

# Chief Speak !

**Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa, CAS IAF on**



## “Joint Operations and Indigenisation”\*

The IAF is often blamed for not participating whole heartedly in joint operations and (supporting) indigenisation. As regards Joint Operations, one has to commence with a historical perspective.

### Operations in 1948, 1962, 1965, 1971

During the 1948 Kashmir Operations, there were limitations imposed on the use of air power by a higher political directive immediately after independence, and this is not to be misconstrued as lack of jointness. Offensive air action was limited owing to restrictions imposed by (the then Governor General) Lord Louis Mountbatten and senior British officers, lest the war between the two new nations escalate.

In the 1948 Kashmir Operations (the RIAF's) Nos. 7, 8, 10 & 12 Squadrons participated. The Operations were limited to direct support of troops and there was no air interdiction outside own artillery range. There was no interdiction of (vital) bridges (Kohala for example) and thus the Army did not count much on the IAF's support.

During the 1962 Indo-China War, the IAF was not inducted into the conflict due to fear of escalation, as there was no defence against retaliatory action by the Chinese. The IAF was only employed to carry out supplies to forward posts in Ladakh and NEFA. Helicopters were employed in the air maintenance role. Transport aircraft were used in improving reinforcement of troops and to fly AMX-13 tanks to Chushul.

In 1965, the Army and the IAF fought their own wars, with the latter pitching in when called upon. In fact, Akhnoor was saved due to the lightning response to a call for close air support to stop the attacking Pak armour, which was carried out with aplomb by the IAF fighters. The IAF flew about 1400 of a total 3927 sorties in the west for offensive air support to the army. Of these, only 482 sorties were planned at the JAAOC level.

Air Chief Marshal PC Lal later observed: “Having had some responsibility for all this, I must confess that the air war became a somewhat hit-and-miss affair that depended heavily on finding targets of opportunity for its success.”

On the other hand, Lt General Harbaksh Singh (then GOC-in-C Western Command) mentioned in his ‘War Dispatches’ that joint organisations did not work properly because “professionally ‘Below Standard’ army officers manned GLO Type ‘B’ & ‘C’s and out of the authorised total of 43 Ground Liaison Officers, the army had only 12”.

He further stated that “Having suffered a rebuff in the Khem Karan Sector, the enemy's ace 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division with Patton tanks was able to transfer, by railways, two Regiments of tanks through the plains of Lahore without any interference from our Air Force. They inducted these in the Sialkot Sector. “This was because we had not carried out a joint appreciation on the enemy's course of action”.

Again, as observed by Air Chief Marshal PC Lal, in 1965 “On the Army's side the notion persisted that it would fight on its own, with the Air Force providing only an occasional bonus: and in the Air Force (where I was the Vice Chief), we thought of fighting mainly an air war against the PAF and what we considered to be strategic