

IAF COMBAT KILLS - 1971 INDO-PAK AIR WAR

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The final tally of the 14-day 1971 war announced by Indian Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram, in the Parliament on Dec 18, 1971, puts Pakistani losses at 94 aircraft and Indian losses at 45 (54¹²⁸¹) aircraft. The figure for kills was determined through very strict procedures and does not include damaged aircraft or probable kills. It has not been clear whether these claims refer to PAF losses alone or to all aircraft destroyed in combat or if they include the F-86Es captured at Tejgaon, which would make the numbers much higher. A breakdown of kills was never released officially, although a crude estimate of 75 kills mentioned in the Official history of the 1971 war, would include 35 Pakistani aircraft lost to the air action and the rest destroyed on the ground. This document attempts to list to the highest extent possible, all of the claims made by the IAF, in terms of enemy aircraft destroyed during the conflict. Since the IAF itself has not released a single, detailed list of such claims, all the respective tables (especially Table 1.1) are thus incomplete until more information becomes available.

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19	MAP of Western Sector	KIA Killed In Action
20	MAP of Eastern Sector	POW Prisoner of War
		AAA Anti Aircraft Artillery
		LMG Light Machine Gun
		EP East Pakistan
		HE High Explosive (ammo)
		t/n Tail Number
		s/n Serial number

TABLE 1.1 - IAF Air to Air claims Dec 1971 – Confirmed Kills

Date	Kill	Aircraft	Sqn	Claimant	Sector/AB	Victim/Comments
22 Nov 71	F-86E	Gnat F.1	22	F/L R A Massey	Boyra	W/C Chaudhary (14 sqn) / BO over EP
22 Nov 71	F-86E	Gnat F.1	22	F/L M A Ganapathy	Boyra	F/O Khalil Ahmed (14 sqn) / POW
22 Nov 71	F-86E	Gnat F.1	22	F/O D Lazarus	Boyra	F/L Pervez Quereshi (14 sqn) / POW
04 Dec 71	F-86E	Hunter	20	W/C C V Parker	Peshawar	Not listed as confirmed by No.20 sqn
04 Dec 71	F-86E	Hunter	17	W/C N Chatrat	Dacca	F/L Saeed Afzal Khan (14 sqn) / KIA
04 Dec 71	F-86E	Hunter	17	F/L V K Neb	Dacca	W/C S M Ahmed (14 sqn) / KIA
04 Dec 71	F-86E	Hunter	14	W/C R Sundaresan	Dacca	S/L Dilawar Hussain (14 sqn)
04 Dec 71	F-86E	Hunter	37	F/O H Masand	Dacca	F/O Sajjad Noor (14 sqn)
04 Dec 71	F-86E	Hunter	??	F/O S Jayendra	Dacca	14 sqn
04 Dec 71	?Mirage III or F-86	Hunter	27	F/O Sudhir Tyagi	Murid	?5 sqn
05 Dec 71	F-86E	HF-24 Mk.1	220	S/L K K Bakshi	Nayachor	(See note.3)
07 Dec 71	F-86E (t/n 4030)	Hunter	?7	?	Khushalgarh	F/O Hamid Khawaja (17 sqn) Pilot crashed while chasing Hunter, acc. to the PAF. (See note.3)
10 Dec 71	F-86E (t/n 3856)	Hunter	20	S/L R N Bharadwaj	Chamb	S/L Aslam Chaudhry / KIA
12 Dec 71	F-6 (t/n 1703)	Su-7BMK	32	F/L S S Malhotra	Mianwalli	F/L Ejazuddin (23 sqn) / BO
12 Dec 71	F-104A (s/n 56-773)	MiG-21FL	47	F/L B B Soni	Jamnagar	W/C M L Middlecoat (9 sqn) / KIA
12 Dec 71	F-104A or F-86	MiG-21FL	47	S/L V Kapila	Badin	F-104A mentioned in official records ^[28] as seen crashing but more likely, probable. Rockets were fired at aerial target.
13 Dec 71	F-86	Hunter	OCU	F/L K S Suresh	Talhar	
13 Dec 71	F-86	Hunter	OCU	S/L F J Mehta	Talhar	F/O N N A Baig (19 sqn)
15 Dec 71	2x F-86	Hunter T.66	OCU	W/C M N Singh S/L F J Mehta	Nayachor	Maneuver kill. Both targets flew into the ground.
16 Dec 71	F-6	MiG-21FL	29	F/L S B Shah	Nayachor	Escort mission
16 Dec 71	F-6	MiG-21FL	29	F/L S B Shah	?Uttarlai	Wreckage found by Indian Army ^[4] .
17 Dec 71	F-104A	MiG-21FL	29	S/L I S Bindra	Uttarlai	9 sqn (RJAF)
17 Dec 71	F-6	Su-7BMK	?	?	Shakargarh	From Official history ^[1]
17 Dec 71	F-104A	MiG-21FL	29	F/L Niraj Kukreja	Nayachor	9 sqn (RJAF)
17 Dec 71	F-104A (s/n 56-787)	MiG-21FL	29	F/L AK.Datta	Nayachor	F/L Samad Changezi (9 sqn) / KIA
Dec 71	2x 0-1	Hunter	?	?	?	Confirmed from PAF chronicler, John Fricker's, records ^[6]

TABLE 1.2 - IAF Air to Air claims Dec 1971 - Damage, Probables and Close calls

Date	Target	Aircraft	Sqn	Claimant	Sector / AB	Comments
4 Dec 1971	Mirage-III EP	Gnat F.1	29	?	Amritsar	Mirage claimed as hit. Probable.
4 Dec 1971	F-104A	Gnat F.1	2	W/C Johnny Greene	Amritsar	Intercepted and photographed. No claim.
4 Dec 1971	F-86	Hunter	20	F/O K P Murlidharan	Peshawar	Probable kill claimed by No.20 sqn but unlikely. Pilot was firing at target but was eventually SD and KIA.
4 Dec 1971	F-86	Hunter	20	S/L K N Bajpai	Peshawar	Aircombat with target attacked and result unknown.
4 Dec 1971	F-86E	MiG-21FL	30	?	Kalaikunda	Probable. No claims.
4 Dec 1971	F-86	Hunter	20	W/C C V Parker	---	Not claimed by squadron but mentioned in citation. Damage claim but write off unlikely.
4 Dec 1971	F-86E (t/n 1689)	Hunter	20	W/C C V Parker	Peshawar	F/L Nayyar Iqbal / KIA (17 sqn). Listed as accident during raid, by Pakistan.
4 Dec 1971	F-86	Hunter	20	F/L C S Dhillon	>40 nm from Peshawar	5 min aircombat. Probable kill.
4 Dec 1971	Mirage-III EP	Hunter	27	F/O Sudhir Tyagi	Murid	Target claimed damaged in citation.
8 Dec 1971	F-6 (t/n 1508)	Su-7BMK (s/n B-910)	26	F/L R G Kadam	Risalwala	F/L AJ Siddiqui* (23 sqn) is claimed by the PAF to have been shot while chasing this formation. The pilots of both sides were KIA.
9 Dec 1971	Mirage-III EP	MiG-21FL	1	?	Pathankot	2 K-13 AAMs were launched and a proximity hit recorded. Target disappeared from radar. Listed as 'Probable'
>9 Dec 1971	F-86	MiG-21FL	TACDE	W/C T J Master	?Escort	K-13 launched and claimed to hit wing of target. Pilot B/O reported.
11 Dec 1971	Mirage-III EP	Gnat F.1	23	?	Pathankot	Claimed as hit and damaged.
12 Dec 1971	F-104A	MiG-21FL	47	F/L Saigal	Jamnagar	K-13 launched. Claimed hit ^[2] .
14 Dec 1971	F-86E	Gnat F.1	18	F/O N S Sekhon	Srinagar	1 F-86 claimed as shot and 1 damaged, initially but claim seems to have been revised to no kills. See note**.
	F-86E					
17 Dec 1971	F-104A	MiG-21FL	29	F/L S B Shah	?Uttarlai	K-13 launched and observed to hit. Probable.

Notes

1. In a major PR exercise following the 1971 war, the PAF lined up^[11] no more than 22 Mirage-III fighters at on, in order to claim that none had been lost in combat, with one claimed to having been written off in a 'training sortie' prior to the war and another undergoing repairs. However, according to Dassault and other sources^{[10] [11] [25]}, the PAF took delivery of no less than 28 Mirage-IIIs in and not 24 Mirages as claimed by the PAF. Furthermore, some sources^[35] claim that additional Mirages were supplied during wartime by an unspecified middle eastern ally, possibly Libya. The latter is confirmed to have transferred at least 3 F-5E to the PAF, but these were claimed by Pakistan to have arrived only after the war ended, due to formalities concerning US clearance. Since the IAF only claimed 1-2 Mirage-IIIs confirmed as destroyed on the ground and 1 shot down by AAA, it is quite likely that the Mirage did suffer a number of air-to-air losses at the hands of IAF fighters.

2. There have been cases where a number of IAF probable claims or no claims from an encounter where a target was engaged, have actually been shown to be a confirmed kill when some timely and selective admission of losses show up on Pakistani records. SS Malhotra's F-6 kill is one such example^[40]

3. Polly Singh, a prominent IAF author, writes^[45] that F/O Hamid Khawaja was shot down by KK Bakshi, flying the Marut, on 07 Dec 1971.

* Loss also attributed to own AAA^[43] or possible fratricide^[17] by Leader, during the same encounter. Pakistani sources have not been clear. While Kadam was shot down by W/C Hashmi (PAF) and KIA, it is possible that he shot down AJ Siddiqui before going down. However, the IAF does not claim a kill and the record is mentioned for reference and study only.

** Damaged aircraft were said to have been noted by eyewitnesses but the PAF maintains^[41] that all 6 aircraft of the formation which attacked the lone Gnat, returned safely.

TABLE 2.1 - PAF AAA and Ground Fire Losses

Date	Target	Victim / Status	Cause	Sector / Claimant
3 Dec 1971	F-104A	Claim ^[1]	AAA	Amritsar
3 Dec 1971	B-57B	Unknown / KIA ^[44]	3x SA-2	Halwara (crashed in Pakistan)
4 Dec 1971	B-57B	Claim ^[1]	AAA	Amritsar
5 Dec 1971	F-104A (s/n 804)	S/L Amjad Khan / POW	AAA	Amritsar / Hav T C Ramaswamy, 27 AD Regt
5 Dec 1971	B-57B	Claimed hit but unlikely	AAA	Amritsar
6 Dec 1971	B-57B	F/L Javed Iqbal / KIA	AAA	Amritsar / Hav Gopala Krishnan, 27 AD Regt
		F/L G M Malik / KIA		
6 Dec 1971	B-57B	S/L I Hameed / KIA	AAA	Bhuj
		S/L Z Ahmed / KIA		
6 Dec 1971	B-57B (t/n 3939)	S/L Khusro / KIA	AAA	Jamnagar
		S/L Peter Christy / KIA		
6 Dec 1971	3x F-86	Claim ^[1]	Small Arms fire	?Chamb / 26 Division
7 Dec 1971	F-6 (t/n 4110)	F/L Wajid Ali Khan / POW	LMG	Marala / Naik Bal Bahadur, 29 AD Regt
7 Dec 1971	F-86F (t/n 1657)	S/L Cecil Choudhry / BO	AAA	Zafarwal / Claimed by Pakistan as fratricide
7 Dec 1971	F-86	Claim ^[1]	AAA	
8 Dec 1971	F-86F	F/L Fazal Elahi / KIA	AAA	Zafarwal / Hav Uttam Jawalge, 501 AD Grp
9 Dec 1971	F-104A	Claim ^[1]	Naval air defence	Okha
10 Dec 1971	Mirage-III	Claim	AAA	Pathankot
11 Dec 1971	F-6	F/L Shahid Raza / KIA	AAA	Shakar Garh / Hav M Kycharala, 45 AD Regt
11 Dec 1971	F-86	Claim	AAA	Amritsar
14 Dec 1971	Mirage-III	Claimed 'hit'	AAA	Jammu
17 Dec 1971	F-6	Claim ^[1]	AAA	Shakargarh

TABLE 3.1 - IAF Air to Ground kills Dec 1971 - Pakistani losses due to Air to Ground Action

DATE	KILL	AIRCRAFT	SON	CLAIMANT	Sector/AB	COMMENTS
4 Dec 1971	3x Pilatus PC-3	MiG-21FL	28	W/C B K Bishnoi	Tejgaon	Identified as light aircraft. Wreckage photographed.
4 Dec 1971	DHC-6 Twin Otter	MiG-21FL	28	W/C B K Bishnoi	Tejgaon	Solitary DHC-6 in East Pakistan. Wreckage photographed
4 Dec 1971	F-86F in Pen (t/n 1187)	Hunter	20	F/L A A Rozario	Murid	Admitted by Pakistan
4 Dec 1971	2x F-86	Hunter	20	W/C CV Parker VM	Peshawar	Claimed as decoys by Pakistan but thick black smoke was noticed. See section 3.3
4 Dec 1971	B-57B	Su-7BMK	32	F/O A Sathaye	Shorkot	Two B-57Bs were targeted while being refueled. Photographed by W/C Mangat.
4 Dec 1971	Mirage-III	Su-7BMK	32	F/O A Sathaye	Shorkot	Claim ^[2] but not mentioned in leader's own account.
4 Dec 1971	3x F-86	Su-7BMK	32	S/L VK Bhatia	Shorkot	Confirmed from gun camera footage. 1st attack.
4 Dec 1971	C-130	Hunter	20	Lt Arun Prakash, Navy, EX (P)	Chakala	3 C-130 were spotted and all three were hit. 1 C-130 confirmed destroyed, 2 damaged. See 3.3
4 Dec 1971	3x F-86E*	Su-7BMK	221	?W/C A Sridharan	Tejgaon	Possibly includes RT-33s, see note.
4 Dec 1971	?Bristol-170	Su-7BMK	221	?W/C A Sridharan	Tejgaon or Kurmitola	[27] [1]
4 Dec 1971	Mirage-III or F-104A	Hunter	20	F/O S Balasubramanian	Murid	Attackers got airborne at 1035 hrs. Burning wreckage confirmed by Su-7 photo-recce at 1200 hrs. The kill was described as a 'needle nosed' aircraft.
4 Dec 1971	2x F-86	Hunter	OCU	Unknown	Masroor	8 total claims by sqn on Masroor strikes. Strikes were on 4 and 5 Dec.
4/5 Dec 1971	3x B-57B	Hunter	OCU	W/C D M Conquest	Masroor	Credited with destroying 6 aircraft on the ground in citation.
	3x F-86					
5 Dec 1971	C-130	Hunter	20	Lt Arun Prakash, Navy, EX (P)	Mianwali	Aircraft was being loaded with troops.
5 Dec 1971	Beech Queen Air (USAF)	Hunter	20	F/O B C Karambaya	Chakala	The most prolific kill of the war. This was Brig. Gen Chuck Yeager's personal aircraft. The destruction was described by the same as 'The Indian way of giving Uncle Sam the finger!' ^[32]

5 Dec 1971	C-130	Hunter	20	S/L Bharadwaj VM	Chakala	Shared kill
				F/L S S Gahlaut		
5 Dec 1971	DHC-6 Twin Otter (s/n 13808)	Hunter	20	S/L Bharadwaj VM	Chakala	Shared kill. Admitted by Pakistan (Radio)
				F/L S S Gahlaut		
6 Dec 1971	RB-57D (t/n 3934)	Canberra	35	W/C K K Badhwar	Masroor	Admitted by Pakistan. Last remaining Elint RB-57D.
8 Dec 1971	5x F-86F (t/ns 1095 ,3839,3848 ,3851, 4018)	Hunter	220	Unknown	Murid	All destroyed aircraft were fully armed and four were in Pens. Loss admitted by Pakistan but no respective IAF accounts discovered. (so far)
8 Dec 1971	3x F-6	Su-7BMK	?	?	Risalewala	2 Confirmed ^[1]
8 Dec 1971	C-130	Su-7BMK	?	?	Risalewala	[1]
	Light aircraft					
8 Dec 1971	2x F-6	Hunter	20	F/O B C Karambaya	Murid	The Hunters attacked aircraft being pushed into Pens. No mention in PAF accounts.
				F/L A L Deoskar		
8 Dec 1971	Transport (?Bristol 170)	Hunter	20	S/L Bharadwaj VM	Murid	First pass of attack.
9 Dec 1971	Light aircraft	?	?	?	Nawabshah	[1]
11/12 Dec 1971	Light aircraft	Canberra	16	?W/C Gautam	Tejgaon	Destroyed in proximity blast of 4000 lb bomb.
16 Dec 1971	11x F-86E*	----	28	W/C B K Bishnoi (see comment*)	Tezgaon	Disabled by PAF after permanent destruction of runway by MiG-21FLs. Five F-86s were recovered by India for Bangladesh.

Notes

* The figure of 11 F-86Es and 2 RT-33s disabled, is a purely PAF claim. After the liberation of Bangladesh and the Pakistani surrender, the IAF personnel at Tejgaon were able to recover no more than five F-86Es and no mention is made of other aircraft. Although the RT-33s were confirmed to be in service, there is no specific mention of them being found or recovered at Tejgaon as per IAF records and their air activity is also never mentioned in PAF records. Thus the aircraft destroyed by the Su-7s on 4 Dec 1971, could have included the RT-33s among the targets attacked. PC Lal^[2] does mention (p.193) that 11 aircraft were located on the ground at Tejgaon (Dhaka) but some of them had been destroyed by air-strikes and some of them had been disabled by the Pakistanis themselves. The exact figure for the number of F-86Es in East Pakistan does not remain certain - India claims between 19^[1] and 22 units whereas Pakistan claims 16 to 18. But from what can be concluded from the mentioned evidence is that out of the PAF's entire deployment in East Pakistan, only five F-86Es survived intact.

2. Foreign C-130s, notably those from Iran, were known to have operated in West Pakistan, supplying spares and other vital supplies. On 10 Dec 1971, an Iranian C-130 was photographed^[2] off-loading supplies at an airstrip near Gwadar, by aircraft from the IAF's No.106 recon squadron. It is unclear whether any foreign C-130s were attacked and destroyed while operating at Pakistani airfields, although suspected supply points such as Nawabshah, were most certainly attacked.

TABLE 3.2 - IAF Air to Ground kills Dec 1971 - Damage and Probables

Date	Target	Aircraft	Sqn	Pilot	Sector/AB	Comments
4 Dec 1971	Blast Pen	Su-7BMK	32	F/O A Sathaye	Shorkot	Destroyed
4 Dec 1971	3x F-86	Su-7BMK	32	S/L VK Bhatia	Shorkot	2nd Attack. Claimed destroyed and listed as probable. Gun camera was ineffective in fading light.
4 Dec 1971	2x C-130	Hunter	20	Lt Arun Prakash, Navy, EX (P)	Chakala	Damaged
				F/O BC Karambaya		
5 Dec 1971	Aircraft in Blast Pen	Hunter	20	F/O S Balasubramanian	Mianwali	Pilot fired into the open mouth of the pen and black smoke of aircraft on fire was observed. 1430 hrs.
5 Dec 1971	B-57B	?	?	?	Shorkot	Probable ^[1] (official history/records)
6/7 Dec 1971	Hangar	Canberra	35	?	Drigh Road (Karachi)	Smoke from aircraft fires noted.
7 Dec 1971	Aircraft in Hangar	Hunter	20	F/L AA Rozario	Kohat	400 rounds of 30 mm HE were put into a large hangar which thus emitted black smoke, indicating aircraft fires.
				F/O R Demonte		
8 Dec 1971	C-130	Hunter	20	Lt Arun Prakash, Navy, EX (P)	Chakala	Described as Arun's "Lobster thermidor". Damage to wing and tail sections.
8 Dec 1971	Hangar	Su-7BMK	32	S/L VK Bhatia	Shorkot	57mm rockets were used to destroy the Hangar
8 Dec 1971	B-57B (s/n 3945)	?	?20	?	Murid	Claimed by Pakistan to have "caught fire" while "servicing" / Write off ^[17]

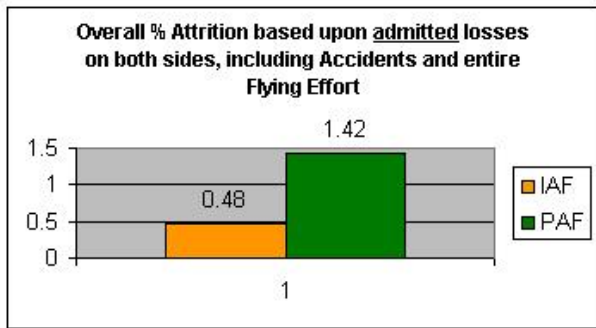
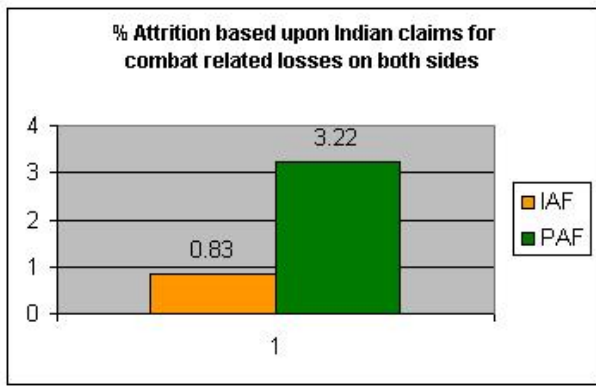
TABLE 3.3 - IAF Air to Ground kills Dec 1971 – Decoys

Both the IAF and PAF were known to have deployed several decoys in the form of dummy and retired aircraft. While it was highly convenient to claim that destroyed or attacked aircraft on the ground were actually decoys, it must be mentioned that through extremely strict standards of observation and reconnaissance plus pre and post-war intelligence, the IAF never claimed any as actual kills. In some cases they were identifiable before being attacked and in others, they did not display the thick black smoke expected. Here are a few examples where they were encountered,

Date	Decoy type	Aircraft	Sqn	Pilot	Sector/AB	Comments
?4 Dec 1971	F-86 decoys	?	?28	?	Tejgaon	Photographed. Kurmitola mostly had dummy aircraft.
					Kurmitola	
5 Dec 1971	2x F-86 decoys	Hunter	20	W/C CV Parker	Masroor	Destroyed but explosion pattern confirmed them as decoys. No kills were claimed.
7 Dec 1971	3x F-86 Decoys	Hunter	27	?	Murid	Destroyed but noted as decoys. No kills claimed.
8 Dec 1971	7x F-6 decoys	Su-7BMK	32	S/L VK Bhatia	Shorkot	Identified and Ignored

Attrition Trends

For the period of the war, the IAF also logged no less than 7346 combat sorties ^[2], not including the 191 sorties ^[5] flown by aircraft of the INS Vikrant, or the sorties by other segments of Naval aviation and Army aviation. It would appear that combat aircraft (fighters, bombers) alone apparently logged between 6542 (PAF estimate ^[17]) and 6758 ^[28] combat sorties. Transports and Helicopters logged no less than 588 "combat" sorties ^[28]. In his article "Some Reflections on the IAF" ^[9], Air Commodore Jasjit Singh AVSM VrC VM (Retd), Director, Center for Air Power Studies, mentions that Transports and Helicopters flew around 7500 sorties in total (p.178) and cross referencing this with his attrition figures [see chart 2], it would appear that the IAF itself did indeed log something in the area of 15,000 sorties, totally, during the war. The PAF officially ^[37] logged 3076 sorties in total, with 2914 combat sorties, meaning that they suffered almost twice the amount of losses at less than half the combat sortie rate.



A War of Credibility

While it is generally said that the actual figure for kills/losses or the truth lies somewhere in between the claims of both sides, one must also note that the 1971 war was an outright decisive victory for India. With objectives and air superiority fully achieved, numbers had very little meaning or immediate worth for the Indian side. Even so, numbers and more importantly, attrition, have always been secondary when compared to actual objectives achieved, that influenced the overall outcome of the war. Very strict procedures and missions^[44] for evaluating the validity of a kill claim were followed, using several sources for a single claim, such as gun camera film, wreckage in own territory and from reconnaissance over enemy territory, post war intelligence and survey. For air-to-air and air-to-ground claims, only perfectly clear gun camera footage and/or enemy admissions of losses, were considered. Radio intercepts and intelligence reports alone were not^[2] usually considered sufficient evidence to confirm a kill, although plenty of such intercept records existed on tape. The IAF was also considerably more generous in releasing wreckage and gun camera evidence into the public domain. Therefore, the Indian estimate of kills (94) and own losses can be deemed fairly accurate, with little or nothing to gain from additional propaganda from inflating kill figures and hiding own losses, in light of the outcome of the same conflict which has been so decisive. The credibility of a Secular Democracy over a Military Dictatorship known for oppression^[42] of its own people, should also come into consideration.

The situation in Pakistan was thus quite the opposite. With not only a decisive defeat at hand but a comparatively low sortie rate (which increases the overall attrition figure even with a small number of losses), numbers meant everything. After suitable fairytales about the 1965 war fed to the public, including but not restricted to the fantasy of a 4:1 kill ratio in its favor, the PAF had built an invincible image for itself until the outcome of the 1971 conflict proved otherwise. Therefore, very strategic figures for kills (suitably high) and losses (suitably low) needed to be carefully fabricated, so that the PAF could once again claim a 3-4:1 kill ratio in its favor and save face. Pakistan acknowledged the loss of no more than 42 aircraft to all causes including operational accidents and units disabled by self, not including foreign aircraft such as Brigadier General Chuck Yeager's Beech Queen Air, Pakistan Army Aviation or civilian losses (barring a single Fokker F.27 which 'disappeared' at sea).

Brig General Chuck Yeager's account^[29] of the war, from his autobiography, is selectively quoted by Pakistanis in support of PAF claims. However, the credibility of the same is also completely destroyed through the inclusion of certain laughable gems in his own assessment, such as the claim that India wanted to keep East Pakistan for itself, that the IAF operated the MiG-21J (not inducted until 1973 as the MiG-21MF) and that F-86 and F-104 Starfighters constituted half the PAF fleet of 500 aircraft! Yeager gives away his agenda by explicitly labeling the conflict as a surrogate war between the Soviet Union (India) and America (Pakistan). Yeager also mentions that the outcome on the ground was the complete opposite of the outcome of the air war, where the PAF "*whipped their (Indian) asses in the sky*". Yet, without the IAF's dominance over the battlefield and the consequential ability to provide uninterrupted support to ground forces throughout the conflict, how could that have ever happened? Perhaps this embarrassingly false account simply added to the PAF's lack of credibility, fueled in the past by ridiculous claims. Pakistani sources even needed to fabricate the IAF's strength in order to once again portray a David-vs-Goliath struggle. For example, a prominent PAF author^[37], claims that the IAF had no less than 1200 combat aircraft alone, against the IAF's actual strength of 625 combat aircraft. Another author, a retired Pakistani Brigadier, claims^[38] that the IAF was in fact, in possession of, MiG-23s and MiG-19s, as early as 1965. Funnily enough, it was the PAF itself and not the IAF, which had a MiG-19 variant, the Shenyang F-6C, during the follow on 1971 conflict. It is thus unsurprising to see so many independent air-power and air-war analysts^{[30] [33] [35]} castigate the PAF for the use of rather bare faced propaganda.

Finally, it is confirmed^[17] that the PAF's sortie rate slowly decreased day-by-day, as the conflict proceeded. Both Offensive Counter Air (OCA) and Defensive Counter Air (DCA) sorties showed an extreme fall from 4 Dec to 17 Dec, while Offensive Air Support sorties, showed an increase^[17]. Overall, the PAF sortie rate dropped from 240 sorties on 4 Dec 1971, to 150 sorties on 15 Dec and finally 215 sorties per day on 17 Dec. The PAF was nowhere to be seen on 5 Dec at Longewella, where just 4 Hunters wiped out an entire Pakistani armored regiment, despite desperate pleas^[19] for air support from the latter. The tank busting over Longewella lasted not a few hrs, but nearly two whole days, and despite this, the PAF never ever showed up. Neither was air support provided at all^[31] when Karachi was attacked. On 16 Dec, when Indian tanks broke the protective cordon in the Zafarwal area, no PAF air support was provided^[18] despite requests. All of the mentioned, indicate the IAF's local air superiority plus a solid depletion of available numbers in the PAF aircraft fleet, despite reports^{[7] [8] [35]} foreign reinforcement.

The PAF extensively received foreign assistance and aircraft throughout the war, and these not only added to its combat element but more importantly, helped camouflage the extent of its losses. The most famous example would be the transfer of 11 RJAF F-104A Starfighters to Pakistan, on 13 December 1971. This was not initially mentioned in Pakistani accounts, was first noted by IAF pilots when the F-104s they shot down, bore a desert camouflage. Eventually, declassified US documents^[7], confirmed the transfer, which, was eventually acknowledged by Pakistan. Also transferred were at least 3 Libyan Northrop F-5Es, but Pakistan maintains that these units arrived only on Dec 27, well after the Pakistani surrender. Besides the mentioned examples, Pakistan does not acknowledge the transfer of any other aircraft although Indian sources^[1] as well as independent sources^{[34] [35]} constantly mention the transfer of several additional F-86 Sabres and possibly Mirage-III EPs^[35] from Middle Eastern sources. Additional US Declassified documents^[8] further mention the supply of about another 2 squadrons of aircraft from Turkey and 12 more F-104s after the war had concluded, all of these paid by the Shah of Iran under US orders. Given that foreign aircraft were already photographed supplying equipment to Pakistan during the war and taking into

consideration the examples of the F-104A and F-5 transfers, the possibility of additional loaner aircraft during wartime cannot be easily written off despite PAF denials. The PAF has always accused Bengali defectors of giving away deployment details and information to the Indian side but such access to information only makes Indian claims relating to the PAF, more accurate.

The PAF almost exclusively flew defensive ^[16] ^[18] sorties with 61.5% ^[17] of the overall effort and up to 70% ^[18] excluding bomber, transport and recce sorties, being purely DCA sorties. The IAF in contrast, flew an almost completely offensive air campaign (65.5% according to a serving PAF author ^[17] or up to 80% according to Indian sources), exposing themselves much more to enemy fire under low fuel states which made engagement of patrolling aircraft very difficult. Whatever the real statistics are, it is quite clear that the IAF won the air war of 1971 and high level Pakistani Army sources ^[13] ^[14] ^[16] are now starting to acknowledge the same at some level or the other, despite what the PAF claims. Pakistan lost the whole of East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh, plus a massive 5,500 sq. miles of territory ^[15] in the West, with about 93,000 soldiers taken as POW, over 20,000 casualties and 253 tanks lost in combat. The Indian Army acknowledges ^[2] ^[11] the fact that the IAF played a critical role in achieving the decisive victory within a very short period of 14 days. The IAF couldn't have done so without achieving air superiority. The latter also allowed the IAF to fly more photo-reconnaissance missions for accurate damage assessment. The IAF's performance (in some cases) was so good that some authors ^[26] began to estimate that the missions were conducted under AWACS control of a 'loaned' Soviet Tu-126 Moss. Both Yeager and Russian personnel ^[2] began to think that the Su-7s and MiG-21s had been modified with weapons aiming computers and precision guided weaponry.

When the above became too apparent, both Pakistani piloting skills and the PAF's tactical and strategic planning came under severe criticism, from their own side ^[16] ^[24] as well as from the international side ^[21] ^[22]. This perspective can be attributed to a number of factors. The first would be the fact that the Pakistanis enjoyed a technologically superior Air Force and were mostly on the defensive while the IAF was flying most of its aircraft in offensive sorties over Pakistan. The second factor is that the PAF became a victim ^[23] ^[2] of its own propaganda from the 1965 war with India. While the PAF would try to have both the world and its own country believe that it had achieved a major victory over India in September 1965, even though the actual outcome was the opposite, the Indians carefully studied their past actions and force levels, thus acknowledging the existence of and consequently weeding out the weaknesses, making refinements in tactics and carefully planning for future action. So while the Indians were drawing strength from their superior training and tactics, the PAF was drawing strength from a fictitious past victory over India, thus setting themselves up for a massacre. Truth is indeed, stranger than fiction.

Despite the mentioned perceptions however, the fact remains that neither was the overall conduct of the IAF, perfect, nor was the conduct of the PAF, poor. The IAF for example, suffered massive losses to ground-fire (65 to 80 % of total combat losses) and some of the primary causes were attributed as 'over-enthusiasm' or in some cases 'indiscipline' ^[2] in taking more attack passes than allowed, sometimes up to 8 passes when fuel reserves were sufficient. The intensity of ground fire over Pakistani territory is however, illustrated by the number of related fratricide claims made by the PAF. Rather than the joy of victory, the IAF considers the lessons learnt in combat for the future review and refinement of tactics and procedures, as far more important. In the PAF's case, she was facing a better trained and better disciplined opponent which had carefully planned its course of action. Unfortunately, this was compounded by the underestimation of IAF capability and the overestimation of self capability, due to nothing more than fantasy accounts from the 1965 air war. The PAF also could not boast of support from a indigenous Defence industry, unlike India, and was dependant on external sources. Lastly, as a consequence of oppression ^[42] and attempted racial discrimination ^[23], it had also lost a considerable amount of its East Pakistani (Bengali) personnel. At the end of the day, while the procedures used both the opposing air forces needed some improvement, it was the IAF which got the job done.

NOTES - Bibliography, References and Excerpts

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- [4] 1971 war section, "Sam's Indian Air Force down under", siafdu.tripod.com (archive of 2001)
- [5] Vice Admiral GM Hiranandhini (Retd.) NM,PVSM,AVSM, "Transition to triumph - Indian Navy 1965-75", Lancer International
- [6] "*Two PAA artillery -spotting and reconnaissance Cessna O -1s were blasted out of the sky during the 1971 war by the 3 0mm ADEN cannon of marauding Indian Hawker Hunters over the battlefield .*" , John Fricker, Pakistan's Army Aviation, AIR INTERNATIONAL
- [7] Declassified documents concerning the transfer of American aircraft to Pakistan, 1971, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB79/#3>
- [8] Faqir Syed Aijazuddin Khan, The White House & Pakistan, Secret Declassified Documents, 1969-74, Oxford University Press
- [9] Air Commodore Jasjit Singh AVSM VrC VM (Retd), [Some Reflections on The IAF](#), Airpower Journal, Vol.1, No.1, Monsoon 2004 edition
- [10] Pushpindar Singh, "Journal of an Air War", Air Enthusiast, Volume 2, No. 6 April 1972
- [11] Editors footnote from official sources, Fricker John, Postmortem of an Air War, Air Enthusiast, May 1972.
- [12] "PAF losses were heavy and included **54 Sabres**", Stewart Wilson, North American F-86 Sabre, p.58
- [13] "by 14 December, the Indian air force had achieved alarmin g success" Maj.Gen Shaukat Raza, The Pakistan Army 1966-71, p.166
- [14] "While the enemy was free to fly over our territory , Air Marshal M. Rahim Khan kept himself and his air force hidden during the conflict." , p.174, Lt.Gen. A.A.K Niazi, The Betrayal of East Pakistan, Oxford University press, ISBN 0185777271
- [15] "A military exercise should also be held to find out how and why the small, tired and ill-equipped eastern garrison completed all the given tasks under the worst possible conditions against over whelming odds, and why the western garrison, with enough forces and resources and having the initiative, failed and lost 5,500 square miles of territory in

less than 10 days under conducive conditions." , Interview with Lt Gen A A Khan Niazi, Rediff, February 02, 2004, <http://www.rediff.com/./news/2004/feb/02inter1.htm>

[16] "The PAF's performance in 1971 did not come up to public expectation. The C-in-C, PAF failed to provide imaginative leadership to plan and direct the air effort. Both strategically and tactically, the air force was kept on the defensive. It was deployed in depth but too thinly. Whereas it could undertake its own Defence, it could not generate offensive support. When the Indians changed their strategy on or about December 7, after the first three days, the PAF was not prepared to change over during the short war to meet the new enemy threat, and remained helpless." , Maj.Gen. Fazal Muqeeum Khan, "Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership", National Book Foundation, Islamabad, 1973

[17] Group Captain M. Kaiser Tufail, "Great Battles of the Pakistan Airforce" and "Pakistan Air Force Combat Heritage" (pafcombat) et al, Feroze sons, ISBN 9690018922

[18] "Air support was not provided in the Zafarwal sector, this defies explanation, was the C-in-C PAF drunk? ", Sqn Ldr Shuaib Alam Khan, "The Fighter Gap", Defence Journal <http://www.defencejournal.com/may98/fightergap1.htm>

[19] Air Marshal (retd.) M.S. Bawa, PVSM, AVSM, VM, "The saga of Longewella", Indian Air Force Journal, 1997, <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/1971War/Longewala.html>

[20] "the IAF influenced the war significantly with relatively small losses while the PAF flew far fewer sorties with greater losses and less effect." , Major RG Kyle, Royal Canadian Artillery, "Indian-Pakistan War of 1971: A Modern War", Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1984.

[21] "Trying to catch the Indian Air Force napping, Yahya Khan, launched a Pakistani version of Israel's 1967 air blitz in hopes that one quick blow would cripple India's far superior air power. But India was alert, Pakistani pilots were inept, and Yahya's strategy of scattering his thin air force over a dozen air fields was a bust!" , p.34, Newsweek, December 20, 1971

[22] "The Indian air force dispersal (of its air units) plus the spotty operational efficiency and dubious tactics of the PAF operating from West Pakistan bases blunted an effort to emulate the Israeli air blitz against Egypt in 1967" , Editorial, AWST, Dec 13, 1971

[23] Inflated Perceptions about Pakistani military effectiveness, Maj (Retd) Agha Humayun Amin, "Pakistan Army Since 1965", <http://www.defencejournal.com/2000/nov/pak-army.htm>

[24] "A former Air Force Chief, Air Marshal Jamal Ahmad Khan while commenting about the pathetic performance of the air force in 1971, boasted that, "if India was not supported by Soviet Union, Pakistan Air Force would have crippled Indian air force" (Note : However, the aircraft of Russian origin, namely the MiG-21FL and Su-7BMK represented only 34 % of the IAF fleet strength), Hamid Hussain, "Demons of December - Road from East Pakistan to Bangladesh", <http://www.defencejournal.com/2002/dec/demons.htm>

[25] Pusphindar Singh, Ravi Rikhye, Peter Steinemann. "Fiza'ya: Psyche of the Pakistan Air Force." Society for Aerospace Studies, New Delhi 1991, Himalayan Books

[26] HP Willimott, "War in Peace - An analysis of Warfare since 1945"

[27] Pushpindar Singh, "The Battle Axes : No.7 Squadron IAF, 1942-1992", 1993, The Society for Aerospace studies, New Delhi.

[28] No.47 sqn history, Fighter Units, Official website of the Indian airforce, indianairforce.nic.in

[29] Air Marshal (retd.) CV Gole, "Air Operations of Dec 1971", Vayu Aerospace Review, Dec 1991, New Delhi

[30] *"The war between India and Pakistan, which is being fought on two major fronts is undoubtedly going in India's favor despite extravagant Pakistani claims, reported in one newspaper, of "at least 74 Indian aircraft" having been destroyed.*

On the western front Pakistani aircraft have been maintaining attacks on bases in NW India, part. in Kashmir, the Punjab and the New Delhi area, but these were reported to be ineffectual; certainly the Indian sortie rate has been consistently high.

With the war being fought on two widely separated fronts, it is difficult to make any clear assessment of the relative effectiveness and successes of either air force, but first impressions are that the IAF has the upper hand"

Flight International, Dec 9, 1971

[31] *Dec 10 : In W. Pakistan, the PAF claimed it was shooting down more Indian aircraft than it was losing itself - a reversal of the earlier situation in E. Pakistan. Repeated attacks by IAF Su-7s against Pakistani air bases, however have gone largely unchallenged, as have raids against Karachi.*

Flight International, Dec 16, 1971

[32] *It was the morning after the initial Pakistani strike that Yeager began to take the war with India personally. On the eve of their attack, the Pakistanis had been prudent enough to evacuate their planes from airfields close to the Indian border and move them back into the hinterlands. But no one thought to warn General Yeager. Thus, when an Indian fighter pilot swept low over Islamabad's airport in India's first retaliatory strike, he could see only two small planes on the ground. Dodging anti-aircraft fire, he blasted both to smithereens with 20 -millimeter cannon fire. One was Yeager's Beechcraft. The other was a plane used by United Nations forces to supply the patrols that monitored the ceasefire line in Kashmir.*

I never found out how the United Nations reacted to the destruction of its plane, but Yeager's response was anything but dispassionate. He raged to his cowering colleagues at a staff meeting. His voice resounding through the embassy, he proclaimed that the Indian pilot not only knew exactly what he was doing but had been specifically instructed by Indira Gandhi to blast Yeager's plane. ("It was," he relates in his book, "the Indian way of giving Uncle Sam the finger.")

The destruction of the Beechcraft was the last straw for Yeager. He vanished from his office, and, to the best of my knowledge, wasn't seen again in Islamabad until the war was over. It wasn't a long period; the Indians took only two weeks to trounce the Pakistanis. East Pakistan, known as Bangladesh, became an independent country, and Yahya resigned in disgrace. He was so drunk during his televised farewell speech that the camera focused not on him but on a small table radio across the room

Edward C. Ingraham, "[The right stuff in the wrong place](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1316/is_v17/ai_3959887)" - Chuck Yeager's crash landing in Pakistan, Washington Monthly, Oct, 1985

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1316/is_v17/ai_3959887

[33] *"The 1971 war with Pakistan was the proving ground for the new air force (IAF), which was not found wanting. Achieving 80 percent serviceability, the Indian Air Force mounted some 4000 sorties in the west and 1978 in the east, despite preemptive strikes by the PAF against many IAF airfields. The IAF concentrated on interdiction sorties, preventing a major Pakistani offensive against India. Despite much propaganda by Pakistan and its apologists, the bulk of Indian losses were to ground fire, and in the air, the Indians demonstrated an edge.*

The end of the war brought with it major analyses of IAF performance but most reports indicated that refinement rather than revolutionary change was all that was required, although it underline the importance of a number of re-equipment plans, and appropriate requirements were drawn up "

Jon Lake, [Air Power Analysis : Indian Airpower](#), World Air Power Journal, Volume 12

(Note : Sortie rate incorrect, although very often cited, officially and unofficially)

[34] *Interestingly the PAF was augmented during the war by No.9 squadron of the Royal Jordanian Air force, flying F-104s and the delivery of between 25 and 70 F-86s from Saudi Arabia. It is also believed that Libya sent a training detachment of F-5s, perhaps to allow for rapid transfer of more of these aircraft had the war gone on for a longer period.*

Exact kill and loss figures remain controversial to this day, but it is clear that India effectively won the air war in 1971, and that the Pakistan Air Force emerged with a dented reputation and was blamed by the man on the street for 'letting down the nation'

World Air Power Journal, [Air Power Analysis : Pakistan](#)

[35] *The Mirage-III EP served with No.5 squadron at Saragodha during the 1971 war, operating primarily in the air Defence role. Some 28 Mirages were supplied by France, and 23 were shown after the war, though six extra aircraft were said to have been supplied by a Middle Eastern ally.*

The PAF played a more limited role in the operations, and was reinforced by F-104s from Jordan, Mirages from an unidentified Middle Eastern Ally (probably Libya) and by

F-86s from Saudi Arabia. Their arrival helped camouflage the extent of Pakistan's losses. Libyan F-5s were reportedly deployed to Saragodha, perhaps as a potential training unit to prepare Pakistani pilots for an influx of more F-5s from Saudi Arabia.

Chris Bishop, Indo-Pakistan wars 1965-71, p.386, "The Encyclopedia of 20th Century Air Warfare", 2001 Aerospace publishing ltd, 2001 edition

[36] *"During the war itself, it (the PAF) received 35 F-86s from Saudi Arabia and Iran"* , Official History of the 1971 war, Chapter 10, the Western sector

[xx] *"Growing tensions between India and Pakistan was compounded by unrest in East Pakistan, smaller but more populous than the west. Indian support for East Pakistan was resented by Pakistan. On 3 Dec 1971, the PAF struck at 10 IAF bases including two in Kashmir, timing the attacks at dusk on a Friday, the Muslim Sabbath, when the Indians would be least likely to expect such an attack. The attack was largely unsuccessful - the IAF claimed to have lost just 3 aircraft. The IAF had not deployed too many aircraft forward, close to the frontier and those that were had been stored in concrete hangars invulnerable to anything less than a direct hit. After the initial attacks, the PAF deployed relatively few of its 300 aircraft and did little to support the land campaign, a classic example of an air force without the support of an indigenous aircraft industry, struggling to conserve its equipment. The war lasted till 16 December, when east Pakistan declared independence as the new state of Bangladesh ."*

PAF, David Wragg, "JANES AIRFORCES OF THE WORLD", ISBN 0007115679

[37] *"In terms of military hardware the IAF stood fifth largest in the world after the USA, USSR, France and China. It possessed over 1,200 aircraft, some of them belonging to the very advanced category and the remainder of substantial capabilities.*

The inventory of advanced aircraft, which were capable of performing multiple roles, comprised 232 Mig-21, 128 Su-7 and 165 Gnat fighters. These were backed by some 300 relatively old but still operational Hunters (199) Mysteres (61) and indigenously produced HF-24 Maruts (54). Nearly 85 Canberra night bombers were also available. Even the obsolete Vampire (224) and Ouragon (50) fighters could be used in areas uncontested by the PAF, to add to the IAF's overwhelming numerical superiority ."

Group Captain Sultan M. Hali, 'The Air War in 1971-Revisited', Shaheen, Vol.XLVI, Summer issue, 1997, Rear Air Headquarters, Peshawar.

and "History of Pakistan Air Force - 1948-1988", PakMilitary, 1971 War section

[38] *"the PAF out-flew and out-fought the IAF who not only had **MIG-19s**, but also **MIG-21s** and even **MIG-23s**."* Brigadier (retd) Shaukat Qadir, "OpEd : 1965 war : Comedy of errors ", http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_25-10-2003_pg3_4

[39] Gen (retd.) Chuck Yeager and Leo Janos, "Yeager : An Autobiography"

[40] Pushpindar Singh "Su-7 : A Whale of a fighter", 1983, <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/Aircraft/Su-7.html>

[41] W/C (retd.) Salim Baig, "Air Battles -December 1971 - My experiences", Defence Journal

[42] http://www.gendercide.org/case_bangladesh.html

[43] PAF Citations, 1971, http://www.defencejournal.com/sept98/citation_paf3.htm

[44] *"Unlike in 1965, the Indian Air Force in 1971 handled claims of aerial victories by its pilots with great maturity. No "kills" were awarded until all claims could be verified, preferably by photo reconnaissance missions. Almost immediately after the War was over, the Air Chief asked the Halwara station commander, Air Marshal C.V.Gole, to visit every IAF station in the West to ascertain the performance of various squadrons. "Later, we had access to other information as well and we worked out a pretty accurate picture of losses on both sides", he explains. But discrepancies could well remain. For instance, Gole recalls that one SAM battery had fired missiles at a couple of attacking Pakistani B-57 bombers. One was hit and streaming smoke. A few hours later, some villagers called to say that they had found the debris of the Pakistani aircraft. On investigation it was found that what remained was not the debris of an aircraft but that of a missile. The hit was not taken into account. It was only much after the war that some Pakistani report spoke about a B-57 pilot who had become "Shaheed" after he tried to bail out his burning aircraft but could not make it."*

Indranil Banerjee, Rupak Chattopadhyay and Air Marshal (Retired) C.V.Gole, "SAPRA India 1971 War site", <http://www.subcontinent.com/1971war/1971war.html>

[45] http://www.aircraftresourcecenter.com/Gal2/1301-1400/Gal1347_HF-24_Singh/gal1347.htm

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MAP 1.1 - IAF and PAF Deployments in the Western Theatre, Dec1971



MAP 1.2 - IAF and PAF Deployments in the Eastern Theatre, Dec1971



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