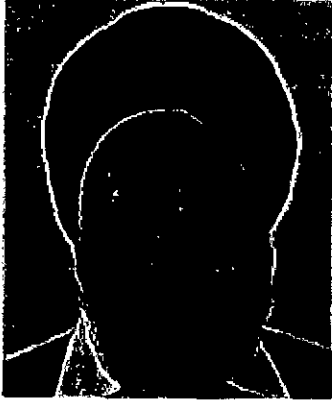


OP CACTUS LILY (MALDIVES) - 1988

A Note by Major Harjinder Singh Jonjua (Retd.) - Intelligence Corps



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Date 22/11/2021

The idea behind this Note is to enrich the history of the accounts about 3 PARA and Intelligence Corps in this Operation with facts not found in the online records in general and the article of Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia (then Brigade Major) by one who participated as part of the 50 (I) Para Bde HQ Team and was decorated in the operations with a COAS Commendation Card. I was the first engineer in the Intelligence Corps and the first Intelligence Corps Officer to serve with the Para Bde HQ. I am the only Intelligence Corps Officer decorated in Airborne Operations Overseas.

Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia (then Brigade Major) states in

<https://salute.co.in/operation-cactus/> (ARMED FORCES OPERATIONS

OPERATION CACTUS, Jun 10, 2016) as below:



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"Those were not the days of the internet and mobile communications, and we had very little or no information on the Maldives. All that we knew was that Male was the capital of the island nation and the airfield was at Hulhule.

.....
With scant inputs of not only the prevailing situation but also of the topography, the situation remained uncertain and confused. The only maps available were photocopies of tourist sketches of Male and Hulhule islands. But now Brig F.F.C. Bulsara took charge."

I was tasked by the Brigade Commander to collect information on Maldives. I proceeded to the office of Sita Travels in Agra Cantt. and purchased a Tourist Guide on Maldives which was the source of maps and pictures of Male and

Hulhule islands referred to above.

He continues to write:

"Flying the two aircraft were Group Captain (later Air Marshal) AK Goel and Group Captain A.G. Bewoor, the Commanding Officer of 44 Squadron."

I met Group Captain A.G. Bewoor a friend of my father that day November 3, 1988 evening at the Agra Air Force Base for the first time after the death of my late father Shri Jagir Singh Jonjua in 1975 at an air base near Cuttack where he was also based.

He writes:

"The second IL 76 landing after a gap of ten minutes, brought in the company of 3 Para under Maj. (later Lt Gen.) N.K.S Ghei, elements of sappers and medical and the artillery component under Col K.K.K. Singh."



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I landed at Hulhule Airport along with Col. AK Chakrabarty (Deputy Commander), Col K.K.K. Singh (CO, Artillery Unit) and Maj. (later Lt Gen.) N.K.S Ghei (3 PARA) in the second IL 76 landing.

After landing, I immediately started creating a local network for real time intelligence for which I was well equipped after years of experience in insurgency operations in Mizoram and Tripura.

He further writes:

"The navy thereafter kept surveillance over MV Progress Light and with INS Godavari and Betwa having moved in on 06 November, rescued the hostages, took the rebels including their leader into custody and destroyed the ship. The coup leaders and rebels were brought to Male and handed over to the Maldivian authorities. The Indian Army was requested to keep the rebels in their custody till the legal proceedings could be completed, and accordingly they were taken to a prison Island Gamadoo under the escort of Indian troops."

I was called by the Brigade Major and put into a Naval Helicopter which landed me on INS Godavari. There I interrogated the Coup Leader Abdullah Luthufi. On reaching Male, I was provided a detachment to parade Abdullah Luthufi in the streets of Male. I lifted his face up and showed him to President Abdul Gayoom. Then I deposited him in the prison Island Gamadoo and proceeded to interrogate the rebels at Hulule with the detachment from 3 PARA. During the interrogation we established that it was PLOTE and not LTTE which had attacked Male alongwith Abdullah Luthufi.

He writes:



"50 (I) Para Brigade less 6 Para with two companies de-inducted by 17 November."

I was de-inducted and landed in Trivandrum along with the 50 (I) Para Brigade HQ.

I conclude to note that it was my honor to serve under visionary Airborne Commanders - Brig F.F.C. Bulsara and Col. AK Chakrabarty who led India's most successful airborne mission overseas.

About the Author:

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IC-34785F Major Harjinder Singh Jonjua (Retd.) was awarded Commandant's Silver Medal (NDA/51) and Silver Grenade (CME/66 YOs). He was granted

premature retirement shortly after the above operation as a permanent low medical category in 1990. Fighting physical disability over the years, he has successfully promoted Jonjua Overseas Limited (a Company listed and traded on BSE SME), Jonjua Air Private Limited and Jonjua Agro Private Limited to bring positive hope in the lives of officers and jawans who become permanent low medical category at a young age.



Harjinder Singh