

ECHOES OF VALOR: THE STORY OF BALTISTAN AND BRIGADIER (R) ASLAM KHAN

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Abstract

The first war over Kashmir, fought from 1947 to 1948, was a significant conflict between India and Pakistan that arose shortly after both countries gained independence from British colonial rule. The war continued until December 1948, when both nations agreed to a ceasefire mediated by the United Nations. Following the ceasefire, the UN passed a resolution calling for a plebiscite in Kashmir to determine its future status. This initial conflict marked the beginning of a series of wars between India and Pakistan over the region, establishing a long-standing territorial dispute and ongoing tensions between the two countries. The Line of Control (LoC) now divides the region into areas administered by India and Pakistan. Among the key figures in this conflict was Brigadier (R) Aslam Khan, a military officer from Pakistan, who played a crucial role during the war. He is often referred to as the "Legend of Baltistan" due to his leadership and

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significant contributions. During the war, Aslam Khan led the Azad Rebels, a group associated with the Gilgit Scouts, a paramilitary force operating in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan (formerly known as Baltistan). The Gilgit Scouts were instrumental in the early stages of the conflict, as they revolted against the rule of the Maharaja of Kashmir and declared their allegiance to Pakistan. This paper aims to explore the historical events and perspectives surrounding Aslam Khan's contributions, drawing on multiple sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of his role during this pivotal time in history.

Keywords: Kashmir, Pakistan, India, UN, Aslam Khan, Legend of Baltistan, Gilgit Scouts, plebiscite, Resolution and Maharaja

Introduction

Muhammad Aslam Khan was a man of remarkable valor and unwavering principles, belonging to the Afridi clan from the Tirah Valley. He was raised in Jammu and Kashmir, where he received his primary education in the scenic city of Srinagar. His father, Sardar Rehmatullah Khan, was a distinguished officer in the army of Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir. During his military career, Sardar Rehmatullah Khan played a pivotal role in expanding the territories under Maharaja

Hari Singh's rule, thereby instilling in his son, Aslam, a profound sense of bravery and duty. Inspired by his family's legacy of military service, Aslam Khan aspired to join the British Indian Army. His strategic capabilities and military acumen became evident during the Yidum Road operations, where he notably captured the strategically significant Kennedy Peak in October 1944 a feat that had previously eluded American forces. For his extraordinary gallantry during the assault on Fort White in Burma, he was awarded the Military Cross by the British royal family, in recognition of his exceptional contributions to the Allied war effort. Following the partition of India in 1947, Aslam Khan was transferred to the Pakistan Army, where he joined the 6/8 Punjab Regiment. He was entrusted with the critical mission of liberating the northern regions of Pakistan, particularly the strategically vital Gilgit-Baltistan area, from Indian control. Many skeptics considered this mission nearly impossible, given the rugged terrain and the well-fortified enemy positions. However, Major Aslam remained resolute in his determination to lead his men, embodying the steadfastness and resilience of the majestic mountains that surrounded them. He resumed command in January 1948, accompanied by his younger brother, Major Anwar Khan, who was appointed brigade major, responsible for overseeing logistics and support operations. Faced with a severe

shortage of weapons, Major Aslam demonstrated remarkable ingenuity by using dummy wooden rifles to train his scouts ensuring they were prepared for combat despite the limited resources at their disposal. The scope of their military campaign extended from the southern reaches of Astore to the valley of Gurez, and from the vast Deosai Plains to the strategic borders of Zojila Pass. Despite the persistent threat posed by advancing Indian forces from Rondo along the Skardu Astore road, Major Aslam Khan displayed exceptional strategic foresight and leadership. His tactical brilliance led to the successful liberation of key territories, many of which are now administered by Pakistan, including the Gilgit Agency. Had he not been recalled from the front lines, the geopolitical boundaries of Kashmir today might have taken a very different shape. This underscores the profound and lasting impact of Aslam Khan's leadership during one of the most critical junctures in the region's modern history.

2. Historical Background

2.A Brigadier Aslam Khan

Aslam Khan, the second son of Sardar Rahmatullah Khan, left an enduring legacy not only in the military but also in the realm of business. His family was distinguished in public service, with his

younger brother, Air Marshal (Retired) Asghar Khan, serving with distinction in the Pakistan Air Force and later becoming its Chief. Within the esteemed Rahmatullah Khan family, Aslam Khan emerged as a key figure, earning national recognition for his military achievements (Dani, 2001). Nicknamed the "**Legend of Baltistan**," Aslam Khan earned widespread respect and admiration for his daring and successful military operations, particularly during the first Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir in 1947. Demonstrating extraordinary leadership and organizational ability, he assembled and commanded a powerful force of approximately 1,200 local rebels in the Gilgit region. These volunteers were recruited and trained under his guidance to form a formidable resistance against the Indian Army and the forces of the Jammu and Kashmir State. Armed with limited resources but fueled by a strong sense of purpose, Aslam Khan launched an aggressive campaign from the northern front. His forces successfully captured Skardu after intense combat and advanced nearly 30 miles into Leh, deep within Indian territory. These strategic maneuvers were not only militarily significant but also highlighted his capacity to lead under difficult and resource-constrained conditions (Poplai, 1959). During the conflict, the opposing forces managed to repel attacks originating from both the Kargil Sector and Skardu.

Despite these defensive efforts, the territory ultimately remained under rebel control and was later integrated into Pakistani-administered territory following the cessation of hostilities between the newly created dominions of India and Pakistan. This military success bore historical significance, echoing a moment from the past Aslam Khan's grandfather, General Sammad Khan, had once captured the same region while serving in the Dogra army. In a remarkable repetition of history, Aslam Khan, now leading forces for Pakistan, reclaimed the same land by defeating the forces loyal to the Maharaja of Kashmir. At the time of the 1947 Partition, Aslam Khan made a defining choice to join the Pakistan Army, thereby aligning his future with that of the nascent state (Dani, 2001).

2.B Early Life

Aslam Khan was born on August 27, 1918, in Jammu, into a family with a distinguished military background. After completing his education, he embarked on a military career that coincided with the outbreak of World War II in 1939. He enlisted in the Infantry Battalion of the 4th Jammu and Kashmir regiment, famously known as the "Battalion of Fateh Shibji." His first posting was in Rattu, Gilgit, where he served for two formative years, gaining crucial operational

experience (Dani, 2001). Amid the global turmoil of World War II, Aslam Khan's regiment was deployed to Burma to support the British Imperial Forces in their campaign against the Japanese. It was during this assignment that he distinguished himself in combat, leading a daring assault on Kennedy Peak a strategically important mountain in the Burmese theater. His fearless leadership and tactical brilliance earned him the **Military Cross**, one of the highest honors for valor, awarded by the British government in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the war effort (Brahma, 1990). Following the successful campaign in Burma, a series of celebratory events were organized by the British Indian Army in collaboration with the First Punjabis Battalion (FPB) and the Infantry Regiment of the 4th Jammu and Kashmir. Aslam Khan played an active role in these celebrations, which not only marked a military victory but also highlighted a spirit of unity among soldiers from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. These events, held in 1945, stood as a powerful testament to communal harmony, showcasing the camaraderie and solidarity that transcended religious divisions within the ranks of the British Indian Army (Bhattacharya, 2013). After returning from his military engagements during World War II, Aslam Khan was stationed in Jammu, where he was promoted to the rank of Major in recognition of his service and

leadership. Around the same period, Captain Mirza Hassan Khan—also a recipient of the prestigious Military Cross and stationed in Bhimber—initiated the formation of a **Revolutionary Council**. This council, composed primarily of Muslim officers within the military, was founded with the aim of overthrowing the rule of Maharaja Hari Singh following the anticipated withdrawal of British colonial authority from the Indian Subcontinent. Under the leadership of Captain Mirza Hassan Khan, the council began formulating a strategic plan to assert control over the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. As a newly promoted Major, Aslam Khan was entrusted with significant leadership responsibilities in Jammu to further the council's revolutionary objectives. In a subsequent career move, he formally joined the British Royal Indian Army and was posted to Ranchi in Gilgit, at the G-2nd station. However, with the Partition of British India in 1947 and the emergence of Pakistan as an independent nation, Major Aslam Khan transferred his allegiance to the newly established Pakistan Army, reaffirming his commitment to the defense and consolidation of the new state (Dani, 2001).

3. The Pakistan Army and the Kashmir Conflict (Tribal Invasion of Kashmir)

In October 1947, while on military leave from the Pakistan Army,

Aslam Khan was traveling towards Srinagar. During his journey, near the area of Lowari Gali close to Muzaffarabad, he encountered a group of Pashtoon tribal fighters under the command of Khursheed Anwar. These forces were part of an organized invasion aiming to wrest control of Kashmir from the Maharaja's administration before its accession to India. Recognizing the strategic importance of the moment, Aslam Khan made a decisive choice to join the tribal forces, assuming the position of second-in-command to Khursheed Anwar. This decision, though critical to the unfolding military campaign, led one journalist to label him as a defector and absconder from the Pakistan Army (Jha, 2003). On October 27, 1947, in response to the formal accession of Jammu and Kashmir to the Indian Union, Indian military forces were rapidly mobilized. The 1st Sikh Regiment, led by Lieutenant Colonel Dewan Ranjit Rai, was among the first to be airlifted into the conflict zone. Their mission was to secure the route to Srinagar and halt the advance of tribal and rebel forces. Aslam Khan, now embedded within the invading forces, responded swiftly. He utilized captured mortars with precision to disrupt the Indian Army's initial advancement near Baramula. The sudden and accurate shelling resulted in the death of Colonel Ranjit Rai a significant loss for the Indian side and a turning point in the early stages of the conflict (Suharwardy, 1983). Following the skirmish, the 1st Sikh Regiment retreated to establish a defensive position at Pattan. However, the Indian military responded by intensifying its airlift operations into Jammu and Kashmir, significantly reinforcing its ground presence. In a series of coordinated offensives, the Indian Army gradually pushed the tribal invaders back, eventually reclaiming Uri. By November 7, 1947, Indian forces had secured the

entire Kashmir Valley, stabilizing the region and eliminating the immediate threat of further incursion.

3.A The Legacy of Major Aslam Khan

Major Aslam Khan was a distinguished leader known for his principled and empowering approach to command. Unlike many who tighten their grip on authority by dominating their subordinates, he chose a path of mutual respect and decentralization. He firmly believed in giving his junior officers the freedom to act independently, encouraging them to contribute creatively to military strategy. This openness allowed them to adapt intelligence tactics on the ground according to evolving circumstances and to execute repeated offensives that kept the enemy disoriented and off balance particularly effective in preventing the Maharaja's forces from gaining an upper hand. What truly set Major Aslam apart was his exceptional familiarity with the region's terrain. His geographical insight was so profound that he could navigate the land inch by inch, a mastery that proved crucial in planning and executing successful military logistics. He was able to ensure the seamless movement of supplies and the timely redeployment of troops, battalions, and platoons across various sectors. This strategic agility not only strengthened defensive operations but also allowed for rapid

response to enemy advances, consistently giving his side a decisive advantage. (Muneeb, Owais, 2015)

3.B Major Aslam Khan's Bold Advance into Kashmir

Major Aslam Khan played a pivotal role during the early stages of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. With strategic foresight and daring initiative, he led his men across the frontier and began coordinated raids into the Hirmal Pardesh region. Recognizing the significance of his movement, he swiftly transmitted a wireless message back to his superior command at Rawalpindi, informing them of the developing situation. The boldness of his actions took the British Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army, General Douglas Gracey, by surprise. Unaccustomed to such autonomous military maneuvers, Gracey summoned Major Aslam back for immediate consultation. Following his recall, rather than facing reprimand, Aslam's capabilities and vision were recognized he was appointed as the private secretary to the Chief of Army Staff, a position that allowed him to remain close to the heart of military strategy and leadership. Despite the shift in his role, Colonel Aslam Khan remained driven by a larger mission. He was deeply passionate about extending territorial control toward Srinagar, the capital of Jammu and Kashmir. At the time, the region was in a state of

flux, as the Maharaja had already abandoned the city in fear of losing control. Aslam saw a historic opportunity not just to gain ground, but to reshape the political and military landscape of Kashmir. (Muneeb and Owais, 2010-2020)

4. Gilgit and Baltistan

On November 1st, 1947, a transformative chapter unfolded in the northern frontier of the Indian Subcontinent. In the Gilgit Agency, a calculated rebellion erupted under the leadership of Major William Brown, a British officer commanding the Gilgit Scouts. The revolt led to the arrest and imprisonment of Brigadier Ghansara Singh, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir's appointed governor in the region. This insurrection was not an isolated event; it was reinforced by a simultaneous uprising led by Captain Mirza Hassan Khan, who commanded the Bunji Garrison. Composed primarily of Muslim troops, his forces joined hands with the Gilgit Scouts in a coordinated effort that resulted in the expulsion of non-Muslim officials and forces from the area. The swift success of this coordinated rebellion signaled a critical shift in power dynamics across the region. In response, the Government of Pakistan, recognizing the strategic significance of Gilgit, dispatched Khan Muhammad Alam Khan as its political agent to formally assert control over the area on November 16, 1947. His arrival

was meant to legitimize Pakistani governance and establish a formal administrative foothold in the volatile region. However, the military command soon changed hands. On January 10, 1948, Major Aslam Khan was appointed as the Commander of the Gilgit Scouts, a position of immense responsibility. His role included not only the consolidation of military control but also articulating the jurisdiction of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Government in the area. Aslam Khan was widely regarded as an intelligent, strategic, and disciplined commander. In his very first meeting with the political officials Mr. Alam and Major Brown he asserted, in no uncertain terms, that military operations and strategic planning were solely under his command and would not accommodate interference. His firm and unflinching stance reportedly took both men by surprise, challenging their assumptions about the chain of authority and the nature of governance in the newly liberated territory. Aslam Khan's prior involvement in the tribal invasion of Kashmir, where he served as Second-in-Command, had already attracted international attention. The British High Commission in India had directly associated him with the tribal offensive, further elevating his profile (Jha, 2003). In recognition of his instrumental contributions to the military cause, Aslam Khan was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was henceforth referred to by the codename

Colonel Pasha—a measure adopted to conceal his true identity due to the sensitive nature of his involvement in clandestine operations. Resuming operational leadership in Gilgit, Aslam Khan wasted no time. On November 1st, he convened a high-level meeting with officers from the Azad forces, including rebels from the Bunji Garrison, members of the Gilgit Scouts, and newly recruited local volunteers. In this meeting, he outlined the strategic objective: to secure and consolidate control over Skardu, a crucial town in the Baltistan region, then under the jurisdiction of the Ladakh Administration. He emphasized the importance of avoiding unnecessary bloodshed, instructing his volunteers to conduct operations in a manner that would discourage resistance and preempt conflict (Brown, 2014). Aslam Khan then organized the volunteer fighters into three operational units, each assigned specific tactical roles in the broader campaign. This strategic deployment of forces under his command was instrumental in isolating Skardu and laying the groundwork for a larger military campaign to neutralize Maharaja-aligned forces in Baltistan. His leadership during this phase was pivotal in shaping the fate of Gilgit-Baltistan within the newly drawn geopolitical contours of South Asia. Following the consolidation of control in Gilgit and surrounding areas, Lieutenant Colonel Aslam Khan undertook a comprehensive reorganization of the

volunteer forces under his command. Understanding the strategic complexity of the region, he divided his available manpower into three specialized operational units, each designated with a unique code name and distinct objectives. This segmentation marked a critical phase in the campaign to expand and secure control over key areas of Baltistan and Ladakh, while simultaneously cutting off critical logistical and military access routes used by Indian forces.

The Ibex Force was commanded by Major Ehsan Khan of the 6th Infantry Regiment of Jammu and Kashmir and comprised approximately 400 men. Their primary mission was to capture and secure Skardu, the administrative center of Baltistan, which held significant strategic value due to its location and connectivity. The name "Ibex" was symbolically chosen, representing agility and resilience—traits that mirrored the high-altitude terrain and the adaptive warfare required in the mountainous region. The Ibex Force was expected to navigate treacherous terrain swiftly, applying pressure on the garrison at Skardu and denying Indian forces a foothold in Baltistan.

The Tiger Force, also consisting of around 400 soldiers, was placed under the leadership of Captain Mirza Hassan Khan, another seasoned

officer from the 6th Infantry Regiment. This force was tasked with launching an offensive from Bunji and Kamri, moving toward Gurais, and eventually progressing into Bandipora in the Kashmir Valley. The unit's code name, "Tiger," signified strength and ferocity, encapsulating its aggressive role in expanding the rebellion eastward. The strategic intent behind this maneuver was to disrupt Indian communication lines and challenge their presence in the northern areas of Kashmir.

The Eskimo Force, the third component of Aslam Khan's military strategy, was led by Lieutenant Shah Khan and also numbered around 400 men. This group was charged with executing a daring march across the Deosai Plateau, one of the highest and most challenging alpine plains in the world. Their objective was to capture Drass, Kargil, and the Zojila Pass, key points that linked Ladakh to the Kashmir Valley. The name "Eskimo" was reflective of the harsh, frigid conditions the unit was expected to endure. Success in this operation would effectively sever Indian access to Leh, the heart of Ladakh, and extend rebel control deep into strategically vital territory. Aslam Khan's military acumen was evident in the timing and geographic precision of these deployments. He meticulously scheduled the operations to

conclude before the end of the summer months, with a particular focus on capturing and blocking the Zojila Pass—a lifeline between Srinagar and Leh. By neutralizing this route, Aslam Khan effectively cut off Indian military reinforcements and supply lines to Ladakh. The Zojila blockade proved to be a decisive move. By May 19, 1948, rebel forces under his leadership had successfully isolated the entire Ladakh region, bringing it under their control. The Indian military, caught off-guard by the rapid gains, scrambled to maintain a presence in Leh, resorting to localized defensive measures. These included the formation of indigenous paramilitary units, such as the Ladakh Scouts, and the construction of an emergency airstrip, which allowed them to fly in essential supplies and reinforcements (Suharwardy, 1991).

5. Return to Army Headquarters

Upon the successful completion of his assigned mission, Colonel Muhammad Aslam Khan operating covertly under the alias Aslam Khan dispatched a coded wireless communication to the Commander-in-Chief, General Douglas Gracey, stationed in Rawalpindi. In response to the unfolding developments, General Gracey, evidently concerned by the evolving circumstances, issued an immediate summons for Aslam Khan to return to Army Headquarters. Upon his arrival in

Rawalpindi, Colonel Khan was unexpectedly reassigned to serve as the Private Secretary to General Gracey. This reassignment was, in fact, a calculated strategic maneuver by the British leadership, designed to discreetly reposition Colonel Khan from the volatile and strategically critical Northern Areas. Despite this abrupt transition, Colonel Khan's exemplary role in advancing the territorial boundaries of the Gilgit Agency pushing them as far as the threshold of Kashmir did not go unrecognized. In acknowledgment of his outstanding military service and strategic acumen, he was decorated with the prestigious military honor of Hilal-e-Jurat. At the remarkably young age of 36, he was further promoted to the rank of Brigadier (one-star general), a rare and notable achievement. However, despite his distinguished service record and significant contributions to national defense, Brigadier Aslam Khan did not ascend further in the military hierarchy and ultimately retired from active service in 1963. Following his retirement, he chose to reside in Skardu—the very region he had valiantly helped to liberate and to which he remained emotionally and spiritually connected (Palit, 1972).

5. A Soldier Shaped by Destiny

In essence, it was divine providence that led to the creation of a soldierly figure like Brigadier Aslam Khan, tasked with defending and

strengthening the military presence in Baltistan. While the freedom of a nation is won through the courage of freedom fighters, its protection and progress rest in the hands of a committed military. Unfortunately, we have failed to honor Brigadier Aslam Khan as he truly deserved, and we have neglected to explore and acknowledge his significant contributions.

5. Legacy Beyond Battlefields

Today, people from all corners of the world flock to Shangrila Resort to admire its breathtaking beauty. This iconic destination marked the beginning of modern development in Gilgit-Baltistan. It is crucial that we remember and celebrate the sacrifices made by our forebears and derive meaningful lessons from our history.

6. Implications of Brigadier (R) Aslam Khan's leadership for current regional dynamics,

6. A Impact on Future Conflicts:

1. **Leadership and Decision-Making:** Khan's leadership during the 1947-48 war, especially in managing limited resources and navigating the challenging terrain of Ladakh, emphasized the importance of decisive leadership in conflict zones. His ability to adapt and strategize

in the face of adversity became a reference point for subsequent Indian military leaders in future conflicts with Pakistan.

2. **Military Strategy:** Khan's emphasis on controlling key supply lines and understanding the strategic value of terrain in Ladakh contributed to the development of more sophisticated strategies for future India-Pakistan conflicts. His tactics, particularly in leveraging the difficult terrain of Kashmir and Ladakh, provided a model for military campaigns in similar environments.

3. **Enduring Lessons:** These lessons were reflected in later military operations, including the 1965 and 1971 wars between India and Pakistan, as well as in the ongoing preparations for potential conflicts in the region. Khan's insights into the importance of logistics, rapid mobilization, and the defense of key geographic areas like Ladakh have shaped the military doctrine in the subcontinent. (Wilkinson, 2010-2020)

6.B Influence on Regional Security:

1. **Kashmir as a Flashpoint:** Khan's role in the Kashmir conflict solidified the region as a central point of contention between India and Pakistan, setting the stage for decades of tension and conflict. His efforts in the region underscored the significance of Kashmir, which has since remained a key issue in Indo-Pakistani relations.

2. **Military Doctrine:** The conflict influenced military strategies on both sides, emphasizing the importance of controlling key geographical areas, such as Ladakh, and disrupting supply lines. The experience of the First Kashmir War shaped future conflicts, including the 1965 and 1971 wars, by establishing Kashmir as a core security concern.

3. **Long-Term Tensions:** The unresolved nature of the Kashmir conflict and the influence of early military leaders like Brigadier Khan continue to affect India-Pakistan relations, fueling the ongoing arms race and periodic skirmishes, including the Kargil War in 1999 and more recent standoffs in Kashmir. (Chari, 2015)

7. Shangrila Resort

After concluding his military career, Brigadier Aslam Khan consciously distanced himself from political pursuits, instead redirecting his focus toward the socioeconomic development of the Gilgit-Baltistan region, nestled in the heart of the Trans-Himalayas. Fueled by a vision to transform the remote northern expanse into a hub of tourism and natural wonder, he spearheaded the creation of the iconic Shangrila Resort in Skardu. The conceptual inspiration for this ambitious endeavor was drawn from James Hilton's celebrated novel, *Lost Horizon*, which describes a mythical utopia known as "Shangri-La." Brigadier Khan's pioneering efforts laid the foundation for what would become one of Pakistan's most celebrated tourist destinations. The resort today stands not only as a symbol of peace and beauty in the Northern Areas but also as a testament to his enduring legacy. The

administration and management of the Shangrila Resort is now entrusted to his son, Arif Aslam Khan, who continues to uphold and expand his father's visionary dream (Sarwar, 2022).

8. Death

Brigadier Muhammad Aslam Khan passed away on October 12, 1994, at the age of 76, concluding a life marked by valor, vision, and unwavering dedication to his country. He was laid to rest atop a hill within the grounds of Shangrila Resort, overlooking the serene and majestic Skardu Valley the very land he had liberated and loved profoundly. His final resting place, elevated and serene, mirrors the heights of the ideals he stood for and the vistas he cherished most deeply (Suharwardy, 1983).

Conclusion

The strategically vital region of Baltistan was not a part of Pakistan at the time of independence in 1947. Its eventual integration into the country owes much to the courage, determination, and tactical brilliance of one man Major Muhammad Aslam Khan. A physically robust and resolute leader, equipped with an intimate understanding of the local terrain, Major Aslam Khan was entrusted with the formidable task of securing as much territory as possible, despite being armed with only limited resources. At that critical juncture, he was the most senior

Muslim officer in the Northern Sector after Colonel Ahsan. Given a narrow window of time, Major Aslam was tasked with raising a disciplined and effective fighting force from among the local civilian population one capable of countering the better-equipped and seasoned Indian troops. His mission was clear: to hold the territories already secured, and to push forward, liberating as much land as possible, all on his own initiative. Deeply committed to this cause, he was willing to lay down his life in pursuit of this objective. Demonstrating extraordinary military foresight, Major Aslam devised a plan to occupy as much unclaimed strategic territory as possible during the harsh winter months. His strategy involved securing the southeastern and southwestern mountain passes, thereby laying a strong defensive foundation before the following summer. This bold maneuver ensured that the enemy would be unable to reclaim the captured ground, effectively weakening Indian control and paving the way for further consolidation of Baltistan under Pakistani influence. To execute this vision, Major Aslam established two paramilitary forces: the *Tiger Force* and *Ibex Force*. The *Tiger Force* was directed to advance toward Tragbal and Gurez, and to maintain pressure on the Bandipura region until Indian forces were compelled to withdraw. Simultaneously, the *Ibex Force* was assigned the route along the Indus River, tasked

with confronting Indian advances at Rondu and proceeding to capture Skardu, and from there to push onward to Kargil, Drass, and ultimately Ladakh. This multi-pronged approach left the enemy with no room to regroup or mount a counteroffensive. Despite the punishing climate and difficult terrain, Major Aslam Khan's resolve never wavered. When the Ibex Force faced setbacks at Skardu and struggled to advance further, he promptly adapted to the evolving situation. He relocated his headquarters to the Chillum Valley and began training a new contingent in the mountainous region surrounding Burzil. Drawing recruits from Yasin and Hunza, he trained his men in unorthodox survival techniques such as wrapping their legs in rugs for insulation and led them across the snow-laden Deosai Plains.

Through fifteen inches of snow and brutal winter conditions, Major Aslam marched alongside his troops, reaching Kargil in just three days. This feat stands as a testament not only to his strategic genius and adaptability but also to his unparalleled leadership and indomitable spirit. A junior officer under the command of Major Muhammad Aslam Khan established a specialized unit known as the "Eskimo Force" a cold-weather combat team trained to operate under extreme winter conditions. This force was tasked with the grueling challenge of

traversing the snow-laden Deosai Plateau, an unforgiving expanse rising over 12,000 feet above sea level. These resilient soldiers endured harsh environments, often sleeping directly on the snow, while launching surprise attacks that disrupted enemy supply lines and logistical operations. The mission's success was largely attributed to the tireless leadership and visionary strategy of Major Aslam Khan. Remarkably, Aslam Khan never imposed rigid authority over his subordinates. Instead, he fostered a command environment built on autonomy and mutual respect. He encouraged his junior officers to develop and implement their own tactical and intelligence strategies, often allowing them the flexibility to execute independent operations. This empowerment not only enhanced operational effectiveness but also sowed confusion among enemy ranks, keeping the Maharaja's forces in a state of disarray. Possessing an exceptional geographical understanding of the region, Major Aslam utilized his terrain knowledge to orchestrate the movement of troops and resources with precision. He effectively managed the deployment of battalions and platoons, rerouting them strategically from one sector to another, ensuring consistent supply lines and battlefield coordination. At one point, he ordered his troops into Jammu and Kashmir, where they initiated raids into areas such as Hirmal Pardesh. Upon executing this

maneuver, he transmitted a wireless message to his superior in Rawalpindi. His actions startled Commander-in-Chief General Douglas Gracey, who promptly summoned him back to Army Headquarters. Upon his return, Major Aslam was appointed as the Private Secretary to the Chief of Army Staff a move that subtly distanced him from the operational theater. Despite this reassignment, his military contributions were formally recognized when the Government of Pakistan awarded him the prestigious *Hilal-e-Jurat*, honoring his valor and strategic brilliance. At the exceptional age of 36, he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier, making him one of the youngest officers in the world to attain such a position. However, his military career came to an early end, and he retired from service in 1963. Declining involvement in politics, Brigadier Aslam Khan turned his attention to developing tourism in the isolated Trans-Himalayan region. His vision materialized in the founding of the iconic Shangrila Resort in Skardu, which stands today as a symbol of peace and natural beauty. Brigadier Muhammad Aslam Khan passed away in 1994 after a battle with liver cirrhosis, leaving behind a legacy of courage, innovation, and enduring service to his nation.

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