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**The Ifs and Buts of the Line of  
Control (LC): A Historical  
Analysis to Fathom Out Why is  
the LC in a Shape as it Exists  
Today**

**PK Singh**

**CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES**

**Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw**, better known as Sam “Bahadur”, was the 8th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS). It was under his command that the Indian forces achieved a spectacular victory in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Starting from 1932, when he joined the first batch at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), his distinguished military career spanned over four decades and five wars, including World War II. He was the first of only two Field Marshals in the Indian Army. Sam Manekshaw’s contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. He was a soldier’s soldier and a General’s General. He was outspoken and stood by his convictions. He was immensely popular within the Services and among civilians of all ages. Boyish charm, wit and humour were other notable qualities of independent India’s best known soldier. Apart from hardcore military affairs, the Field Marshal took immense interest in strategic studies and national security issues. Owing to this unique blend of qualities, a grateful nation honoured him with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in 1968 and 1972 respectively.



**Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC  
1914-2008**

CLAWS Occasional Papers are dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw

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**PK Singh**



Centre for Land Warfare Studies  
New Delhi



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# **The Ifs and Buts of the Line of Control (LC): A Historical Analysis to Fathom Out Why is the LC in a Shape as it Exists Today**

## **Abstract**

The paper pertains to a historical analysis of evolution of Line of Control (LC), which took shape during the 1947-48 war. If someone states that the origin of the LC lies in the communal riots at partition, one would find it difficult to believe. The paper focuses on identifying such defining moments that shaped the LC and its future. Besides giving a ring side view of the operations, the paper answers several intriguing questions on the LC such as 'How could the entire debacle have been avoided', 'Why Muzaffarabad could not be captured', 'Why Skardu and Gilgit are not there with us today', 'Why did Pakistan fail' and 'Had India not agreed to the ceasefire, would the PoJK have been captured?'

## **Introduction**

The Line of Control (LC) in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) between India and Pakistan is one of the most contested and active military spaces that stands testimony to various battles comprising gallant actions and tales of supreme sacrifices. This serpentine 'line' on the map is a ferocious livewire in reality on the sub-Himalayan territory of J&K. The exact shape of this line, each turn, salient,

enclave or bulge, is not an arbitrary or random strokes of a pen, but is a fallout of several actions, events and political jostling that have been the defining moments to shape the LC. These defining moments comprise those moments which, if they were seized at the time of occurrence, the LC would not have existed at all. The J&K would have been fully part of India, could have been totally swallowed by Pakistan or could have even existed as an independent state if the Maharaja of J&K had been able to assert his contention. However, the state was not destined to be in any of these forms and the events following the 1947 partition shaped things in a manner that led to a bloody and fierce battle between two nations that had barely come out of centuries of colonization and foreign rule. The outcomes of the battles taking place in late 1947 and the entire 1948 had a major role in shaping this LC, the way it exists today. As was the case with the events during independence, even the battles of this war had several 'ifs & buts' moments which could have gone in favour of either warring side, and the LC could have been way different from what it is today. The magnitude of these moments is such that if those few moments had gone in India's favour, the Pakistan Occupied J&K (PoJK) would not have existed or if those moments had tilted in Pakistan's favour, the PoJK would have been much larger than its present limits. The article intends to identify and bring forward such moments, prior to the war and during war. Some of these moments and actions contain important lessons that could still be relevant in the prevailing operational context. In identifying these defining moments, nothing should be taken away from those leaders who made decisions in the fog of war. The analysis in hindsight to infer that things could have been done differently, would be very unfair to them and their sacrifices, and hence there is no such effort in the article. The article relies primarily upon the contents of the 'History Division' of the Ministry of Defence, Government of India publication 'History of Operations in J&K (1947-48)', besides other

publications of repute and documentaries. To facilitate easy reading, a sketch has been compiled that contains names of all the places in the war.

## Events Before the 1947-48 War

It would not be an overstatement to say that the origin of the LC lies in the communal riots that followed during partition, especially along the frontiers of Punjab. To be more specific, the perceptions and reactions of these riots in Poonch (MoD Archives, p.12), were the trigger for creation of the LC in months to come. While the Maharaja of J&K was yet to decide the future of his dominion and accordingly a Standstill Agreement with both India and Pakistan existed in August 1947, the infamous riots took place wherein thousands of Hindus and Sikhs were butchered and their women abducted in West Punjab (Pakistan) and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. Thousands of Muslims suffered a similar fate in East Punjab (India). The riots led to the mass migration of millions of refugees whose transition through the frontiers was unsafe. The prevailing bonhomie between all religions in J&K did not see any riots, and hence its territory became a safe conduit for the refugees to cross over the frontiers. However, the stories of horror narrated by these refugees transiting through Poonch, infuriated some over-enthusiastic trouble makers amongst the Muslims in Poonch who were taken to task by the Maharaja's State Forces. The situation was exploited well by the Muslim League leaders in West Punjab, who launched a propaganda campaign through newspapers that the Dogra Maharaja was terrorising the innocent Muslim population of the state through his army. Some otherwise subservient Rajas, as of Hazara, even threatened the Maharaja to fight against him. Immediately, the raids commenced in the border areas of undivided J&K in September 1947, followed by many defections by Muslim troops of the State Forces and rebellions in the garrisons of Muzaffarabad,

Domel, Poonch and Kotli. These events backed by the Pakistan Army's 'Operation GULMARG' to annex J&K, snowballed into the infamous invasion on 22 October 1947. These rebellions in the J&K State Forces qualify to be the defining moments which led to instant falls of garrisons in Muzaffarabad, Domel, Kotli, and Poonch and set the stage for exploitation by Pakistan and its army.

As early as 20 August 1947 itself, the secret plan of this 'Operation GULMARG' accidentally fell into the hands of the Brigade Major in the Bannu Frontier Brigade Group in Pakistan. He was to soon relocate to India. He valiantly escaped and hiding in a goods train, managed to reach India. He reached Delhi and immediately contacted the Directorate of Military Operations (DMO) and the Defence Minister, but no one believed him. Only when the actual invasion commenced three months later, he was traced in Amritsar and brought to Prime Minister Nehru, who admonished the Defence Minister for this lapse (MoD Archives, p.17). One can now only imagine that if cognizance of this input, a potential defining moment indeed, was taken, how different the situation today would have been.

The inaction of the British leaders and military commanders also led to this debacle. As Lieutenant General LP Sen, one of the first commanders to fight the war of 1947-48, has observed (Sen, L.P. 2019, pp.20-22) that both Indian and Pakistan armies then were commanded by British officers General Rob Lockhart and General Frank Messervey respectively, in addition to Field Marshal Auchinleck, who was the Supreme Commander of the neutral Supreme Headquarters fully staffed by British officers, to oversee the transition after partition. All these Britons could have easily saved the situation, but chose to absolve themselves of their responsibility, barring a few innocuous actions as optics.

## The Invasion and Response by Maharaja's State Forces

Taking advantage of the situation, Pakistan Army carved out an invasion plan under Major General Akbar Khan, who coincidentally had meticulously planned this 'Operation GULMARG' in the very headquarters where the British General Messervy was commanding the Pakistan Army from. Not knowing such a major operation raises suspicions towards British complicity with Pakistan. This suspicion got subsequently validated in actions led by a British officer, Major Brown in Gilgit where there was a rebellion on 31 October 1947, and Gilgit was annexed from the Maharaja, as discussed later in the article.

To garner forces for the invasion, the Pakistan Army wanted the operation not to be attributable to them but at the same time they were in need of large size force also to defeat the J&K State Forces. To achieve this, the Pakistan Army came out with a master plan to kill two birds with one stone. They diverted the Pathans (MoD Archives, p.17) of NWFP towards J&K by luring them with the promise of land and loot in the Kashmir invasion. At that point of time, Pakistan was facing a major problem from Pathans, who under Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, were in an uprising against the Pakistani state with their 'Pathanistan Movement'. The trick worked, and both the problems of the Pathan Movement and of force generation for the Kashmir invasion were resolved.

The state of preparedness of the J&K State Forces was abysmally below par (MoD Archives, p.7,11,38, 39) and it was in an ill-equipped state, without potent weapons, artillery, or armour. The infrastructure was poor, and there were limited roads, no rail and no airfields. The state was dependent on fuel, supplies, and clothing from Peshawar and the military was dependent on Rawalpindi for arms, ammunition and equipment. There was a wireless link with Rawalpindi and not with New Delhi. Due to this

dependency, Pakistan had established an economic blockade on the J&K State before the invasion. When the invasion happened, the Chief of the State Forces, a retired British officer, Major General HL Scott, was unavailable to command the army (Sen, L.P. 2019, p.19). He was then succeeded by Brigadier Rajinder Singh of J&K State Forces who led the battle valiantly and later emerged as the savior of Kashmir.

Amidst such state of affairs, the invasion commenced on 22 October 1947, and Domel (near Muzaffarabad) was the first major town to fall. The unit of Maharaja's army responsible for Domel, saw defections and traitors from the unit (MoD Archives, p.21) joined the raiders to capture the garrison and maul the officers. The raiders then marched towards Srinagar through Uri and Baramulla. Brigadier Rajinder Singh took charge of the defensive battle and dug in his heels at Uri. Under heavy pressure from thousands of raiders, he retreated his forces to Baramulla. He fought bravely with his small force and held the raiders at Uri for the next three days which not only delayed the advance of the raiders to Srinagar but also eventually bought time until the Indian Army arrived. Indeed, he is regarded as savior of Kashmir. Nonetheless, the raiders continued their loot, rape, butchering minorities, burning temples and churches in Baramulla for the next two days, which further delayed their advance to Srinagar. Since these so-called warriors were hired on the premise of loot bounty, they had their hands full already and wanted vehicles to return with the loot. The delay and confusion caused by this greed also contributed to saving Kashmir and hence qualify to be one of the defining moments.

### **Operations by the Indian Army 1947- 1948**

Frustrated by the lack of support from the British and the belligerence of Jinnah, the Maharaja of J&K approached New Delhi for intervention and signed the Instrument of Accession with

Union of India on 26 October 1947 which led to induction of Indian Army in Kashmir in form of 1 SIKH Battalion stationed in Gurgaon. Another battalion of MADRAS Regiment located much closer in Delhi itself was to be tasked but the Commanding Officer (CO) being a British officer, it was not felt appropriate (MoD Archives, p. 375) to task a Commonwealth officer to fight the raiders. Accordingly, 1 SIKH was flown into Srinagar airfield on 27 October 1947 under the CO Lieutenant Colonel DR Rai. To beef up their manpower, approximately 160 Sikh Artillery persons who had reported to Delhi after leaving their mountain artillery unit in Pakistan, were also allotted as an ad hoc company of 1 SIKH. The landings in Srinagar through Dakota planes of the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) were a risky operation as it was uncertain whether the raiders were already in occupation of the Srinagar airfield. Technically, it was also not possible to land a series of aircraft on a dusty airstrip. The courageous landings by RIAF did happen, albeit with risk and difficulties. The valiant CO took stock of defences around Srinagar and reinforced the defences of already depleted State Forces on Srinagar Baramulla axis. That very night, while he was reconnoitering the areas in outskirts of Srinagar, a stray bullet hit his head killing him instantaneously. Loss of the CO was a major blow to own operations. Fortunately, due to the ensuing loot in Baramulla, the raiders did not press the attack towards Srinagar. Soon, on 29 October 1947, a brigade group under HQ 161 Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier LP Sen, was flown in. The brigade fought valiantly and within the next two weeks, had recaptured Pattan, Baramulla and Uri. The most defining battle was the Battle of Budgam in which the valiant action by the company of 4 KUMAON saved the Srinagar airfield (MoD Archives, p.36) from a large number of attacking raiders. Had the Srinagar airfield been captured, it would have critically impacted the operations for the liberation of Kashmir. Major Somnath Sharma laid down his life in this battle and was awarded Param Veer Chakra (PVC)

posthumously. Another defining moment was the battle of Shal Teng (MoD Archives, p.40) on the outskirts of Srinagar, in which the attack by thousands of raiders was beaten back by 1 KUMAON, 7 CAVALRY, and RIAF on 03 November 1947. This victory saved Srinagar from the raiders forever and also cleared the way to recapture Pattan, Baramulla and Uri.

The first phase of counter offensive by India Army to drive out the raiders was successful, and the threat to the Kashmir valley had been contained. However, Pakistan opened many fronts simultaneously and that led to the predicament of the Army Headquarters, which had to handle multiple fronts with limited forces. Ideally, after the recapture of Uri by 13 Nov 1947, the advance should have continued to recapture Domel and Muzaffarabad. But by then, there were fierce counterattacks by raiders on Uri, and simultaneously, Poonch was also coming under heavy pressure. The Commander-in-Chief Gen Rob Lockhart was of the opinion that operations for Muzaffarabad should be continued and in the interim, Poonch could be evacuated and could be recaptured later. However, Mirpur fell to raiders, leading to loot and plunder that saw minority women abducted and sold for Rs 150 (MoD Archives, p. 76). The miseries were narrated to Sardar Patel during his visit to the Jammu-Poonch area, and subsequently, the Prime Minister Nehru ordered (MoD Archives, p.76) that Poonch had to be held at all costs. The forces available being limited, both Muzaffarabad and Poonch could not have been liberated. As regards moving additional forces from mainland India, the nation was grappling with more serious situations such as the liberation of Hyderabad, defending Punjab borders in case the conflict escalated out of J&K, and also the Eastern frontier where East Pakistan was a threat. Complying with the higher political directives, the Muzaffarabad plan was shelved and the troops of 161 Infantry Brigade at Uri were diverted for relief of

Poonch, but this operation also did not succeed fully due to the miscalculated burning of the bridge at Kahuta. Soon enough, the snowfall froze the plans towards any advance towards Muzaffarabad and with that the best chance to recapture PoJK in 1947 itself had been lost. Simultaneously with the commencement of the invasion in October 1947, Pakistan had opened fronts in the Jammu division and Gilgit.

### **Loss of Gilgit and Skardu: The Treachery with a Heavy Price to India**

Gilgit in July 1947 was being politically administered by the (British) Government of India as Gilgit was handed over by J&K State to British India on lease for 60 years. Just before the independence, it was decided to handover Gilgit back to the Maharaja and accordingly, Brigadier Ghansar Singh of J&K State Forces was serving as Governor of Gilgit. It is the largest part of the areas under Pakistan's control now. This massive tract of territory fell into Pakistan's hands due to treachery by three crooked minds (MoD Archives, pp. 280-281). Exploiting the communal riots of Punjab and in Poonch, the Subedar Major Babar Khan of Gilgit Scouts orchestrated a rebellion in cahoots with two defiant subordinate Rajas of Nagar and Humza principalities, who were also his nephew and brother-in-law, respectively. On 31 October 1947, they surrounded the Governor's House and arrested the Governor. One British officer Maj Brown (MoD Archives, p.281), along with a young officer from the Pakistan Army abetted this rebellion and hoisted the Pakistan flag in Gilgit, besides establishing a provincial government. A battalion of State Forces, 6 J&K Infantry comprising Muslim and Sikh troops, was also stationed in Gilgit but the CO was arrested and the Sikh troops butchered; some of them escaped to peril to treacherous mountains, barring a few who survived to narrate the spine-chilling tale. In a jiffy, entire Gilgit had fallen to hands of Pakistan, and this enabled

them to annex adjoining Skardu and subsequently also Gurez. To save Skardu, in November 1947 State Forces tasked Lt Col Sher Bahadur Thapa to muster troops from Leh and Kargil and to occupy Skardu. He occupied Skardu Fort with his limited troops and resources, reinforced with remnants of Sikh troops of Gilgit. He barely had a company strength and came under repeated attacks from hundreds of raiders led by an officer and the infamous Subedar Major of Gilgit Scouts along with two officers Major Ehsan Ali and Captain Mohammed Khan of rebel battalion 6 J&K Infantry (MoD Archives, p. 282). His company fought valiantly over six months repelling six major attacks by numerically much superior enemy, with almost depleted stocks of ammunition and ration (MoD Archives, p.303). To make situation worse, the non-muslim civilian population also had taken shelter in the fort. Even the air maintenance by RIAF did not help as only a few of drops made using Tempest aircraft landed inside the fort. Drops were attempted with Tempests since Dakotas could not fly at altitudes over 4750 meters (MoD Archives, p. 305). The miseries faced by this body of troops have been covered in a recent publication of Sabre and Quill Publishers, titled 'TREACHERY AND GALLANTRY' and merit an entire film on the lines of recent releases as URI, SARAGARHI, and various films based on the Kargil Conflict of 1999, to bring out what they faced. All efforts to replenish by air failed and relief of the Skardu Fort could not succeed as the infamous 'Biscuit Column' (MoD Archives, p. 288, 305) sent to reinforce was ambushed on its way. Subsequently, the raiders captured Kargil and Dras and with that the hope of saving Skardu dashed. In July 1948, AHQ had planned to release three battalions to recapture Skardu. Unfortunately, this offensive towards Tithwal later turned out to be a feint. This was again a defining moment and in a way it can be concluded that the Skardu was lost for want of Tithwal which eventually was not threatened at all. Skardu Fort finally fell on 14 August 1948 by when the fighting impoverished

troops had turned into near skeletons. All the men in the sieged Skardu Fort were killed and women were taken away. Fall of Skardu led to fall of Kargil and Dras. The loss of Gilgit and Skardu could have been avoided if reinforcements could have reached Skardu in time so that operations from there could have cleared the Gilgit garrison also. This offensive by raiders was so momentous and it proved so costly to India that Kargil, Dras and Gurez were lost temporarily and Gilgit and Skardu is still not with us. Air support especially the air maintenance by RIAF was not effective (MoD Archives, p.303) for the battle of Skardu, unlike in Leh where RIAF played a key role in saving it from falling into the hands of the raiders.

### **Jammu Division: Naushera, Jhangar, Rajauri, Mirpur & Poonch on fire**

Immediately after the invasion of Kashmir, while fighting was going on in Baramulla and treason in Gilgit, Pakistan orchestrated multiple raids in the areas of Naushera, Akhnoor, Jhangar, Kotli, Mirpur and Poonch. These areas were very close to Pakistan territory, especially Mirpur which was next door and hence it was easy to launch operations, whereas for the Indian Army, the axis to Poonch and Kotli ran parallel to Pakistan-influenced territory and threats emanating from there. 268 Infantry Brigade was raised and moved from Patiala to take over the protection of the lines of communication and recaptured Palanwala, Akhnoor and Chhamb, while 50 PARA Brigade was tasked to clear the opposition on Poonch axis. By November 1947, Rawlakot was evacuated, Jhangar, Mendhar and Rajauri were captured by the enemy, and in February 1948, they further attacked Nowshera, where they met the grit of Brigadier Usman, who emerged victorious by repelling the enemy. Buoyant with success, the Indian Army recaptured Jhangar by March 1948 and subsequently Rajauri and Thanamandi were also recaptured by 19 Infantry Brigade. At this point of time Poonch was

still under threat from the enemy and past efforts by 161 Infantry Brigade to link up with Poonch garrison had failed, barring the partial success by 1 KUMAON which at the site of blown up Kahuta bridge, had crossed the stream and entered Poonch garrison where about 2000 troops of the State Forces were already available. There was an urgent need to now link up with the thinly held Poonch garrison. After months of consolidation, repelling of repeated attacks from the enemy on Poonch, it took nearly six months to capture the dominating feature Saltori Ridge by November 1948, which conclusively eliminated the threat to Poonch, and enemy hastily withdrew from there. Today, Poonch is with us because of two defining events – firstly, the insistence of Prime Minister Nehru (MoD Archives, p.76) to hold on to Poonch at all costs, and secondly, the valour of Indian Army troops who successfully evicted the enemy from areas captured by them. The brave sons, like Brigadier Usman, turned out to be the saviours. But for their efforts, maybe Poonch would not have been with us today.

### **Operations along the Uri Axis: Why Muzaffarabad could not be Recaptured**

When the initial operations by Indian Army to save Srinagar and Baramulla concluded at Uri due to snowfall in winters of 1947-48, the operations for capture of Domel on Muzaffarabad axis was launched by 161 Infantry Brigade in next campaigning season in May 1948. However, the operation did not succeed due to very difficult terrain which was exploited by enemy to lay several ambushes and 72 bridges (MoD Archives, p.171) en route were destroyed by enemy, besides creating road blocks through felled trees, making the advance of own forces extremely difficult. Alternate approaches were also attempted through Pandu by 77 Brigade and through Haji Pir Pass by 2 MADRAS. Though Pandu was captured but enemy response was fierce to recapture it. Artillery buildup to support own offensive was inadequate due to

limited availability of guns and state of infrastructure. Heavy enemy action continued for coming months. By October 1948, additional HQ of 165 Infantry Brigade was brought in to assume command of three of the six battalions already under the 161 Infantry Brigade. The early snowfall in October 1948 itself closed the options of any offensive to Muzaffarabad and LC in the Uri sector therefore got settled and it exists in similar way today. In hindsight, induction of additional forces during summers of 1948 could have facilitated capture of Muzaffarabad from Uri axis, as was planned by the Western Army Commander Lieutenant General Cariappa but the plan was turned down by AHQ (MoD Archives, p.211) in favour of recapturing Kargil which had fallen to raiders and it was feared that they would infiltrate columns to Kishtwar and Bhandarwah causing serious threat to Kashmir valley and Jammu-Srinagar axis. No additional forces were released for Uri operations owing to many other burdens. The large number of troops required for the operation was not available. The situation in Kargil and in Jhangar was deteriorating. Air support and logistics build up for operation of such magnitude was not available. Denuding of Punjab borders for this battle was not felt prudent, especially if the war spread beyond J&K, as political repercussions. The thought process was to take one season to prepare and launch offensive in the next season. However, before that could happen, the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) came about on 01 January 1949, freezing the LC. We could have generated more troops from the mainland to recapture the areas of Muzaffarabad, Mirpur and Gilgit.

### **Leh: on the Brink and then Grand Turn Around**

The initial loss of Kargil and Dras was linked to the treason in Gilgit. After the fall of Gilgit, the raiders boldly moved into Kargil and captured it in May 1948. Dras was also abandoned and defences were retreated south of Zojila. The government made

plans to recapture Muzaffarabad and Skardu and had allotted resources but as brought out earlier, the Skardu plan was shelved in view of enemy action at Tithwal (feint). Simultaneously, the raiders were pushing hard to capture Leh as well which was earlier held by only a platoon. Thankfully in February 1948, much before raiders moved into Kargil, displaying a future-defining foresight, Commander 161 Infantry Brigade, Brigadier LP Sen sensing the danger emanating from events in Gilgit and Skardu, decided to reinforce the Leh garrison by a company under Major Prithi Chand of 2 DOGRA. This officer, despite harsh winter conditions being without adequate resources, did a commendable job using his ingenuity to motivate and train the local militia and also organised buildup of resources through Zojila Pass for impending battle (MoD Archives, pp. 327-328). However, the need of hour was reinforcement of troops to defend Leh and the predicament was that the road axis to send troops through Zojila and Dras was in enemy hands. RIAF at that point of time had no idea if Dakota can land in Leh so that additional troops can be sent by air. The Air Officer Commanding of Number 1 (Operations) Group, Air Commodore Mehar Singh took a courageous decision (MoD Archives, p.330) to validate the suitability of Leh for landing and fly a Dakota himself on 24 May 1948. Equally brave GOC, Major General Thimayya also decided to join him. When they successfully landed at Leh, it boosted the morale of the troops and assured that they were not left to fend for themselves when the enemy noose was rapidly tightening around them. The GOC promised reinforcements within two days and flew back the same day. When the promised reinforcements got delayed by four to five days, Major Prithi sent out a courageously worded stinging signal (MoD Archives, p.331) to the division HQ at Srinagar. The HQ, which was under pressure to garner troops and planes due to ongoing pressure by the enemy in Tithwal and Poonch, could manage to finally induct a company of 2/4 GR on 01 June 1948 through an Air

Landed operations by six Dakota planes (MoD Archives, p.332). Simultaneously, 2/8 GR was tasked to build up to Leh through the Manali (MoD Archives, p.337) axis but it took a long time as the road axis that time was not like a bikers' delight as it exists today. For reasons unknown, probably lack of leadership, thankfully the raiders did not continue the pressure (MoD Archives, p.338) otherwise they could have captured Leh. Till the first company of the 2/8 GR reached Leh, Major Prithi led his troops to fight valiantly and was on the brink of falling but he held on and once reinforced with the additional company, could repel many attacks till July 1948. In August 1948, the division HQ decided to send Colonel HS Parb as Military Governor of Leh (MoD Archives, p.338). He was authorized with absolute powers in Leh by practically placing all government entities under his command. His induction turned the tide as he reorganised the defences and with complete 2/8 GR battalion joining in, not only all the attacks were repelled but the raiders were chased down back upto Nimu and as a result Leh was saved forever. The defining moments for Leh have been the heroics of Prithi Chand, Mehar Singh, HS Parb, Thimayya and the valiant troops and locals. The lethargy on part of the raiders also proved a defining moment as it led to them squandering the golden opportunity to swallow Leh as well. With threat to Leh thwarted, it was now time to recapture Zojila, Dras and Kargil so that subsequently Skardu and Gilgit could be liberated.

### **Zojila, Kargil and Dras : Given and Taken**

After the loss of Kargil and Dras in May 1948, our troops had retreated south of Zojila, and the Zojila Pass was held by the enemy. With the recapture of Leh in August 1948, it was necessary to clear the Zojila Pass so that operations towards Dras and Kargil could proceed. In September 1948, two assaults from different directions by 77 PARA Brigade failed to capture Zojila. In the third attempt, an innovative approach was adopted by using tanks disguised as

jeeps. It took several weeks to prepare the route and surreptitiously build up two troops (eight tanks) of 7 CAVALRY to Zojila. On 01 November 1948, the assault of guised tanks followed by Infantry took the enemy by surprise and Zojila was captured (MoD Archives, p.356). Subsequently, the 77 PARA Brigade progressed the operation towards Dras but the enemy gave a pitched battle at Pindras (located between Zojila and Dras). The enemy was eventually dislodged but not before causing a heavy time penalty (MoD Archives, p.359). Our operations were running against time because we were already into November and to recapture Dras, Kargil, Skardu and Gilgit, a lot of ground had to be covered before the snowfall which would close the window of operations. By 15 Nov 1948, Dras was recaptured and by 23 November 1948, Kargil was also recaptured, which saw a fierce and memorable battle at Shingo River. Immediately, the battle was progressed towards Marol which if captured, would have cleared the approach to Skardu. Simultaneous to the operations in Dras and Kargil, the 2/8 GR in Leh was aggressively carrying out the pursuit of fleeing enemy. The commando group led by Major Harichand who had selected Gorkhas and State Forces troops, unleashed a series of guerrilla attacks on the enemy, which forced the worried enemy to withdraw. This combined effort had pushed the enemy upto Marol along the Leh-Tharu-Nimu-Khatse-Marol axis, where heavy fighting was going on and soon the 77 PARA Brigade would have joined from the Zojila-Dras-Kargil axis. But that was not to happen as the snowfall commenced at the end of November and everything came to a standstill - vehicles were buried under snow, blizzards blinded all movements, troops in open suffered miserably and were now facing a new enemy in the form of 350 cases of 'Frost Bites'. So, practically, the snowfall (MoD Archives, p.364) decided and settled the LC in this sector because on 01 January 1949, the CFA came into existence, and there was no further scope of operations. If the operations were pressed at a faster pace, Skardu and Gilgit would

have been with us because the raiders were on run against our hot pursuit and there was no significant presence of Pakistan regular army in that sector that time, However, expecting a faster pace would be unfair to own troops who fought so valiantly in such harsh winter conditions and in the same breath, credit is due to the enemy who firstly kept pressure on Leh garrison for months and then fought fiercely in Zojila, Pindras and Marol causing delay that took away the campaigning season from us. Once again, another jinx had emerged for Skardu – earlier the Tithwal feint attack, and now the snowfall.

### **Gurez: the Classical Counter Offensive**

Gurez had partially fallen to raiders in the initial stages of the invasion itself in 1947. When the Indian Army landed in Srinagar and recaptured Baramulla, after the battle of Shal Teng, the raiders were compelled to fall back through Bandipore-Rajdiangan/Rajdhani (now Razdan) Pass – Gurez since the Baramulla route was blocked for them. The Army then was too preoccupied with Uri, Poonch, Rajauri, and other emerging vulnerabilities. By the time the raiders in Gurez could be pursued, the snowfall closed the Razdan Pass and hence Gurez was cut off from any operations. With the fall of Gilgit, the Burzil axis was available to the raiders who, exploiting this opportunity, had captured Gurez along with Kargil and Dras in early 1948. Military operations to recapture Gurez could commence only in April 1948. The road terminated at Sonarwayne in Bandipur itself and hence the road head was extended till Traqbal. Traqbal was recaptured by 2 BIHAR in April 1948 followed by recapture of Razdan Pass by 1 GRENADIERS in May 1948. Traqbal and Razdan having fallen, the approach to Kanzalwan-Dawar (Gurez) was clear, but recapturing of Kanzalwan was not an easy task. It was feared that the attack along the main route to Kanzalwan (also known as the Caravan Route) would be fatal and the enemy would have blown away the

Kanzalwan Bridge if their defences had turned untenable. This would foreclose going North of Kanzalwan, and Gurez could have been lost forever. So, it was decided to adopt an alternate route known as the 'Viji Route' which was unfamiliar, very difficult terrain and supplies would not have passed through this axis. But the Viji route had the major advantage of surprising the enemy, as it was a direct route to Wampora village near Dawar in Gurez. 'Operation ERAZE' was launched on 25 June 1948 with 1 GRENADIERS attacking through the treacherous Viji Route and 2/4 GR launching a feint along the Caravan Route. Attacking through one of the toughest terrains, 1 GRENADIERS overcame all hardships, including blizzards (MoD Archives, p.318), and with able support from the Patiala Mountain Battery of Artillery and bombing enemy positions with pinpoint accuracy by RIAF Tempests, Gurez fell on 28 June 1948. The raiders hurriedly tried to blow up the Kanzalwan Bridge, but a swift action by a company of Major Menon who came rushing down on them, led the raiders to flee. After the capture of Gurez, the grenadier troops chased the raiders, who consolidated themselves along Burzil Pass. Simultaneously, the 2/4 GR also advanced along the Caravan Route and recaptured Kanzalwan. Sensing that the sector was now free of enemy, in early July 1948, the Gorkhas were then tasked to destroy all bridges (MoD Archives, p.321) on the Kishenganga River from Kanzalwan to Kel and then fall back to Bandipur. When they encountered heavy resistance at Taobat, these orders were cancelled and the battalion was tasked to consolidate the gains. The entire month of July 1948 saw heavy pressure from the enemy to regain Kanzalwan, Bagtor and Razdan Pass but by month end they gave up and consolidated at Burzil Pass blocking the route to Chilam Chowki and Skardu.

This gallant action by our troops regained Gurez for us and the defining moment was bold and ferocious action by 1

GRENADIERS through Viji Gali, the success of which exemplified the 'Strategy of Indirect Approach' (Hart, L. 2005). The conditions that the battalion faced is aptly summed up in the MoD Report

*"The night of 26/27 June 1948 would never be forgotten by 1 Indian Grenadiers who faced the full fury of arctic weather in the open and covered only with one blanket between two men. Huddled together and shivering behind the rocky outcrops in the darkness of that storm-lashed bowl in the mountains, the men barely managed to keep their blood circulation going."* (MoD Archives, pp.318-319).

### **Handwara, Kupwara and Tithwal**

The threat to Kupwara and Handwara came as a surprise in February 1948. Having driven out the raiders from the Kashmir valley in the winter of 1947, the army was engrossed in the battles around Jhangar. Thousands of raiders crossed the Kishenganga River and, passing through Pharkian Gali in Keran sector, moved towards Tregham to capture Kupwara, Handwara, Sopore and eventually Srinagar (MoD Archives, p.140). On reaching Tregham, the raiders successfully persuaded the Kashmir Militia at Tregham to change sides leading to the entire Tregham valley falling to raiders and opening their avenues towards Kupwara, Handwara and Sopore. The only force available to counter this threat was a company of 1 SIKH at Baramulla and the remaining battalion at Srinagar. The CO, Colonel Harbaksh Singh was immediately ordered to deal with the threat and tank troops of 7 CAVALRY were also released for the operation.

By early February 1948, the enemy had consolidated around Handwara with a battalion strength organised and equipped like a regular Pakistan Army battalion and was being led by several officers from the Pakistan Army, Lieutenant Colonel Bashir Ahmad being the CO (MoD Archives, p.142). The initial response to this

threat commenced on 11 February by 1 SIKH and 7 CAVALRY based at Baramulla. When the enemy was contacted at Handwara, they retreated through Magam and Kupwara. The battalion commenced the pursuit and occupied areas short of Drugmulla as the Tactical HQ. While retreating, the raiders burnt all the bridges in Kupwara. The pursuit continued, and Kupwara was found deserted by the enemy; however, the raiders had shot scores of Kashmiri pundits and littered the corpses of women and children along the Kupwara road. The advance of the battalion reached till Tregham, which was evacuated by panicking raiders. While the pursuit by the battalion was on, at Srinagar, reorganisations were taking place. Now with induction of 7 SIKH also, a 'Z' brigade was formed for operations along the Handwara front. The brigade was later renamed as 163 Infantry Brigade. While 1 SIKH had successfully chased the raiders till Tregham, on 12 February 1948, the battalion was surprisingly ordered (MoD Archives, p.145) by the brigade HQ to abandon the chase. Complying with the directions, the battalion employed a company in Guglusa to keep scaring the raiders while the remainder battalion settled temporarily in Tregham where the local population received the Sikhs very well, especially the local National Conference leader (MoD Archives, p.146), who assured all the support. The Sikh troops finally got some respite, who feasted on the rations and dry fruits abandoned by the raiders and this was the place where to regain their energy, the Sikhs had prepared their favourite 'Go To' source of energy, the makkey-di-roti (Maize Bread) using the shovel blades as a pan over fire.

By 14 February 1948, due to inclement weather, the troops were withdrawn to Handwara and the operations were restricted only to reconnaissance and fighting patrols in the areas of Drugmulla and Magam. This passive (MoD Archives, p.148) approach gave the raiders elbow room to consolidate in Kupwara area and they

routinely sniped our troops. Soon, by mid-march, heavy snowfall commenced and the cold and snow restricted even the patrolling by the battalion. As the pressure from the enemy intensified, the battalion decided to move up and captured Petaheri, and the battalion Tactical HQ moved forward from Drugmulla to Kupwara by end March and again subsequently withdrawn back to Drugmulla area with focus on patrolling actions which continued till April 1948. One such patrol clashed with a group of raiders who broke contact and fled through Bungas route but every single raider perished (MoD Archives, p. 151) due to the infamous and deadly lightning strikes Bungas was known for. If at all another brigade size force was applied on this axis to continue the pursuit, may be Muzaffarabad would have been recaptured within few days. On the contrary, the deferred offensive gave a couple of months to the Pakistan Army to consolidate and prepare to withstand Indian advances towards Muzaffarabad, as was actually seen in the coming summer of 1948. However, the release of additional forces was not a matter of choice back then. GOC Srinagar Division, Major General Thimayya had planned a deliberate offensive plan for which he had bid for 18 battalions, but only 15 could be garnered, as there was huge pressure on multiple fronts and a lot was at stake.

Deliberate offensive to clear the enemy commenced only in May 1948 under the newly inducted 163 Infantry Brigade. This offensive was part of a larger offensive to liberate Muzaffarabad in which the main thrust was by 161 Infantry Brigade along Uri-Domel axis and the diversionary by 163 Infantry Brigade along the Handwara-Kupwara-Tregham-Panzgam-Chowkibal-Tangdhar-Tithwal axis. The raiders at that time had consolidated in areas around Tregham with Tithwal as their main supply base and Chowkibal and Panzgam as forward bases. The operation of 163 Infantry Brigade commenced on D Day being 18 May 1948. Tregham was captured on the same day, and advance resumed to

Panzgam on 19 May 1948 when the raiders escaped through Pharkian Gali and Nasta Chun (NC) Pass. By 20 May, Chowkibal was also captured. The raiders had now taken up hasty defences in open on NC Pass, which was a formidable position to be cleared. Artillery could not move beyond Chowkibal due to the poor condition of the road, and the guns of the Mountain Battery were not able to support the attack on NC Pass, as the raiders were just outside the extreme range of guns from Chowkibal. The Battery Commander major Bawa suddenly remembered that two new guns in his battery were known for overshooting by 350-450 meters. Using his ingenuity, he brought forward these guns and the fire was enough to cover the position of the raiders on the NC Pass. The enemy put up only token resistance. He was believed to have been completely surprised and demoralised by the shells from the guns (MoD Archives, p.161). 1 SIKH passed through towards Tangdhar while 1 MADRAS remained at NC Pass. That night the thambies, without any coats or blankets (MoD Archives, p.161), had a real tough time battling the cold and piercing winds the NC Pass is infamous for. 1 SIKH resumed its advance and on 22 May, captured Chamkot, which is eight kilometers short of Tithwal and dominates the Tithwal area. Seeing the Indian troops, the raiders fled Tithwal by crossing the Kishenganga River and dumping their arms and ammunition in the river. On 23 May 1948, 1 SIKH occupied Tithwal.

Post capture of Tithwal, it was decided to progress the operation towards Muzaffarabad and recapture areas beyond the Kishenganga River. Accordingly, 1 SIKH captured Richmar Gali and Kalsi Ridge on 31 May, and initial counter-attack by enemy was successfully repulsed. To strengthen the defences of Tithwal, it was decided to capture Keran also, in the neighbouring sector. By 11 Jun 1948, Keran was captured without fighting. In the meantime, enemy had intensified its counter-attacks opposite Tithwal, especially on a feature named Ring Contour (RC) and due to

limited availability of troops, sustaining the ever-intensifying counter-attacks became difficult and hence own troops were retreated on own side of Kishenganga River, including abandoning the Mir Kalsi Ridge and all the bridges on the river were destroyed. This action is the reason for the alignment of LC in this sector along the river and the enemy stiff resistance led to Muzaffarabad remaining out of our reach. Similar was the situation on Uri front, where operations in Chakothe Sector for the recapture of Muzaffarabad did not progress as per own designs and even Pandu, which was captured, fell into enemy hands. The enemy had intensified the counter-offensive to regain the territories lost and hence it became important to thwart his designs and also progress own operations towards Muzaffarabad. Major General Thimayya's requisition for two additional brigades could not be met. The macro level decision in Delhi was governed by the lurking threat in Hyderabad, where it was feared that the impending Police action would lead to communal riots and army would be required to control the situation. Defence of Punjab was also a key factor and so was the question of Kargil which was still in enemy hands. Though the forces allotted for Kargil operations were diverted to stabilize Tithwal after loss of Pandu in Uri Sector. In a considered decision, the GOC ordered the forward troops to consolidate the gains and not to concede even an inch to the enemy launching counter-offensives. His orders were valiantly complied with and the situation was stabilised, and in the process, the LC was frozen and still exists more or less in the similar manner.

### **Cease Fire Agreement: End of the Conflict**

The CFA came into effect on 01 January 1949, ending the year plus conflict between India and Pakistan sponsored raiders in the initial stage, and later joined by regular Pakistan Army. The agreement was fallout of resolution passed by United Nations (UN). Prime Minister Nehru had engaged with Pakistan from the

very beginning of the conflict in 1947 and wrote letters to his counterpart PM Liaqat Ali Khan who obviously did not respond as per expectations of PM Nehru. Frustrated with Pakistan's inaction, he had approached the UN on 01 January 1948 itself but the resolution took a year to take place. This delay was primarily due to Pakistan being in denial mode about the invasion. Pakistan's stance was that the persecuted Kashmiris had risen in revolt and operations were emanating from the so-called Azad Kashmir over which they had no control. The stance adopted by West, especially the USA and UK were pro-Pakistan and that too confused the issue. Subsequently, resolutions prepared by the UN were not agreeable to either India or Pakistan. Eventually, a mutually agreeable resolution was passed on 11 December 1948 and as a result of which the Cease Fire came into effect on 01 January 1949. The formal agreement was signed by both nations at Karachi in July 1949, and the demarcation of the Cease Fire Line (CFL) was finalized. It was known as CFL till it was replaced by the Line of Control after the war of 1971.

While the Indian Army respected the agreement, Pakistan violated the conditions in some areas, such as Gurez where they were initially placed at Burzil Pass but when snow melted, they grabbed the areas, barely a few kilometers from Gurez. Similarly, they surreptitiously occupied the heights around Kargil town to dominate the Kargil – Leh highway.

Many ask the question that should India have agreed to the CFA rather than continuing with offensive operations in next season till the entire J&K was liberated? There is no clear answer to the question but there are few aspects that merit due consideration. The forces required for the offensive were very large. Out of 127 battalions held with India that time, 50 battalions were already allotted to J&K while 29 battalions were defending Punjab frontier and 19 battalions were earmarked for the Hyderabad action

'Operation POLO' in September 1948. Allotting anymore battalions was a difficult task in the prevailing situation. As regards comparison with forces applied by Pakistan in J&K, the comparative ratio including regular troops and state militia or raiders, as applicable, was tilted towards Pakistan which has 73 (MoD Archives, p.374) battalion worth troops compared to 64 battalions worth troops of India and State forces. So, to achieve the requisite numerical superiority over the enemy, much more forces were required, which as such were far and few. Besides the requirement of troops, the challenge of logistic buildup was staring in India's face. We practically had no infrastructure of roads, rails or air bases. Comparatively, Pakistan enjoyed a far superior infrastructure of roads and logistics which existed in the area of operation over ages since J&K state was fully dependent on its needs from Pakistan. In addition, the thought process at political level was not to escalate the war outside J&K and the PM carried the conviction that the UN would be able to move Pakistan out of J&K. This unfortunately did not happen.

A similar question is asked from the Pakistan's perspective as why did they accept the CFA and not continued the operations till they grabbed the claimed territory. The answer lies in few events that had unfolded just prior to the CFA. The 'Operation POLO' for annexation of Hyderabad had successfully concluded in September 1948 and Pakistan feared that the troops earmarked for this operation could now get applied against them. In similar timeframe, Jinnah also died creating a political vacuum and lack of higher guidance. In addition to these events, the economy of Pakistan was in tatters due to a prolonged war over a year. And most importantly, Pakistan stood testimony to the grit and valour displayed by the Indian Army and RIAF and she certainly did not want to face the brunt anymore. Like India, possibly Pakistan also

would have pinned its hope on UN for a favourable outcome, the communal card being in their perceived advantage.

### **Why did Pakistan Lose and Failed in Achieving its Nefarious Goals in J&K?**

Lieutenant General LP Sen, who had fought this battle in Kashmir, opines that Pakistan's choice to employ the tribesman in J&K as Cat's Paw, was a blunder (Sen, L.P. 2019, pp.34-35). These tall men looked ferocious but were chicken hearted in actuals. They would attack only numerically inferior and unsuspecting enemy but would fizzle out against a trained body of troops. These traits were well known to British who shied away from enlisting these tribesmen into the regular British Indian Army. In World War I, the tribesmen had resorted to mutiny and murder leading to their disbandment. During World War II, an 'Afridi' unit was used as a labour battalion in Persia and a 'Mehsud' battalion deserted with arms and ammunition. Having burnt their fingers, the British always used these tribesmen in irregular frontier forces to be employed for managing their own tribes. However, Pakistan failed to learn from the decades of wisdom of British and on the contrary put its money on the unreliable tribesmen. Since they were motivated by Pakistan Army to enter J&K for want of loot of wealth, land and women, they did exactly that in Baramulla, as discussed earlier. Though Pakistan had planned the invasion by tribesmen as a pretext to enter Kashmir. Major General Akbar Khan, responsible for the invasion, had planned (MoD Archives, p.34) to enter Srinagar with his regular infantry brigade at Kohala, after the raiders had captured Srinagar. They would have instructed the tribesmen to return to NWFP with the promised loot and Pakistan would have declared themselves as saviours of Kashmir from the wrath of these tribesmen. The Instrument of Accession would have followed automatically by the Maharaja under duress. But the events were not destined to be that way. To

their misfortune, the might of brave Indian Army and RIAF came in their way and the rest is history. A total of 1135 (MoD Archives, p.379) brave sons of India, including 32 from the Air Force, laid down their lives and 3152 were wounded. On the Pakistani side, fatal were 6000 and wounded were 14000.

## Status of LC after the 1948 Operations

Post CFA, barring a few changes at tactical levels, the LC has been by and large respected and remained unchanged, albeit unacceptable to either nation. In 1965, delusional Pakistan made another ambitious effort to usurp J&K but failed miserably in achieving its political and military aims. The 1971 war did not see much action along LC as compared to the focus on the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) frontier. In late 1980s, buoyant with its success in driving out Russia from Afghanistan, Pakistan fermented trouble in Punjab and then in J&K to annex the state through proxy warfare. Here again, Pakistan's nefarious designs were defeated by the resilience and might of the Indian Army. Subsequently, in 1998 Pakistan made another audacious effort to annex parts of Kargil but yet again was thrown out with a bloody nose and an embarrassed face. The present focus of Pakistan is on proxy war, garnering an otherwise elusive international support and reliance on terror to usurp J&K. However, with each passing day, the influence and the nuisance of Pakistan are dwindling rapidly. Soon Pakistan should smell the coffee and realize the futility of banging its head against the wall in claiming something that does not belong to her at all. In doing so, she would serve herself well.

## Conclusion

The political and military conflict for J&K started in 1947 and continues till date. As it has been analysed in the article, the LC that exists in its present form could have easily been so different had those defining moments been seized by the opposing forces. The



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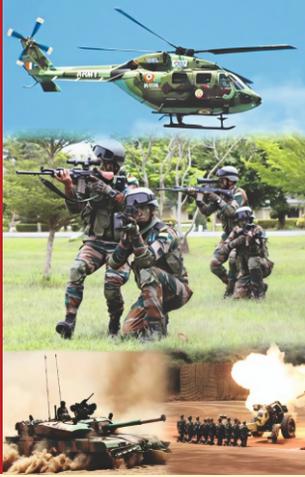
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The Line of Control (LC) has remained more or less frozen ever since it came into existence after Indo-Pak war 1947-48 and developments thereupon. Each and every bend in the LC is outcome of a fiercely contested battle and certain defining moments that make several fascinating tales, which this paper intends to bring to fore.

The paper is primarily based on the Ministry of Defence publication based on actual historical records of the war and a few other books of prominence besides on-ground visits and interactions by the author while serving in a LC formation.

The paper is written in an easy flowing language which narrates the events by stitching together all the battles that took place in this war. The contents can be extremely helpful to the military history enthusiasts, followers of geopolitics and various aspirants of promotion or competitive examinations in Indian Army. A taylor-made sketch which contains only the relevant details, also has been enclosed to facilitate easy reading.

'Bonne lecture!'

• • •



**Brigadier PK Singh** is a serving officer in Indian Army and has experience of serving in various terrains and operational environments, including in LC environment, wherein this article was conceptualised. He is presently commanding a formation involved in operations in the North East. The author is a keen observer & has a penchant for geopolitical developments and has a flair for disambiguation of complex subjects through effective writing & presentation skills.



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