

positioned at strategic points for the defence of important shore installations(12).

The air element, comprising the PAF aircraft in East Pakistan, was formidable. But it was assessed that these aircraft would mainly be deployed in providing air support to the Pak land forces and would not be available to provide adequate support to the Pak Navy.

The only Pak submarine in the eastern waters, immediately before and during the operations, was the Ghazi, a Tench class submarine built at the Portsmouth Naval Dockyard, USA as USS Diablo (the devil) and later transferred to the Pakistan Navy free of cost. It displaced 2,410 tons, had a surface speed of 20 knots and a submerged speed of 10 knots, carried mines and was equipped with ten 21-inch torpedo tubes. She had an operational range of 14,000 nautical miles at 10 knots and a complement of 89 officers and sailors.

Strengths of the rival fleets in the eastern waters at the commencement of hostilities thus were:

<u>Ship</u>	<u>Indian Navy</u>	<u>Pakistan Navy</u>
Submarines	1	1
Aircraft carriers	1	-
Destroyers/frigates	5	-
Landing ships/craft	3	2
Tankers	1	-
Smaller vessels	4	53

While the Indian Navy had deployed such ships in the Bay of Bengal as would constitute a blue water force, the Pak fleet in the east comprised ships that would mainly operate in the harbours and inland waterways of East Pakistan. This was because the tasks of India's Eastern Fleet mainly related to operations on the high seas(13). But in Pak Fleet, only the submarine was to be used in an offensive role for seeking and destroying Indian ships at sea and sabotaging Indian ports and harbours. All surface units, some of which had limited seagoing capability, were to be deployed in a defensive role for the security of East Pakistan's ports, harbours, their approaches and the contiguous sea areas(14).

THE SINKING OF PAK SUBMARINE GHAZI

Elimination of the Sub-Surface Threat

The dawn of 3 December 1971 broke on Vishakhapatnam's shores like any other dawn but the

night of 3/4 December witnessed an exciting event which significantly affected the war(15).

PNS Ghazi, the only Pak submarine operating in the Bay of Bengal, with the mission of sinking INS Vikrant and mining the approaches of Indian ports on the eastern seaboard, was sent to her doom during the early hours of 4 December thus virtually eliminating the underwater threat and 'sanitising' the entire Bay of Bengal.

It has been confirmed from a chart recovered from the wreck of the Ghazi that she had sailed from Karachi on 14 November 1971, was 400 nautical miles off Bombay on 16 November, and reached the Bay of Bengal on 20 November. She was off Madras on 23 November and reached Vishakhapatnam soon after and lay in wait for the Vikrant and other ships to come out of the harbour, not knowing that Vikrant was hundreds of miles away and she had been duped into believing that the carrier was in Vishakhapatnam. This was done by other ships masquerading as the carrier and making signals to various authorities, and by the Eastern Naval Command Headquarters requisitioning berths for the carrier and indenting stores and other supplies at Madras and Vishakhapatnam(16).

In retrospect it is clear that this contrived spurt in requisitioning, particularly for meat and fresh vegetables, must have been picked up by Pak spies. This is further evidenced by the signal, received by the Ghazi from the Commodore in Charge of Pak submarines in Karachi on 25 November, quoted later in this chapter, stating that Vikrant was in Vishakhapatnam(17).

The Denouement

After the feeble attempt at a pre-emptive attack on Indian airfields by the PAF aircraft on the evening of 3 December, it was appreciated by the naval authorities that a pre-emptive underwater attack against the Naval Base at Vishakhapatnam might be imminent. All local naval defences were immediately alerted and precautions were taken within the harbour against possible sabotage. All ships were made to sail out of harbour before midnight(18)

Lt Cdr Inder Singh, Commanding Officer of INS Rajput, took his ship out of the harbour around midnight on 3/4 December. Great care in navigation was necessary as all navigational aids had been completely switched off. He had been briefed by the Eastern Naval Command authorities on the possible presence of a submarine outside Vishakhapatnam harbour

which might try to sink a merchant ship leaving harbour mistaking it for the carrier or to lay a minefield in order to prevent the carrier and other ships from leaving harbour(19).

On sighting a sea disturbance caused by a possible submerging periscope, INS Rajput decided to go into action. She carried out an immediate attack directly over the sea disturbance with depth charges, and then proceeded on her urgent mission.

A few moments before the Prime Minister's broadcast to the nation shortly after midnight, a very loud explosion was heard from the sea which was of such great intensity that it sent shock waves through the buildings on the sea front. The explosion was heard, among others, by the Coast Battery which immediately made a report to the Maritime Operations Room of the Eastern Naval Command Headquarters.

It was initially assumed that the explosion was the result of the attack carried out by INS Rajput. Searches were commenced and co-operation of local fishermen, who had earlier been briefed on possible developments of this kind, was sought.

The next morning (4 Dec), some fishermen reported large oil patches and picked up some debris off the harbour entrance. INS Akshay was immediately ordered to proceed to the area and after a day-long search, she confirmed that there was a large submerged object about three miles off the harbour entrance in about 17 fathoms (30 metres) of water(20).

The next day, i.e., on 5 December, INS Akshay succeeded in identifying the submerged object as a bottomed submarine. She anchored close to the object and sent divers below. At 0914 hrs she made a signal to the Eastern Naval Command Headquarters, confirming that the submerged object was indeed the wreck of the Ghazi, the 'Defender of Faith' lying defenceless on the seabed. She was found in position 17° 40.8' North, 83° 21' East with her head pointing towards the harbour entrance. The length of her hull from the conning tower to the stern was about 61 metres (200 feet) and the forward part had been completely blown off. The stern was intact, there was no sign of life or engine noise, a long slick of diesel oil was still being made, air bubbles were noticed coming out and all hatches (openings) were tightly screwed down. Among the large amount of debris collected was one damaged escape set.

Naval Headquarters was immediately informed. But it was decided that no announcement would be made till the identity of the kill had been established

beyond all doubts. An aircraft was positioned at Vishakhapatnam on 6 December to fly evidence of the submarine's identity to New Delhi.

By now divers had entered the submarine's fin where there was some loose gear but they could not enter the conning tower and hatch. The first break came at 1155 hrs on 7 December when a diver opened the conning tower lower hatch and a dead body was recovered. The hydrographic correction book of PNS Ghazi, PN 83, and one sheet of paper with the official seal of the Commanding Officer of the submarine were also recovered and three more dead bodies were floated out. The dead bodies recovered from the submarine were accorded burial at sea by the Eastern Naval Command in accordance with naval custom.

All papers recovered were in a soggy state and were cleaned and dried out before being sent to Naval Headquarters as the "Ocular Proof" of the identity of the submarine. The Raksha Mantri made the announcement on the sinking of the Ghazi in Parliament on 9 December.

The Command Diving Team was in charge of the diving operations and soon brought up a large number of items from the submarine after blowing open a hatch. One of the items recovered was a clock which had stopped at 0015 hrs which was the time the explosion had taken place on the night of 3/4 December.

A chart recovered from the Ghazi's hull indicated the movements of the submarine immediately preceding her sinking. From this chart and the following signal and other items recovered from her wreck, it is apparent that the submarine had been assigned the task of sinking the Vikrant and mining the eastern ports of India, especially Vishakhapatnam(21):

FM COMSUBS

IMMEDIATE

TO GHAZI

SECRET

INFO PAK NAVY

OCCUPY ZONE VICTOR WITH IMMEDIATE DESPATCH(.)
INTELLIGENCE INDICATES CARRIER IN PORT (.)

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An alternative explanation for the sinking of the Ghazi has been provided by some naval experts as quoted by Vice Admiral N. Krishnan, "The Ghazi had

evidently come up to periscope or surface depth to establish her navigational position, an operation which was made extremely difficult by the black-out and the switching off of all navigational lights. At this point of time, she probably saw or heard a destroyer approaching her, almost on a collision course. This is a frightening sight at the best of times and she obviously dived in a tremendous hurry and at the same time put her rudder hard over in order to get away to seaward. It is possible that in her desperate crash dive, her nose must have hit the shallow ground hard when she bottomed. It seems likely that a fire broke out on board for'd (forward) where, in all probability there were mines, in addition to the torpedoes fully armed. Whatever may be the cause of the final explosion, it was quite enough to seal the fate of the Ghazi forever"(22).

Referring to the sinking of the Ghazi, a Pak General claims that having been loaded with mines the submarine met with an accident on her passage and exploded(23). This explanation is clearly misleading, because the fact that the Ghazi was lying in wait for INS Vikrant has been documentarily proved, besides the 'flotsam' from the Ghazi indicating that debris was picked up from the area in which INS Rajput had dropped her depth charges. But whether the explosion was caused by the bows of the submarine hitting the seabed hard during a crash dive or by the implosive damage caused by the Rajput's depth charges is unlikely to be resolved.

THE BATTLE OF THE BAY

Preparation

On being attached to the Eastern Naval Command as the flagship of the Eastern Fleet, INS Vikrant arrived off Madras on 31 July 1971 and commenced her work up with the other ships which were to operate with her - the anti-aircraft frigates INS Brahmaputra and INS Beas, the anti-submarine vessels INS Kamorta and INS Kavaratti and the submarine INS Khanderi - in order to give them adequate experience in operating with a carrier. During the period of the work up, which continued till 13 September, emphasis was laid on anti-submarine warfare and air strikes on ships and shore targets. Army co-operation exercises were also held with local units of the Army(24).

This was followed by Fleet exercises held in the North Bay in September which culminated in simulated attacks on Vishakhapatnam, the major naval base in the east and the location of the headquarters of the Eastern Naval Command.