

Crispit - Somnath Sharma's Last Stand

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1. Meeting with Lieutenant General (retd) Surindra Nath Sharma

1.0 Intro to the Meeting

- The author arrives 15 minutes early for an interview with Lt. Gen. (retd) Surindra Nath Sharma, brother of Major Somnath Sharma.
- The interview takes place at Lt. Gen. Sharma's house in Defence Colony, New Delhi.
- Lt. Gen. Sharma is described as a remarkably fit 90-year-old with a British accent, delightful wit, and old-world courtesy.

1.1 The Interview

- Lt. Gen. Sharma displays an excellent memory, recalling names, dates, and events clearly.
- He recounts stories of his brother's bravery with pride and nostalgia.
- He shares anecdotes about his brother's childhood and a youthful infatuation, declining to provide details about the girl involved.
- He recounts the Battle of Badgam lucidly and vividly.

2. Lt. Gen. Sharma's Recollections of his Brother

2.0 Intro to Lt. Gen Sharma's Recollections

- This section details Lt. Gen. Sharma's personal memories and insights into his brother, Major Somnath Sharma's life and personality. The recollections are interwoven with the narrative of the Battle of Badgam.

2.1 Childhood and Personality

- Recounts Major Somnath Sharma's (referred to as 'Somi') childhood, including his tendency to organize neighborhood children in mock marches.
- Highlights Somi's preference for outdoor activities over academics.
- Describes the close bond and a deal of academic support between Somi and his brother, Tindy (Surindra Nath).

3. The Battle of Badgam

3.0 Intro to the Battle of Badgam

- The Battle of Badgam, fought on November 3, 1947, in Jammu and Kashmir is the central focus of the narrative.
- The battle involved Major Somnath Sharma and his company of the Indian Army against a larger force of Pakistani Pathans.
- The battle's significance lies in its crucial role in preventing the capture of the Srinagar airfield.

3.1 Initial Deployment and Reconnaissance

- A fighting patrol, including A and D Companies of 4 Kumaon (under Somi) and one company of 1 Para Kumaon, was sent to Badgam based on intelligence reports of a large Pathan lashkar heading towards Srinagar.
- Companies of 4 Kumaon established positions on a hillock west of Badgam.
- 1 Para Kumaon searched the village and found it seemingly peaceful; villagers appeared scared but were going about their chores.

3.2 Withdrawal Orders and the Deception

- After 1 Para Kumaon reported back to Srinagar, Sharma was ordered to withdraw his companies.
- A Company completed its westward patrol and began returning to the airfield.
- D Company was to remain in Badgam until late evening before withdrawing. This decision was supported by Brig. L. P. Sen.
- The Pathans, disguised as villagers, were actually waiting in a nala.

4. The Pakistani Plan

4.0 Intro to the Pakistani Plan

- This section details the strategic plan of the Pakistani forces involved in the Battle of Badgam.
- The plan involved deception, infiltration, and a surprise attack to capture the Srinagar airfield.

4.1 The Strategy

- The lashkar, led by a Pakistani major, arrived in Badgam in smaller groups to conceal their numbers.
- They mingled with the local population, waiting for reinforcements before attacking.
- The ultimate objective was to capture Srinagar airfield to cut off the Indian Army's supplies and take control of Jammu and Kashmir.

5. The Attack on D Company

5.0 Intro to the Attack on D Company

- This section describes the surprise attack launched by the Pakistani forces on Major Somnath Sharma's D Company.
- D Company was significantly outnumbered.
- The attack showcases the bravery and resilience of the Indian soldiers.

5.1 The Surprise Attack and Initial Response

- Around 2:30 p.m., the Pathans launched a surprise attack on D Company, using machine-gun and mortar fire.
- Sharma was concerned about returning fire and potentially harming civilians.
- Despite being heavily outnumbered (seven to one), D Company initially repulsed the initial attacks.

5.2 Overwhelming Numbers and Continued Resistance

- The Pathans, reinforced by their sheer numbers, began to surround D Company from three sides.
- They climbed the hillock, attacking with automatics and shouting "Allah-o-Akbar!"
- Despite being outgunned and facing heavy casualties, D Company continued to fight fiercely.

6. Somnath Sharma's Actions and Leadership

6.0 Intro to Somnath Sharma's Actions and Leadership

- This section focuses on Major Somnath Sharma's leadership and courageous actions during the battle.
- His actions highlight his dedication, selflessness, and inspirational leadership.

6.1 Inspiring his Men

- Sharma encouraged his men to fight back, moving between trenches, urging them on despite facing overwhelming odds and imminent danger.
- Despite having a plastered left arm, he assisted in reloading weapons and directing fire.

- He continued to fight despite being outnumbered and outgunned, buying precious time for reinforcements to arrive.

6.2 Request for Reinforcements and Ammunition

- Sharma requested ammunition and reinforcements, but understood that assistance would take time.
- He recognized the crucial importance of holding back the enemy to prevent their advance on the airfield.
- He held his position despite heavy casualties and dwindling ammunition, refusing to withdraw.

7. The Final Moments and Aftermath

7.0 Intro to the Final Moments and Aftermath

- This section details the final moments of the battle, Major Somnath Sharma's death, and the subsequent actions of his remaining men.

7.1 Mortar Attack and Death of Somnath Sharma

- A mortar shell landed near Sharma while he was helping a Bren gunner reload, killing him, his sahayak, the gunner, and a JCO.
- This event happened approximately five hours into the battle.
- Sharma died, but his men continued to fight for another hour.

7.2 Lance Naik Balwant Singh's Heroism

- Lance Naik Balwant Singh took charge when ammunition ran low, collecting remaining rounds and ordering a tactical retreat.
- He and three other soldiers stayed behind to cover the retreat, charging the enemy and sacrificing their lives. -Their actions allowed many soldiers of D Company to escape.

7.3 The Repulse of the Pakistani Attack

- D Company's brave defense delayed the Pakistani advance for approximately six hours.
- This delay allowed Indian reinforcements to arrive and strengthen the defense of the Srinagar airfield.
- A counterattack on November 5th resulted in the recapture of Badgam. Around 300 Pathan bodies were counted.

8. Somnath Sharma's Life and Legacy

8.0 Intro to Somnath Sharma's Life and Legacy

- This section provides biographical information about Major Somnath Sharma and highlights his legacy within the Indian Army.

8.1 Family Background and Early Life

- Somnath Sharma was born on January 31, 1923, in Jammu.
- His father was a medical corps officer who reached the rank of major general.
- He had two brothers (Surindra Nath and Vishwa Nath) and two sisters (Kamla and Manorama), all of whom had military connections.
- He attended Hampton Court Convent in Mussoorie and Sherwood College.

8.2 Military Career

- He joined the Prince of Wales's Royal Indian Military College (now RIMC) and the Indian Military Academy (IMA).
- He was commissioned in February 1942 at age 19, joining the 8/19 Hyderabad Regiment (later 4 Kumaon).
- He served in Arakan during World War II, demonstrating bravery by carrying a wounded soldier through Japanese fire.
- He served in internal security duties in Punjab in 1947 before deploying to Kashmir.
- His organizational skills were noted during his work organizing supplies and people during civil disturbances.
- Even with a plastered arm, he insisted on going to Kashmir and played a crucial role in the defense of Srinagar airfield.

8.3 Award and Remembrance

- Awarded the Param Vir Chakra (PVC), India's highest military decoration, posthumously. The first PVC of independent India.
- The training ground at the Kumaon Regimental Centre in Ranikhet is named Somnath Sharma Ground.
- He is fondly remembered within the Indian armed forces for his courage and leadership.
- His story is frequently recounted and used as an example of bravery and selflessness.