

*Book reports*

## **The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965**

by PVS Jagan Mohan and Samir Chopra  
<http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/Books/>

### *Synopsis*

The India-Pakistan 1965 Air War is a book that aims to fill in the gaps regarding a military conflict that took place almost four decades ago. Why is a book about an air war that took place four decades ago being written now? An answer is perhaps best made indirectly. In 1999, a military conflict broke out in Kashmir. The world read about a war that threatened to attain nuclear flashpoint. The world read about wars having been fought before for the same region. In this book we describe the air component of a war that was triggered by the issue of Kashmir in 1965; we believe that it is the air war that has not been documented adequately. While the Pakistani side of the story has been told, the Indian story has not.

Our book begins with a brief historical background to the Indian Air Force (IAF) and provides a look at the events that drove the IAF's developments in the years leading up to the war. These chapters enable some appreciation of the challenges that faced the IAF as it strove to develop the aviation component of its military. The political circumstances of India and Pakistan drove their purchasing policies: American aces from the Korean War had trained the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) whose main strike force consisted of F-86 Sabres - the stars of the Korean War - and B-57 Canberras; the Indian Air Force flew a mixture of British, Russian and French jets. We examine with some brief technical detail the orders of battle in 1965. India was often using untried and untested aircraft beyond their designated performance profiles. India persisted in attempting self-reliance in military matters a process that continues to this day as can be witnessed in its manufacture of nuclear weapons and the development of an indigenous aviation and space program. After a brief look at the events that eventually triggered the war in September 1965 - the battles in the disputed Rann of Kutch territory and the Pakistani intrusion into Kashmir by Operation Gibraltar - we move on to a day by day recounting of the war, from the Pakistani attack in Jammu to the Indian retaliation across the Punjab border to a blow by blow account of the escalation of the air war on the western front. It makes sobering reading to realize that the Kargil conflict in 1999 began in almost exactly the same fashion. We also provide a detailed description of events in the Eastern Sector i.e., on the border between India and the erstwhile East Pakistan, something that no book on the conflict has ever attempted. Our account is unique in providing Indian eyewitness accounts of the major actions of the air war. We describe in subsequent chapters, the air component of the three-week long inconclusive slugging battle on the ground that employed tanks

and artillery and that was only brought to a halt after intense international pressure for a ceasefire involving all the major superpowers (the US, the USSR and China) and the United Nations.

We conclude with an evaluation of the performance of the respective Air Forces and an epilogue on the men who fought the war.

Our main source of information on the book has been interviews with Indian Air Force personnel that fought in the war. We also procured war diaries of squadrons, material made available from both Indian and Pakistani sources, including magazine articles, fictionalized accounts and other books mainly by Army personnel on both sides of the border that chiefly addressed the conflict on the ground. As a result of conducting interviews - in the USA, the United Kingdom, Australia and India - we were able to get a unique perspective on the war. We faced challenges: some IAF personnel could simply not be located - some had migrated and left the country to become members of the Indian diaspora, some were reluctant to talk about a subject that could often evoke painful memories; some had passed away before we began the book, and others sadly left us as the book was being written. Lastly, the Indian Air Force itself has not made public its records of the war. Still, our contact with ex-IAF personnel provided us with unique information: pilots logbook scans, never before published photographs (close to 100) including gun camera photos and personal details on the men who fought the war. We also conducted interviews via email by sending questionnaires to the veterans involved. We used the Indian Governments Official History of the 1965 War to crosscheck details and verify claims. We did not however, have access to the Indian Air Forces history cell. We have received no funding from the Indian Government or the Indian Air Force. We did receive support from serving IAF officers in an unofficial capacity.

The book is of value in understanding the deployment of airpower of the 20th century. Furthermore, the 1965 war represents a turning point in Indo-Pakistan relations. India had already realized its military vulnerability after the 1962 war with China. This war took it further down the path of military modernization and re-equipment. Its air force was rapidly undergoing an expansion program in the mid-sixties; it took the lessons from this war into its next campaign: the highly successful war to liberate East Pakistan in 1971. The lessons learned from the 1965 war still drive military aviation in India, which has embarked on the Light Combat Aircraft project and recently inducted the Sukhoi-30MKI, the most advanced jet aircraft in the world today in active service. Understanding this war will help dispel some notions the West has about the countries that find themselves still locked in battle over Kashmir. One of these is the misconception that the countries are not militarily sophisticated. On the contrary, as this book will show, the two have had practice in developing military tactics over a period of time that are unique to the theaters that they will fight in. The two countries have fought fiercely, with no

quarter given and certainly none asked for. The armoured battles in the Sialkot sector in 1965 were the most intense since the Second World War rivaled only by Israeli-Egyptian battles in the Sinai in 1973, and the air battles often took place at low-altitudes in high performance aircraft.

Each country appointed heroes; here we tell some of the Indian stories. We tell for the first time the story of Alfred Cooke, the Indian pilot who tangled with four PAF Sabres and shot down two of them. Cooke is peacefully retired in Australia this is the first time his story has been recorded. Some legendary raids that have made their way into the aviation lore of the Indian subcontinent are described for the first time in print such as Pete Wilson's raid on Badin, the Pakistani pilot admirably dubbed '8-Pass Charlie' by Indian pilots and the story of the daring clandestine reconnaissance missions flown by Jaggi Nath in broad daylight at low level over Pakistan - prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

The war had a unique edge to it: men fought in the war that prior to the creation of India and Pakistan had served in air academies together. The Air Chiefs in the war - Arjan Singh and Nur Khan - were friends before the war and remain friends to this day. Indian pilots flew across the border and over the villages that their grandparents and parents had lived in. More than one Indian pilot was to comment on the incongruity of fighting against men who might have been his squadron mates had the history of the subcontinent been even marginally different. With the publication of this book, the history of the 1965 war will be complete. We do not spend much time on political details, commentary or historical background that is non-aviation related. Much has already been written on these matters. For the interested reader we provide a bibliography of further reading that will provide adequate background on the land war and on the politics of Indo-Pakistan relations in 1965. We started this project with a certain boyish enthusiasm and have used that as a balance to the seriousness of the project. Still, in writing this book, we strive to do justice to the facts, to present history with respect for its players and with the fervent hope that the future history of the subcontinent will not require the kind of cost that appears to be imminent in these grim days. Contact email addresses for authors (Please replace '&' with '@') :

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## Treasures of Indian Wildlife

Ashok Kothari and B. S. Chhapgar

Oxford University Press:

hardback, 192 pages Oct 2005.

This book brings together articles, drawings, and paintings from valuable old books, journals, and gazetteers in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society. The historical writings of wildlife and bird enthusiasts of the past paint a vivid picture of India's rich flora and fauna, in urgent need of protection today. Stunning paintings, mostly of birds, and lithographs and sketches of animals and trees, scenery and monuments by eminent European wildlife artists of the 19- and early 20- century are brought together. In a substantial section at the end of the book, gleanings from the miscellaneous notes section of early issues of the Journal of the BNHS provide interesting snippets of information on species as wide ranging as red ants, mongoose, monitor lizard, python, cobra, cheeta and darter.

### *Product Details*

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### *About the Authors*

**Dr. Ashok Kothari** has been practicing medicine in Mumbai for the last three decades, simultaneously pursuing his keen interest in nature and traveling extensively in India and abroad. He served as member of the Executive Committee and Chairman of the Library Committee of the Bombay Natural History Society. **Dr. Bowman F. Chhapgar**, former Curator of the Taraporevala Aquarium, Mumbai, is an internationally renowned marine biologist.

The Indo-Pakistani Fight of 1965 was a war that took place between April 1965 and 23 September 1965 between Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of India. This conflict became known as the Second Kashmir War. Both countries fought over the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir. The first Kashmir War took place in 1947. The war began after Pakistan's Operation Gibraltar. In this operation, Pakistan wanted to bring forces into Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir to conquer the area of Kashmir ruled by

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The events of September 1st, 1965 are seared into the minds of every Air Force veteran who fought in that conflict. In no small measure to the sacrifice The events of September 1st, 1965 are seared into the minds of every Air Force veteran who fought in that conflict. In no small measure to the sacrifice made by three pilots of No.45 and 220 Squadron, flying obsolete Vampire FB52s in the face of the overwhelming odds against the Pakistani offensive. The 1965 Indo-Pak War came when India was in the midst of a major military expansion. India did not want to escalate matters when Pakistani forces invaded Kutch in April 1965 and accepted a ceasefire with British mediation. Although the government allowed the use of Indian Air Force (IAF) combat aircraft on 1 September 1965, action remained localised to the Chhamb area for five days. This was primarily because of India's desire to avoid all-out war. IAF was used for counter air, air defence, and in support of the ground forces. Poor communications with the Army, lack of joint planning, and also India and Pakistan have gone to war against each other four times since their independence from the U.K. and subsequent partition into separate sovereign states.

The Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 was instigated by several events. First, in 1956, India regained control over the Rann of Kutch region in the Indian state of Gujarat. Then, in January of 1965, Pakistan sent troops to patrol an Indian-controlled region, believing the local population wanted to be out of Indian control. This move was followed by attacks on both sides in April of the same year. The Indian army, together with the Air Force, recaptured the majority of the Kargil district. Facing international opposition, Pakistan was forced to withdraw its invasion over the rest of the district. The lessons of the 1965 war led India to refine its tactics which proved decisive in the 1971 war. Pakistani forces failed to take account of the extent to which they had relied on two factors which the IAF could not take for granted – complete ground-based defensive radar coverage and an adequate supply of air-to-air missiles.

The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965. Manohar Books. Retrieved 2009-07-03.