this sector. The Corps was composed of 20 Mountain Division commanded by Maj Gen Lachhman Singh Lehl, 9 and 340 Infantry Brigades, an Engineer Brigade, an Armoured Regiment (PT-76 Tanks). As per the broad strategy for the offensive operations in the North Western Sector, Bogra was identified
as the key to unbalancing the entire Pakistani forces operating in the sector. However, the other large town Rangpur was also in important objective. The broad plan was to advance onto Bogra along the Hilli-Gaibanda axis while Pakistani forces deployed to the North in Dinajpur – Rangpur area were to be pinned down by subsidiary actions. The thrust to Bogra was to be via Hilli, Pirganj, Ghoraghat-Gobindganj.

There had been a great debate at the HQ Eastern Command, Calcutta during finalization of the offensive plan of 33 Corps. Apparently Aurora was not too confident of Thapan’s capability. Pros and cons of various options were discussed by Aurora and Thapan. Aurora’s Chief of Staff, Jacob too many times had different views. The final plan for the offensive approved by the Army Commander was as follows:

a) 71 Mountain Brigade under Brig P.N.Kathpalia to advance along Mirgarh-Pachgarh – Thakurgaon to secure Panchgarh and Thakurgaon by D plus 5. (five days after start of the operation).

b) A Brigade from 20 Mountain Division to advance from south along Gangarampur-Dinajpur-Kantanagar to link up with 71 Mountain Brigade near bridge over Atrai on road to Saidpur by D plus 5.

c) 20 Mtn Division was to advance with two brigades up using Samjia-Phulbari-Palasbari and Hill-Gaibanda axes with one brigade establishing the firm base. Capture, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur and bridge on Atrai and Palasbari by D plus 5.

Depending upon the progress of operation, subsequent operations towards Rangpur or Bogra will be decided in due course.

d) In this plan 202 Brigade was asked to capture Hilli, a strong fortress. This is a faulty plan, actually it should have been tasked to bypass. General Thapan was rightly against it, but Aurora overruled.

Conduct of Operation

71 Mtn Bde under Brigadier Kathpalia advanced with great speed from Mirgarh to Thakurgaon a distance of 60 km and by 04 December completed capture of Pachagarh and Boda. After capturing Birganj on 05 Dec the Brigade was halted at Kantanagar Bridge on Dhepa River. This bridge was demolished by the Pakistan army and they put up a heavy resistance. The brigade could hardly make any progress for next few days and
suffered heavy casualties. The brigade managed to cross the river 10 miles upstream and after capturing Khansama was nearing Nilphamari when surrender took place on 16 December. The action of this brigade had tied down the Pakistani garrisons at Dinajpur, Saidpur, Purbaltipur and Rangpur, thus preventing a pull out of troops to reinforce threatened areas further south.

Further south, 202 Mtn Bde under Brig F Bhatti was given the task of capturing Hilli defence complex. This was the only battle the Indian forces fought to capture a Pakistani fortress in entire Bangladesh operations and it proved very costly in terms of casualties and time schedule.

The 20 Mtn Div offensive was now modified to advance on single axes along Phulbari-Charkhai-Pirganj Road, 66 and 202 Mtn Bde with an additional battalion each from 165 Mtn Bde and 340 Mtn Bde were to advance on this axes. 165 and 340 Mtn Bdes were to invest Dinajpur from south. Phulbari was contacted and captured by 66 Mtn Bde Group while 340 Mtn Brigade Group under Brig Joginder Singh, was tasked to capture Pirganj which it did on 07 Dec and cut off Rangpur from Bogra. The attack on Bogra was planned meticulously with full support from air force and tanks. After two days fierce fighting Bogra, was captured on 16 December, Rangpur too fell on the same day.26

**Conclusion**

The entire action by 33 Corps saw some 450 Pak officers, 670 JCOs and 16800 ORs surrender after ceasefire with 3000 from the PARA military forces. The Indian casualties were 16 officers, 11 JCOs and 344 other ranks killed and 54 officers, 33 JCOs and 874 Ors wounded. Most of these were suffered at Hilli by 202 Mtn Bde. Most spectacular performance in the 33 Corps Operation was that of 340 Mtn Bde led by Brig Joginder Singh which bore the major burden of winning the war in this sector and suffered only 46 all ranks killed proving that manoeuvre warfre is economical in both casualties and time compared to attrition warfare. Pakistan’s 16 Division commanded by Maj Gen Shah could have given better fight had he moved the Brigade deployed at Nator –Rajshahi sector to strengthen the Bogra-Ichhamati complex. Indian plan to capture the fortress at Hilli was not a wise plan at all. Though Hilli taught a good lesson to modify rest of the
offensive operations. Overall tangible result was capture of 150 km inside the East Pakistan territory in this thrust line.27

Southwestern Sector: Offensive Operation by 2 Corps

Area of Operation
Southwestern sector lies opposite Calcutta and the Krishnanagar sector in West Bengal. East Pakistan had a 600 kilometres border with India to its west. Jessore which was 90 kms from Calcutta and 45 kms from Bangaon(West Bengal) was an important cantonment town and the most lucrative objective for the invader. Jhenida is another important township in this sector. Khulna and Chalna ports were located in this sector.

Order of Battle
The newly raised 2 Corps was placed under command Lt Gen T.N. Raina. It comprised of 9 Infantry Division commanded by Maj Gen Dalbir Singh and 4 Mountain Division commanded by Maj Gen MS Brar, 50 PARachute Brigade less a Battalion, 45 Cavalry(PT-76 Tanks), and a Squadron of 63 Cavalry(T-55 Tanks). In addition Head Quarters Bengal Area under Maj Gen P Chowdhry with one Infantry Battalion and PARA military forces.

Plans of the Opposing Forces

Pakistani Plan of Defence
9 Division of Pakistan with its HQ at Jessore commanded by Maj Gen Ansari planned to delay the Indian forces at the line Benapole – Barasana – Rajapur with an aim of trading space for time, and after fighting battle of attrition, pull back to Jessore and Jhenida, the two fortresses of the area. Maj Gen Ansari calculated that the attacking force would not venture to strike deep without neutralizing one or both the fortresses. If the Indian Army decide to invest them, he would have to employ a division each which would not leave the Indian Army with adequate troops to achieve a breakthrough. 9 Division had two infantry brigades, namely 107 Bde under Brig. Makhdum Hayat with HQ at Jessore with responsibility to defend the area from the border region of Jibannagar to the Sunderbans to the south, and 57 Bde, under Brig. Manzoor Ahmed with HQ at Jhenida to defend area
from Jibanagar to Padma in the north. One squadron of Chaffe tanks were also allotted to 9 Division.28

2 Corps Operational Plan
Lt Gen T.N. Raina was tasked by HQ Eastern Command to capture Jessore and Jhenida and subsequently secure Khulna, Faridpur, Goalondo Ghat and Hardinge Bridge. Raina employed 9 Infantry Division under Maj Gen Dalbir Singh in the Jessore Sector and 4 Infantry Division under Maj Gen M.S. Brar in the Jhenida Sector. HQ Bengal Area with its small outfit operated along Satkhira –Khulna axis, in conjunction with Sectors 8 and 9 of Mukti Bahini.

Conduct of Operation
9 Infantry Division
The division was tasked to capture Jessore by D plus 7 i.e. within seven days after start of the operation. It proceeded to contact the Jessore defences by advancing along the Bangaon axis. From first light 04 Dec to 06 Dec, Jessore was pounded and a series of hammering attacks launched to achieve a breakthrough. Surprisingly, by dawn 06 December, Maj Gen Ansari decided to vacate Jessore, which was an inexplicable act. Jessore was however not occupied by Indian Army till 07 December. 9 Infantry Division continued to advance towards Khulna with 32 Infantry Brigade. The Indian advance was however delayed by a series of tactically sited delaying positions of the Pakistani army. Indian army had to clear the delaying positions step by step through deliberate attacks. It took the entire division four days to cover thirty miles against an opposition of approximately an infantry battalion. The advance was again stalled at Daulatpur on 11 December and it continued to stay there till 15 December. On night 15/16 December, an attempt was made by 42 Infantry Brigade to resume the advance but by then the ceasefire came into effect.

4 Mountain Divisions
The division commanded by Maj.Gen. M.S. Barar was tasked to capture Jhenida by D plus 8 and thereafter secure the ferry site over Madhumati river by D plus 11. In the next
phase secure or capture Goalondo Ghat and Faridpur ferries. Or capture Hardinge bridge and Kushtia. As part of the preliminary operations, Jibanagar was captured by 27 Nov and Darsana by 04 December. A road block was successfully established between Jhenida and Chuadanga by an infantry battalion and an armoured squadron, which facilitated the capture of Jhenida. 41 Mountain Brigade made a dash for Jhenida along a duckboarded track and captured it by 06 Dec, which probably triggered the evacuation of Jessore. 62 Mountain Brigade captured Magura on 08 Dec. This brigade was later tasked for the battle of Madhumati and on completion they advanced towards Faridpur. By now the Pakistani 9 Infantry Division had split up into three with 107 Brigade at Khulna in the South, 57 Brigade at Kustia in the North and the remnants of the Division with its headquarters at Faridpur. Gen Ansari had lost control over it. 7 Mountain Brigade under Brig. Zail Singh resumed the advance towards Kushtia and was held up by the rear elements of the Pakistani 57 Brigade. 22 RAJPUT Battalion of 7 Mountain Brigade while racing towards Kushtia suffered heavy casualties including loss of five tanks. At this stage of the operation, Lt Gen Raina overreacted and diverted the whole 4 Mountain Division towards Kushtia leaving a battalion holding the West bank of Madhumati. On 10 Dec two thirds of the Pakistani 57 Brigade had crossed over almost intact and demolished the Hardinge Bridge. This decision of Raina to divert Maj Gen Barar’s formation wasted three days. On this episode Sukhwant Singh’s comments merits mentioning. He says:

It is a matter of wonder why Raina made Barar divert his effort to a questionable objective and why Barar did not object strongly enough to this order when the road to Faridpur and Dacca lay almost bare. Thus both Raina and Barar lost a godsent opportunity to lead the first Indian troops to reach Dacca. 30

Faridpur was captured on 16 December along with Maj Gen Ansari, with the remnants of his division which was in total disarray.
Map No.9
Conclusion
2 Corps during the operations, captured or destroyed 500 personal arms, 18 Chaffee tanks, 13 guns and four heavy mortars. Indian casualties were 367 killed including 17 officers, 1292 wounded and lost 19 tanks. According to General Sukhwant Singh, “Lt Gen Raina’s victory lay in Lt Gen Niazi’s surrender in the overall context of the Bangladesh operations”32. Only a part of the Pakistani 9 Infantry Division fell in to his hands and some were still fighting at Khulna, while a major portion escaped to join Pakistan 16 Infantry Division. On interrogation after the surrender, Lt Gen Niazi mentioned that he did not consider the South Western sector operations to have affected his decision to surrender. In hindsight, Lt Gen Raina could have perhaps speeded up his operations considerably and made an impact, had he blocked the escape routes across the Padma River at Hardinge Bridge in the north and Khulna Bridge on the south and not diverted 9 Mountain Division which even surprised the Pakistani GOC, Maj Gen Ansari facing him. Ansari after his surrender apparently said to Indian 62 Brigade Commander that:

He was totally surprised to find Indian troops withdrawing instead of advancing after reaching the banks of Madhumati. He had only two battalions……..which had suffered casualties in earlier battles. But when Indian troops withdrew he decided to develop the defence and reinforced these two battalions with PARA military troops.33

Raina had sufficient troops with him, but he did not keep his sight at Dacca. In hindsight, but for certain wrong tactical decisions, 2 Corps could have achieved more and possibly reached Dacca earlier than the other formations. However, at the end of the day, they too contributed towards the overall victory.

Offensive Operation by 4 Corps: Eastern Sector
Area of Operation
The Eastern Sector of Bangladesh comprised of the area East of Meghna in the districts of Sylhet, Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Chittagong Hill Tracts. This sector was comPARAtively narrow and long and extended from north of Sylhet to south of Cox Bazaar. The terrain, except for the hill tracts of the southeast, were generally low lying
and water logged by paddy fields. Cross country movement was difficult due to numerous rivers and drainage channels. Approaches to Dacca lay across the Meghna through the ports at Chandpur and Daudkhandi and there was only one bridge at Ashuganj to cross Meghna river for further movements towards Dacca. Meghna was almost three kilometers wide with a depth of 40 feet at most of the places. A single meter gauge railway line connected Sylhet to Chittagong running close to the IB. Laksham was an important communication centre to Chittagong, while Brahmanbaria area was a strategic bottleneck, owing to the Ashuganj bridge. Both Laksham and Brahmanbaria therefore have strategic importance. Sylhet, maulavi bazaar and Comilla are other important townships. Airfields existed at Sylhet. Shamshernagar, Comilla, Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar. Ports of Chittagong and Cox Bazar are located here.

On India’s side a single meter gauge railway line connecting Dharampur to Lumding close to the international border existed. The important roads connected Silchar(Assam) to Tripura and a new road running PARAllel to the international border ran from Agartala to Chanddegram for quicker deployment of troops. Silchar was an important airfield capable of handling jet aircraft while Kamalpur, Khowai and Kailashar could only handle transport planes. Agartala airfield was very close to border.

**Deployment of Pakistan Army**

Prior to hostilities only one infantry brigade looked after the entire Eastern Sector located at Comilla with a battalion at Sylhet and Chittagong. In General Niazi’s perception the threat from the East was minimal in view of the inadequate infrastructure on the Indian side. Niazi’s concept was to hold the border in strength. The deployment was subsequently changed to suit the growing intensity of insurgency and imminent operations by India in erstwhile East Pakistan.

The following newly raised brigades were placed under command HQ 14 Infantry Division under Maj Gen Abdul Majid:-

a. 202 Infantry Brigade at Sylhet.

b. 313 Infantry Brigade at Maulvi Bazaar.

c. 27 Infantry Brigade located at Brahmanbaria and Akhura.
39 Infantry Division was raised under command Maj Gen Rahim Khan, with 117 Infantry Brigade located at Comilla, 53 Infantry Brigade loc at Laksham was responsible for the defence of Feni, and newly raised 97 Infantry Brigade loc at Chittagong. None of these brigades had full combat power, since they consisted of one or two regular battalions and one “Azad Kashmir” unit and a battalion strength of PARA military forces.  

**Indian Plan: 4 Corps**

Lt Gen Sagat Singh, GOC 4 Corps was responsible for conduct of operations in the sector entailing securing area up to the line of Meghna river. Point to note is that Dacca did not find a mention in the directive issued to him at this stage. Sagat Singh was very clear since the planning stage that his ultimate objective was Dacca though not spelt out by higher HQs in those many words. His strategy was to close in towards Daudkhandi and Chandpur to threaten Dacca and also ensure Pakistani units deployed in Feni-Chittagong sector and Sylhet- Maulavi Bazaar sector are tackled to prevent interference and withdrawal to beef up Dacca defence. Following formations were placed under command 4 Corps:

(a) 8 Mountain Division under Maj Gen KV Krishna Rao  
(b) 23 Mountain Division under Maj Gen R.D.Hira  
(c) 57 Mountain Division under Maj Gen B.F.Gonsalves.  
(d) Kilo Sector

Gen Sagat Singh felt that greater dividends would be obtained if Pakistani forces were unbalanced by a swift and vigorous offensive to secure Chandput and Dandhkandi, isolate all troops deployed East of Meghna and South of Brahmanbaria by passing the strongly held Comilla-Maynamati fortress. In order to do this he had to evict 53 Infantry Brigade located at Laksham. A deception plan was devised to depict operation along the Shatir Bazaar-Belonia axis. Task was entrusted to 23 Mountain Division. 36
8 Mountain Division was ordered to capture Maulavi Bazar and thereafter Sherpur-Saidpur ferries. Also depending upon progress of operation, capture Sylhet in Phase-2. Later it was to secure Brahmanbaria in Phase-3. Earmark one brigade as Corps reserve after D plus 5.
57 Mountain Division was to capture Akhaura, and contain enemy in the Brahananbaria area thereafter build up north of Maynamati, and capture Daudkhandi. Subsequently it was to capture Chittagong.

23 Mountain Division was ordered to capture the southern portion of the Lalmai Hills and contain enemy in the Lalmai and Mynamati defences. In Phase 2, they were ordered to capture Chandpur. Subsequently in Phase-3, clear the enemy in Lalmai Hills.

Kilo Sector and adhoc formation comprising of two Indian battalions, two converted Bangladeshi battalions and one battalion each from BSF and CRPF along with with certain artillery elements was to capture Feni and subsequently Chittagong depending upon the progress.

Map No.10
Execution
Sylhet Sector: Operation of 8 Mountain Division.\(^{37}\)

(a) 81 Mountain Brigade under Brig R.C.V. Apte was tasked to advance along the Kaulashabar- Shamshernagar Maulri Bazaar axis.

(b) 59 Mountain Brigade under Brig C.A. Quinn was tasked to advance along the Dharmanagar- Kulawra-Brahmanbaria-Maulvi Bazaar axis.

(c) By 02 Dec against stiff resistance and heavy casualties 81 Mountain brigade captured Shamshernagar. 59 Mountain Brigade contacted Kalaura and captured it on 06 December.

(d) On 07 December 81 Brigade commenced its advance and 4/5 Gorkha Rifles from 59 Mountain Brigade was helilifted South East of Sylhet town.

(e) Pakistani 313 Infantry Brigade located at Maulvi Bazaar area had also pulled back into Sylhet garrison. Effective strength of Pakistan at Sylhet was of six battalions with reduced strength.

(f) Maulavi Bazaar was captured on 09 December by 81 Brigade. 59 Brigade captured Frenchgunj on 11 December and linked with 4/5 Gorkha Rifles on 13 December.

(g) Sylhet was under siege from all directions. The actual surrender of this garrison took place only on 17 Dec when 105 officers (including three brigadiers) 191 JCOs and 6124 other ranks (nearly twice the strength under command of Maj Gen Krishna Rao).

Operations of 23 Mountain Division: Chandpur Sector\(^{38}\)

23 Mountain Division commanded by Maj Gen R. D. Hira was tasked to undertake operations in this sector. The divisional plan was to secure the southern area of the Lalmai Hills and subsequently capture Chandpur. The division had three brigades to undertake the operational tasks in Chandpur namely, 301 Mountain Brigade, 181 Mountain Brigade and 83 Mountain Brigade. In addition, 61 Mountain Brigade (4 Corps reserve brigade) was also given operational role in this sector.
(a) 23 Mountain Division carried out preliminary operation in the Belonia Bulge to evict Pakistani 53 Infantry Brigade located at Laksham. It was successful but the Pakistani brigade could not be trapped and moved back at Laksham with minimal casualties.
(b) Plan was modified to isolate Laksham, bypass the Lalmai defences and dash for Chandpur and Daudkhandi.
(c) 61 Mountain Brigade (4 Corps Reserve) under Brig Tom Pande was directed to cross the Gomti and close in Mynamati from the West. Tom Pande did an excellent job by crossing Gomti speedily and there after established successful roadblocks. Daudkhandi fell on 09 December. This triggered a general collapse in the Pakistani defensive posture, and Comilla was vacated and fell on 9 December. Pakistani troops were falling back to Mynamati defended area from the border locations and 61 Mountain Brigade trapped them resulting in surrender of approx. 1500 Pakistani troops to the brigade. This was the first major surrenders by the Pakistan Army. On 12 December the brigade closed on to Mynamati from the West and the North.
(d) 301 Mountain Brigade commanded by Brig. H.S.Sodhi infiltrated between Lalmai hills and Laksham on night of 03 Dec and secured Mada Haraganj by 06 Dec. Chandpur was captured on 08 Dec without any opposition.
(e) 181 Mountain Brigade under Brig. Y.C.Bakshi followed 301 Mountain Brigade and established road block west and north of Laksham. The Pakistani garrison escaped leaving their heavier weapons and equipment behind. Laksham was captured on December 9. 301 Brigade under Brig. Sodhi captured Chandpur on December 9. Pakistani 53 Brigade under Brig. Niazi launched counter attacks to recapture Mudaffargaranj on the night of 7/8 December, but was not successful. On December 9, Brig Niazi with most of his troops joined Pakistan’s 117 Brigade in the Mynamati area. From Chandpur, Maj Gen Rahim Khan with some troops crossed over to the west of Meghna River but the General was intercepted by the Indian Air Force and got wounded. Later, he managed to escape to Pakistan flying via Myanmar.
(f) 23 Mountain Division was now poised to cross the Meghna river, focusing attention on Marayanganj and Chittagong, 61 and 181 Brigades were tasked to capture Mynamati but despite their valiant efforts the fortress held out by the Pakistani troops till hostilities ended on 16 December. Pakistan army was well prepared and gave a good fight. Brig
Atif, Commander of Myanamati Fortress refused to surrender as he was sure he could hold on to this fortress for a longer duration. Ultimately because of Niazi’s surrender in Dacca, Brig. Atif reluctantly surrendered. Later it was learnt that Mynamati defences were well prepared and had almost 4000 troops because, after retreating from Laksham troops of 53 Brigade joined them. Sagat Singh rightly changed his plan and bypassed Maynamati and focused on Dacca. Brig Atif Rana, Commander 117 Brigade of Pakistan, Fortress Commander Mayanamati, showed great determination and fighting spirit. Incidentally, Brig. Atif was a legendary Olympic hockey player.

(g) Kilo force captured Feni on 06 Dec and Kaberhat and Zocarganj on 08 Dec. 83 Mountain Brigade and Kilo force married up at Sitakund and they reached outskirts of Chittagong by 15 December. Pakistani Chittagong garrison surrendered 161 officers, 305 JCOs and 8618 other ranks after ceasefire on 16 December.

Ashuganj Sector: Operations of 57 Mountain Division

57 Mountain Division commanded by Maj Gen B.F. Gonsalves was responsible for operations in Ashuganj sector. The division had two brigades under its command, 73 Mountain Brigade and 311 Mountain Brigade. Gonsalves was tasked to capture Akhaura and close in to Myanamati area by D plus 5 for capture of Daudkhandi to be completed by D plus 8. Subsequently the division less 311 Mountain Brigade was to capture Chittagong with K Force placed under command. Therefore general area where 57 Mtn Div had to operate covered the area of Akhaura, Brahmanbaria, Ashuganj, Bhairab Bazar, Kasba and Daukhandi. Later some of the tasks underwent changes keeping with the progress of operations. 61 Mountain Brigade, the corps reserve brigade, “was given the task of making a wide outflanking movement and isolate well-fortified places like Comilla and Myanamati and thus help 57 Division in capturing Daudkhandi.”

Pakistan’s 14 Division was deployed here and its 27 Brigade under Brig. Saidullah was responsible to defend Akhaura, Kasba and Brahmanbaria. Pakistan did not have sufficient troops to hold important river ports like Daudkhandi and Chandpur in the rear of defended sector of Brig Saidullah.

a) Akhaura was captured on 05 December by an outmanoevring move carried out at night, tackling the defences from the rear, while depicting tank noises in the North East
employing 5 ton trucks (heavy trucks) with silencers removed which the Pakistanis assumed that huge number of tanks moving to attack them. The deception plan worked, Pakistanis thought that a large number of tanks are moving towards their defended location for assault.

b) Brahmanbaria was perceived as bottleneck, would be strongly held. There was no intelligence about the road existing, linking Brahmanbaria to Ashuganj. When situation got clear Gen Sagat Singh changed the thrust line of 57 Mountain Division towards Brahmanbaria-Ashuganj instead of going south towards Myanamati-Daudkhandi. 311 Brigade captured Ashuganj on 10 December. While haphazardly withdrawing in panic, Pakistan army demolished the rail bridge at Ashuganj across Meghna but in haste left behind many of their own troops on the wrong side (eastern bank).

c) GOC 4 Corps, Sagat Singh reviewed the situation and modified his plans to accelerate operation to wards Dacca in his mind. Taking advantage of the situation he planned a helicopter borne operation (in army parlance heliborne ops) and speed up build up by using maximum river transport also inaddition. Plan was to contain Bharab Bazar and capture Raipura followed by Narsingdi by helborne operations across the Meghna river. Thereafter, 73 Mtn Bde advanced on Tungi axis and 311 Mtn Bde on the Demra axis.

**Operations Against Meghna River**

(a) On 09 Dec water line of Meghna was secured. Now all approaches to Dacca lay bare across the Meghna River, which was 4000 yards wide.

(b) On night of 9/10 December, a helicopter fleet in the theatre numbering 14 MI-4s were made use of flying troops to cross the mighty Meghna river. In the next 36 hours,110 sorties were flown. MI-4 had limited carrying capability: each sortie could carry ten soldiers with equipments and weapons.

c) 311 Mountain Brigade Group was the first to be lifted, and secured Narsingdi on 11 December.

Crossing the Meghna River and advancing to Satlakhya River by 57 Mountain Division, was a great feat of logistics and the movement was achieved with rare ingenuity and enterprise. Credit for operations in the sector which had for more bearing on the outcome of the war, should rightly go to Lt Gen Sagat Singh and to Maj Gen Gonsalves. Vertical
movement i.e. crossing Meghna river by helicopters ( heliborne operation) did imbalance
the mind set of Pakistan army commanders. This was the first time in an war in the Indian
subcontinent such an innovative method had been resorted to which added to speed and
surprise was axiomatic.

Romeo Force: Amphibious Operation
Manekshaw, after observing the fast collapse of Pakistani defence took a hurried decision
on an amphibious operation at Cox Bazar to seal the escape route of the Pakistani forces
from there to Burma . All his advisors were against this operation, but that could not
deter Manekshaw. And a battalion group comprising of 1/3 GR and two companies of 11
BIHAR with some mortars were collected by hastily . 50 naval persons were to join but
could not reach due to short notice. This force, called Romeo force was placed under
command of the commander 8 Mountain Division Artillery Brigade and was asked to
capture Cox’s Bazar. MV Viswa Vijay carried them from Calcutta and the group was to
be transferred to two LSTs(Landing Ships), INS Guildar and Gharial , at the
rendezvous(RV) planned on the map. Unfortunately on ground it was found that the area
was not suitable for beaching. After great effort, a few could reach the bank and found no
Pakistani troops and reported presence of Mukti Bahini persons. Mukti Bahini and the
local people helped this group to shift from ship to shore by using local crafts. Two
soldiers drowned in the process. This operation, turned out to be a sort of fiasco, because
there was no proper planning, coordination, recce and forethought. And, a rare instance
when Manekshaw failed to see logic of his advisers.43

The Northern Sector : Operation of 101 Communication Zone
The Area of Operation. The northern sector denotes the territory south of Nagaland of
India that lies between the Jamuna in the west and Meghna in the east, with Ganga
forming the base. The Brahmaputra ran diagonally from the North West to the South East
dividing the sector into two, with about one third north of the river. A large number of
routes led into the sector from India, but all these arteries led to the two focal
communication centeres of Jamalpur and Mymensingh towns, lying across Brahmaputra,
an obstacle about 1000 feet wide. Though there was no bridge over Brahmaputra but both
Jamalpur and Mymensigh had ferries from where this river can be crossed. Roads and tracks from there ran from where they led to Dacca. Terrain wise, except for Madhupur forest in Tangail district, the area was covered with paddy fields, marshes and lakes. Both Kamalpur–Jamalpur road and Mymensingh–Halurghat road converged at Madhpur from where a single road lead to Dacca. Numerous streams crisscrossing the area made the movement of wheeled and tracked vehicles off the main roads and byways difficult, except in dry season. This sector afforded the most direct, though longer route to Dacca. The Mukti Bahini led by Tiger Siddiqui operated from Tangail.

Pakistan’s Plan of Defence. Gen Niazi had given very low priority to this sector. Maj Gen Jamshed Khan, GOC, 36 Infantry Division with HQ at Dacca was overall responsible for the defence of this area. There was only an adhoc brigade, 93 Infantry Brigade raised under the local Martial Law Administrator, Brig A Qadir which was located at Mymensingh to defend the sector, with two regular battalions, two PARA military battalions and one battery of mortars. Jamalpur and Mymensigh were designated as fortresses where main defensive battles were to be fought with delaying positions located right up to the border. He had prepared good defences at Haluaghat and Kamalpur. The brigade was devoid of tanks and artillery guns, which reduced defence potential. Gen Niazi tasked this formation to delay the Indian advance as long as possible, and then fall back to augment Dacca defences.
Maj Gen. Gurbux Singh Gill, GOC 101 Communication Zone based at Shillong was made operationally responsible for this sector. The Area Commander, primarily was responsible for logistic support of troops deployed in North Eastern States. However to make the shortfall of troops and formation, 101 Communication Zone was given operational role with comparatively smaller size force vis-à-vis a Mountain Division,
suited for employment in this sector where terrain dictated suitability of smaller size force. Troops allocated to this sector consisted of 95 Mountain Brigade Group under Brig. Hardev Singh Kler which was moved from Nagaland, and FJ Sector commanded by Brig. Sant Singh had one infantry battalion brought from 23 Division, BSF Battalions and Multi Bahini 11 Sector. It’s artillery component comprised of one Mountain Regiment and two batteries of heavy mortars. After December 8, 167 Infantry Brigade commanded by Brig. Irani was made available to 101 Communication Zone.  

India’s Plan of Offence

Maj Gen Gurbax Gill planned his main thrust along Kamulpur-Bakshigong-Jamalpur axis with 95 Mountain Brigade while stimulating brigade group advances along Dalu-Halughat-Phulpur-Mymensingh axis with an infantry battalion and Mukti Bahini forces. Task of FJ Sector was to capture Mymensingh by 12 December with a view to preventing withdrawal of Pakistani troops to boost Dacca defence. Maj Gen Gill decided to head for Tangail on the fall of Jamalpur to prevent falling back of forces to Dacca. Kamalpur, a fortified location close to IB, offered stiff resistance under an able officer Captain Ahsan Malik. Despite three written notes sent by Gurbax Gill to this officer couriered by a Mukti Bahini person to surrender to avoid unnecessary casualties", the officer refused to do so and fought gallantly. But finally he surrendered after a stiff fight on instructions from his superior and told Maj Gen Gill that he was doing not because of his warnings but to obey his senior commander. Gill was severely injured in a mine blast near Kamalpur, was replaced by Maj Gen Gandarv Nagra. Gill, a hard task master and a no nonsense man was the only Indian General to get badly wounded during this war.

On 05 Dec, Bakshiganj was captured, after it was found abandoned. 85 Mountain Brigade resumed its advance towards the Brahmaputra river in bullock carts itself on the south by 1730 h on 06 Dec. Move to the river line saw the lack of initiative and training between infantry brigades, with one battalion taking six hours to cover 22 kms, while yet another battalion took 48 hrs to cover 20 kms after fighting no more than one platoon action enroute. Brig Kler at one stage, had to personally plod the battalion to move faster.

Jamalpur garrison was now under siege with two infantry battalions. There was a requirement of additional troops to capture the position, Nagra was allotted 167 Infantry
brigade on 9th December, and the two companies of its leading infantry battalions reached Jamalpur on 11 December. 95 Brigade contacted Jamalpur on 9th December. Indian forces surrounded Jamalpur from all sides. Indian air force and artillery bombed Jamalpur very heavily. On night 10th December, Pakistani forces from Jamalpur, made an attempt to breakout out and retreat to Dacca. This attempt was thwarted and the Pakistanis suffered heavy casualties. Lt Col Sultan Ahmed of 31 Baluch fought a gallant battle and refused to surrender when Brig. Kler sent him a written message. The communication between the Indian Brigadier and the Pakistani Lieutenat Colonel makes an interesting reading. After surrounding Jamalpur fortress and bombarding heavily, Brig. Kler sent a note through a Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini to the Commander of Jamalpur informing him that he has been fully surrounded and therefore he was writing this note advising him to surrender to avoid loss of lives. Lt Col Sultan replied, “…….We here in Jamalpur area waiting for the fight to commence….It has not started yet. So let’s not talk and start it…..Hoping to find you with a sten in your hand next time, instead of the pen you seem to have so much mastery over…..Sincerely, Commander Jamalpur Fortress.”. The letter was timed at 9th December, 5.35 pm.Reply sent by Lt Col Sultan Ahmed of 31 Baluch was wrapped around a 7.6 mm bullet.48

The garrison finally surrendered on 11th December. Total forces that surrendered included two officers, 9 JCOs and 365 other ranks. It was later revealed that the garrison had surrendered on order from higher authorities. Had they continued to hold out, probably the course of battle would have been different in this sector. Meanwhile Mymensingh was also vacated by the retreating Pakistani troops and was captured by FJ Sector on 11 December. The fall of Jamalpur and Mymensingh paved the way for Dacca.49

Move to Dacca

Pakistan defence started crumbling and situations were deteriorating when 4 Corps crossed Meghna. On December 8th under the arrangements of the United Nations, foreign nationals were evacuated by air from Bangladesh with India’s cooperation. General Manekshaw, Indian Army Chief sent out messages by various means including dropping of leaflets, and appealing to Pakistani troops to surrender to save unnecessary loss of
lives. They were repeatedly assured good treatment as per Geneva protocol. It was also an organized psychological warfare by Manekshaw. Seeing the precarious situation, Governor of East Pakistan, Mr. A. M. Malik sent frantic message to President of Pakistan General Yahya Khan requesting him to immediately start political process and arrange for ceasefire. Yahya too was secretly trying to arrange a ceasefire based on Governor Malik’s recommendation, and at the same time to boost morale of his troops in East Pakistan manufactured bluff by telling them ‘Yellow from the North (which meant Chinese) and Whites from the South (which meant Americans through sea route) are expected anytime who will join the war in support of Pakistan. Chinese did not move despite best efforts of Nixon and on 13th December information was received about US Seventh Fleet (USS Enterprise) entered the Bay of Bengal. But that was more to express solidarity with their ally Pakistan than to make any real impact on the war. At this juncture, Maj Gen Gandharv Nagra, GOC 101 Communication Zone ordered 95 Mountain Brigade Group with 1 Maratha Light Infantry, 6 Sikh Light Infantry and 2 PARA to advance towards Dacca, and 167 Infantry Brigade to capture Jaydebpur. Depending on the progress of operations, the entire force under Gen Nagra was to invest Dacca. 2 PARA Battalion was PARACHUTE dropped at about 1600 hours on 11 December in Tangail, with the aim of capturing the bridge over Jaohaganj at Poongli and interrupting and destroying Pakistani troops retreating from Jamalpur and Mymensingh. The battalion was successful in capturing the bridge, however Pakistani troops of Mymensingh and Jamalpur garrison had escaped through Tangail, before the 2 PARA road block became effective. The ‘Dacca Bowl’ was now isolated. 95 Mtn. Bde linked up with 2 PARA at the Poongli bridge at around 1600 hours on 12 December, and by 1800 hours, Tangail was secured. This was a historic occasion for the Indian Army. Maj Gen Nagra’s forces however, found themselves out of logistics support range from their bases. Though they had vehicles, there was no petrol. Air maintenance was resorted to for 95 Mountain Brigade, when an abandoned air strip was discovered close to Tangail on 13 Dec. 167 Infantry Brigade had not fetched up till then. Gen Nagra ordered 95 Mountain Brigade to resume operations.
Further advance of the brigade was delayed by strong delaying actions fought by the retreating troops on the Turag river line. Gen Nagra employed 167 Infantry Brigade on Chandpur-Sabhar-Mirpur axis while 95 Mountain Brigade attempted to cross the Turag river south of Tangail. 2 PARA battalion, the only infantry battalion with four 106 mm RCL guns and RPGs were sent ahead to deal with the Pakistani armour. At 2200 h on 15
December 2 PARA under Brig Sant Singh of FJ Sector, contacted Mirpur defences at about 0200 h on 16 Dec. Pakistani troops armed the bridge at Mirpur for demolition, but were unable to destroy since 2 PARA totally dominated the area. The bridge, which was a gateway to Dacca, was captured intact. 167 Brigade reached Gachham on 15 December. 73 Brigade was nearing Tungi on December 14th. Sierra Force was also threatening Demra, so was 311 Brigade. 301 Brigade after crossing Laksham Khola reached Northern area of Narayanganj. Indian artillery carried out selective bombing in and around Dacca. All seaports were blocked by the Indian Navy and the air space was completely under control of the Indian Air force. Dacca was getting surrounded like garrote. Pakistani army was in very low morale. Seeing no hope of betterment of the situation Yayha at last wrote to Malik and Niazi to stop operational activities to prevent loss of lives and try for the ceasefire. Niazi through Farman Ali approached US consul to facilitate arranging a ceasefire. To make matter worse, through interception of a message, it was learnt that Governor Malik will hold a meeting on 14th December at the Governor’s house, and the Indian Air Force bombed pinpointed on the roof of the Governor’s house. The Governor under panic resigned immediately and took shelter in the International Red Cross building. 52

The BBC on 15th December while broadcasting evening news mentioned that India has agreed to the ceasefire request of Niazi to be effective from 1700 hours to 0900 hours on 16th December. There was lot of confusion and ambiguity about the declaration of ceasefire. Based on Manekshaw’s repeated advice on surrender and ceasefire and because of the precarious situation Niazi was facing, Niazi offered ceasefire. Manekshaw as a token of good faith stopped air action over Dacca from 5 am on 15 December and also conveyed that he would stop all operations in the East should Niazi accept Manekshaw’s ultimatum of surrender. Niazi’s HQ at Dacca advised his troops to observe a ceasefire from 0500h to 0900h on 16 Dec. This was not known to Indian troops fighting near Dacca. Brig Kler intercepted this message of ceasefire of Pakistan Army in the East. Indian operational commander, Maj Gen Nagra, who was waiting at the gateway of Dacca, at Mirpur bridge across Buri Ganga, had no information about the ceasefire from his higher Headquarter. On learning about the intercepted message from Brig Kler, Nagra, encashing the opportunity, on his own dispatched his ADC, Capt Hitesh Mehta

200
and one officer of 2 PARA, to Gen Niazi, with a message offering ceasefire and surrender. In the meanwhile Niazi at 0800 hours on 16th December through a preset radio frequency requested Manekshaw to increase the moratorium by allowing additional six hours which was agreed to. Nagra knew Niazi in person from his earlier stint as Military Adviser in Indian Embassy in Pakistan. He wrote, “My dear Abdullah, I am here. The game is up. I suggest, you give yourself up to me and I will look after you.” This was accepted by Niazi and he asked Dacca garrison commander, Maj Gen Jamshed to coordinate with the Indian Army. Gen Nagra, Brig Kler, Brig Sant Singh and Lt Col. Siddiqi, CO of 2 PARA drove to Pakistan 36 Infantry Divisional HQ (Jamshed’s HQ) from where they contacted Gen Niazi’s HQ. At 1100 hours on 16 December, they met Gen Niazi, GOC-in-C, Pakistan’s Eastern Army. Maj Gen Jacob, Chief of Staff, HQ Eastern Command flew from Kolkata to discuss on surrender formalities and the terms of surrender including signing of the Instrument of Surrender. Niazi was more interested in ceasefire only than surrender and had a bit of argument with Jacob. But Jacob stood firm and Niazi had to give in. Later, Gen Aurora, accompanied by Air Marshal Dewan, (AOC-in-C East), Vice Admiral Krishnan (FOC-in-C East) and Group Captain Khondakar, Chief of Staff of Mukti Bahini flew to Dacca to receive the surrender. Ironically, nine months ago at the Dacca Racecourse from where Mujib declared independence of Bangladesh became the venue of surrender.53

Amidst the joyous shouts of ‘Joy Bangla’ from more than a lakh of Bangladeshis gathered there, ‘The Instrument of Surrender’ was finally signed at 1631 h at the Dacca race course, bringing to an end, the war. A photocopy of the instrument of surrender signed by Lt Gen J.S. Aurora and Lt Gen A.A.K Niazi, is attached as Appendix.11. In all, 1606 officers, 2345 JCOs, 64109 other ranks, 1022 non-combatants of the regular army, 79 officers 448 JCOs and 11665 other ranks of the PARA military forces, 91 officers, 30 petty officers, and 1292 ratings of the Pakistani Navy, 61 officers, 31 warrant officers and 1049 airmen of the Pakistani Air Force, 166 all ranks of the West Pakistan Police and 7555 civilians surrendered in various garrisons all over East Pakistan. Indian losses in the campaign were 1421 killed including 68 officers, 60 JCOs and 1293 other ranks, and 4061 wounded comprising of 211 officers, 160 JCOs and 3690 other ranks, and 56 missing.64
WESTERN THEATRE
The Indian strategy had its war aims focused on the East. Strategic defence was to be maintained in the West and a counter offensive would be launched only after Pakistan initiated hostilities. This served the larger strategic purpose of ensuring that India was not accused of aggression which could have had a negative effect on its operations in the East Wing. The initiative in the West thus lay in the hands of the Pakistan military.

Indian Forces and Plans
There was near parity of forces between India and Pakistan as far as the armour component was concerned. However, Pakistan was deficient in Infantry and here India had an edge. To Pakistan’s ten infantry divisions in the Western Theatre, India had thirteen, one of which was deployed opposite the Tibet border in Ladakh. Pakistan had seven infantry divisions and an independent infantry brigade deployed in a holding role along the international border and the cease fire line. Two armoured divisions, an armoured brigade, three infantry divisions and an independent infantry brigade were available for offensive tasks or for stabilising the front.

India had Western and Southern Command opposite the Pakistani Forces. Western Command consisted of 15 Corps, 1 Corps and 11 Corps. The 15 Corps Sector stretched from Samba to Ladakh and was held with five divisions, one of which was opposite Tibet. The 1 Corps Sector stretched from Samba till short of the Dera Baba Nanak Enclave on the Ravi River. This was initially held by a division and presented to Pakistan the weakest gap in the Indian defences in the event of a preemptive attack. Located in the hinterland, 1 Corps was to assume responsibility of this sector on arrival. It had in its orbat 36, 39 and 54 Infantry Divisions and 2 and 16 Independent Armoured Brigades. 11 Corps was holding area from Dera Baba Nanak Enclave till South of Anupgarh. It had 15 and 7 Infantry Divisions, an armoured brigade and an ad hoc division sized force holding the general area astride Fazilka called Foxtrot Sector. Southern Command had two divisions under its command and was responsible for the Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Kutch Sectors. 1 Armoured Division stationed in Muktsar area and 14 Infantry Division stationed in Faridkot area constituted the Indian Army’s reserves.
Indian plans envisaged holding operations in the West and a few limited offensive operations., and an all-out offensive operations in the East Pakistan. During 1971, Western Command under Lt Gen K P Candeth was responsible to look after area of present Northern and Western Command i.e. J&K, Punjab, UP and Himachal Pradesh. Western Command had 15 Corps looking after J&K, 11 Corps deployed in Punjab against Pakistan, and 1 Corps; only offensive corps generally located between Pathankot and Jammu and was tasked to carry out offensive in Shakkargarh Bulge in order to capture territory. A limited offensive was also to be launched in Chhamb sector by 10 Division of 15 Corps. Thus it would be seen that mostly the troops were deployed against Pakistan except for one division which was deployed in Leh-Ladakh for the defence against China. Southern Command under Lt General G G Bewoor was responsible for the defence of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Southern Command was tasked to defend Rajasthan and also to capture Pakistani territory by launching limited offensive operations. For the purpose of war In the west, India had 12 Infantry Divisions, one Armoured Division, three Artillery Brigades, two Independent Infantry Brigades, two Armoured Brigades and one independent PARAchute Brigade. By middle of October Indian army moved most of its forces towards their operational areas.  

**Conduct of Operations**

In conformity with their war strategy, Pakistan launched four attacks on 3 and 4 December. In the hill sector, Poonch was attacked on night 3/4 December and Chhamb at first light on 4th December. The former attack was beaten back after heavy fighting spread over three days. The attack on Chhamb was partially successful with Pakistan reaching up to the Munawar Tawi. However, Pakistan’s attempt to secure a bridgehead was defeated and the defences were stabilised along the Munawar Tawi.

In Fazilka, the attack was launched on night 3/4 December with Pakistan gaining a foothold on the Sabuna distributary. This provided depth to Pakistan for defending the Sulaimanke Headworks. Indian attempts to evict the Pakistani forces were foiled but the Pakistani bridgehead was contained. The fourth major attack which took place was in the desert sector where Pakistan aimed to capture Ramgarh. They were stopped at the Indian post of Longenwala where the Indian company put up a stiff resistance. Thereafter the
Indian Air Force with just two Hunter aircraft destroyed the bulk of the Pakistani armour. The area of operations was outside the range of Pakistani aircraft which enabled the two lone Hunters to operate unhindered.

Map No.13
Source: John H. Gill: Atlas of 1971 India–Pakistan War

Pakistan Forces and Plans
Pakistan had bulk of its forces in Western Wing which consisted of ten infantry divisions, two armoured divisions, two independent armoured brigades, two independent infantry brigades and PARA military forces numbering about 85,000. Pakistan Army had three Corps (1, 2 and 4) deployed in plains. Till going to war, Pakistan’s military strategy had been ‘Defence of East lies in the West’. Their operational plans were made to translate their strategy into action. According to General Mukeem, Pakistan made a bold and simple plan which had a tinge of gamble. Pakistani plans had been prepared for a counter offensive in the West, to take effect if India invaded the East Wing. Lt Gen Gul Hassan Khan Chief of the General Staff at GHQ in his Memoirs mentions that Pakistani plans contained two ingredients: first, formations other than those in the reserve were to
launch limited offensives in J&K; secondly, engage Indian Army deployed in Punjab with small scale actions and a major counter offensive was to be launched concurrently into India’ ,perhaps in the Ganganagar- Suratgarh area. The latter part of the plan was altered by General Yahya Khan in respect to its timings. As per the revised plan, the main offensive would take place only after local operations had secured ground. This change ostensibly was made due to shortage of equipment and also due to operational voids caused by move of forces to its East Wing.” Katoch’s observations notwithstanding, Pakistani writers do not mention much about change of plan due to shortage of equipments. Pakistan’s strategy hinged on the employment of their GHQ reserves and the decision of not to unleash this potent force is rather bizarre.

Analyses on the Performance of the Opposing Forces

At the political level, diplomatic initiatives taken by Indira Gandhi set the stage for ultimate victory in East Pakistan. But both the antagonists were found wanting in defining political and strategic goals and war aims. Operational art was conspicuous by its lack of application throughout the conflict in the Western theatre. Senior commanders on both sides missed out capitalising on fleeting opportunities. Both sides showed a remarkable hesitation in use of reserves. While preservation of resources is part of command responsibility, in the context of short duration wars there is a need to effectively utilise all available resources in furtherance of the higher commander’s aim. At the junior level, leadership displayed was of a high order. This was reflected in the success achieved in Ladakh, Kargil, Chicken’s Neck and many other areas all across the front. The defence of the bridgehead at Barapind across the Basantar River, or the defence of the post at Longenwala, are also fine examples of junior leadership rising to exceptional heights.

Though, operation in the Western Theatre is not within the purview of the theme of the theses, but because it was part of the overall politico-military strategy, hence a very brief account of it is given below to have the overall perspective clear.

Indian Army fought well in the Ladakh Sector and captured Turtok and a few strategically dominating heights overlooking the Leh Srinagar Highway in the Kargil
sector. Minimarg area and Kaiyan bowl in Kashmir region and Chicken Neck area in Jammu region were also captured. Indian army reached up to Naya Chor in the desert area but the Green Belt could not be reached. In addition, the war saw offensive action at the local level which led to the capture of a large number of enclaves by both sides. Shakargarh Sector too was contacted where a major offensive was launched but was not successful. In Punjab Indian Army captured Dera Baba Nanak (DBN) and Pakistan area of the Sehjra Bulge. But it lost some territory to Pakistan in Hussainiwala area. The ceasefire however came into effect when Shakargarh had been contacted. Pakistan lost a good number of tanks in the Battle of Longewal: Indian army though much less in number there defended it well with support of the air force. After failing in Longewal Pakistan offensive force, 18 Division withdrew. India’s 12 Division could have reached further beyond Longewal had they undertaken a relentless pursuit, but the GOC Maj Gen Khambatta was overcautious. His opponent on Pakistan’s side Maj Gen Mustafa was sacked on 7th December for his ineptitude and failure in Longewal and was relieved by Maj Gen Hamid. On this Pakistani General Muqeem commented, “Mercifully the Indians did not pursue.”

Pakistan made some dent in Ferozepur and Fazilka sector, had the Pakistanies exploited further it would have been a big problem and embarrassment for India. Pakistan started well in the Chamb sector and achieved a quick victory there and captured some Indian territory. But once again they failed to maintain the momentum which saved India a lot.

Conclusion

Niazi’s strategy and conduct of defensive battles in the East Pakistan was linked like an umbilical chord with that of overall military strategy of Pakistan and concept of operational plan envisaged for the war in the West. His whole idea was to delay Indian armed forces as long as possible to gain adequate time for a decisive war in the West. About the conduct of defence in the East, Niazi explained:

The concept envisaged a forward posture in defence, with the troops trading space for time in a gradual withdrawal from the borders to fortresses which were prepared as killing grounds and where last-ditch battles have to be fought, where the enemy should be kept tied down long enough to give ample time to the Western Garrison to achieve their mission. “ The battle of the East will be fought
in the West”. The fate of not only Eastern garrison and East Pakistan, but of the whole of Pakistan, hung on the outcome of the battle to be fought in West Pakistan, the offensive to be launched by Tikka Khan’s Reserve Army.\textsuperscript{60}

General Krishna Rao comments that as far as the Eastern Wing was concerned, by the time the war broke out, there were total of about five Divisions available including PARA-Military Forces, reasonably adequate to put up a fairly effective defence of the territory. Since Niazi’s task envisaged the defence of the entire East Pakistan against external aggression, he had adopted forward defence posture and a series of defence lines based on fortress concept of defence. This concept envisaged important communication centres and towns all around ahead of the major rivers, to be held in strength as fortresses and prevent advancing forces from getting through into the interior areas. The attacking troops were to be destroyed by the main fortresses and if any of the advancing troops tried to get through the gaps, the neighbouring fortresses were to deal with them. Accordingly, Niazi selected the important communication centres and towns of Jessore, Jhenida, Bogra, Rangpur, Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Bhairab Bazar, and Chittagong as Theatre Fortresses. In this concept, no depth was provided for from where reserves could be employed to deal with any infiltrating columns of the enemy. No defence of the major river obstacles ahead of Dacca was thought of either, leave alone the deliberate defence of Dacca.

Performance of India.\textsuperscript{61}

Mukti Bahini’s modus operandi made Pakistan deployment in penny pockets. Pakistan army in the East fought two wars: civil war against Mukti bahini and then with the Indian Army and Mitro Bahini. Preliminary operations that commenced from 22\textsuperscript{nd} November did help in securing launching pads in some selected areas. It was surprising that much talked about Tikka Khan’s offensive operation against India never took off. Pakistan’s whole strategy therefore became defunct because it hinged on the proposed decisive action by their strike corps. Pakistani Defence analyst A.H.Amin stated, “The only answer to Pakistan’s strategic dilemma was to mount a pre-emptive attack on India in Monsoon season before the Indian Army had fully mobilised and the Himalayan Passes had not become snow bound. This did not happen because Indira Gandhi conducted skilful diplomacy and also because Pakistan’s military junta lacked strategic
Insight. Indian Western Command C in C Candeth admitted the fact that all Indian plans to attack Pakistan would have gone to winds had Pakistan attacked in October 1971.38 Thus Candeth’s remark that “Yahya Khan had tarried too long and had missed the boat”62 Commenting on the India’s strategy for the Bangladesh Liberation War, Mr. Dixit summed up the 1971 Indo- Pakistan war with the following comments:

The strategy worked and all the objectives set by India were fully achieved. The Pakistan forces in East Pakistan were decisively defeated with India taking 93,000 prisoners of war, the largest number of soldiers taken prisoners in world history, and only comparable with the Russian Army capturing the entire corps of Field Marshall von Paoli at the battle of Stalingrad. The Pakistani prisoners included all the generals serving in East Pakistan. On the western front, India pushed back the Pakistani forces from Jammu and Kashmir from the Rann of Kutch. India captured strategic locations in Jammu and Kashmir and about 5000 sq kilometres of Pakistani territory of southern Punjab and Sind, when it declared a unilateral ceasefire in the western sector on December 16, 1971.63

Success in Bangladesh Liberation War -1971, owes a lot to the leadership at the national level and also amongst the military. Young military leaders of both Pakistan as well as India not to forget the Mukti Bahini proved their mettle. But weakness in Pakistani higher level of leadership was mainly responsible for their debacle as analyzed by Pakistani military historians. Indian Defence Forces won a decisive victory that enhanced India’s reputation and catapulted India to the position of regional power. While making a final comment on the Liberation War of Bangladesh, historian D.K. Palit compares the victory in Bangladesh citing poet Southey’s description of Blenheim: 64

“T’WAS A FAMOUS VICTORY”
End Notes: Chapter-VII


4. Ibid., p.59.


6. Ibid., p.84.

7. Niazi, pp.85-86. Niazi wrote his book *The Betrayal of East Pakistan* many years later after receiving much of criticism for his inefficient planning and conduct of defensive operations during the Bangladesh campaign. All most all the historians have found faults in Niazi. Hamdoor Rahman Commission ordered by The Government of Pakistan blamed Niazi squarely. Niazi through his book in addition to giving details of the liberation war, blamed many higher-ups at times rightly though. There has also been an effort to apportion the blame of defeat on others while giving a clean chit to himself. Veracity of some of his statements need to be ascertained by corroborating facts from other unbiased sources.


13. Ibid.


16. Ibid. p.87.


22. Krishna Rao, p.169-71


26. Ibid., p.487.


31. Ibid., p.146. Also see Rajendra Nath, p.504.

32. Singh, Sukhwant, p.146.


35. Ibid.

42. Singh, Sukhwant, pp.202-204.
43. Ibid, pp.159-160.
45. Ibid.
46. Rajendra Nath, p
47. Singh, Sukhawant, pp.189-190.
51. Ibid.


59. Muqeeem, Maj Gen, Pakistan’s Crisis in Leadership, cited in Rajendra Nath, Military Leadership in India,p.561.

60. Niazi, AAK, Lt Gen, Betrayal of the East, pp.84-85.


63. Dixit, J.N., Liberation and Beyond, pp 93-94.

64. Poet Southey quoted in Palit, D.K., The Lightning Campaign,p.158. Battle of Blenheim was fought in 1703 . Duke of Marlborough led this famous battle also known as War of Spanish Succession to victory.