

Battle of Asal Uttar

The Battle of Asal Uttar was a large tank battle that took place during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war on 8 to 10 September. The Indian Army repulsed a large Pakistani force after three days of bitter fighting.

It was regarded on par with the tank battle of Kursk in World War II between the Soviets and Nazi Germany. Like Kursk turned the fortunes of war for the Soviets, the Battle of Asal Uttar changed the course of the 1965 war in India's favour.

This article will further elaborate upon the details of the Battle of Asal Uttar within the context of the IAS Exam

Background of the Battle of Asal Uttar

The Battle of Asal Uttar was fought in the final stages of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, which had begun in August of that year.

Pakistan had fired the first shot when it sent its commandos to stir up an insurrection in Kashmir during Operation Gibraltar. The operation was a catastrophic failure as the infiltrators were discovered and eliminated.

In retaliation for the act, India launched an offensive against Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), culminating into the successful battle of Haji Pir Pass. The capture of Haji Pir Pass gave India a springboard to launch further offensive operations into the rest of PoK.

To relieve pressure from the Kashmir sector, Pakistan launched an offensive of its own in the Chamb-Jaurian region. The attack did make some initial gains but was delayed from the Pakistani side during a crucial moment in the offensive. This gap allowed reinforcements to be rushed to the Indian army. When the offensive resumed, the Indian army held on to its gain.

Pakistan then redirected its forces to the Punjab sector. Pakistan's invading force, consisting of the 1st Armoured Division and 11th Infantry Division, crossed the International Border and captured the Indian town of Khem Karan.

Considering the gravity of the situation, GOC Indian 4th Mountain Division Maj. Gen. Gurbaksh Singh immediately ordered the division to fall back and assume a horseshoe shaped defensive position with Asal Uttar as its focal point.

The battle of Asal Uttar was about to begin.

Events and Aftermath of Battle of Asal Uttar

In the night, the Indian troops flooded the sugar cane field, and the next morning, the Pakistani tanks of the 1st Armoured Division, consisting mainly of M47 and M48 Patton tanks, were lured inside the horse-shoe trap.

The swampy ground slowed the advance of the Pakistani tanks and many of them could not move because of the muddy slush. Over 100 Pakistani tanks, mostly Pattons, and a few Shermans and Chaffees, were destroyed and another 40+ captured while the Indians, as per official estimates, lost only 10 tanks during this counter offensive.

Despite the initial thrust of the Pakistani Army into Indian territory, the battle ended in a decisive Indian Victory. The commander of Pakistani forces Maj. Gen. Nasir Ahmed Khan was killed in action. According to military historian Steven Zaloga, Pakistan admitted that it lost 165 tanks during the 1965 war, more than half of which were knocked out during the "debacle" of Asal Uttar.

The battle also witnessed the personal bravery of an Indian soldier, Abdul Hamid, who was honoured with the Param Vir Chakra, India's highest military award, for knocking out seven.

The war ended with a United Nations mandated ceasefire on 23 September 1965. Both India and Pakistan had gained each other's territories with India having the lion's share in comparison. All the territories were returned following the Tashkent Agreement.