

ORISSA SUPER CYCLONE 1999



***This is the story of OP SAHAYATA, the Disaster Relief Operations of
Fifth Battalion The Assam Regiment***

On October 29, 1999, a 'super cyclone' slammed into Orissa. The catastrophic cyclone came with winds of up to 300 kmph, a tidal surge of about 7 to 10 metres that swept more than 20 km inland, and torrential rain for three days





OP SAHAYATA – ORISSA 1999

5 ASSAM had just returned to base - Ranchi after four months of mobilization of the Kargil War.

On 28th October 1999, the Battalion was tasked to proceed to Orissa, at 6 hours notice, before the super cyclone made landfall.

Two Field Company Engineers, additional Medical resources, workshop and Signals were grouped with the Battalion



CO & Reconnaissance party departed Ranchi in 3 hours and Main Body under 2IC moved in 6 hours.

Unit entered Orissa at night on 28th October 1999, through Birmitrapur, just as the cyclone was building up, and took the detour via Sambalpur to avoid roadblocks visualized along the coastal road.

COs party reached Cuttack at 10 pm on 29th October, much to the relief of the State Administration

- ◇ The first task was to secure by first-light (dawn) of 30 October, the two godowns in Cuttack, stocked with food supplies
- ◇ Organising relief convoys by activating people, battered by the cyclone, and suffering a combination of shock and individual losses, was a huge challenge
- ◇ By the afternoon of 30th October we succeeded, and our Company Columns set out to to their assigned locations with relief convoys in tow:
 - ◇ A Coy – Paradeep
 - ◇ B Coy – Jagatsinghpur
 - ◇ C Coy – Cuttack/Ersama
 - ◇ D Coy – Kendrapara
 - ◇ Bn HQ and SP - Cuttack





*On the following evening while returning from A Coy at Paradeep, the CO discovered the block worst hit, by the eye of the cyclone, **Ersama!***



A lone house remaining from a once bustling village,
a common scene across the entire landscape



Enroute, Madhab the guide pointed to the ruin, “this was my house”



This was the tallest coconut tree in my courtyard



Once upon a time a bus



Human and cattle carcass floating together



The all-pervading stench of death



By 31st October the soldiers reached with rations and boats at the ferry sites



Boats were our lifeline to the people



**100 kilos
of rice on
each
Rhino
buddy
pair**

**Commanding
Officer
with a
boat column
through a
creek**





**Capt Indrakhi
Bhattacharjee
Medical
Officer
in action**



Maj DS Cheema receiving supplies from Sea King Hetr Indian Navy



Maj KK Anil
2IC
overseeing food
drop



**Battlefield
Nursing
Assistants
5 ASSAM at
the forefront**



Helping the Anand Margis dispose mortal remains



***LNk Gobin
Bori and many
others
evacuated
casualties by
the thousands***

By first week of November road restoration was the top priority to reach relief to the needy





Repairs to bridges was a priority for restoring roads to reach the needy

Finishing touches as the hopeful population watches





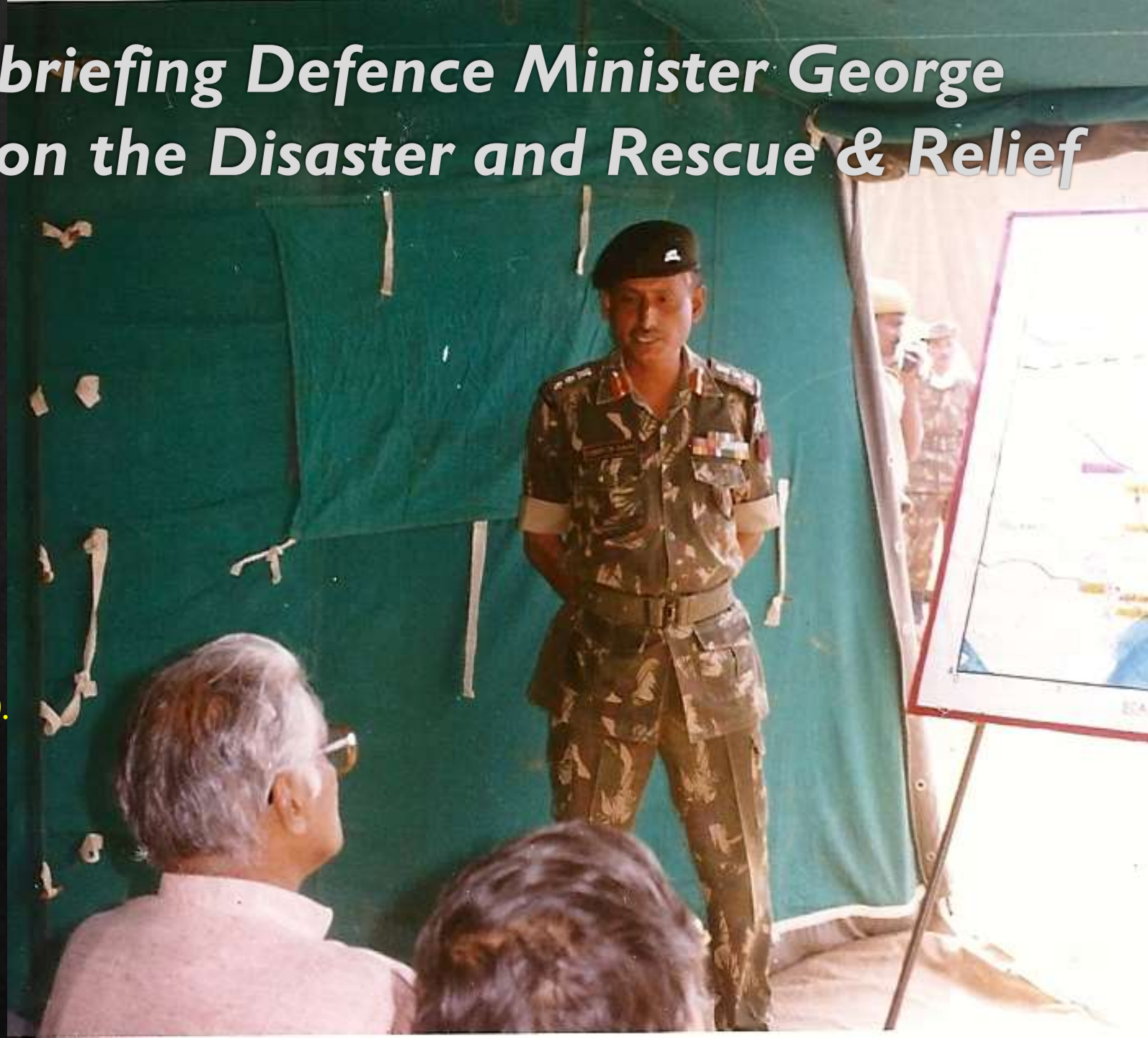
On 5th November Commanding Officers Gypsy on test drive over a restored bridge



Finally on 6th November, the Shaktimans roll across the bridges with relief

Commanding Officer briefing Defence Minister George Fernandes at Ersama on the Disaster and Rescue & Relief

- Originating from about 550 km east of the Andaman Islands as a depression the super cyclone centred over coastal areas of Odisha for three days, accompanied by torrential rain as a tidal surge of about 7 to 10 metre that swept more than 20 km inland
- The storm affected 14 coastal districts, 28 coastal towns and two major cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.
- At least 13 million people, were affected.
- Official death toll then was 9,885, unofficial sources estimated the toll to be above 50,000. Of the total casualty, Jagatsinghpur district alone had accounted for 8,119 people.
- Livestock lost - 3,15,886 head of cattle.
- 16,50,086 houses damaged, 23,129 houses washed away, 7,46,337 houses fully destroyed and 8,80,620 houses partially damaged.





*Showing the
ground situation
to the Defence
Minister*



**Parting comments
of
George Fernandes
Defence Minister**

**“The Nation Can't Thank
You Enough”**

The Fighting Fifth Group

A Coy	Maj DS Cheema, Sub Mojen Ch Ray
B Coy	Maj Lokesh Saxena Sub Daniel Marak
C Coy	Capt N Sahrawat Sub LP Mawia
D Coy	Lt V Jondhale Sub Kamleshwar Roy
SP Coy	Sub Kehito Sema
HQ Coy	Sub K Borah
Adjt/RMO	Capt S Mondal
Addl MOs	Col S Roy Capt Indrakhi Bhattacharya
Engr Coy 1	Maj Reddy
Engr Coy 2	Capt Rao
2IC	Maj KK Anil Kumar
CO	Col Subrata Saha



***Grateful
people
make the
world a
better
place no
matter
what!***

Lessons Brought Home

- **Always be ready to mobilize – never know why, when & where will be the next call**
- Strong resolve and good resilience is a winning combination
- **Operate with trust and an air of confidence**
- Smaller and more agile teams deliver better
- **Spirit of collaboration and cooperation helps tide over any challenge**
- Human tolerance has no bounds
- **Might of the Infantry Battalion is its teamwork**

