

CHAPTER - VI

WALONG AND OTHER SECTORS

Besides Kameng, the only area in Arunachal Pradesh witnessing major and intense fighting was Walong in the Lohit Frontier Division. Subansiri and Siang divisions of Arunachal, and the Indo-Tibet border areas in Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh saw little or no fighting. Operations in the Walong sector, therefore, would be described first, while the other sectors would receive brief mention later.

TOPOGRAPHY OF WALONG AREA

Lohit Frontier Division lies in the extreme north-east corner of India. Like other Frontier Divisions of NEFA, this Division too now stands divided into two districts - Dibang Valley and Lohit. As the operations during the conflict were confined to Walong Sector in Lohit District, this topographic description deals only with that area.

In the north, the traditional boundary between India and Tibet follows the watershed between Di Chu in India and Lati Chhu in the Tibet region of China. The tri-junction of India, Burma and China is in the extreme east of the Lohit District, about 8 km north of the Diphu l'ka (Taluk Pass)(1). From the pass itself, a mountain wall, called the Patkoi range, extends to the south-west and then south-east, separating India from Burma(2). In the west of Walong sector there is a mountain range. In the south also unidentified mountain ranges border the sector.

Lohit, which is the prominent river of the District, divided the brigade defended sector into two. The only means of crossing this obstacle of approximately 150 metres was by means of a single steel wire rope spanning the river. Boats could not be used due to the torrential current(3).

Rivers/Nullahs

The main tributary of the Lohit River is the Di Chu. It rises from a point 7 km north of the Diphu Pass. It flows between the mountain ranges and after running westward for about 80 km (50 miles) joins the Lohit river, north of Dichu village. In the middle of its course is the 'Hot Spring', a suitable camping ground for troops on patrol.

The second river - Tho Chu, which emerges from a mountain range along the crest of which runs the Indo-Tibetan boundary, runs eastward and joins the Lohit below Kibithoo.

A Nullah or ravine, Sat Ti, enters Lohit river from the east between Dong Plateau and Dong Spur. A second ravine, the Tamun Ti Nullah, coming from East, enters Lohit near Tinai. The third Nullah Dandi Ti, which too flowing from east to west, enters Lohit River about 5 km south of Walong. Nam Ti (Nullah), flowing from west to east, enters Lohit River north of Walong Camp. Yapak or Yerbi Ti (Nullah) - the fifth one - flowing from west to east, enters Lohit River also 5 km (3 miles) south of Walong.

Though the river bed was at an altitude of about 900 metres, the hills on either side rose steeply up to 5200 to 5500 metres. The sides of the hills were covered with virgin pine forests up to about 3,650 metres and thereafter with other stunted plants. This obstructed both movement and observation. Not even hunters' tracks existed beyond a few hundred metres of the beaten tracks, which generally followed the River lines.

#### Line of Communication

Regarding the supply line and the transportation of troops, it was only through air. Tezu airfield was the nearest airlift point. There was an airstrip at Walong. But it was so small that the only IAF aircraft which could use it were the Otters, and after 1000 hrs even Otters could not operate due to strong winds(4). A foot-track existed from Tezu to Walong along the Lohit valley, but it was a 14 days' march(5).

A track led from Hayuliang to Kibithoo via Du Pass. From Hayuliang the Du Pass was about 130 km (80 miles). The track from Hayuliang followed the left bank of the river Dau through very dense tropical jungle and undergrowth. The area around the pass was bare rock with precipitous cliffs on both sides of the pass, which was about 21 to 25 metres wide on top, rising suddenly on both sides. Immediately after crossing the pass, there was an oval shape lake called Tho Chu Tuwi, almost 1.5-km long and about 720 to 820 metres wide. The lake fed the Tho Chu river.

Du Pass connected Dau and Tho Chu valleys and dominated both these valleys. The pass normally remained snow-bound from middle of November to middle of May. The track along the Tho Chu followed the river along its left bank, and finally emerged near Kibithoo.

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A track from Walong also led towards Kibithoo, along the right (western) bank of Lohit river. There were many stairways on this track which had to be negotiated before the McMahon Line was reached. Beyond the McMahon Line, the track passed through Tatu and Sama villages to reach Rima, a Tibetan administrative base(6).

Another track from Walong to the international border ran along the left (eastern) bank of the Lohit river. In its lower portion, its gradient was steep. The track passed through Tinai, Dong and Kahao hamlets. Like the western track, it was unsuitable for animal transport. The former could be used for carrying heavy loads with some difficulty but the latter was absolutely unfit for such traffic.

The Indian troops positioned on the hill features around Walong soon coined names for their localities for the convenience of quick and easy identification. West of Walong, at an altitude of approximately 3,350 metres (11,000 ft), was "WEST RIDGE", and further to the west lay the "Mortar Position" at a height of about 3,650 metres (12,000 ft). North of the Mortar Position, and along the crest of the mountain range were located "Tri-junction" (4,175 metres), "Yellow Pimple" (4,025 metres) to its north, and "Green Pimple" (3,840 metres) to the east of Yellow Pimple, dominating and providing full observation of the forward defended localities on both banks of the Lohit river. On the spurs going east from the Yellow Pimple/Green Pimple, there were the "Maha Plateau", "Lachhman Ridge", "Patrol Base", "Mithun" and "Ladders" positions, as shown in the sketch, successively going down in altitude. Across the Lohit, there was "High Plateau" to the north of the Sat Ti and Dong Hill to its south. Dakota Hill lay between Dong Nullah and Tamun Ti and south of Tamun Ti was the "East Ridge" position facing the above-mentioned West Ridge across the river.

### TROOP DISPOSITIONS

When the responsibility for the defence of NEFA was handed over to the regular Army at the end of 1959, 5 Inf Bde under 4 Inf Div was made responsible for the Lohit Frontier Division. It was only in July 1961 that 2 Rajput (less 'A' Coy) of 5 Inf Bde stood concentrated at Walong. 'A' Coy with one Tp of 71 Hy Mor Bty of 44 Hy Mor Regt remained at Tezu(7).

In March 1962, 6 Kumaon was ordered to relieve 2 Rajput. The complete operational responsibility of the area was then taken over by 6 Kumaon from 2 Rajput on 21 April(8).

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Even before the handing over of the responsibility for the defence of NEFA to the regular Army, the policing of Lohit Frontier Division, as in the case of other Frontier Divisions, was being done by a battalion (Second) of the Assam Rifles. The three Wings of the 2 Assam Rifles stood deployed as under(9):-

- (a) One Wing in West Lohit Frontier Division for the Dibang Valley.
- (b) 2nd Wing at Hayuliang.
- (c) 3rd Wing at Walong.

With the induction of regular Army troops, the Assam Rifles units came under their operational control. Under 'OP ONKAR', which envisaged setting up of additional posts by Assam Rifles on all possible routes of ingress, a maximum number of eleven new posts were set up in Lohit Frontier Division(10).

When the two Battalions of 62 Inf Bde - 4 Sikh and 2/8 GR - reached Jorhat from Rangarh on 21 September, they were placed under 5 Inf Bde, and 4 Sikh was earmarked for Lohit Frontier Division. More troops were then moved to Kibithoo from Walong and the frequency of patrols to the McMahon Line was increased(11). By the end of September 1962, two Coys and Battalion TAC HQ of 6 Kumaon stood concentrated at Kibithoo(12).

When troops ('A' and 'B' Coys) of 4 Sikh arrived in the sector, the responsibility for the defence of Walong Garrison was taken over by them from 6 Kumaon on 8 October 1962. Its other two Coys - 'C' and 'D' - had been moved to Chabua from Jorhat(13).

For defence purposes, the Lohit Frontier Division was divided into three sub-sectors. The deployment of troops in these three sub-sectors, as on 18 October 1962, was as under:-

Dibang Valley sub-sector(14)

Battalion HQ of 2 Assam Rifles with 13 platoons.

Kibithoo sub-sector

The CO 6 Kumaon was the Sub-Sector Commander with his TAC HQ at Kibithoo. (Battalion HQ with

administrative elements were at Walong).  
different Coys were deployed as follows:-

- 'A' Coy - Dichu
- 'B' Coy - East Ridge
- 'C' Coy - Kibithoo
- 'D' Coy - Ladders Area (This Coy completed its move to Thapa DZ on 20 October 1962)

'A' Wing of 2 Assam Rifles, consisting of Wg HQ with six platoons, was also deployed there(15). The six platoons, acting basically as Observation Posts, were located at -

- Jachep - 2 Platoons (One section was at Chu Pass).
- Hot Spring - 1 Platoon and Wing HQ.
- Kibithoo - 2 Platoons
- Tangkhal/Du Dakhru - 1 Platoon

Walong sub-sector(16)

The CO 4 Sikh commanded this sub-sector. Only two Coys - 'A' and 'B' - along with Battalion HQ had arrived there till then. 'A' Coy was in Dong area with 3-in Mortar Section while 'B' Coy was at Mah Plateau, with one Pl at Ladders.

In support(17)

71 Hy Mor Bty of 44 Hy Mor Regt.

As regards the Chinese strength, Intelligence Bureau assessed in September 1962, that out of the nineteen battalions deployed by the Chinese along the NEFA-Tibet border, six battalions were positioned across Lohit Frontier Division(18). The troops had moved forward close to the Indian border and from September 1962 onwards they were observed continuously digging and preparing defensive positions opposite Indian posts(19). According to HQ IV estimate, the Chinese had deployed approximately 10000 Inf Div in area Shugden - Drowa Gonpa - Tithang, with sub-units at Rima(20).

The Chinese had improved the Drowa Gonpa - Rima road which led to Kibithoo and then to Walong on the Indian side of the border(21). Shugden was on the main Lhasa-Chamdo highway. From Shugden, Rima could be approached by the Chinese through two roads, Shugden - Drowa Gonpa - Rima and Shugden - Tithang - Rima(22).

### LOSS OF KIBITHOO

Kibithoo was an Indian army post on the western bank of Lohit river, about 3 km (2 miles) south of the McMahon Line. To the south of this post was the Thapa Ridge, on the southern side of Tho Chu. This ridge was being used as the DZ for the troops there. Across the Lohit from Kibithoo was a feature on the McMahon Line, named McMahon Ridge. The foot track to Hot Spring, Jachep and Chu Pass posts, far to the east, ran from Kibithoo to Dichu over the McMahon Ridge and along the northern bank of Di Chu Nullah. The track to Tangkhal and Du Dakhru posts, towards the west, ran along the southern bank of the Tho Chu Nullah. Approximate time taken to reach Chu Pass from Kibithoo through Dichu, Hot Spring and Jachep was seven days while to Du Dakhru it took only two days from Kibithoo(23).

A reconnaissance patrol sent on 18 October 1962 to a feature - known as Hundred Hill - observed the presence of some enemy soldiers on the feature. When the patrol returned to base on 19 October morning, an AR platoon, which was at that time deployed at Thapa Ridge, was sent to the feature. It was asked to dig defences there with a view to check the Chinese advance to Kibithoo along that approach. On the same day, one platoon of 'A' Coy/6 Kumaon was also sent to take up position on the McMahon Ridge(24), followed by the whole Coy on 21 October. A platoon of 'A' Coy was then sent up along Di Chu Nullah to prevent any enemy advance from Taluk Pass (Diphu La).

On the same night, (i.e. 21 October) at about 2345 hrs, the enemy commenced MMG fire and artillery shelling on the McMahon Ridge from their bunkers, approximately 700 metres, north of Sama Post. Immediately thereafter, the enemy attacked with approximately a battalion group. Accurate firing by the Indian 3-in Mortar Detachment, which at that time was positioned south-west of Kibithoo Ridge, halted the first rush. But before long, replenished in strength, Chinese mounted another fierce attack. The Indian troops, stuck to their position and put down continuous accurate small arms and mortar fire on the Chinese troops.

In this action, approximately 60 Chinese were killed as against four Indian killed, two missing and four wounded, including the Coy Commander. For an outstanding act of gallantry in this action, Nk Bahadur Singh was posthumously awarded Vir Chakra.

In the face of great numerical superiority of the enemy and with no possibility of being reinforced, 'A' Coy and its attached troops were ordered to withdraw from the McMahon Ridge and Di Chu to concentrate at Kibithoo. The troops started withdrawing at 0700 hrs on 22 October.

The Bde Commander arrived at Walong at 0900 hrs to personally review the situation. After a telephonic conversation with the Battalion Commander, orders to cut all the twine rope-ways across the Lohit river at Kibithoo at the earliest were issued. The enemy continued with heavy shelling and used innumerable smoke bombs, which caused dense smoke in the whole area. At 1000 hrs, on 22 October 1962, HQ 5 Inf Bde received orders from IV Corps placing the Bde directly under the Corps. In view of the loss of the Dichu Ridge to the enemy and its superior build up against Kibithoo, the message from HQ IV Corps, among other things ordered(25):-

- i. 4 Sikh and 6 Kumaon were to occupy compact defensive areas with the mutual support north of Walong in such a way as to preclude observed enemy mortar fire on Walong airfield.
- ii. 6 Kumaon to withdraw to new defensive area from Kibithoo preferably after last light 22 October, so as to give time to 4 Sikh to occupy new defences.
- iii. All Assam Rifle posts on the western side to be withdrawn to Hayuliang for protection of the left flank of Walong Garrison.

6 Kumaon received orders of withdrawal at 1600 hrs on 22 October 1962. In the sequence of withdrawal, 'C' Coy was given the task of destroying all stores/rations at Kibithoo and the bridge on Tho Chu. It was also made responsible for taking delaying positions on way back to cover the withdrawal of the Battalion. Kibithoo was finally abandoned at 2100 hrs on 22 October 1962. The Battalion, less 'D' Coy, concentrated at Walong at 1700 hrs on 23 October 1962. 'D' Coy, which was at Ashi Hill, withdrew from the screen position, and took up defences at Walong at 1000 hrs on 25 October(26).

The withdrawal of troops from Kibithoo to Walong alarmed the Army HQ that in a signal(27), on 25 October 1962, it asked the Eastern Command to consider withdrawing bulk of the troops from Subansiri, Siang and Lohit Frontier Divisions. The Command was also asked to consider using full 23 Inf Bde to contain the enemy thrust from Walong.

To augment the force in Lohit Frontier Division, Coys - 'B' and 'D' - of 2/8 GR (the Battalion had been moved to NEFA under 62 Inf Bde) were air-lifted from Tezu and from there to Walong on 25 October. 'D' Coy of the Battalion occupied a defended locality on the western bank of Lohit river (under command 4 Sikh) and 'B' Coy on the eastern bank (under command 4 Sikh, Kumaon)(28).

The enemy in an attempt to achieve a break-through, launched an attack on the Mithun track position in the early hours of 27 October. In the fighting, Sep Kewal Singh of 4 Sikh, gave a superb display of bravery for which he was posthumously awarded MVC, the only MVC awarded for the operations in Lohit Frontier Division(29). The enemy's attack was successfully beaten back with the help of 71 Hy Coy Bty. The MMGs and 3-in Mor from East Bank also supported the Sikhs to foil the enemy attack.

There was a lull in the fighting for the next few days. The situation in Lohit Frontier Division by the end of October 1962 was:-

- (a) The AR posts at Hot Spring, Jachep, Chu Pass, Du Dakhru and Tangkhal had been withdrawn.
- (b) The posts by Dichu Ridge and Kibithoo had been occupied by the enemy after a fight.
- (c) Indian defences at Walong had been attacked twice by the Chinese since 25 October, but without success.

#### REINFORCEMENTS AND PATROLLING

After the formation of 2 Inf Div to take over operational responsibility in Subansiri, Siang and Lohit Frontier Divisions of NEFA, its GOC, Maj Gen M.S. Pathania, arrived at Walong on 26 October to receive the forward areas(30). With two battalions located at Walong, but without a coordinating HQ located nearby, the new GOC found inherent problems of command and control of troops in the Walong Sector. Accordingly, on 29 October 1962, it was decided that operations in the Walong Sector would be looked after

by an independent Inf Bde. For this purpose, first 181 Inf Bde and finally 11 Inf Bde (then located in Nagaland) was placed under 2 Inf Div(31). The new Bde Commander, Brig N.C. Rawlley, MC, along with his Rover Gp arrived at Walong at 1030 hrs on 31 October. The same day in the evening he called a conference of his COs and told them:

"There was going to be no withdrawal from this place - everybody must get that straight"(32).

On 31 October 1962, the Order-of-Battle of 11 Inf Bde was as follows(33):-

- (a) 6 Kumaon
- (b) 4 Sikh
- (c) Two Coys 2/8 GR (After the decision of 1 November to allot 3/3 GR to 11 Mtn Bde, these two Coys were diverted to Siang Frontier Division).
- (d) One Coy 3/3 GR
- (e) Platoon 6 Mahar MG
- (f) Tp 62 Para Fd Bty
- (g) 71 Hy Mor Bty

After the withdrawal of Indian troops from Kibithoo, the Chinese had occupied positions behind Ashi Hill. Since then it had become a daily routine with the Chinese troops to fire at the Mithun and Ladders positions and also to carry out probing attacks on Indian defences. It was also a daily affair with the Indian troops to repel the enemy attacks forcefully. The Indian firing, it is believed, hurt the Chinese so heavily that on 2 November the local commanders were reported to have sent a message to the rear for permission to withdraw, which was refused(34).

The Chinese fire on the Mithun and Ladder positions was, in fact, a ruse to cover their activities somewhere else. Behind the screen of their firing, the Chinese constructed a track from Ashi Hill to the Green Pimple post and started their build-up unchecked.

On 1 November 1962, 2/Lt P.S. Bhandari, who was occupying an OP of 71 Hy Mor Bty at Maha Plateau, was detailed to go on a wide recce patrol for 3 days

West Ridge to locate the Chinese in the area and, if possible, to engage them by fire. An OP party from 1 Hy Mor Bty and a platoon of Assam Rifles was given to him for the purpose. The patrol moved out on 2 November, and camped for the night just below the crest of West Ridge. Next day, they moved along the ridge, avoiding "Green Pimple", and camped at "Yellow Pimple". This patrol was the first to go to that area, and used these names for the features - named such because of the distinctive colour of the leaves on their slopes. Next morning, i.e. on 3 November, the patrol turned back, via Yellow Pimple and Green Pimple. As the patrol moved up the slope of Green Pimple, the leading men came under heavy enemy automatic and small arms fire. The patrol took position and returned the fire, and later, skirting the Chinese position, returned to its base, though a day late(35). 2/Lt P.S. Bhandari of Regt of Arty and Sub. Jagandhoy Limbu of 2 Assam Rifles earned Vir Chakras for their performance in this episode.

The presence of the enemy on the Green and Yellow Pimples was causing anxiety to the Bde Commander. Green Pimple dominated Lachhman Ridge and Maha Plateau. The approach to Green Pimple was through Tri-junction and Yellow Pimple. Moreover, advance of another 3 km along that Spur by the enemy meant his domination of Walong Airstrip and DZ. The Bde Commander, anticipating the danger from the enemy, determined to dislodge the Chinese from there at the earliest.

'A' Coy, 6 Kumaon, under Capt R.K. Mathur, was sent on 5 November 1962 to clear the enemy from area Green Pimple and then to reconnoitre the route from Green Pimple to Ashi Hill(36). The Company was to get fire support from heavy mortars of 71 Bty and on that day the Bty fired 110 rounds on Green Pimple, Yellow Pimple and left edge of Maha Plateau(37).

The Kumaonis launched the attack on 6 November. The enemy opened fire on the Indian troops with all weapons, but the Coy continued its advance steadily and forced the enemy to vacate its forward defensive positions. Later, however, the Coy Commander pulled back, ostensibly because the ammunition with the Kumaon Coy was running short. The Coy then took defensive positions at a height of 3,350 metres (11,000 ft) in order to check the enemy's advance on to the West Ridge. Capt R.K. Mathur received Vir Chakra for this action(38).

For his next attempt, the Bde Commander selected the Sikhs and their 'D' Coy was given the task to evict the enemy from the Green Pimple. One Coy, 5 Kumaon, was detailed to assist the Sikhs in the task(39).

Tri-junction was secured by two platoons of Kumaon under 2/Lt A.S. Khatri on 12 November, and the Battalion less one Coy and one platoon stood concentrated there by 2000 hrs on 13 November(45).

Position on 14 November

Indian

(a) The position of Indian troops as on 14 November 1962 in the Walong Sector was as follows:-

11 Inf Bde

TAC HQ	Southern slopes of Tri-Junction.
Admn HQ	Walong
<u>6 Kumaon</u>	
Bn TAC HQ less one Coy & one Pl	Tri-Junction
One Coy ('A') & one Pl	West Ridge
3-in Mortar	Mortar Post
Bn Rear HQ	Firm Base(46)
<u>4 Sikh</u>	
Bn HQ	Forward slopes of West Ridge
'A' Coy	Patrol Base
'B' Coy	Depth Position at Ladder's
'C' Coy	Maha Plateau
'D' Coy	High Plateau (On the eastern bank of Lohit River and under command 3/3 GR)
3-in Mortar	Bn Locality.

3/3 GR

This Battalion could concentrate at Walong only in the first week of November 1962. Its troops were deployed as follows(48):-

- |             |                  |   |  |
|-------------|------------------|---|--|
| Bn HQ       | - Dakota Hill    | }   | These locations were south of Sat Ti (Nullah), on the eastern bank of Lohit river. |
| 'A' Coy     | - Dong Plateau   | }   |  |
| 'B' Coy     | - Dong Hill      | }   |  |
| less one Pl |                  | }   |  |
| One Pl      | - Dong Choti     | }   |  |
| 'C' Coy     | - Ladder's       | under command 4 Sikh (Took over this position from 4 Sikh on 11 November)         |  |
| 'D' Coy     | - Lachhman Ridge | under command 4 Sikh (Took over this position from 'D' Coy/4 Sikh on 11 November) |  |

4 DOGRA(49)

The Battalion's Rover Gp and 'O' Gp under CO reached Walong by air on 9 November 1962. Its 'A' Coy with two platoons of 'B' Coy was at Walong on 13 November.

- 'A' Coy - Was ordered to re-inforce 6 Kumaon at Tri-Junction. One Pl of the Coy was positioned at Mortar position for the protection of Bde TAC HQ.
- 'B' Coy - Moved from Walong at 1600 hrs on 14 November, to position itself at Tri-Junction (two platoons - No.4 & 6, and the third Platoon, No.5, was to be positioned at Firm Base).
- 'D' Coy - When the Coy reached Walong at 1500 hrs on 14 November, it was ordered to proceed to Tri-Junction to re-inforce Kumaon. 'A' Coy, which was at that time at Firm Base and was proceeding to Tri-Junction was asked to act as fighting porters for 'D' Coy and Rover Gp from Firm Base to Tri-Junction.

'C' Coy with  
Bn HQ - At Walong

Later, on 15 November 1962, the whole Bn was asked to relieve 6 Kumaon in area Tri-Junction and to take up Bn defensive position there.

MGs

One Platoon of 'B' Coy(50) - Mortar Post, in  
6 Mahar (MG) support of 6 Kumaon

Arty

71 Hy Mor Bty/ } Depth position at Ladder's  
44 Lt Regt (T) (51) } (with 'B' Coy 4 Sikh)

52 Para FD Bty/  
17 Para Fd Regt(52)

'E' Tp Dakota Hill

'F' Tp In support of 4 Sikh Coy at  
High Plateau.

None of the Positions occupied by the Indian troops were mutually supportive, and as such each post had to fight an independent battle.

(b) Hayuliang Sector

Considering the terrain and the distance from Rima to Hayuliang and Glei Dakhru to Hayuliang, being 192 km (120 miles) and 120 km (75 miles) respectively, it was felt that the enemy would not be able to build more than a Bn Group in that area, in the near future. Accordingly 4 Assam was ordered to reach Hayuliang to reinforce the four platoons of 2 Assam Rifles in that area latest by 13 November(53).

(c) Northern Lohit F.D.

The enemy had so far made no ingress in that area. However, consequent upon the withdrawal of Assam Rifles posts to their winter locations, the enemy might have occupied some of those posts. As there appeared to be no immediate threat in that area, the sub-units of 2 Assam Rifles were not re-inforced by the induction of any regular troops. The Sector was, therefore, to be held entirely by eleven platoons of 2 Assam Rifles(54).

(B) Chinese

The Chinese after occupying Kibithoo on 22 October 1962, had speedily advanced till checked at Nam Ti (Nullah). They had dug in positions on Ashi Hill. Efforts were then made by them to penetrate the forward Indian defended localities, and since then skirmishes had been going on between the Indian and enemy patrols. By 10 November, the enemy had occupied its defended localities with estimated strength of one Rifle Coy plus. Indian efforts to dislodge the enemy from Green and Yellow Pimples had not met with success.

The distance to Walong from the enemy's base in Rima was not more than 32 km (20 miles) and, as it turned out, the enemy had completed build-up of one Inf Div, fully supported by Arty, south of McMahon Line by 14 November 1962(55).

THE BATTLE FOR WALONG

Indian Attack on Yellow Pimple

After the troops of 6 Kumaon had been concentrated at Tri-Junction, it was decided to launch the attack on Yellow Pimple at 1000 hrs on 14 November. Before the attack, fire support was to be provided as follows(56):-

<u>Timings</u>	<u>Type of fire</u>	<u>Target</u>
(a) 132000 to 132330	Harassing Fire	Yellow Pimple
(b) 140930 to 141000	Preparatory	Yellow Pimple
(c) 140930 to 141000	Counter bombardment	Ashi Hill

Plan for the attack was(57):-

- (a) Attack to commence with two Coys - Ad hoc Coy under Capt Singh on the left and 'B' Coy on the right under Maj Sharma.
- (b) 'C' Coy in reserve on Tri-Junction.
- (c) 'D' Coy to put pressure on Green Pimple from West Ridge by remaining in contact with the enemy. This Coy was to ensure that the enemy positions at Yellow Pimple were not reinforced from Green Pimple.

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At 0900 hrs 14 November, 2/Lt Shyam Chavan and Sub Govind Singh with a platoon of 'C' Coy, were sent to secure forming up place. When this position was threatened by the enemy patrol in forming up place, the time of attack was advanced by 30 minutes. On 15 November at 0930 hrs the assault on Yellow Pimple was launched. 'KALIKA MAI KI JAI', the war cry of the Kumaonis, reverberated in the area, and the Kumaonis charged up the slopes of Yellow Pimple. Unfortunately, the artillery fire was not very effective, and the Indians 3-in Moratrs could not compensate for artillery fire due to very limited ammunition with them(58).

Enemy reacted violently and brought down heavy fire on the advancing Kumaonis. But this did not deter the advancing troops, and the left flank under Capt Singh pushed on to just 20 metres of the enemy bunkers. The right flank was held up 180 metres from the top. Further progress proved difficult as the enemy was well dug-in and was covering every inch of ground in front with a shower of bullets. At about 1200 hrs, two platoons of 'C' Coy, under Sub Govind Singh and Sub Surendra Chand, were rushed to Yellow Pimple as reinforcement(59). Sub Govind Singh decided not to be held up within a few metres of glory and fame. "Where every movement was death, he dashed forward with an LMG to destroy the enemy bunker which was holding up the Indian advance". He was fired upon from another bunker and died on the spot. Right flank troops again made a determined move till they were only about 45 metres from the enemy bunkers(60). The Bde Commander, who had been witnessing the fighting at Yellow Pimple from the forward slopes of Tri-Junction, ordered the Battalion to stick to the ground it had captured and to gradually creep up under the cover of darkness. But during the night, the enemy moved up sufficient reserves, and counter-attacked the assaulting Indian troops with approximately a battalion supported by artillery and mortars. In fierce hand to hand fighting the Indian troops were compelled to fall back on Tri-Junction, due to superior enemy strength and threat to Firm Base(61). Of the approximately 200 men who had gone in the assault in the morning, only 90 returned(62).

Chinese Capture Tri-Junction

After having successfully beaten back the Indian assault on the Yellow Pimple, the Chinese were ready to launch a counter-attack simultaneously on all the locations, stretching from Tri-Junction on the west side of Lohit River to the High Plateau on its eastern bank, supported by 81 mm mortars(63).

The enemy attacked Tri-Junction at 0430 hrs on 15 November. At that time, the strength of the Indian troops at the post was only one Coy, including the troops which had withdrawn from Yellow Pimple. Bitter fighting ensued. For the next two hours, Tri-Junction constantly echoed with the sound of bullets and exploding mortar bombs. Capt Bhatia put up a determined resistance. When the gunner near him was fatally wounded, he himself manned the LMG and emptied magazine after magazine into the advancing enemy. The attack was repulsed, but both Capt Bhatia and 2/Lt Khatri got wounded(64). Both these officers were later honoured with Vir Chakras.

At that stage, the Bde Commander ordered 4 Dogra to reinforce 6 Kumaon at Tri-Junction. But soon the enemy succeeded in cutting off the axis of maintenance - approach between Mortar post and Tri-Junction - which interfered with the movement of Indian reinforcements to Tri-Junction. In spite of this, some troops of 4 Dogra (33 men) were able to arrive there by breaking through the enemy. The arrival of these men raised the hopes and morale of the Kumaonis as they anticipated that the remaining troops of 4 Dogra would be with them any moment. However, no other troops could reach there(65).

During the night 15/16 November, the enemy kept up his assaults on the position in battalion strength. All these successive assaults were repulsed on that night. But it was bitterly cold at Tri-Junction and the troops had no rest. Moreover, the ammunition was running short and the casualties were also steadily increasing.

The enemy, supported by 120 mm mortars, again launched a massive attack at 0730 hrs on 16 November. But this attack, too, did not succeed in over-running Tri-Junction.

Even though repeated enemy attacks at Tri-Junction had been beaten back, his mortars were continuously harassing the Kumaonis. The Battalion had also lost contact with the Bde HQ. The enemy was present all around. The CO realised that as he could neither get reinforcement nor replenishment of ammunition, further resistance would be suicidal. He ordered his troops to disengage themselves from the enemy. Tri-Junction fell to the enemy at 0900 hrs on 16 November(66). The Indian troops were repeatedly ambushed by the enemy on their downward march.

Fall of other Posts

Three Coys of 4 Sikh with Coys of 3/3 GR were holding the defended positions on the western side of the Lohit river. All these posts were subjected to intermittent enemy bombardment throughout the operations.

(a) Patrol Base

'A' Coy 4 Sikh took over the position at Patrol Base from its 'B' Coy on 13 November. The main objective of the Indian troops at the post was to threaten the rear of the Chinese columns stationed at Green Pimple and Yellow Pimple and as such this Post was an eyesore to the enemy. Wherever patrols from the post were out, they came into contact with the enemy patrols. On 13 November, a patrol under Sub Harnam Singh was sent to cut off the enemy's route of supplies to its troops at Green and Yellow Pimples. The patrol came back after inflicting some casualties on a small enemy column, which was reportedly moving from Ashi Hill to Green Pimple(67).

The enemy launched an attack on Patrol Base for the first time at 2100 hrs on 15 November. The Coy Commander asked for artillery fire, and after being vetted by the GOC, 2 Inf Div (who was at Walong on that night), fire came down on the enemy, and the attack was beaten back. 'A' Coy position was attacked again and again, but the enemy was always beaten back, and the position held resolutely. The battle raged furiously the whole night. The ammunition holdings with the Indians were being depleted seriously. To make matters worse, small enemy parties had infiltrated and cut off the maintenance route to the forward Companies(68). The QM Platoon then showed its mettle. Under Capt Inder Jit Kumar, the Platoon fought its way to the forward Companies, and delivered the much-needed ammunition. While performing this task, L/Hav Kirpa Ram, laid down his life. He was awarded a Vir Chakra.

Again, at 0430 hrs on 16 November, the enemy launched another attack at Patrol Base. This time 'A' Coy 4 Sikh could not withstand the enemy pressure and, after obtaining the approval of the Brigade, it was ordered to withdraw to take up position where the Mithun track and the Ladders' track met(69).

(b) Ladders'

At about 0300 hrs on 16 November, Ladders' position, which was being held by 'C' Coy of 3/3 GR under command 4 Sikh, was attacked frontally by a strong Chinese force from Ashi Hill(70). Direct firing weapons from Ashi Hill knocked out all the nine

bunkers then occupied by the Gorkhas, who suffered casualties. Maj N.B. Chand ordered his men to come out into the crawl trenches and to continue engaging the enemy. Capt G.S. Bajaj of 71 Hy Mor Bty shifted its fire to the area in front of Ladders'. However, the situation became critical when small groups of enemy started infiltrating to bring the Indian gun positions under small arms fire.

Coy Commander 3/3 GR requested the Bn HQ 4 Sikh for additional men and ammunition. But the Bn HQ had no reserves. 3/3 GR troops had to continue fighting with the man-power and ammunition that was available with them in the picquet area. The enemy continued firing and shelling. Ultimately, the Coy Cmr, feeling that his ammunition was almost finished, ordered his men to pull out. The troops managed to come out without much casualties, but the Coy Cmr could not(71).

(c) Maha Plateau/Lachhman Ridge/Mithun track

These positions were being held by 'C' Coy of 4 Sikh and 'D' Coy of 3/3 GR, under command 4 Sikh. Like the other posts on the western side of Lohit river, this location was also subjected to intermittent enemy bombardment throughout the day and night of 15 November. After the Chinese had over-run the 'A' Coy 4 Sikh position at Patrol Base by 0530 hrs on 16 November, they advanced on the position held by 'C' Coy 4 Sikh and 'D' Coy 3 GR. Prior to this, the enemy had already infiltrated between Mithun track and Maha Plateau.

The enemy's first attack came at 0530 hrs. Sub Kharak Bahadur Gurung of 3/3 GR ordered his platoon to open fire only when the Chinese were very near, and the attack failed. The Chinese made second attempt to advance at 0630 hrs, but were again pushed back with heavy casualties. In the fighting, Indian troops, too, suffered heavily.

A platoon from 'B' Coy 4 Sikh was sent, under Sub Jaswant Singh, to stop the enemy's advance along Mithun track(72). By the time this reinforcement reached the Plateau, the remnants of 'A' Coy from Patrol Base had also arrived there, which increased the strength of the Indian troops at the track. But after further attacks by the enemy, the Indian troop positions were over-run. Both the Coy Commanders were made PsOW and the troops dispersed.

(d) West Ridge

After the Chinese had rolled over the Indian defences at Tri-Junction, they mounted a frontal attack on West Ridge, which was held by four platoons of 6 Kumaon. The attack did not succeed. Then the Chinese fanned out. The next attack came with an overwhelming superiority of numbers from three sides, aided by Medium Machine Gun fire and heavy artillery bombardment. Since the capture of the position by the enemy would have opened the West Ridge approach to Walong and threatened the troops in the forward defended localities with the likelihood of being cut off, the Coy Commander, Lt Bikram Singh, was asked to deny West Ridge to the enemy till 1100 hrs that day, at all cost(73). He successfully performed this task, and half an hour after the specified time, asked for permission to withdraw as he and his men stood encircled by the enemy. Some of the men - 1 JCO and 17 Other Ranks - managed to break through the Chinese ring, but the rest died fighting till the last, including the Coy Commander, Lt Bikram Singh.

(e) Mortar Position

Troops of 'A' and 'D' Coys of 4 Dogra, under Bn Rover Group, were at Mortar Position by the afternoon of 15 November, on their way to reinforce 6 Kumaon at Tri-Junction. Their move to the destination was very slow, as the route passed through thickly wooded area, and the troops were continuously under enemy's small arm and grenade fire(74). Meanwhile, the Chinese had also been able to infiltrate downwards. The enemy, approximately a battalion strong, opened up with Light Machine Guns, automatic rifles and had grenades. The troops of 4 Dogra held their ground and kept back the enemy till morning of 16 November, despite repeated attacks. But after the enemy had captured Tri-Junction, he concentrated all his troops against Bn Rover Gp and 'A' Coy, and the Dogras soon got encircled. At that stage, the troops learnt of the order for withdrawal. They, therefore, charged through the enemy and headed downward to reach Yapak-Lohit Junction at the earliest.

(f) Fighting on Eastern Bank of Lohit River

Two Coys ('A' and 'B') of 3/3 GR with one ('D') Coy 4 Sikh were deployed there under Bn HQ 3/3 GR. 'D' Coy 4 Sikh, under Lt Palta, was holding the forward-most post at High Plateau.

On 15 November, it was observed that a strong enemy force, approximately Bn plus, had crossed the river from the western to the eastern side. At about

0130 hrs on 16 November, this force attacked the left rear platoon of the Sikh Coy and quickly over-ran it. The Coy Commander collected some men from the remaining platoons and launched a counter-attack(75). During the battle, Lt Palta, the Coy Commander, provided exemplary leadership to his men and displayed personal courage and bravery of a very high order in the face of the enemy, for which he was awarded Vr C posthumously.

After the death of Lt Palta, 2/Lt P.S. Bhandari, the OP Officer, took over the command of the troops. By 0300 hrs, Coy HQ and the right rear platoon had also been over-run. The Sikhs fought with stubbornness and tenacity and lost 36 of their men, including the Coy Commander(76). The remnants held on to their positions supported by Arty and 3-in mortars till 1000 hrs, on 16 November. During the early hours of the day, efforts were made to re-inforce 4 Sikh, but the Gorkhas could not go beyond the southern edge of High Plateau. The Chinese were well established there, and all efforts failed to reach the Sikhs.

#### WITHDRAWAL FROM WALONG

During night 15/16 November, the enemy supported by mortar and RCL guns had assaulted all the Indian positions stretching from Tri-Junction on the western side to the High Plateau on the eastern side of Lohit river. Indian troops offered stiff resistance, but they had to vacate their positions. The situation at 1100 hrs on 16 November 1962 was(77):-

- (a) Tri-Junction and West Ridge held by troops of 6 Kumaon had been over-run by the enemy. The occupation of the West Ridge gave the enemy observation and small arms fire capability over the Dropping Zone, advanced Landing Ground and Bde HQ at Walong itself.
- (b) Patrol Base, Maha Plateau/Lachhman Ridge and Ladders' posts had been occupied by the enemy.
- (c) Firm Base, held by troops of 4 Dogra, stood surrounded by the enemy.
- (d) High Plateau, held by troops of 4 Sikh, had been captured by the enemy.
- (e) Troops of 3/3 GR holding Dong Plateau, Dong Hill and Dakota Hill stood encircled.

The Bde Commander had witnessed the battle for the capture of Yellow Pimple by his troops on 14 November. He had also seen the enemy counter-attacking the Indian troops on the entire length of the front from the western to the eastern side of the Lohit River, on 15/16 night. The Corps Commander and the Div Commander were at Walong with the Bde Commander from the afternoon of 15 November till they left Walong for Hayuliang by Otter at 1100 hrs on 16 November; while leaving Walong, the Corps Commander instructed 11 Mtn Bde Commander to hold the Defended Sector to the best of his ability. In the event of his position becoming untenable, he was instructed to fall back to an alternative position, and to plan for taking up a series of delaying positions, if that became necessary(78). The GOC IV Corps, confirmed his verbal instructions of withdrawal to Bde Commander 11 Mtn Bde in the evening, through a signal(79).

The enemy had succeeded in securing a foothold both on the western and eastern side of the Lohit river, and had been able to force the Indian troops back from their locations. He was now in a position to shell the Walong landing ground. Out of the four battalions of Indian troops, only four companies (2 Coys of 3/3 GR at Dong Plateau and 2 Coys of 4 Dogra at Bde HQ) were available with the Brigade, which had so far not come into contact with the enemy.

Finding his position untenable, the Bde Commander, at 1100 hrs on 16 November, gave orders for the withdrawal of troops from the forward areas and for the holding of Yapak feature. The decision to withdraw from Walong was taken to save whatever troops were still left.

The withdrawal plan was:-

- (a) All elements of the Brigade, less Infantry battalions, to clear brigade Check Point at Yapak Ti-Lohit River Junction between 1300 hrs and 1600 hrs.
- (b) Infantry battalions to abandon positions at 1700 hrs on 16 November.
- (c) Brigade less 3/3 GR to assemble at Sathi (which probably indicates the place Salti, south of Shet Ti on the western bank of the Lohit).
- (d) 3/3 GR Group (which included one Coy 4 Sikh and two Coys 3/3 GR) on eastern bank, to withdraw along east bank and join the Brigade column at Hawaii.

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- (e) Troops on the Western Flank (troops of 6 Kumaon, 4 Sikh and 4 Dogra) to withdraw along Yapak Ridge.
- (f) Left flank above Dropping Zone to be held by one Coy 4 Dogra, who were to withdraw after 4 Sikh had passed through.
- (g) Firm Base troops to break through the enemy and withdraw via Walong to the Brigade rendezvous.
- (h) One Coy 6 Kumaon plus on ad-hoc Coy 4 Dogra to hold a lay back position at Yapak Ridge until 0500 hours on 17 November.
- (i) All guns to be destroyed/rendered unserviceable after firing all remaining ammunition.

(A) 6 KUMAON/4 DOGRA

The troops at Tri-Junction and Mortar Post had already disintegrated before they received the orders for withdrawal at about 1200 hrs. They had a difficult time coming down to join the Brigade column due to the pressure from the enemy. They moved in small parties and the troops kept on trickling down to Tezu, till 4 December 1962.

6 Kumaon suffered the following casualties throughout the operations in this Sector:

	<u>Officer</u>	<u>JCOs</u>	<u>OR</u>	<u>Total</u>
Killed	2	6	110	118
Wounded				113
PsOW	6	5	161	172*

\* including 2 NCs(E)

4 Dogra, too, suffered heavy casualties, which included one Officer, 2 JCOs and 107 ORs(80).

(B) 4 SIKH

When the Bde Commander spoke to the Commanding Officer 4 Sikh on wireless a few minutes before 1200 hrs on 16 November, he, it appears, just gave an indication of withdrawal and nothing else. The CO sent his Adjutant to Walong to find out the real situation. Orders to the Coy Commanders for withdrawal were passed on by the Commanding Officer.

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about 1400 hrs. By that time, the enemy had infiltrated, and he ambushed the withdrawing troops. The Battalion withdrew to Tezu after marching for eight days. The 4 Sikh suffered a total of 180 casualties during the operations:

	<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>
Officer	2	1
JCOs	4	4
ORs	76	93

(C) 3/3 GR

The troops of 3/3 GR Group, which were ordered to rejoin the Brigade at Hawaii, could not do so for various reasons. The telephone lines between Bde HQ and the Battalion stood cut, and orders regarding withdrawal were received by them very late. During the withdrawal, they were repeatedly ambushed by the enemy and suffered heavy casualties(81).

In the battle of Walong, 11 Mtn Brigade had fought a defensive battle against heavy odds. It had attacked to gain a formidable feature, viz, Yellow Pimple, and nearly captured it, and finally carried out a planned withdrawal; all of which were without adequate artillery fire support and without administrative cover(82). The troops fought bravely, but being out-numbered and out-weaponed in automatics and ammunition, suffered heavily.

In this battle, 832 personnel were either killed, wounded or found missing. On the other hand, by an orderly withdrawal, about 1,700 troops were saved from being captured by the enemy(83).

The troops which took part in the fighting in Lohit Frontier Division were awarded one Maha Vir Chakra and ten Vir Chakras. The recipients of those awards were(84):-

Maha Vir Chakra

Sepoy Kewal Singh (Posthumous)      4 Sikh  
(No.334970)

Vir Chakras

Capt Prem Nath Bhatia                      6 Kumaon  
(IC-7077)

Capt Ravi Kumar Mathur                      6 Kumaon

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(IC-10156)

Capt Balbir Chand Chopra (MS-6455)	AMC
Lt Yog Raj Palta (Posthumous) (IC-11832)	4 Sikh
2/Lt Amar Singh Khatri (IC-12970)	6 Kumaon
2/Lt Pradeep Singh Bhandari (IC-12322)	Arty Regt
Naik Bahadur Singh (Posthumous) (No.4139362)	6 Kumaon
Hav Kirpa Ram (Posthumous) (No.3330962)	4 Sikh
Sub Jagandhoy Limbu	2 Assam Rifles
Rfn Purna Bahadur	2 Assam Rifles

With one third of the troops deployed in the Walong Sector having been killed, wounded or captured, it became necessary to induct more troops in the Lohit Frontier Division to check the advance of the enemy deep into the south of the Division. Orders were issued to induct another Brigade - 82 Inf Bde - with four Bns - 5/5 GR, 3 Grenadiers, 1/1 GR and 1 JG Rifles - into the Lohit Frontier Division. TAC of 82 Inf Bde and advance parties of 3 Grenadiers and 1/1 GR arrived at Chabua on 16 November for their move to Tezu(85). 4 Assam in Hayuliang was asked to perform the role of covering troops. With Hayuliang as the covering position, the new main defended sector in the Eastern Lohit was to be prepared in area Dening-Lohitpur-Tezu under 82 Inf Brigade with its four battalions(86).

REVIEW

In planning these operations, the Chinese had a tricky little problem to solve. The Lohit valley provided the only practicable ingress. At Kibithoo was a narrow gorge, and broadened out only near Walong. The hills to the east of the valley rose steeply from the river bed to a high elevation of more than 4,500 metres. No sizeable force could cross the high range to get behind the Indian positions at Kibithoo and Walong. The hills range to the west of Kibithoo along the McMahon Line was also high and difficult to cross. The bottleneck at Kibithoo therefore, had to be broken through by a front

attack before, a large force could be pushed through to advance deep into India. It was fortunate for the Chinese, therefore, that McMahon Ridge on the east bank of the Lohit was held by only one Coy of Indian troops, and Kibithoo itself was vacated by 6 Kumaon on orders of Headquarters IV Corps without much fighting.

After taking Kibithoo, the Chinese had the option of advancing towards Hayuliang via the Du Pass, which was a shorter route. But in that case, the Indian Brigade at Walong could threaten the flank, and could bottle up the invaders by advancing and recapturing Kibithoo. So, the Chinese were compelled to capture Walong and neutralise the brigade there.

At the start of the operations, the Chinese had a battalion at Rima(87). By the time the hostilities ceased, they had a brigade at Rima, and perhaps another brigade around Ashi Hill area. Field Artillery had also been brought up and moved forward, giving a clear superiority to the Chinese in strength and fire power(88).

After the withdrawal of the Indian troops from Kibithoo on 22 October 1962, the enemy was in a position concentrate more troops to the south of McMahon Line. By 12 November 1962, it was known that the enemy had about one Infantry Division on the Indian side of the McMahon Line with necessary artillery support, and was holding the heights in strength in prepared positions(89). The Bde Commander was aware that he had no reserve troops, which could be moved forward to reinforce the assaulting troops, nor enough artillery fire. But in spite of all this, he committed his troops to an abortive attack on Yellow Pimple on 14 November. By launching an offensive in the face of superior enemy strength and fire power, it is often asserted that the Bde Commander wasted his men and material and enabled the enemy to counter-attack his troops, with full vigour, on the whole front, which resulted in his defeat. In view of the Chinese superiority, it could be said that the decision to launch an offensive on 14 November 1962 by the 11 Mountain Brigade, which had been approved by Div Commander and Corps Commander also on 12 November, was not a tactically sound decision. On the other hand, the Brigade Commander has argued that Yellow Pimple was reported unoccupied, and he had to try and occupy it to prevent the enemy going along the ridge and coming down behind the Brigade positions(90). Mere passive defence was certainly no prescription for victory. In any case, the performance of the Indian Army in the Walong sector was far better than in the Kameng sector.

THE SUBANSIRI FRONTIER DIVISION

TOPOGRAPHY

Subansiri Frontier Division is named after the big river which drains its eastern and northern parts. This Division lies to the east of Kameng Frontier Division. The northern portion of this Division is lined by the great Himalayan Range and in the north-east this Range recedes into Tibet. An offshoot of the Himalayan Range separates it from the Siang Frontier Division in the east. In the south, a narrow belt of Terai merges into the northern plains of Assam(91). This Frontier Division now stands divided into two Administrative districts - Lower and Upper Subansiri.

Lower Subansiri District

Itanagar, which is the capital of present Arunachal Pradesh (erstwhile NEFA) lies in the extreme south of this district. Other important towns of this district are Kimin and Ziro, which were connected by road during 1962, covering a distance of 90 km (55 miles)(92).

A track existed from Ziro to Dharmu, near the Indo-Tibet border covering a distance of approximately 290 km (180 miles). The track ran mostly along the south bank of Kurang, a river, tributary of the Subansiri and cut across numerous smaller tributaries and many intervening ridges. The route from Ziro to Sarli covered a distance of about 208 km (130 miles). From Sarli, Dharmu could be reached by two routes. The shorter one was through the Vatey or Wasi valley, approximately 80 km (50 miles) long, and the longer one through Milli, covered approximately 120 km (74 miles). Sarli was situated on the north bank of Kurung river and a track from this area also led north-east to Takaing(93).

Upper Subansiri District

The Upper Subansiri District comprised mainly of the Longju area and the Subansiri Valley. The Longju area lay in the extreme north-east of the Upper Subansiri District. The prominent villages of this area were Migyitun (in Tibet), Longju, Roi and Maja. On account of its nearness to the international boundary, no landing-ground had been built in the area, though Maja village was being used as a Dropping Zone(94). The nearest landing ground was at Lemeking, a small town approximately 51 km to the south-east of Maja along the track route. Maja, 10 km (6 miles) south of Longju, was 2 days' marching distance from Lemeking(95).

Longju could be reached from Lemeking, Daporijo and also from Menchukha (Siang Frontier Division) by foot-paths passing through dense forests. At places, there were ladder climbs and indigenous suspension bridges which made the journey hazardous and exhausting. The trekking from Lemeking to Longju took three days and nearly the same from Menchukha, but more than a week from Daporijo(96).

Like the Longju region, the Subansiri Valley Region also lacked good communications. Here too tracks were risky and inconvenient. The villages in the valley were Lung (in Tibet), Asaphila, Takaing and Lemeking(97).

A recce of the track from Daporijo to Takaing and then to Maja was carried out by Lt Col K.J.S. Chhatwal, OC 1/5 GR, from 8 March to 29 April 1961. Of the track from Daporijo to Taliha, covering a distance of 41 km (26 miles), the portion upto 27 km (17 miles) was jeepable and the rest of the route was being made fit for a jeep. From Taliha the track went up to Lemeking after covering a distance of 104 km (65 miles). From Lemeking, where a Landing Ground was available the route led to Gelenshiniak, at a distance of 19 km (12 miles). From Gelenshiniak, one track went to Takaing and the other to Maja(98).

About 3 km (2 miles) beyond Takaing, the track crossed Subansiri (Chari Chu). Here the track coming from Lung joined the track from Yume (both places in Tibet). The track to Maja from Gelenshiniak, throughout its distance of about 32 km (20 miles), ran along Tsari Chu and crossed the river many times before reaching Maja.

#### TROOP BUILD-UP

##### (A) Indian

Following the flight of Dalai Lama to India in March 1959 and the subsequent influx of refugees from Tibet, it was decided by the Government of India to strengthen the existing out-posts as well as to establish new posts on the Indo-Tibet border. Under this policy, two out-posts were set-up in the Subansiri Frontier Division(99). One at Longju and the other at Takaing. At that time, the 9th Battalion of the Assam Rifles was made responsible for the defence of Subansiri Frontier Division(100).

The setting up of the Assam Rifles post at Longju by India irked the Chinese and in a Note dated 23 June 1959 they accused Indian troops of intrusion and occupation of Migyitun, Samgur Sampo and other places in the Tibetan region of China and their collusion with Tibetan rebel bandits(101).

The allegations made by the Chinese Government were denied by the Indian government in its Note dated 26 June 1959. The Note said that the outpost at Longju, which was south of Migyitun, was on the Indian side of the traditional international border, and that the Tibetans seeking shelter in Indian territory were being given refuge in accordance with the accepted international usage. The Government of India also assured that they would always respect the traditional international frontier between India and the Tibet region of China and expressed hope that Government of People's Republic of China would do the same(102).

Without any provocation from the Indian side, on 25 August 1959, a strong Chinese detachment crossed into Indian territory, south of Migyitun in the Subansiri Frontier Division, and fired at the Indian soldiers stationed at Longju outpost(103). The Chinese force again encircled the post on 26 August 1959, and opened fire on it, which forced the Indian soldiers to abandon the post(104).

The post at Longju was not occupied by the Indian Army after being vacated by the Assam Rifles personnel on 26 August 1959, as a result of the understanding reached between the Prime Ministers of India and China to maintain status quo on the border(105).

When it was decided not to occupy Longju, a post was set up at Maja on 29 August 1959(106).

In November 1959, when 4 Inf Div was moved from Ambala Cantt to NEFA, 1/5 GR (FF) - a Battalion under 5 Inf Bde - was concentrated at Salorighat, on the right bank of river Bhareli, and the area of responsibility of this Battalion was Ziro(107).

With a view to have effective occupation of the entire frontier, it was decided to set up maximum number of AR posts near the border under 'OP ONKAR'. During the period starting from January 1962 to August 1962, the following eight AR posts were set up(108).

<u>Post</u>	<u>Date when set up</u>	
1. Milli	3 March 1962	} Closed } later on } opened at } Vatey.
Vatey	June 1962	

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2. Dharmu 11 January 1962
3. Pagak 25 May 1962
4. Kashongla 17 August 1962
5. Sagamla 16 May 1962
6. Tamala 13 May 1962
7. Potrang 06 April 1962
8. Asaphila 19 June 1962

Later, a post was established at Chimpung La on 16 October.

From May 1962 onwards, 2 J&K Rifles under Lt Col Ramphal Singh, started taking over from 1/5 GR (FF) in the Subansiri Frontier Division. The Unit established its HQ at Daporijo with rear HQ at North Lakhimpur(109).

On 4 October 1962, AHQ ordered IV Corps to reinforce Maja also with one Inf Coy(110). In response to that order from Army HQ, 4 Inf Div informed that the post at Maja could not be reinforced by one Rif Coy because no DZ was available in Maja area which was two days march from Lemeking, the nearest IAF approved DZ. Alternatively, it was suggested that the post at Maja be abandoned and a new post established at Besa Camp, approximately 7 km north of Maja(111).

Considering the enemy's threat on the border, ban on occupation of Longju, which was imposed in August 1959, was removed by the Army Headquarters on 16 November 1962. It also asked the Eastern Command to forward recommendations regarding establishing a post in the area with a view to preventing Chinese re-occupying Longju(112). On 22 October 1962, 5 Inf Bde was placed directly under command IV Corps(113).

On the eve of the Chinese aggression in October 1962, the area of Subansiri Frontier Division, for defence purposes, was divided into two sub-sectors - Kamla Valley sub-sector (Comprising the district of Lower Subansiri) and Subansiri sub-sector (Comprising the district of Upper Subansiri)(119). The Kamla Valley sub-sector was placed under the CO of 9 Assam Rifles with 'A' Wing HQ at Ziro and seven Platoons and four Sections of Assam Rifles personnel. The Battalion had its headquarters at Kimin(115).

Subansiri sub-sector was being looked after by 2 J&K Rifles and the deployment of its Coys was as follows(116):-

Takaing	- One Coy
Lemeking	- Bn TAC HQ with one Coy
Taliha	- One Coy
Daporijo	- Bn HQ with one Coy

Eleven platoons of 9 Assam Rifles with Wing HQ at Takaing were also under the operational command of this unit(117). In support at Daporijo were 69 Hy Mor Bty of 44 Hy Mor Regt(118) and Platoon of 'A' Coy 6 Mahar (MG)(119).

The Bn HQ with 'C' Coy, 69 Hy Mor Bty and Platoon less Sec MMG were ordered to move immediately from Daporijo to Taliha on 22 October 1962. The troops left at 0530 hrs on 23 October 1962 and reached Taliha on 24 October at 1600 hrs(120).

(B) Chinese

Across the border the Chinese had concentrated approximately one battalion each at Sangacholing and Chosam. These battalions were under the command of Regt HQ located at Lhuntse Dzong, which was linked by road to both these places. The Chinese had later on moved more troops into the area, bringing their strength to a full Brigade(121). The troops at Sangacholing posed a threat to Takaing while the troops at Chosam threatened Longju and Maja through Migyitun(122).

Chinese officers were reported to have been visiting Lhuntse Dzong and Sangacholing since July 1962. They had moved their frontier posts quite close to the Indian border. Defence preparations, road construction, storing of supplies and ammunition had been opposite Subansiri Frontier Division in the same way as in the area opposite the Kameng Frontier Division(123).

In fact, from the beginning of 1962, Chinese activities had increased on the border. In January 1962, two Chinese civilian officers, accompanied by one interpreter and two army personnel of the rank of Platoon Commanders, had crossed the border near Longju. They came upto a place known as Rol approximately one km south from Longju towards Maja(124).

On their side of the border, the Chinese had constructed a class 9 road from Tsethang - a fairly large Garrison town and the main logistic base for the Chinese Troops in Western Tibet - to Lhuntse Dzong and then from there to Chosam via Sangacholing. Migyitun on the border stood linked with Chosam through a jeep road. A mule-track existed from Migyitun to Longju on the Indian side of the border(125).

CHINESE ATTACK FORWARD POSTS

While the reports of concentration of Chinese troops across the border were coming in, the Indian posts at Asaphila, Sagamla, Tamala and Potrang were attacked on the morning of 23 October 1962, close on the heels of their massive attack in Kameng Frontier Division, with approximately a battalion group(126). In view of the heavy odds, all the AR personnel and regular army troops in the area were ordered to withdraw to Taliha from forward positions under the orders of IV Corps(127). For the purpose of withdrawal, all the troops were placed under Maj Naidu of 9 Assam Rifles, who had his HQ at Takaing. HQ 5 Inf Bde issued its withdrawal order at 1445 hrs on 23 October 1962, which laid down that(122):-

- (a) All AR and regular Army troops should move from area Takaing to Taliha.
- (b) All troops - regular and AR - located in area Takaing were placed under command Maj A.E. Naidu of 9 Assam Rifles for the completion of the task.
- (c) Personnel located at Sagamla, Tamala and Potrang and en-route were ordered to move direct to Taliha.
- (d) Asaphila post was to concentrate at Takaing by 1800 hrs on 23 October 1962.
- (e) Move ex Takaing was to be in batches, and the move was to commence immediately.
- (f) 2 J&K personnel were to leave Takaing not earlier than 2000 hrs on 23 October.
- (g) Efforts were to be made by the troops to bring back maximum ammunition and all arms.
- (h) Nothing useful was to be left undestroyed.
- (i) All bridges over Subansiri or other rivers/nullahs were to be destroyed.

- (j) If track Maja-Gelenshiniak-Lemeking was found blocked, move was to be through hills on southern bank of Subansiri river.
- (k) One staging section was to be established a few stages ahead of Taliha to supply rations to the withdrawing troops.

In the first enemy attack at Asaphila at about 1450 hrs on 23 October, one JCO and 17 ORs were reported killed/missing in action and the remainder joined Takaing defences around 1800 hrs, where 'B' Coy of 2 J&K Rifles had also arrived. Those troops covered the withdrawal of men from Sagamla, Tamala and Potrang, who reached Takaing on 24 October 1300 hrs(129). Takaing was shelled by the enemy with mortars at 1400 hrs on 24 October before it was abandoned by the Indian troops(130). On 25 October, the Chinese attacked and occupied Takaing(131).

Enemy build up opposite Longju was also reported(132) and the troops at Maja were ordered to withdraw direct to Lemeking(133). Indian troops abandoned Maja at 1500 hrs on 23 October, and it was occupied by the Chinese on 25 October(134). The troops withdrawing from Maja were attacked by the enemy near Reding, 8 km south of Maja(135).

The situation in Subansiri Frontier Division at midnight 28/29 October 1962 was that (a) the personnel of Assam Rifles at Vatey post were asked, on 26 October, to withdraw to Sarli, leaving behind two sections at Milli; (b) the Assam Rifles posts at Kashong La and Chimpung La with their elements from Pagak were ordered, on 26 October, to withdraw to Huri; (c) posts at Sagamla, Tamala and Potrang had been ordered on 22 October, to withdraw; (d) the Indian soldiers at Asaphila, who had been attacked by the Chinese on 23 October, had withdrawn to Taliha through Lemeking; and (e) the Indian soldiers at Maja had been attacked by the Chinese on their withdrawal from Maja at Reding(136). Chinese troops had fired with LMG, 2-in Mortar and Grenades(137).

#### INDIA STRENGTHENS DEFENCES

Towards the end of October, another Inf Div 2 Inf Div - was formed as already mentioned, to lead after the operations in Subansiri, Siang and Lohit Frontier Divisions. The new GOC, Maj Gen M.S. Pathania, accompanied by Cmdr 5 Inf Bde, visited Taliha on 28 October and discussed operational plans for the defences of the area(138). With the induction of more troops in the area in the wake of the formation of a new Inf Div, the operational responsibility of the 5 Inf Bde was confined to the defence of Subansiri and Siang Frontier Division and the whole area was named as sector 1(139).

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On 30 October 1962, GOC 2 Inf Div ordered his Sector Commanders to carry out active and aggressive patrolling in their respective areas of operational responsibility in order to:-

- i. dominate no man's land;
- ii. obtain more information regarding enemy, particularly his likely approach;
- iii. capture prisoners and obtain identification to gain information regarding enemy's future intentions; and
- iv. safeguard against possible enemy infiltration, ambushes and being surprised(140).

The Sector Commanders were further instructed by the GOC 2 Inf Div on 1 November 1962, not to withdraw any troops including AR platoons from any post without prior approval of Div HQ(141). The Bde Commander was also instructed to re-inforce and strengthen Lemeking and the troops withdrawing from Takaing were ordered to return to Lemeking(142).

With the induction of one more Inf Brigade in the area 192 Inf Bde - the operational responsibility and sector boundaries were re-organised and the defence of Subansiri Frontier Division - termed as Sector I - was entrusted to 5 Inf Bde exclusively(143). This re-organisation was to take effect from 13 November 1962(144).

The Commander 5 Inf Bde was also assured that as and when additional troops were available, one more Inf Battalion(145) would be allotted to his Sector, and he was asked to hold, at all costs - Lemeking - Taliha - Sarli and Huri(146). Units were not to be allowed to fight in penny packets any longer. Defences were to be organised on the basis of brigade defended sectors, or where the situation so merited, in battalion defended areas, with artillery support forming an integral part of the defences in either case(147).

All defence sectors were to be built up to a scale of five first line of ammunition and 28 days supplies(148). For ammunition, priority was to be given to artillery ammunition.

Reports were continuously coming in about the Chinese strengthening their defences in the area south of the McMahon Line. They were reported to have constructed new tracks(149). To meet the increasing Chinese threat, one Sec 3-in mortar and one detachment MMG were air-lifted from Taliha to Lemeking in three trips on 14 November 1962(150).

Another Bn - 1/4 GR - which moved to NEFA under 192 Inf Bde - was placed under 5 Inf Bde for the defence of Taliha(151). Bn less 'C' and 'D' Coys of 1/4 GR concentrated at Daporijo by 1630 hrs on 14 November and the 'C' and 'D' Coys reached Daporijo on 15 November. While 'B' Coy left for Taliha at 0600 hrs on 15 November, 'A' Coy, Bn 'O' Gp and all elements of SP Coy and Adm Coy left Daporijo at 0700 hrs on 16 November for Taliha. All these troops reached Taliha by 1630 hrs on 17 November. Due to non-availability of porters, 3-in mortars were carried by the troops. 'Long Ridge' near village Dochak was proposed as site of Bn defence area.

Position of Troops as on 18 November

(a) Indian

HQ 5 Inf Bde  
1/4 GR - North Lakhimpur

Bn HQ 1/4 GR with  
'C' & 'D' Coys - Daporijo

Bn 'O' Gp, all  
elements of SP & Adm  
Coys and 'A' & 'B'  
Coys of 1/4 GR - Taliha

2 J&K Rifles

Bn HQ 2 J&K Rifles - Taliha  
with two Coys

Bn TAC HQ of 2 J&K  
Rifles with two Coys - Lemeking

MMG Pl less one Det of  
'A' Coy 6 Mahar MG - Taliha

One Det of  
6 Mahar MG - Lemeking

Arty

69 Hy Mor Bty of 44  
Hy Mor Regt - Taliha

(b) Chinese

HQ IV Corps Op Instruction No.4 issued on 11 November 1962, mentioned that the Chinese probably had a regimental Group in Longju - Maja area. But it was unlikely that they would be able to build up more than a battalion group against Lemeking. So far as the Western Subansiri area was concerned, the enemy was unlikely to make any appreciable headway in that direction because of heavy snow in that area(152).

A straggler of 9 AR - Sepoy Puran Bahadur Limbu - from Maja reported on 16 November that approximately 2,000 Chinese troops were located in area Golenshiniak and that the troops held 2-in Mor, 3-in Mor, Hy Mor, MMG and flame throwers(153).

INDIAN TROOPS WITHDRAW FROM LEMEKING

While positioned at Lemeking, the troops of 2 J&K Rifles continued with their aggressive patrolling. On the other hand, the Chinese kept themselves busy in consolidating their gains made earlier and bringing forward reinforcements. They also moved up further from Rio bridge after having crossed the Subansiri river in Gelenshiniak area. One of the Indian patrols - one platoon of 'D' Coy of 2 J&K Rifles under 2/Lt M.R. Kishore - had contacted the Chinese troops on 4 November, north of river Subansiri. After exchange of fire with the enemy and inflicting some casualties, the patrol had moved back approximately 4 km from the place of the incident, and stayed there(154). The patrol had, later on, reported that the Chinese were constructing bunkers across river Subansiri and covering the Rio bridge by fire. Reports were also coming in that the Chinese were trying to out-flank Lemeking and Taliha.

On 18 November, at 1500 hrs, Chinese troops were seen advancing and approaching the location of the protective patrol, over the main track. When their forward element, about 200 strong, came within view and field of fire, the Indian troops opened up with four Light Machine Guns, 2-in Mortar and Rifles on the enemy. The enemy was apparently surprised and suffered many casualties. The firing continued for about 45 minutes. When the ammunition with the Indian troops had expended, they withdrew to Lemeking in the darkness of the night(155).

As the maintenance of the troops in the forward areas was posing a problem, coupled with heavy pressure from the advancing Chinese troops, the Indian troops were asked to withdraw to road-heads or to Dakota Landing Grounds(156). In pursuance of these orders, the troops at Lemeking/Taliha were told to withdraw to Daporijo and those at Sarli and Huri to Ziro.

On 20 November, HQ 5 Inf Bde issued detailed instructions to its two Bns - 2 J&K Rifles and 1/4 GR - for redeployment of their troops, after withdrawal from forward areas. The instructions were(157):-

- (a) Orderly withdrawal from Lemeking was to commence forthwith by fastest possible pace - both by day and night.
- (b) It was to be ensured that the troops did not get involved in a running fight with the Chinese.
- (c) The Garrison at Taliha was to be held by One Coy supported by Sec 3-inch Mor to cover the withdrawal of troops from Lemeking and then to withdraw to Daporijo.
- (d) After the troops had withdrawn to Daporijo, they were to guard all the approaches to Daporijo.
- (e) All the bridges en-route were to be prepared for demolition/destruction and were to be destroyed after the troops had crossed them.
- (f) Withdrawal was to be kept as secret as possible.
- (g) When abandoning the position, ammunition where possible was to be buried.
- (h) Mortar ammunition was to be rendered unserviceable by defusing.

When Army Headquarters came to know of the orders issued by the Brigade for withdrawal from Taliha to Daporijo, it reversed the orders and issued fresh instructions, which said that "5 Inf Bde will occupy defensive positions in Taliha-Daporijo and Ziro" and Assam Rifles posts "will continue to stay in present locations"(158), as on 21 November 1962.

Thus, as a result of the Chinese aggression, AR posts at the under - mentioned places were closed/withdrawn:-

- (1) Vatey
- (2) Dharmu
- (3) Pagak
- (4) Chimpung La
- (5) Kashong La
- (6) Potrang
- (7) Tamala
- (8) Sagamla

- (9) Asaphila
- (10) Takaing
- (11) Lemeking
- (12) Maja

The posts at Serial Nos (1) to (5) were not attacked by the Chinese but some stores, equipment, ammunition and rations had to be destroyed at these posts since carriage was not possible due to lack of porters when orders for withdrawal were given(159).

## OPERATIONS IN SIANG FRONTIER DIVISION

### TOPOGRAPHY

Siang Frontier Division, too, is named after the river which flows through it. The Great Himalayan Range in the north separates this Division from Tibet. Two mountainous barriers separate it from Subansiri Frontier Division in the west and Lohit Frontier Division in the east. The southern part is a plain but it is so thickly forested that it almost stands isolated from Assam. The Division now stands divided into two administrative districts - west and east Siang.

The northern part of this Division, bordering on Tibet, lies in west Siang District with its headquarters at Along. This area is very mountainous and its altitude ranges from 3,650 metres (12,000 ft) to 5,480 metres (18,000 ft). The level of even the river valleys is high. The area is crossed by more than a dozen mountain spurs jutting out of the Himalayan Range from the north-west to the south-east. The main spur separates the waters of two rivers, Siyom and Dihang or Siang (called Tsangpo in Tibet and Brahmaputra in Assam) flowing parallel to it. These rivers are joined by tributaries flowing from the south-west to the north-east and the north-east to the south-west. This criss-crossing of the watersheds has made travelling from one valley to another very difficult. The snow-line in the bordering areas in the north runs at a height of 4,560 metres (15,000 ft) and as such the crests of practically all local watersheds remain covered with perennial snow. The Lo La, Dom La (or Tunga La), Shoka La, Lamdo La, and Lusha La are the well-known passes on the border with Tibet.

Important villages near the border are Gelling, Korbo, Jidu and Tuting in the east and Menchukha in the west.

Tracks

Many tracks came from Tibet to the border villages of Siang Frontier Division. All of them, on their way downward merged with the main tracks which terminated either at Along or Pasighat.

(i) Kepang La - Gelling - Tuting - Pasighat track

A track came through Kepang La to Gelling, which was the first village on the Indian side of the border, approximately 10 km from the McMahon Line. The track then came down to Jidu and Tuting(160). A track coming from Korbo met this track at Jidu. The track coming from Lusha La also met this track at Tuting(161). From Tuting the track came down to Miging, Bomda, Ramsing, Karko, Rigo and Pasighat. This was the main route - also called the Pilgrimage route in the Siang Valley for trade among villages of the valley as well as with the Tibetans. It was also the main route for the villagers of the upper region to come down to Pasighat(162).

(ii) Tuting - Along track

A track came down from Tuting to Along. On its downward march it crossed the watershed between the Siang and the Siyom rivers, and met many paths coming from Shoka La and Tunga La. These paths were merely jungle trails over high mountains and could be used only during dry season. Following the Siyom valley, the main track reached Along, and continued on to hit the Siang again near Pangin.

TROOP BUILD-UP IN THE AREA

(A) Indian

Before the induction of regular troops, the responsibility for the border security was that of the Assam Rifles, which had deployed its 11th Bn in the Siang Frontier Division(163). In June 1959, one Platoon of the Bn stood positioned in Tamadam, 9 km north-west of Lo La. When the Chinese Government lodged a protest(164) against the occupation of Tamada, Indian troops, in October 1959, were withdrawn from Tamadam to Lamang, about 5 km south of Lo La(165) where a Section post had already been established in September 1959(166). Lo La (Pass) was approximately 103 km (64 miles) north-west of Along(167).

In November 1959, when 4 Inf Div took over the responsibility of defending the Indo-Tibetan border NEFA, 5 Inf Bde, with Assam Rifles units under operational control, was assigned the task of Subansiri, Siang and Lohit Frontier Divisions. After initial deployment and subsequent re-shuffle of units in July 1961, 2 Madras and 'A', 'B' and 'C' Wings

11 Assam Rifles remained in Siang Frontier Division for its defence. 2 Madras had its HQ, along with two Coys, at Along and the other two Coys were deployed in Tuting and Menchukha. The rear HQ of the Bn was at North Lakhimpur(168). HQ 11 Assam Rifles and its 'A' Wing were at Along and its 'B' and 'C' Wings were deployed in the Menchukha-Manigong and Pasighat/Tuting areas(169).

In February 1962, for the first time an advance party, consisting of one officer and 12 ORs, was moved from Tuting to Gelling and established a post there on 18 February(170). Gelling was approximately 40 km (25 miles) north-east of Tuting and 10 km (6 miles) south of McMahon Line(171).

Under Op 'ONKAR', new Assam Rifles posts were set up at the following places, by the middle of September 1962(172):-

<u>Summer Location</u>	<u>Winter Location</u>
Lamang	No Change
Henker	No Change
Nayu La	Jorging
Shoka La	-do-
Lamdo La (Nambui Diba)	Sonsi
Lusha La (Maney)	No Change
Hunters' Track (Muglam)	-do-

When troops were moved from Tuting to Gelling, orders were issued to reinforce Tuting by sending troops from Along(173).

With the start of OP 'LEGHORN' in the Kameng Frontier Division in early September 1962, Corps HQ directed 5 Inf Bde, on 20 September, to take all measures to ensure the security of this Sector against Chinese incursions. Cmr 5 Inf Bde was assured that more troops were being sent to his Sector. He was also directed to reinforce Menchukha by one Coy and Tuting by Bn HQ and Coy as early as possible but not later than 10 October 1962(174).

In response to the orders issued by Corps HQ, Rover Gp 2 Madras was established at Tuting on 20 September(175). When 62 Inf Bde moved from Ramgarh to NEFA in September 1962, two of its Bns 2/8 GR and 4 Sikh, were placed under 5 Inf Bde. Of these two Bns, 2/8 GR was earmarked for the defence of Siang Frontier Division.

The border areas in the Siang Frontier Division were divided into three sub-sectors for defence purposes. viz., MENCHUKHA, MANIGONG and TUTING. The deployment of troops in those sub-sectors as well as in Along/Pasighat areas on the eve of the Chinese invasion was as follows(176):-

(a) Menchukha sub-sector CO 2/8 GR (Lt Col D.A. Taylor) was Commander of this sub-sector which was divided into three areas (i) MENCHUKHA (ii) NISANGONG area (iii) LAMANG area. HQ 2/8 GR with 'A' Coy, some elements of 'C' Coy of 2/8 GR, Coy 2 Madras, 'B' Wing of 11 Assam Rifles with 3 Platoons and a sec 3-in mortar and two sec MMG ex 6 Mahar (MG) were distributed in all the areas under this sub-sector.

(b) Manigong sub-sector was placed under command of CO 11 Assam Rifles (Lt Col R.P. Gautam). The troops available to this sub-sector HQ 'B' Sub Wing of 11 Assam Rifles and 3 Platoons, sec 3-in mortar and sec MMG ex 6 Mahar (MG) were deployed in the (i) Manigong and (ii) Tadadege area.

(c) Tuting sub-sector. This sub sector, under the command of CO 2 Madras (Lt Col S.K. Mushran) had, under its jurisdiction, the following areas:-

- i. Tuting town area.
- ii. Gelling area.
- iii. Guyor La - Korbo axis.
- iv. Tinpatta - Jidu axis.
- v. Lusha La axis and
- vi. Jorging axis.

HQ 2 Madras less Coy, HQ 'C' Wing and 'C' Sub Wing 11 Assam Rifles along with 8 Platoons, and 70 Hy Mor Bty ex 44 Hy Mor Regt were deployed to cover all the areas under this sub-sector.

(d) Along/Pasighat: Battalion HQ and HQ 'A' Wing of 11 Assam Rifles along with 4 Platoons were deployed in this area.

All the troops were being maintained by air Kalinga Airways, for which ALGs were available only in Along, MENCHUKHA and Tuting. Ammunition was held on authorised scales, because additional ammunition could not be sent to forward posts due to lack of porters(177).

(B) Chinese

By the end of June 1962, the Chinese had brought under their control Pemako area of Tibet opposite north-eastern part of Siang. They were also reported to have occupied several villages near the border(178). Later, in August 1962, the Chinese troops moved forward close to the Indian border at Tamadam and even entered Lo La. They had re-inforced Nagiti and Nayu and were rapidly constructing roads to the Indian border and parallel to it(179).

The Chinese had constructed some mule tracks through the difficult terrain from Tsela Dzong - their Div HQ - to the border. Temo Gumpa was the road head on the north bank of Tsangpo. The road to Temo Gumpa branched off from the main Lhasa - Chamdo high-way at Nagiti(180). They also built tracks from Nayu and Milling, which led to group of passes between Longju and Gelling(181).

From the information gained through Tibetan refugees it was clear that some war-like activities were afoot on the Tibetan side of the border. In August 1962, two jawans of Assam Rifles from patrol which had gone to Lo La were found missing. It was believed that they had been taken prisoners by the Chinese to gain information on the Indian defences(182). These activities of the Chinese confirmed other reports(183) that the Chinese would launch an attack sometime in October 1962.

When the hostilities started in October 1962, the Chindes had five battalions deployed opposite Siang Frontier Division. Of these battalions, one each was at Tsela Dzong, Nayu/Milling and Pemako area and the remaining two were on the border(184). These troops posed a direct threat to Manigong and Menchukha in the west and Gelling, Korbo and Tuting in the east of the division(185).

CHINESE ATTACK INDIAN FORWARD POSTS

Menchukha sub-sector

On 21 October 1962, at about 1000 hrs, when a patrol from Lamang to Lo La was near the Pass, it observed about one Coy of the Chinese troops there. The patrol saw an officer, briefing those troops. The patrol took no offensive action but merely withdrew to Lamang and passed back the information. On that very day, the Chinese occupied Lasam - about 45-minute walk from Lamang towards the border(186).

Next day, the AR platoon at Lamang, which consisted of about 30 men, set up an CP between Lamang and Lasam. The enemy, more than 100, advanced from Lasam and attacked Lamang by 1800 hrs on 23 October 1962. Indian troops were forced to open fire on them. Fierce fight continued till 2100 hrs. When the Chinese fired Verey Lights, it showed that the Indian post stood surrounded except from the south. Under orders of IV Corps(187) the AR platoon was asked, on radio, to withdraw to Menchukha. While the troops were withdrawing, there was a fight with the enemy at Pokhar Valley, in which five AR soldiers and three civilian posters were killed. Chinese occupied Lamang while the Indian troops concentrated at Menchukha.

Manigong sub-sector

In this sub-sector, patrols were being organised from Tadadege area to observe Dom La and Gingtung Pass on alternative days. On 20 October, a patrol to Dom La saw two Coys of Chinese troops at the pass. They had destroyed the boundary marker put up by the Indians earlier. The patrol sent a runner back with this information and itself withdrew about a km below Dom La.

On 21 October, on the orders of the sub-sector Commander Jem Rai and 30 men moved from Henkar to occupy Gingtung. When they found the Chinese already on the pass, the patrol did not take any offensive action and withdrew on night 22/23 October. Next day, i.e. on 23 October, a patrol led by CO himself found the enemy digging defences there(188).

Considering the situation in the area, HQ IV Corps ordered, on 23 October, the withdrawal of AR posts at Henkar and Tadadege to Manigong(189). But the orders could not reach the troops and they remained at those posts.

The Chinese attacked Jem Rai's post (on Henkar-Gingtung tr) on 24 October 1962, and pushed back the Indian troops to Henkar. Simultaneously, the post on the Henkar-Dom La tr was also attacked by the Chinese. After some fighting, the troops were ordered to withdraw. Jem Rai's platoon was asked to remain at Papikrong and the rest of the troops were to go to Manigong(190).

By 1930 hrs on 26 October, enemy was able to by-pass Papikrong area and advanced towards Manigong. Manigong was later attacked by the enemy at 0600 hrs on 28 October, and the Indian troops withdrew to Karo by 1800 hrs on 29 October. Later, when the enemy was reported to have withdrawn from Manigong, an attempt was made from Karo to recapture Manigong but failed.

Maj P.A. Rege (IC-3174) of Dogra Regiment, who was commanding the troops in this sub-sector as 2 I/C 11 Assam Rifles, was awarded Vr C for his role during the whole action.

Tuting sub-sector

In the Tuting sub sector, only the Indian post at Lamdo La was attacked by the Chinese in October 1962. No.5 platoon of 11 Assam Rifles was deployed at Dilerrock (two stages below the pass) with the patrol base at Nambui Diba (one stage below the pass) and with an OP at the pass under L/Nk Hasta Bahadur Gurung. At 1500 hrs on 24 October 1962, the Chinese attacked the OP with approximately one Coy(191). Three ORs were killed and two wounded. L/Nk Hasta Bahadur Gurung and Rfn Baji Ram Thapa were awarded Vr C for their gallant action and bravery. After this incident, troops at Lamdo La, Nayu La and Shoka La were ordered to withdraw to Jorging. Later on the troops at Jorging were ordered to withdraw to Tuting after destroying stores and equipment there(192).

On 26 October, the troops at Lusha La (AR platoon No.13) were ordered to fall back to Ogong due to heavy snowfall at Lusha La. This platoon reached Ogong on 3 November 1962.

Thus, by the end of October 1962, the Chinese had ingressed upto Lamang (Menchukha sub-sector), Manigong (Manigong sub-sector) and Jorging (Tuting sub-sector) in the Siang Frontier Division(193).

INDIA STRENGTHENS DEFENCES

The new GOC of 2 Inf Div, along with the Brigade Commander arrived at Tuting on 28 October 1962(194). The next day, the Corps Commander also visited Tuting. As a result of the discussions held during that visit, Maj Dikshit, Coy Cmr of 2 Madras, with a Section was sent to Chondrak with orders to halt further withdrawal of Jorging troops and to organise defences at Chondark. Construction of defences at Pango was also started and a party was sent to recce for a position where a section could be deployed to cover different tracks from Ogong. The next day, 70 Hy Mor Bty of 44 Hy Mor Regt fired some rounds for registration of targets in front of the main defensive position at Tuting(193). Maj Gen M.S. Pathania, GOC, 2 Inf Div, after reconnaissance of the forward areas, ordered the Sector/sub-Sector commanders to carry out aggressive patrolling and not to withdraw any troops, including Assam Rifles, from any post without his prior approval(196).

On 5 November, 5 Inf Bde was ordered to establish a firm base at Karoroti, south of Manigong, and send recon patrols to locate and keep contact with the enemy. Withdrawal of forces on mere information about the presence of the enemy was ruled out. If, however, forced by enemy action, troops could withdraw to Tato or Pangri, as the situation warranted. 5 Inf Bde was also ordered to send a strong self-contained fighting patrol ex Menchukha to Tato to establish a firm base there. At the same time, IV Corps was requested to place more Otters at Along and Tezu to induct more troops at Menchukha at a very high priority in view of the enemy moves in the area of Lungthey and Tato(197).

The Corps Commander, after his visit to the forward areas of this Sector was of the view that as the enemy was building up in strength against Menchukha, he was likely to isolate the Indian troops there(198). Some elements of 2/8 GR were air-lifted to Menchukha from Along and Walong on 10 November 1962(199). Consequent upon the induction of one more Inf Bde under 2 Inf Div, the defence of Siang Frontier Division was made the responsibility of that Inf Bde - 192 Bde.

The Corps Commander, in his OP Inst. No.4 dated 11 November 1962, mentioned that the enemy was closing the ring around Menchukha by a double flanking movement through Dom La - Henkar - Manigong and via Lo La - Lamang. As the ingress into that sector was easy, the enemy would soon be in a position to either directly invest Menchukha or cut off its ground line of communications via Tato or both. There being no Indian troops between Along and Menchukha, the enemy had the option even to by-pass Menchukha and head for Along. It was also estimated that the enemy was able to muster approximately a regimental group for this task(200). Still, GOC 2 Div was directed to hold Gelling - Tuting - Menchukha and Along, at all costs. Units were not to be allowed to fight in penny pockets any longer. Defences were to be organised on the basis of brigade defended sectors, or, where the situation so merited, in battalion defended areas with artillery support forming an integral part of defences in either case.

192 Inf Bde, which had been ordered at the end of October to move (ex 23 Inf Div) with its two battalions to NEFA, could assume the operational responsibility in Siang Frontier Division only on 12 November 1962, when its HQ were air-lifted from Chabua to Along(201). Its two Bns - 1/4 GR and Dogra - were, however, inducted into Subansiri area.

Lohit Frontier Divisions respectively. In Siang Frontier Division, 192 Inf Bde, had under command 2 Madras and 2/8 GR at that time.

The Bde Commander made some changes in the operational plans, one of which was the division of his area of responsibility into two sub-sectors i.e., Menchukha and Tuting, instead of the existing three sub-sectors of Menchukha, Manigong and Tuting(202).

The orbat and location position of the troops deployed in Siang Frontier Division on 16 November 1962(203) was as follows:-

Along

HQ 192 Infantry Brigade with 2 Coys 2/8 GR ('B' and 'D' which after being flown out of Walong, had concentrated at Along by 16 November)(204).

- HQ 11 Assam Rifles with one platoon

(a) Menchukha sub-sector

Bn HQ 2/8 GR with 2 Coys

1 Coy 2 Madras with 3-in Mor platoon

Section MMG 'A' Coy 6 Mahar (MG)

'B' Wing of 11 Assam Rifles with 6 Platoons and section MMG.

(b) Tuting sub-sector

Bn HQ 2 Madras with 3 Coys

2 Pls 'A' Coy 6 Mahar (MG) less section

10 Pls of 11 Assam Rifles

Arty

70 Hy Mor Bty

Chinese were also concentrating their forces more and more opposite Manigong/Menchukha. Reports were being received from the locals that the enemy was digging on the Ridge, south of Manigong. One Machine gun/anti-aircraft gun had been seen by Indian supply aircraft on 9 November 1962, on the School Ridge. Unconfirmed reports indicated that approximately 240 enemy troops were seen moving from Naigong to Gasheng. It was concluded that the Chinese had concentrated a full battalion in Manigong.

TROOPS WITHDRAWN FROM MENCHUKHA

A column of approximately two Coys of Chinese troops appeared over a kilometre north-west of the Nisangong defences on tr Yarlung - Menchukha on 17 November. The jawans engaged the enemy with MMG and 3-in mortars(205). The enemy retaliated with 60-mm mortar fire. The fire continued for about an hour. Thereafter the enemy retreated towards Yarlung and was seen digging defences about 725 metres away from the Indian post(206).

The Bde Commander flew into Menchukha at 1000 hrs to study the situation there(207). The defence plan was discussed by the Bn Commander with the Bde Commander and it was felt that troops, located in Menchukha area, were far too few to deny Menchukha to the enemy(208). Bde Commander ordered 2/8 GR to keep the enemy engaged opposite Nisangong(209). Further induction into Menchukha of 2/8 GR troops, which were concentrated at Along, however, could not be continued due to poor flying conditions. The Bde Commander then flew to Chabua in the afternoon to meet the GOC 2 Inf Div there in response to the signal received by him from Div HQ. While Bde Commander was at Chabua, he received orders directly from IV Corps. The order stopped the movement of two Coys of 2/8 GR from Along to Menchukha and asked the Bde Commander to withdraw his troops from Menchukha for the defence of Along. This withdrawal of troops from Menchukha was to start immediately, by night. Men with light weapons were to march back while heavy weapons were to be air-lifted(210).

In the same signal given by GSO-1, 2 Inf Div HQ, endorsed for information, to the Div Commander (who was at that time at Lohitpur), the Div HQ mentioned:-

"Withdrawal from MENCHUKHA without giving fight no recommended (.) events in WALONG should not unduly influence us in other sectors (.) submit you take up again with Corps Comdr(.)"(211).

In accordance with the orders of IV Corps received by the Bde Commander, he issued orders to the Commanding Officer 2/8 GR for a 'fighting withdrawal' of Gorkha and attached troops to Tato on night 18/19 and 19/20 November 1962(212).

On 18 November, the Bde Cmdr again visited Menchukha. Considering the enemy concentration vis-a-vis Indian strength, it was again felt both the Bde Commander and the Bn Commander that the position of Menchukha was untenable. So

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Withdrawal of the troops was to be effected as per orders. While withdrawing, the troops were to hold an intermediate position at Rego(213).

The beginning of withdrawal of Menchukha troops had just been made when the Chinese started shelling 2 Madras Coy position at Saung at 1645 hrs. The enemy was engaged by mortars. Intermittent firing continued till 2200 hrs. It became apparent that the enemy was trying to encircle Menchukha during the night 18/19 November. The CO 2/8 GR spoke to BM, 192 Inf Bde, at 1715 hrs, on wireless and informed him that in view of the latest enemy threat, he might have to pull out his troops on night 18/19 November instead of night 19/20 November, as earlier planned. Wireless contact between Bn 2/8 GR and Bde HQ was lost on night 18/19 November at 0300 hrs(214).

After having informed the BM, 192 Inf Bde, the CO 2/8 GR decided that for withdrawal of troops, a hunters' track, leading to south of Tato, should be followed. Lt Col D.A. Taylor, CO, with 35 men went out with a civilian surveyor to find an easy track. That party never joined the main party again. The main party under Maj S.N. Dar continued downward(215). But on 20 November, the main party led by Maj Dar was scattered by an enemy ambush on track Menchukha-Tato. The party had to abandon the original route of withdrawal and took a more hazardous track over snow-clad pass to Tagin-Taliha-Daporijo. Some of the troops reached Tato by 0900 hrs on 21 November. By that time, the Chinese had also reached there and the Indian troops marched down to Yapuk and were there by 0700 hrs on 22 November(216).

Unfortunately, the withdrawal started slightly un-coordinated. Men carried no rations and in some cases protection against severe cold was inadequate. Route taken to Tagin was very difficult, sparsely used even by locals. It rained and snowed throughout. Most of the men got exhausted and fell victim to frost-bite. Lt Col Taylor, CO, the Adjt Capt Ghosh and RMO Lt Sharma - all of 2/8 GR and Maj Pimple of 2 Madras died of exhaustion. Total casualties of 2/8 GR were 3 Officers and 39 ORs. Two Officers and 10 ORs were made PsOW(217). Out of the total force of 13 Officers, 18 JCOs and 826 ORs and NCsE at Menchukha, 8 Officers, 4 JCOs and 150 ORs and NCsE were reported to be either killed/missing or taken as prisoners of war(218).

The Bde Commander, 192 Inf Bde, on his first visit to Menchukha on 13 November, after taking over the operational responsibility of the Siang Frontier Division, had represented to the Div and Corps Commanders (who were present on that day at Menchukha) for early induction of more troops there. He also pleaded that as Arty fire support was not sufficient, a complete Hy Mor Bty be inducted into the area. Due to over-all shortage of troops, neither of these requests was acceded to. When on 17 November, for the first time, the enemy contacted the Indian troops in Menchukha area, the Sub-sector Commander (OC, 2/8 GR) and the Bde Commander felt that the Indian troops were positively far too weak to deny Menchukha to the enemy. But the enemy column, which had contacted the Indian troops at Nisangong on 17 November, had a strength of approximately 200 only. Against this, the Indian forces in Menchukha Garrison numbered more than 800 regular troops plus AR platoons(219). It appears that the Commanders just lost the heart to give a fight to the enemy before withdrawing. They thought it prudent and safe to withdraw before the enemy could encircle them. The Bde Commander, when he met the Corps Commander on 17 November, perhaps expressed his inability to defend the Menchukha Garrison with the troops there. The Corps Commander, influenced by the events in the Walong Sector (where the Indian troops had suffered badly only a day before), seemed to have yielded to Bde Commander's request and agreed to the withdrawal of troops of Menchukha Garrison.

It seems strange that while taking the decision to withdraw the troops from Menchukha, the GOC 2 Inf Div and his staff were not adequately consulted. This is evident from the signal sent by GSO-1, 2 Inf Div to his Commander in which he requested the latter to take up the matter regarding the withdrawal of troops from Menchukha with the Corps Commander(220).

#### TUTING ABANDONED

On 19 November 1962, at 1530 hrs approximately two Coys of enemy troops contacted the Kepang post(221). At that time, one platoon 2 Madras AR troops was to the east of the Madras. Some Chinese had also been laid in front of the defences. The Chinese launched the attack from right of Kepang and the troops at the pass retreated to Gelling. The place found(226) deserted, as the Indian troops there had already withdrawn to Tuting(222).

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Even before the Indian troops had been contacted by the enemy at Kepang La on 19 November, the Commander 192 Inf Bde had asked CO 2 Madras at 1450 hrs to move his troops from Tuting. He was informed that heavy weapons, e.g. 4.2-in Mors, MMGs, WSs eqpt - would be flown out from Tuting and for this he was asked to hold the airfield up to last light 20 November for air-lifts. He was also asked to make use of darkness for moving his troops for the first two nights(223).

It seems the troops at Tuting started withdrawing at 0300 hrs 19/20 November(224) night although the CO, 2 Madras had been specifically asked to hold the Landing Ground till last light of 20 November. When all the troops in Tuting area had crossed over the Siang bridge to Jidu area on the evening of 20 November, the bridge was destroyed(225).

As in the case of withdrawal from Menchukha, here too the Bde Commander was apprehensive about the ability of his troops to defend Tuting, once the enemy attacked. Hence, at 1450 hrs on 19 November, even before the enemy contacted the forward Indian post at Kepang La at 1530 hrs that day, the Garrison at Tuting had been ordered to withdraw. Once the troops had received the withdrawal order, they started moving down even though they had been asked to hold the airfield up to last light 20 November so as to evacuate the heavy equipment. Instead, heavy equipment, like 4.2-in mortars, was destroyed(226).

INDIAN TROOPS STAY AT ALONG

While the troops were falling back from forward areas, 2 Inf Div asked 192 Inf Bde to concentrate at Pasighat. 11 Assam Rifles was made responsible for the defence of Along and also to assist in the withdrawal of the units.

Army HQ reacted immediately to these orders of 2 Inf Div and, instead, ordered 192 Inf Bde to occupy defensive positions around Along. The AR posts were asked to stay on where they were at that time(227).

After the Cease-fire, 192 Inf Bde was asked to re-occupy Tuting with AR troops if it was un-occupied by the enemy. A platoon of 11 Assam Rifles occupied it on 25 November(228).

Thus ended the operations in the Siang Frontier Division.

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Mana, Niti and Tun Jun Passes were also approachable only by mule tracks, which all converged at Joshimath on the Alknanda branch of the Ganga. The Mana village was approximately at equal distance from Joshimath and Mana Pass, the total distance from Joshimath to the Pass being about 100 km. From Joshimath, a track going up the Dhauli Ganga led to Niti Pass as well as Tun Jun La. At the important village of Malari, the track to Tun Jun La branched off to the right to go up the Girithi Ganga which joined the Dhauli Ganga near-by. While Niti village was the last inhabitant place on the track to Niti Pass, the important staging points were Rim Kin and Ghamsali on the track leading to the Tun Jun La. The Kungribingri and Darma Passes were accessible only from Milam village over extremely difficult mule tracks. Lipu Lekh Pass was crossed by the track from Pithoragarh, passing through Jibti and Garbyang. The Lipu Lekh Pass was the tri-junction of the international borders of India, Nepal and Tibet, in the West-Central region of the Central Sector of the border.

The Tibetan region opposite Himachal Pradesh and U.P. border stood least consolidated by the Chinese till 1959. In end 1959, the Chinese inducted some engineer troops in the region for road-building, so as to extend their roads/tracks upto the main passes on the border. Approaches from Gartok or other centres to many of the passes on the border were approximately 160 km (100 miles) over difficult country and across several rivers. Efforts were being made by the Chinese to construct a pucca road from Gartok to Shipki La. The alignment of this road was the same as the old Indo-Tibet trade route. A road branched off from the Gartok-Shipki La road to Tolingmath, which was being converted into an important military station. Feeder tracks from Tolingmath to Mana and Niti passes existed.

Taklakot in Tibet opposite Lipu Lekh Pass in the east stood connected with Parkha, which was on the main highway coming from Gargunsa (GAR DZONG) (234).

The boundary throughout the West-Central region lay along the main watershed between the Spiti River and the Pare Chu, between the tributaries of the Satluj and between the Ganges and the upper Satluj basins. In this region, the Chinese alignment also conformed for the most part to the traditional Indian alignment. Only in four areas did it diverge from the watershed to include certain pockets of Indian territory in Tibet - the Spiti area (Chuva and Chuje), Shipki Pass, the Nelang-Jadhang area (Sang and Tsungsha), Bara Hoti (wu-je), Sangcha Malla and Laphthal(235).

The Chinese claim was that in the Spiti valley the boundary ran along the Karitha nullah, west of Kaurik, while in the Shipki La area (Kinnaur district) it should be 7 km (4 miles) west of Shipki La. In the Nelang-Jadhang area, the Chinese claimed that the boundary lay along the Himalayan range and not the watershed, and as such these two villages, which lay between the main Himalayan range and the watershed, belonged to them. The distance between the Indian border and the one claimed by China was about 31 km (19 miles). Similarly, in the Bara Hoti area, Tun Jun La was the natural dividing line between the catchment areas of the rivers Dhauli Ganga and the Satluj. But the Chinese claimed not only the Bara Hoti plain but also a large stretch of territory including Girthi valley and Niti valley. The Bara Hoti question was discussed between the officials of the two Governments in 1955 and again in April-June 1958, when both the Governments reiterated their view-points(236). To other areas of dispute in this region, neither side attached much importance.

#### DEPLOYMENT OF TROOPS

##### (A) Indian

The then DMI, Army HQ, in September 1959, had recommended that as Shipki La provided an easy access to the Chinese for entry into Himachal Pradesh, it should be held by approximately a Coy, with the battalion base at Rampur(237). But, the arrangement under which the policing of the border in the area was being done by five companies of Provincial police - two coys from Punjab and three coys from Himachal Pradesh continued till October 1962. In addition to its normal weapons, each Police coy was to be equipped with four LMGs and three 2-in mortars(238). The police posts near the border were at Kaurik and Shipki La, with some posts were in the rear to check the enemy's penetration along Namgia-Sumdo axis(239).

However, in November 1959, HQ Western Command recommended that, till the regular army was deployed on the border, a Sector HQ in the area, under a Lt Col, with a small staff, working directly under HQ WC, should be established to co-ordinate the activities of the Police companies from two different States - Punjab and Himachal Pradesh(240). It was also decided that till then the five Police companies, deployed on the border, would be organised on the same basis as their counterparts in an inf battalion, and the area was given the name of 'Sugar Sector'(241). For operation purposes, Sugar Sector was placed directly under HQ WC(242).

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As the GOC-in-C, Western Command, was not satisfied with the deployment of Police Force for the protection of the border, he, in July 1960, again recommended that he would need two regular Infantry Battalions, with a Bde HQ to control them. The troops were to be deployed as under(243):-

Lahul & Spiti area (which then was part of Punjab)

- (i) Two coys on the Kaurik Pass
- (ii) One coy on the minor passes to the north of Kaurik.
- (iii) One coy as reserve

Kinnaur area

- (i) Two coys on Shipki Pass
- (ii) One coy on the minor passes to the north of Shipki La
- (iii) One coy as a reserve.

The Western Command's proposal was not agreed to but it was asked to earmark an inf bn, ex 17 Inf Div, which could be deployed in Sugar Sector in case of an emergency(244). Consequently, to begin with 2 JAT, then 4 J&K Rif and again, in January 1962 3 Sikh was as earmarked for the purpose(245).

At a discussion held under the chairmanship of the Defence Minister on 25 June 1961, GOC-in-C, Western Command again stated that he was not satisfied with the arrangements for the protection of Shipki La by the Provincial Police force and stressed that a regular battalion should be deployed there(246). But it was only on 21 October 1962 (after the Chinese had launched an all-out invasion in the Eastern and Western Sectors of the border) that the movement of a regular infantry battalion, viz; 9 Madras, (ex 48 Inf Bde) from Ambala Cantt, to ther Sugar Sector was undertaken(247). Bn TAC HQ arrived at Puh on 29 October. The troops of Madras were gradually deployed at Shipki La, Khabo and Kaurik in the beginning of November. A new Bn Commander Lt Col C.R.S Murthy took over the command of the Battalion on 11 November 1962 at Puh(248).

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In October 1959, the Government decided that the responsibility for the defence of the Indo-Tibet border in UP would be taken over by the Army, with the Special Police force already deployed there under its control(249). At that time, out of the six coys of the Police Force sanctioned for the task (against the minimum requirement of eight coys), only five coys actually stood deployed on the border(250). They were instructed to be as near the frontier as possible and where it was not possible for them to stay on in the forward posts during the winter, they were to reach there as soon as it was physically possible after the winter. Even though the military personnel were not deployed on the border earlier, the troops positioned at Almora were carrying on patrolling activities towards Indo-Tibet border with a view to keep watch on the enemy activities in the area and also to strengthen the morale of the local people(251). 8 Dogra, ex 9 Inf Bde, carried out a number of difficult reconnaissances along the border in the winter of 1959 and summer of 1960(252).

In July 1960, HQ Eastcom intimated that if the Police force at the border posts were to be replaced by army personnel, an Inf Bde Gp with five battalions would be their minimum requirement. Out of these five battalions, two were to replace the Special Police coys deployed on the various posts along the border(253). In the same month, 9 Inf Bde, ex-20 Inf Div (with three Bns 8 Dogra, 14 Rajput and 4 Maratha), was placed under command HQ U.P. area(254). The Bde HQ was located at Lucknow. The deployment of the Brigade in the hill region was not agreed to as it would have been against the directive of the Prime Minister which had asked to locate main forces in areas where they could be easily supported logistically and from where they could be moved forward to battle locations when required(255).

In March 1961, the area under the operational jurisdiction of 9 Inf Bde was given the nick-name of 'TRI-SHUL'(256) Sector and in July, same year, 9 Inf Bde was redesignated as 9 Inf Bde Gp(257).

When, in April 1961, it was decided to set up an all-weather post at Rim Kin, at the fringe of Bari Hoti Plain, the 9 Inf Bde provided administrative backing to the Special Task Force in setting up the post(258). The post was temporarily withdrawn in September 1961 as winter accommodation for the troops could not be constructed there(259). The Special Police Force, as deployed, was divided into four sectors, in addition to its HQ at Moradabad. From the West, the first sector was being maintained from Uttarkashi and controlled the posts of Pulamsumda and

Nelang. Second sector was being administered from Joshimath and controlled the posts at Kyunglung, Jimarsain, Ghastoli and Rata Kona in Joshimath - Bara Hoti and Joshimath - Mana areas. Further east, the third sector was Milam which controlled the posts at Sangcha Malla, Lauka, Laphthal and Dung. The last sector Askot-controlled the posts at Kalapani, Kothi and Dawe(260). During winter months, men from forward posts used to withdraw to the rear and were deployed at Uttarkashi, Nelang, Joshimath, Mana, Malari, Milam, Askot and Garbyang(261).

In February 1962, Army HQ decided that an Army post be re-established at Rim Kin in the vicinity of Bara Hoti as early as possible and HQ Eastern Command was also asked to see that no more than one battalion of 9 Inf Bde Gp should be deployed in an 'operational area' at any time(262). The post at Rim Kin was established on 20 April 1962 with a platoon strength of troops of 14 Rajput, under Capt R.S. Taragi. When in September 1962, 8 Dogra took over the responsibility for Joshimath Sector from 14 Rajput, one platoon of 8 Dogra, under Capt Sagar Singh, relieved the troops of 14 Rajput at Rim Kin(263). The other troops of 8 Dogra were deployed at Harsil, Joshimath and Chhiyalekh. This Bn had also stationed detachments at Malari, Srinagar, Bhatwari, Uttarkashi, Sirkha, Dharchul and Jumagwar(264). The remaining two Battalions of the Bde Gp, viz., 14 Rajput and 4 Maratha, were at their permanent locations at Lucknow and Ranikhet respectively(265).

(B) Chinese

When India established a post at Rim Kin in April 1961, Chinese reacted by sending their troops at regular intervals to the Bara Hoti area. At one time, they came up to Sarkya, about 15 km north of Bara Hoti(266).

The enemy was reported to have deployed five Battalions against this region of the border(267). Their Div HQ was reported to be at Gar Dzong, which was on the main Gartok-Rudok highway. The troops were located at Tashigong (opposite Shipki La), Tholingmath (opposite Mana Pass), and Taklakot (opposite Lipu Lekh Pass). The Chinese had developed Dunkar into an important staging post for moving supplies from Gartok and Gargunsa (Gar Dzong), to Tholingmath. This had enabled them to maintain their troops properly in the region, opposite Mana Pass(268). They had also constructed tracks from Tholingmath to the Indian border, which led to Thag La, Mana Pass, Niti Pass and Tun Jun La. The enemy had also moved troops close to the border at Nu (east of Shipki La and north of Thag La on the Gartok-Shipki La track) and Sarang, about 12 km north of Thag La(269).

During the last week of October 1962, some movement on the part of the Chinese troops near the border was reported. The troop movement showed that the enemy was advancing in strength into the area, south of southern Ladakh and north of Himachal Pradesh, which had so far been thinly held by them. Their movement posed a threat to the disputed areas near Kaurik Pass and Shipki La(270). But the mountainous terrain and the onset of winter, coupled with other tactical and strategic factors, perhaps checked the enemy from launching any attack in this region of the border.

### EAST-CENTRAL REGION

#### Topography

The east-central region of the Indo-Tibet boundary covered the Kingdom of Sikkim. Sikkim had Nepal to its west, Tibetan Plateau to its north and the Chumbi Valley of Tibet and the Kingdom of Bhutan to its east. To the south of Sikkim lay the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. As in the west-central region, the northern half of Sikkim was extremely rugged and mountainous, with very sparse population. The southern half had steep mountain ranges and deep valleys cut by the Tista and its tributaries, flowing from north to south.

The Sikkim Tibet boundary was about 225 Km long(271). Along the northern and north-eastern sector of this boundary there were several very high and difficult passes leading into Tibet, the most important pass being Kongra La. Its importance lay in the fact that the Chinese base at Khamba Dzong was only about 32 Km from it, and Khamba Dzong was connected with Lhasa through a motorable road. But the extremely difficult area of northern Sikkim, snow bound for approximately 5 months of the year, made it uninviting route for any invader from the north. The mule tracks from Kongra La and the other northern passes converged on the area of Lachen and Lachung, and then passed through the vital bottle-neck of Chungthang on the Tista river. Following the Tista, the track passed through Mangan before reaching the capital Gangtok and the all weather road system of India. A jeep-track existed from Gangtok to Chungthang, and the distance from Gangtok to Kongra La was estimated to be about 190 Km(272). But an invader was expected to take a whole month to reach Gangtok from the northern passes, if there was even weak military opposition(273).

On Sikkim's eastern border with the Chumbi Valley, there were a number of important passes, only about 4000 Metres (13,000 ft) high. Tangkar La was

important because it was connected with Yatung in the Chumbi Valley through a jeepable road but the route from Tangkar La had to pass through Lachung and Chungthang bottle-neck. Further south along the eastern border lay Cho La, Natu La and Jelep La. The Natu La carried the old Gangtok Lhasa trade route and was only about 55 Km from Gangtok by a jeepable track(274). Jelep La had tracks leading to Gangtok as well as Kalimpong in West Bengal.

On the Indian side, projects were in hand for improvement of the roads and tracks in Sikkim, under the name of Operation 'Dragon' sanctioned in 1960. From the rail head of Siliguri there was a good Class 9 road to Tista and a Class 5 road from Tista to Gangtok(275). Because of these roads it was appreciated an invader could reach Gangtok in about 4 days from Natu La and Jelep La(276).

On the Tibetan side in the Chumbi Valley, the Chinese had much improved system of communication. Yatung, at a height of 3,350 m (11,000 ft), which was about 18 km (11 miles) from the Indian border, stood connected with Gyantse, through Phari Dzong, Tunk and Kala by a motorable road. This road touched the Indian road system at Natu La. From the Yatung - Gyantse road, a number of feeder roads took off towards northern and north-eastern Sikkim. From Kala, a road led to Khamba Dzong, north of Kongra La. This road ran north of Sikkim border.

#### DISPOSITION OF TROOPS

##### (A) Indian

In November 1959, when 4 Inf Div was moved to Assam to take up the responsibility for the northern border from Sikkim to Burma, 11 Inf Bde was detailed to look after the Sikkim-Tibet border(277). In February 1961, 11 Inf Bde HQ with one Bn - 17 MADRAS - was moved to Naga Hills(278) and the responsibility was given to 165 Inf Bde Gp. The bde had its HQ at Jalapahar. The area under the operational jurisdiction of 165 Inf Bde Gp was nick-named 'RAJHANS'. At that time, two Bns of 11 Inf Bde - 7 PUNJAB and 3/9 GR - remained deployed in Sikkim. While troops of 7 PUNJAB were deployed on the eastern border facing Chumbi Valley, the troops of 3/9 GR were in the north. In May 1962, 3 JAT of 165 Inf Bde relieved 7 PUNJAB.

When reports came of concentration of Chinese troops in the Chumbi Valley, HQ 165 Inf Bde Gp was ordered, towards the end of September, 1962, to move to Gangtok immediately. Its Bns - 14 DOGRA and 3 JAT, each supported by a battery of Mtn guns or Hvy mortars, were ordered to occupy battle positions at Jelep La

and Natu La respectively(279). 165 Inf established its TAC HQ at Gangtok on 28 September 1962. Troops were deployed, both in the north and east, on all the forward posts. 36 (M) Hy Mor Bde, which was also moved to Sikkim along with 165 Inf Bde Gp, established its HQ at Gangtok. Its two Btys - 33 (M) and 35 (M) - were concentrated at Kopun and Sherabthang respectively. 3 JAT also established its TAC HQ at Sherabthang(280). One more Bn - 5/1: GR - was inducted into the area from Cooch Behar (now called Koch Bihar).

When IV Corps was formed on 4 October 1962 it was made responsible for the defence of Sikkim border also(281).

Considering the situation arising out of the Chinese offensive all along the Ladakh and NEFA border, and enemy's activities in the Chubitang area, 20 Inf Div was ordered to move its HQ and Div troops from Ranchi to Siliguri Rangpo area. Two more Inf Bdes - 66 and 202 - were ordered to move to Sikkim from Dinapore and Calcutta respectively. To give some relief to IV Corps, the responsibility for the defence of Sikkim was again entrusted to XXXIII Corps(282).

On 10 November 1962, 20 Inf Div issued an order (released to the Brigades on 13 November 1962) which divided the Div defensive zone into four sectors, viz., 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D'(283).

#### Sector 'A'

Area north of Gangtok and including Gangtok formed sector 'A'. The Sector covered the major tracks coming through North Sikkim and through Tangkar La, leading to Gangtok. The responsibility for the defence of this sector was given to 66 Inf Bde, (raised at Dinapore during August 1962), which moved into Sikkim with 16 MADRAS, 1 MARATHA and 1 DOGRA, on 27 October 1962. It moved its HQ to White Memorial Hall, Gangtok on 16 November 1962(284).

#### Sector 'B'

The task of the Commander of sector 'B', which was placed under 165 Inf Bde, was to deny to the enemy the approaches from Tibet through Cho La and Natu La passes in the east.

Sector 'C'

202 Inf Bde, which moved into Sikkim at the end of October with its three Bns - 15 PUNJAB, 14 DOGRA and 4 GUARDS, was made responsible for the defence of 'C' sector. This sector included approaches from Tibet through Jelep La, Batang La, Doka La and other minor passes.

Sector 'D'

This sector, which included remaining territory of Sikkim, was placed under OC 47 LAA Regt. His task was to destroy minor Chinese infiltration into the sector and to be prepared to reinforce other sectors with the available resources, if necessary(285).

A new code-name 'OP FALCON' in place of 'OP RAJHANS' was given to the task of 20 Inf Div in Sikkim, on 10 November 1962.

The new orbat of the Indian troops in Sikkim as on 10 November 1962, was(286):-

Sector 'A'

66 Inf Bde with HQ at Gangtok, had

3/9 GR (had been there since 1960)

1 Maratha

Under Command

One Bty of 82 Hy Mor Regt

One Pl 433 Fd Coy

One Pl D Coy 6 Mahar MG (Borders)

In direct sp

15 Fd Regt

433 Fd Coy less one Pl

Sector 'B'

165 Inf Bde with HQ at Karponang, had

16 Madras (ex 66 Inf Bde)

1 Dogra (ex 66 Inf Bde)

3 Jat

5/11 GR

Under Command

35 Hy Mor Bty/36 Hy Mor Regt

D Coy less one Pl 6 Mahar MG (Borders)

One Pl 7 Mahar MG (Borders)

In direct sp

C Sqn 8 Cav less one Tp

18 Fd Regt

Sector 'C'

202 Inf Bde with HQ at Kopup, had

4 Guards

15 Punjab

14 Dogra

Under Command

33 Hy Mor Bty/36 Hy Mor Regt

'W' Coy 1 Mahar MG

In direct sp

One Tp C Sqn 8 Cav

5 Mtn Bty

92 FD Bty/4 Fd Regt

82 Hy Mor Regt less one Bty

Sector 'D'

47 LAA Regt with troops not allotted to Sectors 'A', 'B' and 'C'

All the Inf Bdes were instructed to organise active patrolling within their respective def sectors so as to keep careful watch on enemy activities and to prevent infiltration. Overhead protection was to be provided for all troops. All supplies and stores were to be stocked in dug-in shelters for protection against snow and shell splinters. Wire and AP mines were to be laid at suitable places in defended localities. All defence works were to be completed

by 30 November. Engineer units in the defended sectors were to assist in construction of defence works.

HQ 20 Inf Div also moved from Burdang to Gangtok on 16 November 1962(287).

(B) Chinese

In September 1961, Chinese had only three battalions in Chumbi Valley, facing Eastern Sikkim. By May 1962, the strength of the force had been raised to nine battalions, out of which three stood deployed at Khamba Dzong, facing northern Sikkim, and six in the Chumbi Valley(288).

In November 1962, the enemy was reported to have deployed one Inf Div plus two Regiments, supported by artillery and mortars, in the Khamba Dzong and the Chumbi Valley areas of Tibet. The known locations of Chinese troops were(289):-

- i. Div HQ and one Regt - Thankarfu Valley -  
area Yatung
- ii. One Regt - Yatung - area  
Chubitang
- iii. One Regt - area north - east of  
Yatung
- iv. One Regt - area Phari Dzong
- v. One Regt - area Khamba Dzong,  
with one Bn in area  
north of Kongra La.

The Chinese had constructed roads/tracks up to the border in the Chumbi Valley and as such were in a position to mount surprise attacks at points of their choosing along this part of the border. They had also developed airfields in the Tuna Plains and Yatung. The airfield in the Tuna Plains was reported to be capable of taking fighter aircraft. Considering the overall Chinese forces in Tibet, and bearing in mind that Chumbi valley was connected up to Yatung by a 5-ton road, it was estimated that they were in a position to concentrate three to four Inf Divisions in the Chumbi Valley for an offensive in Sikkim.

The terrain in the northern Sikkim being highly mountainous, which for about five months in a year remained snow-bound, the Chinese could indulge in only probing attacks from that side in November 1962. They were in a much better position to advance to Gangtok and beyond through Natu La and Jelep La. Accordingly, they had deployed more troops i.e., one Inf Div plus, in the Chumbi Valley as against one Inf Bde in the north.

Although there was no disputed area on Sikkim-Tibet border, it was apprehended that enemy could still attack and penetrate into Sikkim in order to threaten the strategic Siliguri area. The vital task of the Indian troops deployed in Sikkim, therefore, was to prevent any threat to the Siliguri area by the enemy through south-east Sikkim. That area, better known as the Siliguri Corridor, was indeed a narrow strip between Chumbi Valley and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and its loss would have severed entirely the land communication between Assam and the rest of India. India had inducted three Infantry Brigades in Sikkim, of which two were on the eastern border, and had located strong defences close to the south-eastern border.

The deployment of two Inf Bdes, with sufficient artillery support, opposite the Chumbi Valley border, it seems, dissuaded the Chinese from launching any offensive in Sikkim simultaneously with their invasion in the western and eastern sectors. This sector, therefore, remained tense but dormant.

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15. From Official Records.
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