

## CHAPTER - XIV

### IAF IN THE EASTERN THEATRE

#### PLANS AND PREPARATIONS

With the East Bengal situation deteriorating steadily, alongwith the other two Services, the IAF also began contingency planning and preparations in the summer and monsoon months of 1971. To fight a major war in the east, the IAF too had to update and reorganise its bases and support facilities in eastern India. In addition, the IAF had to assist the Army's build up in the east. During the period from March to November 1971, the IAF provided a large number of transport support missions to Eastern Army Command. In all 2386 hrs were flown by AN-12s, Packets and Dakotas, which lifted some 3700 passengers and 1034 tonnes of load(1). It is worth mentioning that the transport forces of the IAF were simultaneously involved in providing flood and cyclone relief in four States, over and above the normal air maintenance in Ladakh, Nagaland and Mizoram.

Both Central and Eastern Air Commands had to share the responsibility of air operations into East Pakistan. Since the two Air Commands would be operating against a single enemy and against the same target systems, both Air Commands were ordered to prepare detailed coordinated plans to cover various contingencies. Communications between Shillong, the HQ of EAC, and Calcuta, the HQ of Eastern Army Command and Allahabad, the HQ of Central Air Command, were improved. Eastern and Central Air Commands were also advised to concentrate their air effort against the air bases at Dhaka, Jessore, Sylhet and the radars at Kurmitola and Mirpur from D to D+2, by when it was expected that the PAF in the east would cease to be a fighting force. Thereafter the resources of the Air Force in the east could be available in toto to support the Indian Army in its land battle.

It was also assumed that, since the PAF would have the initiative, they would take some form of offensive action against IAF bases. To counter this, the available air defence squadrons were redeployed to cover the Assam Valley and Bengal-Bihar Sectors. The IAF radar capability in this area was considered adequate. To detect enemy raiders trying to intrude at low level below the radar horizon, a comprehensive Observer Corps scheme was drawn up, to be implemented with available assets like the BSF and the Railways manpower and communication channels.

To counter the growing threat in the east, IAF

plans also called for the activation of three DGCA airfields, two in West Bengal and one in Tripura, i.e. Dum Dum, Panagarh and Agartala. During the month of November 1971, Dum Dum and Panagarh were activated in order to familiarise the aircrew and DGCA personnel with their new environments. A detachment of No.221 Squadron which was to augment forces in the event of a war was moved to Panagarh for a period of 15 days, and No.22 Squadron was moved to Dum Dum. At this stage, because of the increased activity of the PAF in support of the Pak Army in the Krishan Nagar and Rangpur-Dinajpur Sectors, it was decided to retain the Gnat detachment at Dum Dum throughout the month of November. This ensured that some fighter force was instantly available to counter any PAF aggression against the Indian Army or violation of Indian air space. Similarly, for the Rangpur-Dinajpur Sector, a section of four Gnats was made available to counter any PAF activity in that area.

The Army wanted photographs of the areas through which they would have to advance into Bangladesh if war broke out. Border violations had by then become routine for either side. With the consent of Air Headquarters, fighter reconnaissance aircraft (SU 7 and Hunters) commenced to cover all the areas through which the Indian Army thrusts were to go in. These operations commenced on 24 October and were carried on till 20 November 1971 and proved of great value to the Army(2).

Under arrangements with HQ Eastern Command, Low Level Air Defence guns (LLAD) were deployed at all VAs and VPs under EAC by end of August 1971. A squadron of surface to air missiles was placed around Calcutta. Within the allotted resources and in consultation with GOC-in-C Eastern Command, ack ack defences at some airfields were strengthened while denuding the defences from other airfields and units which were not considered so vulnerable to enemy air attacks. For example, no air defence guns were deployed at Chabua and No.511 Radar Unit. Again under arrangements with Eastern Command, regular/TA troops were deployed at most airfields and SUs for protection against a possible para/commando attack.

On 3 October 1971, EAC was instructed by Air Headquarters to assist the Mukti Bahini Air Force and train it for air operations in Bangladesh. One Dakota aircraft, one Otter and one Alouette helicopters from Air Headquarters reserves were allotted or 'sold' to the Bangladesh government for this flight. The Otter and the Alouette were modified for the carriage of rocket pods and guns.

On 4 October 1971, Mukti Bahini Air Force with

the code name of 'Kilo Flight' was formed at Dimapur under the command of Group Captain Chandan Singh. That very afternoon, conversion training of the Mukti Bahini pilots and ground crew was commenced. The first air operation of Kilo Flight was planned for the night of 10 November 1971. However, because of certain constraints these operations were postponed from time to time and finally took place only in December(3).

Positioning of the Gnat force at Dum Dum and Bagdogra was proved justified on 22 November 1971. That day unidentified aircraft were again picked up violating Indian airspace, and four Gnats of No.22 Sqn were scrambled on a ground controlled interception. Contact was made with 3 American built F-86 Sabres of the PAF in the Bayra area. In the ensuing engagement, all three intruders were shot down, two of the pilots were caught when they ejected over Indian territory.

A first hand account of what happened was given by Flt Lt Massey; "We scrambled from Dum Dum and belted to the border at 450 Kts 3000 ft. My No.2 made contact at 2 O'clock, level, 4 miles. I pulled up over my No.3 and 4 and latched onto one. He did a hard turn and reversed. I took a high angle-off burst and missed. Meanwhile, another Sabre passed us and my No.3 took him on. I took another burst at 700 yards but my starboard gun stopped. I finally got him with my third burst on his port wing"(4).

The Gnat force from Bagdogra also carried out a number of "Flag Showing" flights in the Dinajpur-Rangpur area during this period, and the PAF abstained from interfering with IAF operations in this sector.

In the light of the directive issued by the Government to the Chiefs of Staff, the following aims were stipulated for the Air Force in the Eastern Theatre of Operations(5):-

- (a) Eliminate the PAF at the earliest.
- (b) Render maximum assistance to the Army in the form of offensive support, transport and helicopter support and air borne operations.
- (c) Assist the Navy to isolate East Bengal from West Pakistan and also ensure that the PAF was not able to interfere with the operations of Indian naval ships and aircraft.

- (d) Ensure Air Defence of the area of responsibility (The AD of the steel towns of Bihar and Orissa, though in the area of responsibility of CAC, was entrusted to EAC).

It is pertinent to mention here that the bomber force consisting of five squadrons of Canberra aircraft was under the control of Central Air Command. Since there was no action in the area of responsibility of CAC, the bomber Sqns supported the air effort in the west (four sqns) and east (one sqn).

For effective command and control, the Eastern Theatre of operations was sub-divided into three sectors, viz., Bengal/Bihar Sector, the Assam Valley Sector and the Kumbhigram/Tripura Sector. Air units available for operations were earmarked for deployment between these sectors, and responsibility for operations in each sector was clearly defined.

**Bengal/Bihar Sector:** The AOC Advance Headquarters, Eastern Air Command was made responsible for the conduct of all air operations - Offensive, Defensive and Transport support - in the area of responsibility which covered Bengal/Bihar Sector in India and the area west of river Brahmaputra in Bangladesh. He was to provide close support to the Army through Nos.3 and 9 Tactical Air Commands(6).

**Assam Valley Sector:** The Air Defence of the Assam Valley was made the responsibility of Commander, No.3 Air Defence Control Centre. All offensive operations including close support to the Army in the area east of river Brahmaputra up to the Meghna river were to be conducted directly by Eastern Air Command.

**Kumbhigram/Tripura Sector:** Air Defence operations in this area were to be conducted by Commander No.3 ADCC and air operations in support of the Army, other than transport support, were made the responsibility of Commander, No.5 TAC.

**Naval/IAF Responsibility:** In consultation with the FOC-in-C Eastern Naval Command, it was mutually agreed that all targets south of latitude 22° 25' N would be engaged by the Naval Sea and Air elements. Subsequently on 4 December Chittagong was struck by Hunters from Dum Dum and on 6 Dec 1971 Barisal airfield by the Gnats, again after consultation with the Navy.

The general strategy followed by AOC-in-C Eastern Air Command during the pre-war phase was to ensure the availability of all administrative and

technical requirements of the Sqns at all war locations. All Commanders were ordered to study their war plans in the minutest detail. This included the personal comfort of both air and ground crews. Where fighter aircraft were inducted into peace time transport bases, suitable officers with fighter background were also posted to these bases to take charge of the conduct of fighter operations. This arrangement resulted in better understanding and higher efficiency in close air support and selection of targets. After the Sqns were deployed at their war locations, HQ EAC followed a policy of strict non-interference.

### THE OPPOSING AIR FORCES

Pakistan Air Force: The PAF had 19 F-86 Sabre and 3 RT-33 aircraft deployed at Tezgaon airfield. It also had a few light a/c and helicopters stationed at this airfield. Considering that the PAF had 254 Combat aircraft in the west, the allocation of only 19 fighter aircraft for air operations in the east was indeed an example of the step-motherly treatment of East Pakistan by the military rulers in West Pakistan.

Indian Air Force: The IAF had a total of 10 squadrons deployed in the Eastern Theatre. One MiG Sqn moved to the west on 05 December and has, therefore, been excluded. Considering that the IAF had deployed 24 fighter sqns in the west, the deployment in the east was well balanced and reasonable. In addition, one Canberra sqn from Gorakhpur was made available for the eastern operations. The detailed deployment/redeployment of sqns with their respective Sqn Commanders is given below(7):-

#### Fighter A/C

	<u>Sqn Commander</u>	<u>Base</u>
(a) <u>MiG 21 (Type 77)</u>		
i. 4 Sqn AF	Wg Cdr JV Gole	Gauhati
ii. 28 Sqn AF	Wg Cdr BK Bishnoi, Vr C	-do-
iii. 30 Sqn AF	Wg Cdr VS Chadha (Moved to west on 5 Dec 1971)	Kalaikunda

A detachment of 4 a/c remained at Panagarh till 12 December 1971 and then moved to the west.

(b) Hunter

- |                |                                    |  |
|----------------|------------------------------------|--|
| i. 14 Sqn AF   | Wg Cdr<br>R. Sunderesan            | Kalaikunda/<br>Dum Dum/<br>Jessore                   |
| ii. 17 Sqn AF  | Wg Cdr<br>N. Chatrath              | Hashimara  |
| iii. 37 Sqn AF | Wg Cdr SK Kaul                     | -do-   |
| iv. 7 Sqn AF   | Wg Cdr BA Coelho<br>Wg Cdr NC Suri | Bagdogra/<br>Nal in the<br>west from<br>07 Dec 1971. |

(c) Gnat

- |                |                   |                                   |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| i. 15 Sqn AF   | Wg Cdr MM Singh   | Bogdogra/<br>Dum Dum/<br>Agartala |
| ii. 22 Sqn AF  | Wg Cdr BS Sikand  | Kalaikunda/<br>Dum Dum            |
| iii. 24 Sqn AF | Wg Cdr RL Badhwar | Agartala                          |

(d) SU 7 (S 22)

- |            |  |          |
|------------|--|----------|
| 221 Sqn AF | Wg Cdr<br>A Sridharan<br>(Moved to west<br>on 14 Dec 1971) | Panagarh |
|------------|--|----------|

(e) Bomber A/C

The Bomber Sqn which supported the war in the east was 16 Sqn AF based at Gorakhpur, commanded by Wg Cdr P Gautam, MVC, VM.

Though the Air Force was not keen to activate Agartala airfield because of its inadequate runway length (about 1460 metres) and other constraints in maintenance support facilities, it had to be done in order to provide effective air support to 4 Corps. The airfield was activated on 8 December by No.24 Sqn (Gnats). Further as Indian forces advanced, it became highly desirable to have a forward airfield to enable fighter aircraft to spend more time on target. Arrangements were, therefore, made with the Indian Army for the repair of Jessore airfield and provision of minimum facilities on it for IAF operations. Jessore airfield was in use by the IAF from 14 December and 10 Hunters of No.14 Sqn were based there.

After complete air superiority was achieved, one MiG, one Hunter and one SU-7 Sqns were moved to the west. After the move out of No.221 Sqn and 30 Sqn detachment from Panagarh, all operational staff were withdrawn from the base to augment the additional personnel required at Jessore.

### ESTABLISHING AIR SUPREMACY

The news of the PAF pre-emptive strikes on Indian airfields all along the Western Border was received by EAC Ops Room at 1800 hrs on 3 December 1971. The AOC-in-C, Air Marshal HC Dewan, put all forces in EAC under instant alert. The Canberra force carried out its mission of attacking Tezgaon and Kurmitola airfields on night 3-4 December. This was preceded by an Alouette and an Otter of the Mukti Bahini Air Force attacking the oil installations at Narayanganj and Chittagong. These attacks were successful and fires were started at the oil dumps.

Taking into account the weather at some IAF airfields and in the Dhaka complex, counter-air missions were ordered to strike from 0705 hrs on 4 December. As in the west, CAPs were mounted at the airfields from early morning to foil any PAF attempts at disrupting any operational plan. Eight Hunters from Hashimara, escorted by MiGs from Gauhati, were the first to attack Tezgaon airfield, near Dhaka. Thereafter, continuous pressure was maintained on both the airfields at Tezgaon and Kurmitola (also near Dhaka). The PAF lost seven F-86 Sabre aircraft in aerial battles over Dhaka, (this was subsequently confirmed by Pak AOC Dhaka after the surrender), and three Sabres, one transport and two light aircraft were destroyed or damaged on the ground(8). In one such mission Wg Cdr S. Sunderesan OC 14 Sqn (Hunters) and his No.2 Flt Lt Tremehere were bounded by 6 Sabres over Tazgaon. Flt Lt Tremehere got behind a pair of Sabres. When they carried out a defensive split the No.2 went for the lower aircraft and the leader switched to the upper aircraft. Flt Lt Tremehere got sandwiched by the upper man and could not disengage in time. He was shot down but ejected safely. The leader Wg Cdr Sunderesan meanwhile got behind the Sabre that shot down his No.2 and managed to shoot him down. Throughout the day the airfields of Tezgaon and Kurmitola were attacked by Hunters, with top cover being provided by the MiGs.

By noon on 4 Dec the PAF had lost its sting and was only of nuisance value. The other airfields in East Bengal, the farthest away being Chittagong, also received their share of attention. During the day, 109 counter-air missions were flown from the loss of

four Hunters, and one SU 7. The success of these missions in the east allowed the IAF to move five Hunters to Kumbhigram from Hashimara for supporting the Army. IAF strike and the PAF's reaction to them revealed that it was operating only from the Dhaka complex and would not be in a position to attack any IAF air bases. Therefore, 12 L-70 guns were released from Hashimara for the Western Theatre. These were airlifted to strengthen the defences of Agra which had been raided thrice by Pak B-57s on night 3/4 December.

The main task for the day on 5 December was to eliminate the remaining Pak F-86s and increase support to the Army. It was decided to ground the PAF by bombing Tezgaon and Kurmitola airfields near Dhaka. The Canberras, in the raids of the two previous nights, had left the runways untouched. MiG-21s were, therefore, detailed to bomb the runways with 500 kg and 1000 lb bombs. The bombing by 8 MiGs was very accurate and the runways were deeply cratered. Photographs taken with a hand held camera by one of the MiG pilots showed the bombs exploding on the runway. This pilot also brought back photographs of Tezgaon airfield clearly indicating the layout, and it was most useful for briefing pilots detailed for subsequent missions(9).

The bombing pressure was kept up throughout the period of operations, and post-war inspection revealed 46 direct hits on the runway at Tezgaon and 20 at Kurmitola. Some of the craters at Tezgaon were about 17-metre wide and 3-metre deep. Both the M-62 Russian 500 kg Bomb and the Indian MK-IX 1000 lb bomb proved to be good weapons, though the slightly heavier Russian bomb made somewhat larger craters. The attacks on the runways in the Dhaka complex paid rich dividends in another form, in that they prevented the operation of any Pak transport aircraft also.

With the PAF virtually grounded by midday on 5 December, air defence requirements for VAs and VPs on the Indian side were no more necessary. During the day, only 42 AD sorties were mounted as compared to 116 the previous day. Subsequently, the AD effort was further reduced and became un-necessary from 8 December onwards, though a few CAP sorties were mounted as a precaution during the airborne operations on 11 December. A MiG-21 Air Defence Squadron deployed at Kalaikunda was moved to the west; eight of its aircraft reached Chandigarh by the evening of 5 December and four more followed on 8 December. The AN-12 and Packet fleet ably supported the special re-deployment of the squadron.

On 6 December a R/T intercept led to the

discovery of a landing strip at Barisal which appeared to be in use. The air-strip and a hangar were attacked with bombs and guns, and made totally unusable. Subsequent to this strike Barisal airfield was handed over as a Naval target. The main counter-air effort in the east continued to be bombing attacks on Tezgaon and Kurmitola, to keep them totally unserviceable.

On 7 December bombing of Dhaka airfield was suspended in the morning to enable a RAF C-130 to land at Tezgaon to evacuate UN personnel. But the PAF refused to let the aircraft land, and it had to return to Bangkok. Because of complete air superiority, the IAF was able to use the Gnats and MiG fighters in the ground attack role. Five Gnats from Bagdogra were moved to Dum Dum to support 2 Corps' operations(10). Also, all the ten serviceable aircraft of No.7 Sqn (Hunters) were moved from Bagdogra to Nal, for operations in the west.

Counter-air missions by MiGs on 8 December continued against the Dhaka airfields while Gnats and Hunters attacked Barisal and Ishurdi. On this day, full photo cover was also obtained of both Tezgaon and Kurmitola. They clearly showed the damage to the airfields and installations. Since there was no further danger from the PAF, all air defence guns in the east, except those deployed at some radar stations, were released for the Western Sector. Caribou aircraft continued their night harassment on 8/9 December of Tezgaon and Kurmitola airfields.

Counter-air operations in the east on 9 December were maintained with the aim of preventing repairs to runways.

On 11 December an intelligence report during the day gave rise to the suspicion that six Pak aircraft would try to land near Dhaka in an attempt to evacuate Major General Farman Ali and other senior Pak Officers the same night. Measures were taken to foil this attempt. Canberras were detailed to attack Chittagong airfield in the evening. Two of them bombed the runway and the taxitrack. On the night of 11/12 December, the IAF maintained continuous pressure on the Dhaka area. Eight Canberras in pairs bombed Kurmitola and Tezgaon airfields between 0230 and 0400 hrs. The big 4000 lbs high explosive bombs were used for the first time against Tezgaon. They were meant to inflict maximum damage to standing structures by blast effect. Photographs taken after the cease-fire confirmed that a light aircraft and the Officers Mess were completely destroyed by them. Four MiGs and two Caribous also maintained constant surveillance in the area. These aircraft operated singly at varying

intervals to cover the period before and after the Canberra raids. No Pak aircraft entered the area that night. On this day, an IAF Mi-4 helicopter on a flight from Agartala to Aijal force-landed because of a fire in the air. It was completely destroyed but there were no casualties(11).

On 12 December, MiG and Hunter aircraft carried out 15 counter-air missions against Tezgaon and Rangpur. However, air operations were again suspended over the Dhaka area from 1800 hrs on 12 December till 1400 hrs on 13 December to enable the evacuation of foreign personnel by RAF C-130 Hercules aircraft. One MiG was hit by ground fire at Tezgaon. The pilot ejected and was picked up by the Mukti Bahini.

The RAF C-130s completed their rescue missions from Tezgaon by 1500 hrs on 13 December. At 1515 hrs, the MiGs were back, again bombed the repaired portion of the runway and rendered Tezgaon airfield unuseable. Fighter patrols allowed the enemy no opportunity to make use of the bombing respite to fly any aircraft out of the Dhaka area.

On 14 December, a squadron of S-22s was transferred to the west. They were to relieve other S-22 Squadrons in the west which had been in operations continuously from the morning of 4 December. Another move from the east was that of a guided missile squadron from Barrackpore to Baroda, for the defence fo Koyali refinery. It left on 14 December and was to be deployed at its new location by 16/17 December.

On 15 December, all air effort, including that of the Canberras, was directed at reduction of the Dhaka garrison. No counter-air missions were necessary. At 1700 hrs air action over Bangladesh came to a halt as the Pak Commander, Lt Gen AAK Niazi, asked for time to negotiate a cease-fire. The IAF agreed to cease all operations till 0900 hrs on 16 December(12).

Pockets of Pak troops at Sylhet, Bhairab Bazar and Comilla had been putting up stiff resistance. Agartala had therefore been activated as a fighter base on 9 December when four Gnats had moved there from Kumbhigram. Seven more Gnats were moved from Dum Dum on 15 December, bringing up the force upto almost a squadron strength. These Gnats were extensively employed against the enemy pockets isolated by the rapid advance of 4 Corps troops towards Dhaka. One Mi-4 helicopter was lost on a flight from Agartala. It force-landed due to transmission failure and caught fire on impact with the ground.

On 16 December the cease-fire, which was originally planned at 0900 hrs, was extended upto 1500 hrs, as the Pak Commander asked for more time to inform all his troops throughout Bangladesh and arrange a formal surrender. Aircraft of EAC were recalled from their strike missions to Dhaka minutes before the 0900 hrs deadline. The formal surrender took place at 1631 hrs IST and hostilities in the east came to an end.

#### AIR OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE ARMY

EAC had planned to make close air support available to the Army from the first day of operations. Accordingly, 55 offensive support and interdiction missions and six photo missions were flown on 4 December. The Pak army had built up strong defences on the ground, and for the initial breakthrough the Air Force was used to neutralise gun positions and bunkers which would otherwise have delayed the advance of the Indian Army. A PR Canberra was also employed on 4 December to obtain photo cover of possible dropping zones for airborne operations. Two Hunter aircraft were lost that day to ground fire while on close support missions in the 2 Corps Sector(13).

Support to the Army was stepped up considerably on 5 December. The 2 Corps Sector, especially opposite Jessore, received nine close air support missions, some of them consisting of four aircraft. In 4 Corps Sector, 52 offensive support sorties were flown by Hunters, Gnats and MiGs around Akhaura, on the roads leading to Ashuganj, Brahmanbaria, Laksham, Kalaura, Mynamati and Maulvibazar. The 33 Corps and 101 Comn Zone troops also received their fair share of offensive support. Close air support sorties to the Army rose from 55 sorties on 4 December to 104 sorties on 5 December. It was also jointly agreed that Canberras should be employed against Pak troops concentrations in the Jessore area. At approximately 1630 hrs, four Canberras escorted by four Gnats from Dum Dum, attacked enemy positions in Jessore and dropped 30 x 1000 lb bombs.

With a decrease in air defence and counter-air operations in the east, support for the Army was stepped up in all the Corps Sectors. On 6 December, thirty-two Hunter and S-22 sorties were flown to neutralise the strong defensive positions holding up 2 Corps advance towards Jhenida. Close support was also given on the approaches to Jessore by fighter-bombers in the morning and Canberras in the afternoon. The Canberras dropped 33 x 1000 lb bombs, in five sorties. The 33 Corps' operations around Hilli and Dinajpur

received close support by 16 sorties by Gnats and Hunters. Hunters, Gnats and MiGs did 40 sorties in support of 4 Corps operations in the areas of Kalaura-Sylhet, Mynamati Cantt and Brahmanbaria-Ashuganj. One of the MiGs, which was hit by ground fire, ran out of fuel on its return flight and the pilot ejected from the aircraft some 16 km short of Gauhati airfield.

On 7 December, the IAF was called upon to deal with the remnants of the Pak Army holding out on the outskirts of Jessore. After the air attacks, the Indian Army entered the town to find it devoid of all Pak troops. Thereafter a number of reconnaissance missions were mounted to locate them(14). Four Canberras bombed the road and railway line on the approaches to Khulna as Pak troops were retreating there from Jessore. Fighter-bombers were also active along the roads Chuadanga-Jhenida and Kaliganj-Jhenida to assist 4 Div in its advance. One Hunter was hit by ground fire. The pilot tried to reach Dum Dum but ran out of fuel and ejected short of the airfield.

In the 4 Corps area, close support was given to Indian troops advancing towards Bhairab Bazar. The 8 Div and 23 Div were also supported in the Sylhet and Mynamati areas. In the operations in Sylhet area, helicopters were used for the first time. Plans had been made to provide helicopters for the air-lift of two Company Groups to selected places behind enemy lines on D+5 i.e., 8 December. The actual sector was not defined but it was agreed that the lift would be to areas where enemy defences were strong. This situation arose on 7 December when the Indian Army's advance on Sylhet was almost halted at Kalaura. A landing zone was, therefore, selected south of Sylhet town after a helicopter reconnaissance. The helilift commenced on the afternoon of 7 December and continued till post midnight 8/9 December.

On 8 December, 55 sorties were flown by fighter-bombers mostly in Maulvibazar, Narayanganj and Sylhet areas to support operations of 4 Corps. The capture of Maulvibazar the next day was due in part, to the 16 sorties of close air support flown to neutralise the defences. The stronghold at Jamalpur was attacked by MiGs using rockets and front guns and followed up by bombing of heavily defended positions. Close support sorties were also flown in 33 Corps and 2 Corps Sectors, mostly in the form of reconnaissance of roads and interdiction of enemy movements. Four S-22s blew up a fuel dump and attacked Pak troops located in Magura college. PR Canberras obtained photo cover of Mymensingh, Joydebpur, Comilla, Mynamati Cantt and Bhairab Bazar at the request of the Army(15).

A total of 147 sorties were flown on 9 December in support of the Army. Many Tac R sorties were flown towards Kushtia, spearheading the advance of 2 Corps. In the 4 Corps area, air support was given to troops in the Sylhet and Mynamati areas. Pak concentrations in Chandpur and Bhairab Bazar were also attacked. The advance from the north remained bogged down at Jamalpur in spite of 12 MiG sorties mounted against bunkers and gun positions. In the 33 Corps Sector also, the Hilli and Rangpur areas were stoutly defended and offensive support continued to be provided there.

By now rail and road communications had been thoroughly disrupted in the east and Pak forces were dependent on waterways for movement of troops and supplies. The IAF's interdiction plan included attacks on enemy shipping and river-craft. Hunters and Gnats operating from Dum Dum, Hashimara and Kumbhigram were ordered to attack all coastal vessels, motorized barges, gunboats and ferries. Country boats were to be spared unless they were found carrying Pak troops. The tally for the (9 Dec) day was approximately 100 vessels destroyed or damaged, mainly in the Narayanganj, Khulna and Sirajganj area. In the afternoon two Canberras (interdictors) were also employed for this task in the Narayanganj area. The attacks were executed so thoroughly that thereafter few gunboats or steamers were to be seen in the Bangladesh rivers(16).

Early morning reconnaissance sorties on 10 December flown along the water-ways in Bangladesh failed to find any major targets. A large number of sorties continued to be flown in direct support of the land battle. In the 2 Corps area, air strikes were called to reduce the defences of Kushtia, which was believed to be heavily defended; 26 sorties were flown though no hard intelligence was available on the exact targets to be attacked. In the 4 Corps Sector, air effort against Mynamati Cantt was stepped up. Extensive fortifications, on high ground, made a frontal attack by the army difficult. The Air Force was, therefore, given the task of neutralising enemy positions, tanks and guns. Though the IAF was unable to make any major dent in the strong defences of Mynamati, the air attacks prevented the Pak troops from counter attacking or making a breakout. While on a strike mission to Narayanganj, one Hunter was shot down by ground fire. Another Hunter was shot down near Lalmanirhat to the north, but the pilot was recovered by Indian troops. One more Hunter was lost on this day when it was badly damaged while making a forced landing at Cooch Bihar airfield.

Eastcom plans also called for clearance of Jamalpur by D+5 i.e. 8 December by 101 Comn Zone troops on their drive southward to link-up with the proposed paradrop at Tangail, scheduled for D+8 i.e., 11 December. The Pak garrison had held up a brigade at Jamalpur till 10 December and link-up with the para force was in jeopardy. The IAF launched 14 napalm, rocket and bombing attacks in quick succession to turn the tide. Jamalpur fell to Indian troops on the morning of 11 December.

Demands for close support to the army on 11 December were on a reduced scale, as Indian troops had bypassed most enemy strongholds. Attacks on the defences around Kushtia preceded the entry of 2 Corps troops into this town. In the 4 Corps area, strikes were against targets in Mynamati and Narasingdi. The latter coincided with the airlift of troops by helicopters from Brahmanbaria to Narsingdi on the west bank of the Meghna.

On 12 December, close support was provided to 2 Corps in the Hardinge Bridge area, where it was reported that about 300 Pak vehicles, tanks and troops were concentrated on the west bank of the Padma. Air attacks broke up the Pak forces and accounted for a large number of vehicles and some tanks. Sorties were also mounted all along the line of retreat and the exit points along the river Padma. In the 4 Corps area, 28 close support missions were flown, mainly again in the Mynamati, Bhairab Bazar and Sylhet areas. In the Sylhet areas. In the Sylhet Sector, air strikes were made to clear the path for advancing troops to link-up with troops in Sylhet who had earlier been brought in by helicopters. A Hunter aircraft was lost in a flying accident at Hashimara, as it was taking off on a strike mission(17).

110 sorties were flown on 13 December in support of the Army. In the 2 Corps area, the retreating enemy was harassed along the line of communication, and rivercraft and road transports were attacked. Daulatpur, which was holding up the advance into Khulna, was also attacked. In the 4 Corps Sector, 45 close support sorties were mounted, mostly against Mynamati Cantt and a few in the Bhairab Bazar area. In the 33 Corps Sector, seven strikes were mounted against Pak troops and bunkers around Sirajganj, Bogra and Saidpur. Full PR cover for the Dhaka area was obtained and sent to Eastcom for planning future ground operations.

A special resupply task for troops in the Tangail area was undertaken by Caribous on 13 December, which flew 14 sorties. Ammunition, rations

and stores amounting to 37.7 tonnes were flown from Gauhati and air-dropped over Tangail.

The main task of the Air Force on 14 December continued to be support to the Army in its advance towards Dhaka. Not many sorties were flown for 2 Corps as the weather was unfavourable and the mounting bases at Panagarh, Dum Dum and Kalaikunda had poor visibility. In the 4 Corps area, the IAF continued to maintain pressure against the Pak garrisons at Mynamati, Bhairab Bazar and Sylhet. In the afternoon, after the fall of Dr. Malik's Government, there was increased air action in the Dhaka complex against the Pak Army of occupation.

The transport force was equally active in moving troops from east to west. Helicopters were busy with their shuttle service carrying troops and equipment across the Meghna from Daudkandi to Baidya Bazar. On 14 and 15 Dec a total of 1200 troops and 38.1 tonnes of load were airlifted in 121 helicopter sorties, flown mostly at night.

At Jessore airfield one Hunter was involved in a landing accident. It had a full load of rockets which wrecked the aircraft, but the pilot managed to escape safely.

Offensive support was stepped up from 91 sorties on 14 December to 152 on 15 December. Gnats and Hunters attacked Pak positions at Daulatpur and Khulna with napalm, guns and rockets. However, the Pak troops were well entrenched and continued to offer stiff resistance to Indian ground forces. In the 4 Corps Sector the pounding of Mynamati continued. Further north troops at Sylhet received close support from 16 sorties by Hunters and Gnats. The ferry site at Narayanganj was also attacked to prevent Pak troops escaping from the Dhaka complex.

Canberras were also employed on daylight raids on Dhaka Cantt. In 12 sorties they dropped 87 x 1000 lb bombs. One Canberra was lost to ack ack fire near Tezgaon airfield. With the Pak Commander's request for a cease-fire, all air action over Bangladesh was halted at 1700 hrs on 15 December(18). On 16 December, Caribous and helicopters were used for airlifting Commanders and press parties to Dhaka for the surrender ceremony.

## SPECIAL HELIBORNE AND AIRBORNE OPERATIONS

### The Heli Bridges

Heli-borne operations on a large scale were mounted in India, and perhaps in South Asia, for the

first time during the 1971 War. They proved the key to rapid movement of the ground forces in the Bangladesh terrain criss-crossed with innumerable rivers and rivulets. The complete mastery of the air achieved by the IAF in the Eastern Theatre enabled the helicopters to operate safely. There were only 14 Mi-4 helicopters in theatre, and they had been provided primarily for casualty evacuation and to carry the senior commanders to the different sectors of the wide front. But, seeing in them the only means of crossing major rivers like the Meghna, Lt Gen Sagat Singh, GOC 4 Corps and Group Captain Chandan Singh had decided upon and carefully planned the heli-borne operations. The pilots were trained for night landings on unprepared grounds. The Corps Commander, it appears, obtained several hundred torches from Calcutta in order to mark improvised helipads visible at night(19).

The first major heli-lift carried 4/5 GR from Kulaura to Sylhet between 1500 hrs to 1800 hrs on 7 December, and more than a company of troops was moved across. Pakistani troops fired on the helicopters, but the helilift was continued. The operation was halted for a few hrs in the evening to avoid the enemy ground fire on the illuminated landing zone. However, a special communication element was soon inducted for carrying out night operations, and the second phase of helilift operations commenced at 0300 hrs on 8 December. By 0800 hrs, the complete Bn, except a few elements of its HQ, were ferried over. Initially the enemy fire was moderate, but during the later landings, the helicopters met a heavy barrage of fire from all directions. Fortunately only one helicopter was hit by ground fire, causing a total failure of all its electrical services. But it succeeded in flying back to Kailashahar and landing safely.

Helilift operations to Sylhet continued till the early hrs of 9 December, by which time 66(20) sorties had been flown by 12 helicopters operating round the clock for 36 hrs, and 584 troops along with 12,500 kg of essential equipment, including arms and pouch ammunition, had been airlifted. This was the first time that helicopters were used to airlift troops and equipment on such a large scale.

The Pakistanis, while retreating in the Bhairab Bazar Sector, had blown up the main bridge over the river Meghna. The Indian Army having experienced the success of heliborne operations in Sylhet requested for similar help in this area. This requirement was accepted by the IAF on 9 and 10 December and 656 fully armed troops and 8,200 kgs of equipment was helilifted from Brahmanbaria (2359N 9107E) to Raipura

(2358N 9053E)(21). No ground opposition was experienced in this Sector as the Pak troops had fled just prior to the landings.

The success of such missions instilled a new confidence in the Army. This resulted in more requests being put to the IAF, not only to overcome enemy strongholds and geographical obstructions, but also to inject greater impetus into the Indian Army's advance to Dhaka.

To achieve a breakthrough, the biggest helilift operation for transporting troops, arms and equipment was undertaken from Brahmanbaria to Narsingdi and from Daudkhandi to Baidya Bazar between 11 and 15 December. Eight Mi-4 helicopters flew 164 sorties from 11 to 13 December to helilift 1,350 armed troops and 40,070 kg of weapons and equipment from Brahmanbaria to Narsingdi. One sortie was also flown from Agartala to Narsingdi on 15 December to airlift 4 troops and 1,200 kg of equipment. In the first two sectors, the equipment airlifted included medium artillery guns and ammunition(22).

Thus, between 7 and 15 December, these few helicopters flew at total of 222 sorties between Brahmanbaria and Raipura, Brahmanbaria and Narsingdi and Agartala and Narsingdi, carrying 2,010 troops and 49,470 kg of equipment of 57 Mtn Div and 187 sorties from Kalaura and Kailashahar to Sylhet and from Daudkhandi to Baidya Bazar to transport 1,793 troops and 50,600 kg of weapons and equipment.

These special helicopter operations provided a new dimension to the mobility of infantry in India and the experiment was most rewarding. It also contributed richly to the operational experience of helicopter pilots who operated under the most trying conditions both by day and night without much prior training in this role. The important aspects of these operations were:-

- (a) The helilift was undertaken from improvised helipads without any ground facilities.
- (b) The landings on most occasions had to be done in the face of enemy small arms fire.
- (c) These missions were completed with very marginal fuel reserves.
- (d) All the battle-damaged helicopters were repaired in the field.

It was a matter of great pride and satisfaction that the above heliborne task was performed by only

eight to ten Mi-4 helicopters which were operational at a time. The total effort put in on this task was 409 sorties airlifting 3803 fully armed troops and 100,070 kgs of essential equipment which included nine 75-mm guns with 100 shells each(23). It was indeed a great achievement.

### The Para Drop at Tangail(24).

Four different para-drop operations had been planned for the Eastern Theatre. But three of them were not found necessary. The fourth operation involved the air dropping of a Para Battalion Group north of Tangail, its aim being the capture of Poongli Bridge on Jamalpur-Tangail road, as already detailed in Chapter XIII.

The fleet of transport aircraft to be used for the operation consisted of AN-12s, Packets and Dakotas which had been marshalled at Gorakhpur, Phaphamau, and Bhita by 10 December and ferried to their mountain bases, Dum Dum and Kalaikunda, on the following day.

The main para drop operation was undertaken on 11 December by 48 aircraft - six AN-12s and 20 Packet aircraft operating from Dum Dum and 22 Dakota aircraft from Kalaikunda - which landed most of the Para Battalion Group along with their supply and heavy drops north of Tangail between 1600 and 1630 hrs, the initial plan for a night drop having been changed to dusk drop due to the prevailing favourable air situation.

Before the main drop was undertaken, a Pathfinder force in a Packet aircraft was dropped on the DZ site and two Caribous, employed simultaneously as decoys, dropped dummies about 16 km away from the actual DZ. The main drop commenced with the AN-12s delivering the heavy loads, followed by the Packets with platform loads and troops. The Dakotas brought up the rear, carrying mostly men though some of them also had door loads of 250 kg. While it had been planned to drop 800 troops and 152.4 tonnes of supplies, including 22 heavy platform loads of guns and vehicles, the actual drop consisted of 750 officers and men of 50 Para Bde with their arms, equipment and light vehicles. Fighter cover for the transport aircraft during different phases of the para drop operations was provided by Gnat and MiG aircraft.

On 12 December, a preplanned resupply for the 50 Para Bde was carried out by five AN-12s and one Packet aircraft which dropped 40 troops and 45 tonnes of second line ammunition and other supplies.

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## Government House, Dhaka

This was an operation that hastened the course of events and brought the war in the east to a dramatic end for, within the span of a few minutes, it shattered the morale of the Government in East Pakistan.

Dr A.M. Malik, Governor of East Pakistan, was scheduled to chair an important meeting with his civilian and military officers and East Pak leaders at 1200 hrs (EP Time) on 14 December in the conference hall at Government House, Dhaka. Barely 45 minutes before the scheduled time for its commencement, i.e., at 1115 hrs EP Time (1045 hrs IST), Eastern Air Command received information about the high level meeting that would take momentous decisions on the courses of action to be adopted to save the situation(26). Since the destruction of the focal point of the enemy's 'central nervous system' was likely to paralyse its entire war machinery, Eastern Air Command was ordered to carry out a lightning attack on Government House, Dhaka, while the meeting was in progress.

MiGs and Hunters from Gauhati and Hashimara were immediately alerted, and since only a few minutes were left for the meeting to commence, the pilots, before they were scrambled, were briefed with the help of tourist maps of Dhaka. At 1255 hrs (EP Time), by which time the meeting had been in progress for less than an hour, the IAF arrived on the scene and struck. Four MiGs attacked the Government House with rockets and scored direct hits on the conference hall, followed immediately by another successful rocket attack by two more MiGs and, a few minutes later, by yet another attack by two Hunters.

The sudden and spectacular attack which was carried out with pin-point accuracy and which destroyed a third of the Government House and caused severe damage to the rest of the building, was a turning point in the course of events towards the closing stages of the war. It so completely unnerved and demoralised the persons present at the meeting that the very head of the East Pakistan Government Dr A.M. Malik, along with his entire Cabinet, resigned then and there.

## Transport Operations

On 12 December, five AN-12s and one Packet aircraft were employed for resupply of ammunition and stores and para-drop of 40 troops as already related. At the same time, a special air transport force

consisting of AN-12s, Packets and IAC Boeings assembled at Dum Dum to airlift 1,679 troops and 82.9 tonnes of stores of 1 Para Brigade to Palam(27). A total of 23 sorties were flown and the task completed by the afternoon. Another task of airlifting an infantry brigade (comprising 2,464 troops, 12 vehicles with RCL guns and 67 tonnes of stores and supporting equipment) from Bagdogra to Hindon was concurrently undertaken by AN-12s, Packets and Boeings. This airlift consisting of 62 sorties began on 12 December and was completed on 13 December.

Extensive casualty evacuation sorties were continuously undertaken by all transport aircraft and helicopters on their return flights from the forward airfields and landing zones. Special casualty evacuation flights were also arranged from Agartala to Gauhati. In addition to this, normal operational air maintenance sorties were also carried out from Agartala to Gauhati. After the troops were helilanded at Sylhet and Daudkandi and paradropped at Tangail, their operational air maintenance was undertaken by Caribou aircraft. In the NEFA area, routine air maintenance sorties continued from Mohanbari.

#### AIR OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE NAVY

As soon as AOC Maritime Air Operations (MAO) was informed of the outbreak of hostilities, the three Maritime Air Centres were instructed to put into operation the plans for maritime reconnaissance. The maritime air centre on the eastern seaboard was located at Vishakhapatnam. On 4 December, an HS-748 aircraft commenced a dawn search of the waters off Vishakhapatnam for Pak submarines and surface ships. And maritime air support continued daily thereafter. On 8 December it searched for the Pak merchantship Madhumati and the Norwegian cargo ship Toronto reported to be carrying contraband cargo to Chittagong. The Toronto was sighted and identified by one of the Dakotas from Cochin at 0905 hrs and INS Ganga, which was in the area, was guided in to intercept her. The Madhumati was not sighted. She was eventually apprehended by the Indian Navy off the Makran coast in West Pakistan.

Dakotas operating from Cochin and Tambaram and HS-748s from Vishakhapatnam and Port Blair kept up their search for Pak ships. A specially close watch was kept for merchant ships which might be trying to break out from Bangladesh. Just prior to commencement of hostilities, the Chiefs of Staff had considered employment of Indian Naval ships and aircraft to attack targets south of Latitude 22° 25' N in the east. Because Indian Naval aircraft would not have

been a match for Sabres or MiG 19s, operating from Chittagong, the IAF was given the task of eliminating enemy air from this major air base. On 4 December, Hunters from Dum Dum attacked Chittagong airfield, and when it was confirmed that no Pak fighter aircraft were based there, the Navy was informed to go ahead with its attacks. The elimination of the PAF in Bangladesh by the IAF was part of the coordinated plan for the use of naval air in the east.

### THE MUKTI BAHINI AIR FORCE

The birth of the Bangladesh Air Force as Kilo Flight has already been noticed. On the night of December 3-4 the Otter aircraft of this AF attacked the fuel dumps at Chittagong and an Alouette helicopter raided the fuel dumps at Narayanganj. Both the missions were successful. On 4 December, this Flight at Kailashahar airfield was placed at the disposal of GOC 8 Mountain Division, operating in the Maulvibazar/Sylhet Sector. The GOC asked for attacks by night on convoys, river barges and steamers on the Meghna, north of Bhairab Bazar. The flight flew five sorties between 4-7 December, hitting bunkers and troop concentrations at Maulvibazar, and also destroyed two steamers and several 3-ton trucks carrying troops.

From 7 to 12 December the Alouette helicopter was constantly and effectively used as an armed escort during the special helicopter operations at Sylhet, Raipur, Narsingdi and Baidya Bazar. It engaged targets as directed by the FAC at night also.

After the first night raid on Chittagong fuel dumps, the Otter aircraft was utilised for armed escort/recce on a few missions only, in the same area as the Alouette. The overall returns from this Flight were not very encouraging, perhaps because it had no definite tasks. Contribution of this Flight to the war effort was hardly significant. However, as far as raising the morale of the Mukti Bahini was concerned, it did serve the desired purpose. During the period of operations the total flying effort of this Flight was:-

<u>A/C Type</u>	<u>Sorties/Hours</u>
Alouettee	77/68 hrs 10 mts
Otter	12/23 hrs 35 mts

### REVIEW

2033 In the Eastern Theatre the IAF flew a total of 2033 sorties on fighter, fighter bomber and bomber

aircraft. Of these 184 sorties were flown in the air defence role (9.1%), 1384 sorties for offensive support and interdiction (68.1%), 390 sorties for counter air (19.2%), 52 sorties on special strategic missions (2.5%), and 23 sorties on photo and fighter reconnaissance (1.1%). The allocation of the flying effort was well planned. A little over two thirds of the total flying effort was in direct support of the Indian Army in the land battle. Only 9.1% of the sorties were flown in the air defence role as the PAF ceased to offer any resistance after the second day of operations(28).

### Aircraft Losses

As mentioned in an earlier Chapter, the IAF lost a total of 56 aircraft in the war due to enemy action, of which 43 were lost in the Western Sector. In the Eastern Sector the IAF lost a total of 13 aircraft, as detailed below(29):-

Type of Aircraft	Lost over enemy territory	Lost in Air Combat over own territory	A/C lost on ground by enemy air action	A/C hit in enemy territory but crashed in own territory	Total
S-22 (Su 7)	1	--	--	--	1
Type-77 } MiG 21 }	1	--	--	1	2
Hunter	8	--	--	1	9
Canberra	1	--	--	--	1
Li-4	--	--	--	--	--
Yakota	--	--	--	--	--
<b>RAND TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>

The Pakistan Air Force lost all its aircraft in the east totalling 19 F-86 Sabre aircraft and 3 RT-33 aircraft. Of these, PAF claimed 9 or 10 F-86 Sabre aircraft and 3 RT-33 aircraft, destroyed by the Pakistanis themselves on the ground to obviate their falling into enemy hands. Also one transport and two light aircraft were destroyed on the ground by bombing.

Comparative losses in aircraft seem to be on par on both Fronts of the War. However, the losses as a ratio of the air effort strongly favoured the IAF, which operated many more sorties in hostile skies deep inside Pakistani airspace, and which pressed home its attacks with determination. And Pak air defence guns were numerous and deadly, particularly over the PAF bases.

### Unique Achievements

In many ways the air war in the east presented to this part of the world a unique spectacle. There were features in this struggle which had never been witnessed before, and which are unlikely to be repeated in the future. The total elimination of the rival air power by the IAF within two days of the start of the war reminded observers of the Luftwaffe over Poland in September 1939 and the Israeli Air Force against the Egyptians. In determined attacks pressed home against PAF Sabres and intense ground fire at Kurmitola Air Base(30), the IAF shot down several Sabres, and grounded the rest by cratering the run-ways. Persistent attacks in the days following defeated all attempts to repair the run-ways. Thereafter, the PAF ceased to operate in the east.

This achievement of total air supremacy enabled the IAF to give a revealing demonstration of the unique flexibility and power of a modern air arm. Daylight movements of the Pak Army were effectively interdicted. Concentrated air attacks destroyed within one day almost all gun boats and steamers used by the enemy. Effective support was given to the Indian Army battling on the ground below whenever a request was received. The vulnerable Seahawks of the Indian Navy were enabled by the elimination of the Sabres, to operate with impunity against Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Khulna and Dohazari ports. Elimination of the PAF also permitted transfer from Eastern Front to the Western Front of one MiG, one Sukhoi and one Hunter squadron in the middle of the war.

Only on the first two days of the war, Combat Air Patrols were mounted at IAF airfields for air defence against PAF raiders. No enemy strikes, however, took place and CAPs were discontinued thereafter.

The IAF claimed destruction of 18 enemy tanks, and a large number of artillery guns, in addition to inflicting heavy casualties on enemy troops. The air strikes over Pak strongholds at Lalmai Hills, Comilla and Mynamati proved effective in keeping the troops

bottled up in their bunkers.

As air superiority was complete, several special missions were undertaken. These missions aimed at weakening the enemy's will to fight. Practically every night MiG-21 aircraft were sent to carry out harassment of the Pak troops by flying at supersonic speeds at low levels and firing missiles. The aim was not to attack any particular target but to keep them awake, and guessing. Missions were undertaken to drop leaflets over the Pak troops to exhort them to surrender. There were three other special missions which were carried out with great precision and daring, and deserve special mention, namely the attack on Government House at Dhaka, the strike on Joydebpur Ordnance Factory, and the para drop at Tangail. These missions, especially the first, definitely helped in persuading Gen Niazi to surrender.

With bridges blown up and ferries destroyed, the mighty rivers and innumerable rivulets of Bangladesh presented serious hurdles before the advancing Indian troops. In such situations, IAF helicopters were extensively used for airbridging these obstacles. Less than a dozen Mi-4s airlifted nearly 4,000 troops with supporting arms and equipment across river obstacles at Narsingdi, Baidya Bazar, Raipur and Sylhet.

Both tactical and strategic airlift of troops were carried out. After the situation in the east stabilized, army formations which could be spared were airlifted to the west. Both military and civil aircraft were used for this purpose. The advancing troops were supplied by both para drops and landing sorties, and at times they had to depend only on air supply.

Helicopters and fixed wing aircraft carried out extensive casualty evacuation. The Mi-4s were used to bring the casualties from the battlefield to the forward airfields, and from there serious casualties were evacuated to Gauhati/Calcutta by Dakotas. A total of 899 casualties were airlifted during the period of war in the east. The ready availability of airlift for casualty evacuation was a great morale booster to the troops. Helicopters also provided great mobility to the commanders, enabling them to be present personally at the right time and the right place.

## Conclusion

Many factors contributed to the successful and decisive victory in the east, the foremost amongst them being the achievement of air superiority within

the first five hours of undertaking offensive action and thereafter achieving total air supremacy at the end of the second day of operations.

After having achieved air supremacy in the first two days of operations it really paved the way for the army to reach Dhaka with the least possible resistance. Where there were enemy strongholds the IAF pounded them, where there were big rivers to cross the IAF airlifted troops and equipment, and where pressure was required to bear on the enemy to ask for a ceasefire the IAF was thereto apply it.

The high level of cooperation and understanding between the three Services and the local civil government also played an important role in bringing the war to a quick end and contributed a great deal to the high standard of morale of all the fighting forces.

Air Cmde Inam-Ul-Haque, the PAF AOC of Dhaka is quoted as saying that the IAF activity over Dhaka complex was so intense that the ack ack ammunition which he thought would last for months was exhausted in a fortnight, and he had only one day's ammunition left at ceasefire.

Perhaps the best testimony the IAF received was from Gen Niazi himself. One of the senior Air Force Commanders, it is said, asked him why he had surrendered when his army was intact(31). Gen Niazi thought for a moment, walked up to this officer, pointed at the pilot's wings on his uniform and said "Because of this-you, the Indian Air Force".

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. From Official Records.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid. An Official report, however, says that 110 sorties were flown.
21. From Official Records.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. There were two radars and Chinese LLAD guns at the Dhaka airfields.
31. From Official Records.

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