



Himalayan Blunder: The Angry Truth About India's Most Crushing Military Disaster

J.P. Dalvi , Frank Moraes (Foreword)

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Himalayan Blunder: The Angry Truth About India's Most Crushing Military Disaster is Brigadier J. P. Dalvi's retelling of the Sino-Indian war that took place in 1962 - a war that India lost. Dalvi fought the war as the Commander of the 7th Infantry Brigade in NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency).

His account of the war is graphic and telling. He was captured by the Chinese forces and held for seven months. As a participant of the war, he was privy to all that went on at the battlefield as well as behind the scenes. Based on his firsthand experiences, he recounts the events that occurred between September 8, 1962 and October 20, 1962.

As early as 1951, China silently and steadily began to work its way onto Indian soil. Even in the face of indisputable evidence, India insisted on maintaining cordial relations with the Chinese. China seemed only too happy to play along.

Dalvi narrates the manner in which India's own political leadership traitorously worked against its cause. In no uncertain terms, he holds three men responsible for India's defeat - Jawaharlal Nehru, Krishna Menon, and General Brij Mohan Kaul.

Issuing orders from Delhi, they seemed to be clueless about the situation on the battlefield. Undoubtedly, when they were rushed into battle, the Indian soldiers - underfed, ill-equipped, and unprepared as they were - never stood a chance against the powerful Chinese army. Regardless of that, the soldiers fought bravely and laid down their lives for their homeland.

Dalvi claims that the apathy and the sheer ineptitude of those at the helm of India's political affairs sacrificed hundreds of valuable lives. Brigadier Dalvi's detailed narrative of the massacre of the Indian soldiers, a horror that he witnessed firsthand, is heart-rending.

The book was published in 1969. Among all the books based on the subject of the 1962 Sino-Indian war, this book is considered to be one the most striking and authentic versions. Due to its sensitive subject matter and its portrayal of India's leaders in a harshly negative light, the book was banned by the Indian Government upon its release.

Himalayan Blunder: The Angry Truth About India's Most Crushing Military Disaster Details

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From Reader Review Himalayan Blunder: The Angry Truth About India's Most Crushing Military Disaster for online ebook

Sachin says

Brutally honest.

Amit Tiwary says

Extremely repetitive content. I have complete trust on what J P Dalvi says but the tone is so negative and harsh. This is true that the Dalvi was implicated and made a scapegoat in this whole episode and his frustrations and pain flow on pages of the book. Still I believe he could have gone a bit soft. Plus the Chinese side of story doesn't come out that well in this one.

I have started with Neil Maxwell's "India's China war" and that is good so far.

I have my respect for the gallantry and resolve of J P Dalvi. But still that question is not answered, why didn't he resigned at first place where as in the book he asks why others (of higher posts) didn't resign :-).

Still a good one to read and have at shelves.

Baidhurya says

The book is unique in a sense that it is written by the Brigadier who actually led the force in NEFA. The book is well written and provides an indepth analysis of India's Chinese Policies, its apathy towards its army and most importantly how Mr. Nehru, Mr. Menon and Mr. Kaul created an environment of self deception for them, the parliament and the Indian public which ultimately led to India's defeat... I would have rated it 5 star had it not been repetitive.

Abhishek Rao says

A rather heavy read with lots of military jargon and terminologies which makes it sometimes difficult to understand. However it does point to the collective failures of Civilian and the Military apparatus in averting the War which caused national humiliation in 1962.

The dressing down of "demi-gods" like Nehru and V.K Menon by the author exposes the propaganda that is dished out for Nehru being a statesman and a strategic thinker. The complacent approach of Nehru in mindlessly trusting the Chinese and unabashed nepotism in appointing top military brass (appointing BM Kaul as Chief of General Staff despite having no experience in actual warfare) shows the inadequacy of national leadership at that time and is well documented in the book.

Vikram Karve says

HIMALAYAN BLUNDER

Book Review

By

VIKRAM KARVE

This morning while browsing through my bookcase I chanced upon one of my favourite military autobiographies – HIMALAYAN BLUNDER by Brig JP Dalvi. The television was on, my favourite news channel was blaring away, and as I started reading Himalayan Blunder, leafing through the pages of the book, I was filled with a sense of déjà vu. The events unfolding before my eyes, on TV News Channels, and the events chronicled in the book – the coincidence was startling. And as I read on further, drawing parallels between what was written in the book and the intriguing happenings hogging the headlines in newspapers and dominating the TV news-channels 24/7 for the last few days, I wondered to myself: “Are we heading for another Himalayan Blunder?” Is history going to repeat itself after 50 years?

I have heard a saying: THOSE WHO DO NOT LEARN FROM HISTORY ARE CONDEMNED TO REPEAT IT. That is why I feel that Himalayan Blunder is a must read for the powers that be – political, civil and military. I am sure most of them must have read Himalayan Blunder, but even then, it would be worthwhile to read the book carefully once again to draw parallels between what happened in 1962 and what is happening now and learn lessons so that similar mistakes are not repeated again and we do not have another “Himalayan Blunder” in the making.

Himalayan Blunder is a fascinating war memoir of the 1962 Conflict between India and China in which India suffered a humiliating defeat. Brigadier Dalvi was the Commander of the Indian Army’s 7th Infantry Brigade which was annihilated by the Chinese Army. I feel that it is always better to read history written by those who actually lived it rather than those who recorded it merely by academic research since first person accounts have an air of authenticity about them which lends them credibility. I have read four first-hand accounts of the 1962 War [The Untold Story By BM Kaul, Himalayan Blunder by JP Dalvi, The Unfought War of 1962 By JR Saigal and The Fall of Towang By Niranjana Prasad] and, out of all these, I found Dalvi’s Himalayan Blunder the most illuminating and enthralling, as well as most soul-searching and analytic. In my opinion, Himalayan Blunder is a military masterpiece, arguably the best book by an Indian military author.

Himalayan Blunder tells you of the debacle that happened when ill-equipped, unprepared, confused and demoralized soldiers were rushed into battle against a strong adversary in an ad hoc manner because military decisions were influenced more by political prophecy rather than military strategy.

Dalvi tells his story with remarkable wit and exceptional candour. His candid storytelling style captivates you and once you start reading you get so engrossed that the book becomes unputdownable. There is no military jargon or gobbledegook. Dalvi writes straight from the heart and that is why this book will not only educate you but also will move you emotionally, strike a chord and get you thinking. From the way he writes it is evident that besides being a soldier, the author was a thinker and a scholar, extremely well-read and well-informed, and possessed a witty sense of humour, and has interspersed his book with anecdotes, quotes and similes. Sample this – he writes that a Corps Commander was sacked because “he refused to be a dog in obedience and a lion in action”.

Why did India suffer such a crushing defeat in the 1962 war with China? It seems to be the same story we are witnessing now – the civil-military divide, the lack of appreciation of ground realities by the Delhi-Centric powers that be and the trust deficit between various stakeholders.

Books like the Himalayan Blunder will make us aware of our mistakes of the past so that we don't repeat them. In such matters, let history not repeat itself. That is why we cannot afford to ignore the lessons of history - if we do so it will be to our own peril.

I am going to read HIMALAYAN BLUNDER once again. Why don't you too?

VIKRAM KARVE

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About Vikram Karve

A creative person with a zest for life, Vikram Karve is a retired Naval Officer turned full time writer. Educated at IIT Delhi, ITBHU Varanasi, The Lawrence School Lovedale and Bishops School Pune, Vikram has published two books: COCKTAIL a collection of fiction short stories about relationships (2011) and APPETITE FOR A STROLL a book of Foodie Adventures (2008) and is currently working on his novel and a book of vignettes and short fiction. An avid blogger, he has written a number of fiction short stories, creative non-fiction articles on a variety of topics including food, travel, philosophy, academics, technology, management, health, pet parenting, teaching stories and self help in magazines and published a large number of professional research papers in journals and edited in-house journals for many years, before the advent of blogging. Vikram has taught at a University as a Professor for almost 15 years and now teaches as a visiting

faculty and devotes most of his time to creative writing. Vikram lives in Pune India with his family and muse - his pet dog Sherry with whom he takes long walks thinking creative thoughts.

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Anandraj R says

The key mistakes of Indo-sino conflict like Nehru's ignorance of patel's warning, Appointment of Menon & Gen.Kaul, setting up forward post on controversial DHOLA area, Lack of infrastructure planning for the war time are explained in detail.

The author has nailed every possible events that led up to the war.

Kudos to our army Jawans who fought the Indo-Sino war bravely despite the screw up of our political leadership!

A VERY GOOD READ!

Vikram Karve says

ARE WE HEADING FOR ANOTHER HIMALAYAN BLUNDER

Musings

By

VIKRAM KARVE

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VIKRAM KARVE

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Pradeep says

A must read for all! Readers can understand the hidden politics of the politicians and the horrible life of the soldiers at the Himalayan border.

Every politician must read this book to know what he/she should not do.

After reading this, my impression of Nehru changed to a great extent! People should have changed their mind set slowly after the release of this book. But even today, many projects are being named after him! That is the great irony.

Ankit Rana says

What makes a nation great ?

The book provides a beautiful answer to the question above. Our humble army men, doing a thankless job, without ration, ammunition, boots or winter clothing, defending few useless pieces of logs and redeeming the follies of few spineless, arrogant men with their blood, sacrificed themselves fighting valiantly for the honour of the country.

JP Dalvi rightly asks what more can a nation ask of its soldiers.

Not many of those who sacrificed their lives are remembered by the people today. 1962 is a distant memory. I bow my head in respect to our great martyrs.

Sadly, India is not out of woods yet. 51 years after the 1962 "Blunder", our foreign policies, economic policies and defense policies are out of sync with each other and of the ground realities. In 2010, Government of India refused to make public the Henderson-Brooks-Bhagat committee report regarding the 1962 "Blunder".

I am lucky that I chanced upon the book. Reading it has been a turbulent journey through the emotions of heart. I am really grateful that the book helped me change my notions of a leader by explaining what exactly a leader should not be.

The only thing I found amiss from the book was some references to the military terms which should have been provided in an appendix. Some maps(pre and post 1914 McMahon Line Indian Maps, Tibetan maps and Chinese maps) would also greatly enhance the understanding of the whole saga.

Overall, thank you Mr. Dalvi.
May your soul rest in peace. Jai Hind.

Pali Reen says

HIMALAYAN BLUNDER – An appreciation

At the start, let me say that some books just cannot be starred and this is one of them. I had heard about this book a long time ago, but only recently had the opportunity to read it and it took me some time to fully comprehend what Brig. Dalvi had to convey.

Perhaps, not till the Napoleonic wars one comes across historical books about warfare written by those who were a part of battles. Least of all, there are practically no history books of Indian kings written by historians, let alone military historians, of their times for the past two thousand years. Brig. Dalvi's close involvement with the Sino-Indian affairs through his long stint in the Army Head Quarters in the 50s and later on active

duty in Ladakh, followed by his assignment as the Commanding Officer of the 7th Brigade that took the main thrust of the Chinese attack of 20th October 1962, and his own ultimate humiliation of any army officer to be taken as a prisoner of war, made him just the right man to narrate those events that led the grand old army of the World War II to its most crushing defeat in less than twenty years.

This book was born in a Prisoner of War Camp on a cold, bleak night of 21st November 1962, when the Chinese Major in-charge woke him up in his solitary confinement, writes Brig. Dalvi, to inform him that the war had ended. The general outline was formed during the months of incarceration following his release seven months later, when he resolved that the Indian people must hear the truth from the only senior officer who was there throughout, who had no axe to grind, no reputation to save and was too junior to find a place in history. It was not the Indian soldier that faltered, as the general population was made to perceive, but those who held the reins in the government and complete breakdown of the military chain of command in the NEFA sector

However, reading it some fifty years after the war, the book is still an eye-opener. Only a few pages into the book made me ask some very fundamental questions. Although Pandit Nehru was and still is the receiver of all the brickbats being the Prime Minister, along with the Defence Minister Krishna Menon and General B.M. Kaul, GOC of Eastern Command, but what about the rest of the parliamentarians? Not one, other than Sardar Patel, was able to see through the Chinese designs. On 7th November 1950 he wrote an almost prophetic letter to Pandit Nehru, which is reproduced in the Appendix of the book, about his assessment of the Chinese intentions in Tibet. Sadly, he died barely a month after; else the course of history might have been different. It is ironical that the best brains that sat down to write the Constitution of India and had the perfect institutions required in a democracy in place, failed to see what was quite imminent to any military strategist. In one month's time the whole image of the nation built over the past 15 years lay in tatters. Pandit Nehru could never recover from this humiliation.

Brig Dalvi reflects that having won independence without firing a shot, an average Indian politician has hardly any clue about military strategy or how battles are fought. The same can be said of the civilian population at large, which would be mere cliché for the population of the Western nations where conscription is a must. Generally, the countries with standing armies do not have compulsory conscription and its civilian population is often ill-informed about the armed forces. While narrating the events leading up to the final invasion by the Chinese, Brig Dalvi has attempted to educate the readers in great detail how the army works, integration of the National Policy with Military Strategy in both war and peace, and how important it was to maintain the chain of command and hierarchy, particularly at the highest level.

It is hard to believe what Brig. Dalvi writes, "It is an astonishing historical fact that most invaders have been allowed to enter undefended borders and battles have invariably been fought well inside our frontiers". One could add that the same was true of Pakistan's invasion of Kashmir in 1948. The battle of Thagla ridge might as well have been the first time that India fought to defend its borders. When the soldiers were asked to 'evict the Chinese' with pouch (army terminology of minimum) ammunition, it just reflected assessment of the situation by those in power. It reflected upon the psyche of those in command of battle formations who chose to be quite submissive to the civilian control even at the height of military conflict. When General Thapar accepted the written order handed over to him by a joint secretary at a time when the Prime Minister, Defence Minister and the Finance Minister were out of the country, it was the last straw. Brig. Dalvi observes, "To be right and overruled is not forgiven to persons in responsible positions!"

The 1962 Chinese invasion might be long behind us, but it still haunts the Indian psyche and the blame game still goes on. History is replete with many ifs. The whole story can never be known unless one has access to the Chinese plans that led up to their final assault. Brig. Dalvi records that so emboldened were the Chinese in their advantageous position, they lit bonfires to keep themselves warm on the night before the attack. The last time this happened was probably in 1802, when the French lit fires in front of the Russians on the night preceding the famous Battle of Austerlitz.

But had we learnt our lessons from it? Three years later the Indian army redeemed itself after the 1965 war with Pakistan when the then Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, gave the full command to the Army Chief once the war began. Hardly anyone remembers that even one of the Indian army's ablest soldiers, Sam Maneckshaw, was court-martialed with trumped up charges around these times. Fortunately, the three generals who sat through the court martial were men of grit and integrity. The 1971 war of Bangladesh under his command has become a case study in practically all military academies around the world. In the end, Brig. Dalvi quotes the British military historian, Corelli Barnett, "It is generally true that the Army is an extension of society; military disaster is often national decline exposed in the violence of battle". I consider this book a "Must Read" for our current generation to ask and understand what the armed forces truly stand for. Although the face of modern warfare has radically changed since the Indo-Chinese conflict, there is still a lot to take away from this book at all levels.

Also: Read my blog: An Officer and an Executive

Antariksh Raj says

Historical description from the point of view of a army personal.

Srinivas says

[Through Atanu:]

Apparently, Ms. IG banned this book because it exposed her father. I hope Indians will wake up to the truth, and shove the dynasty to the rightful place it deserves to be in.

Not sure if this book is available in the stores now.

Rupin Chaudhry says

Just sample the following rules of engagement

- (a) Persuade them to leave Indian territory
- (b) If Chinese do not comply, dig-in opposite to them to scare them from attempting further incursion
- (c) Fire is permitted only in self-defense and that too with minimum force

These were the orders to 7th infantry brigade from the higher command to counter the heavily armed, well administered, well prepared Chinese incursion in the Namka Chu valley of Thagla region of NEFA. The orders spelled total annihilation to the loosely held and massively under strength Indian formations which lacked even the basic high altitude clothing. The orders taken by a pacifist Prime Minister, an arrogant Defence Minister and a politically connected General caused the rout of a proud Brigade with many of its men dying like animals in a cage.

Himalayan blunder is lucid blow by blow account of the events, circumstances and actors which led India to the most crushing and humiliating defeats. Very rarely we come across books written on India's war history and rarest of rare ones do highlight the failures.

The book starts off with a narrative on controversial McMahon line dividing border between India and China followed by the Chinese annexation of Tibet and India's lukewarm protest to it.

Majority of the text then deals with China's expansionist attitude and Indian Army's alarm signals to their civilian command. Nehru administration downplayed the warnings from the very start and even during the crisis. By the time the so called "higher command" realised the extent of damage done, it was too late to do anything. It was then that India broke her non-alignment stance and asked the western powers for immediate help.

Brig. Dalvi has written in the simplest manner, the darkest chapter in post independent India. Many a times author has been repetitive but that can be ignored since the gentleman is a soldier and not a professional writer. It's an angry man's memoir the shape of which had been laid in prisoner of war camp. One can feel the anger, frustration and dejection being felt by Brig. Dalvi in almost every page, all negative feelings arising out of misplaced convictions, unpreparedness, total failure of leadership machinery and civilian supremacy in matters dealing with military. The decision makers had neither the training, inclination to listen and the experience of high altitude mountain warfare.

The book was released in 1969 and immediately banned. Maybe the country had not till then forgotten the sores and the key culprits were still in the public eye. Almost three decades after the new generation is better able to understand this chapter and hopefully draw some lesson out of it.

Those who forget their history are condemned to repeat it. Let's not repeat it...lets not head for another Namka Chu blood bath.

Anant Singh says

Just finished "Himalayan Blunders" written by Brigadier John Dalvi. It was my first book on Indo-Sino War and I am thankful for Orkut Non-Fiction community to suggest me for reading this book. Book was banned as soon as it got published and I know the reason after reading it. John was in charge of 7th Brigade who took the responsibility of Handling the Chinese crisis along the Tibetan border. The book is full of agony, frustration and anger which author experienced during those days.

He coined a term "Non - Violence war" given by the civil authority to him. "Higher Authority" which includes Prime Minister (Nehru), Defence Minister (Menon) and General (Kaul) where the deciding one for the war. The book is divided into various parts :

1. This part shows the Chinese aggression along the border of NEFA and Ladakh and how Nehru dismissed it as just a regular patrol done by Chinese. He carried along with the path of brotherhood and thus did some blundering mistakes like allowing senior generals from China to see all the establishment of Army along the NEFA. He also overlooked the requirement of Army for the arms and ammunition which led army to use World War II arms against the Chinese. Kaul and Menon also overlooked the basic requirement which is needed to develop a strong front by India against China. Better roads, good clothing, arms and ammunition, better communication and co-ordination.

2. As Chinese were growing strong on NEFA front building better roads, better communication India were still in hope that Chinese will not attack India and thus Nehru pointed basic requirement as unnecessary expenditure on part of Army. John further adds how Chinese slowly and slowly created a better fighting

position and how Army were helpless despite of being sending continuous reminder to Higher Authority. In this part he also adds how Army generals were promoted to serve the interest of Nehru and Menon thus leaving a disarray in Army. Finally they were told to shift there bases from Punjab and Agra to NEFA as Chinese strike First on 15th sept. During 15th Sept and Till 10th Oct (day when Chinese finally attacked) there were no clear thoughts and chain of command. Nehru was on long trip to foreign land , Desai accompanying him , Menon was in New York and Kaul holidaying in Jammu. 7th Brigade was created during this period comprising of Rajputs , Sikhs and Punjabi's who had no knowledge of High altitude and Mountains. Gorkhas and Assam Regiment were ignored. 7th Brigade were told to shift there bases on Altitude which ranged from 10000 to 15000 Feet with no Roads and clothing they were just like a Police along the Border. For moving 2 Miles only it took days and every soldier were supplied with a 40 Rounds of ammunition and basic clothing. There were no boots , gloves , kerosene , foods and medicine.

3. As they set up there bases along the borders, John quickly analyzed the preparation of Chinese and how they are planing a massive strike. He took a note of around 20,000 soldiers supported by good artillery and mortar regiment. He continuously sent a reminder about the poor preparation of Army against Chinese which felt on deaf people , he also added that it would be crime and murder of soldier to make them fight against this mighty Chinese. But Nehru and Menon insists that Chinese would not do anything and thus they should keep there present positions. Among all problems a major one was to keep Army in there present status by providing food , clothing , arms and shelter, which Civil authority ignored and thus keeping a 3000 soldiers in good condition was a challenge for John. He accounted that Air Force did very little to help the army and chosen dropping zone of Air Force took 2 3 days for them to collect things. The things dropped were of no use as only 20% of them could be collected and rest get lost in those chilling and windy conditions. John , recounted how Army was ignored and soldiers suffered pathetic condition with Brave Hearts.

4. After 10th October 1962 , everything changed Chinese finally attacked and killed Indian Soldiers who were short of Ammunition and communication. John , took some examples of the bravery shown by Sikhs , rajputs and Gorkhas. Along a Tsangle pass only 100 Rajputs controlled 2000 Chinese and made them run for there money , after 5th Attempt Chinese were able to overcome them as Rajputs were left with no ammunition to fight. Same were the story of Gorkhas and Sikhs who fought with waves of thousands of Chinese who attacked there post. One Chinese General Quoted after the War "Indian Army Need everything , Except Courage"

5. In Final chapter John , pin pointed the mistake done by Generals and Politicians who were responsible for the Death of some 2000 Soldiers along the Indo - Sino border. He also accounted that People of India were so ignorant about the tragedy and till now no one is blamed for this grave defeat which costs us loosing some 1200 miles of land to Chinese. He cited the example of random orders and poor infrastructure which could have been improved and arrogance of Nehru Menon made this defeat more painful. There were around 4 lakh soldiers in India and that point but only 3000 were trusted to defeat Chinese.

After "Love Story" this book made me cry with the plight of Army and condition in which our soldiers defended the border with all courage and bravery. It needs to be above Profession and Career to do something like this which we can only imagine. Wonder what takes these soldiers to give there life and protect us , as John summed up " The thought of Mother Nation, kept these Soldiers alive and fight"

"Just a Plain Salute" Jai Hind

Hemant says

So I got to know that the book was actually banned by then congress regime. If you go by the Brigadier J. P Dalvi then yes, the war could have been averted. Brig. Dalvi has painstakingly convinced me at least that it was the fault of Nehru and Krishna Menon's misguided foreign policy and Nehru's mistaken belief that China will never attack India.

This looked to be an attempt by the brigadier to clean the murky waters of the happenings during and leading to the Sino-Indian war.

Brig. Dalvi remained in chinese captive camps for about 7 months after which he was repatriated.

You can't only blame the policymakers the top military chiefs were also responsible for the defeat.

And finally it is a good book on Indo-Sino war laying down the failures of governance.
