



## *Special Services Group*

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I, Dare Life

### Introduction

The Special Service Group is an elite Special Operations Force of the Pakistan Army and one of the oldest Special Forces outfits in Asia. The Special Service Group is ranked among the top Special Forces in the world, due to its bright combat record in a highly diverse theater of operations since its inception in 1956, which includes a number of foreign countries. They are also known as the "Black Storks" and the "Maroon Berets" and go by the Codename "SSG". The SSG, headquartered at Tarbela, is headed by a Major-General. This elite force closely resembles the US Army's Special Operations Forces and the British Army's elite SAS. The actual number of combat battalions is thought to be ten, however, due to their top secret operative scope, the actual number is kept highly classified. Skilled in the use of weapons, the SSG are trained to handle machine guns, sub-machine guns and pistols as if these were extensions of their bodies.

They are trained to fire from the hip with speed and accuracy, even when on the move. Experts in unarmed combat, they are deadly even with no weapons other than their hands and feet. Given their training in unconventional warfare, the SSG also learn how to guard against its use by the enemy. As such, they are the unit of choice when it comes to both guerrilla and anti-guerrilla operations. But of all the varied operations the

SSG are called on to conduct, the most demanding are those that are carried out deep behind enemy lines — cut off from supplies, support or even an escape route. The SSG is a small force, but when employed correctly it can inflict damages on the enemy out of proportion to its size. When viewed against the fact that in most conceivable scenarios the Pakistan army will have to fight a future conventional war while outnumbered, the SSG becomes a critical force multiplier. Therefore, it is best used in support of the army's offensives to create a strategic impact on the enemy that can then be exploited by conventional forces.

## Operational Roles

The Special Service Group has been trained to carry out a number of dissimilar special operations, including, Unconventional warfare, Foreign Internal Defense, Special Recon Missions, Direct Action, Hostage Rescue, Covert/Clandestine Operations, Personnel recovery, Counterterrorism, Counter-proliferation, Special Operations, Asymmetric Warfare, Nuclear, Biological, Chemical warfare, Counterinsurgency, Parameter defense, Air/Underwater/Land borne operations, VVIP escort, Arctic warfare, Mountain warfare etc.



A team of two Special Operators from SSG take combat positions during a counter terrorist drill

SSG teams infiltrate behind enemy lines either by land, air or sea. Insertion by land is hazardous and time-consuming as it involves crossing the frontlines, whereas the air option, in which the preferred means is by helicopter, is the least hazardous and quickest. But when helicopter insertion is precluded, freefall parachutes are used to make either HALO (high altitude, low opening) or HAHO (high altitude, high opening) jumps. HALO jumps are made inside the enemy territory, with the parachute being opened low, while HAHO jumps are made inside one's own territory close to the border, with the parachute being opened high, and then maneuvered towards the area designated for landing inside the enemy territory.

Having landed, whether by helicopter or parachute, they begin the final approach to the target, and once they get within striking distance, all hell is let loose. Minutes later, they are gone as suddenly as they had come, leaving behind a trail of blood and destruction. Now begins exfiltration, the most challenging of all phases. The quickest way is extraction by helicopter. But the real challenge, especially in the plains, is when this option is ruled out. It is now that their physical and mental toughness, resourcefulness

and the ability to remain cool and motivated come under a severe test, as they struggle to get back across a broad expanse of hostile territory with the enemy in hot pursuit.

## History and Organization



The 19<sup>th</sup> Baloch Regiment

The Pakistan Army's history in covert operations dates back to 1948 when tribesmen from the northern areas of Pakistan raided the Kashmir valley with the intent of wresting the control of the valley from its Hindu ruler. These raids, although a failure in achieving their absolute goal, were successful in bringing the disputed status of the Kashmir valley to the forefront of world affairs. As a result of close study of the special operations conducted during WWII by the allies and Germans alike, added to the insight gained during the raids conducted by the Pathan tribesmen, the Army realized the benefits of having a force that could operate behind enemy lines and sabotage the war efforts of its adversary.

Thus, as the relations between Pakistan and the United States cemented, Pakistan Army wasted little time in getting help with the formation of a proper Special Forces unit. In 1953-54, the Pakistan Army was able to raise a battalion of Special Forces within the existing Baloch Regiment (Regt). It was however simply designated as the 10th Battalion as to make it as inconspicuous as possible. In 1956, this formation was firmly established as the 19th battalion of the Baloch Regt and was moved to its new headquarters at Cherat, about 40 miles from Peshawar, where it is based to this day. Its first Commanding Officer (CO) was Lieutenant Colonel Abu Bakr Osman Mitha (later Maj Gen). At the time of its inception, the 19th Baloch consisted of approximately 6 companies.

In March of 1964, some members of the CIA's Covert Action Team, together with the U.S. Army's 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) came to Pakistan as part of a mobile training team to help the Pakistani army set up its first airborne school in Peshawar. Four US Special Forces riggers came to help train SSG members for airborne operations. This assistance was part of the US 'Military Aid to Pakistan' (US MAP) program. Additionally Pakistani SSG officers were sent to Fort Bragg and Fort Benning for advanced training. The training imparted upon the Pakistani officers included basic and jumpmaster courses, allowing the 19th Baloch to become fully airborne qualified.

This capability came just in time for the Pakistani Special Forces to get their baptism under fire during the 1965 Indo-Pak War. In 1965, the 19th Baloch was officially designated as the Special Service Group (SSG). There was a single battalion of the SSG at the time and it consisted of companies specialized in different roles including desert, mountain, ranger, marine warfare, demolition/sabotage and intelligence gathering operations. The desert companies trained with the US 10th SF Group in 1964 and conducted desert survival training for the participating USSF in the Sibbi area. These types of training exercises and operational relationship with US Special Forces continued and were further strengthened during the length of the cold war and later on during the Afghan war. As a result of this close interaction, Pakistani Special Forces have mirrored their American counterparts in many training concepts and operational doctrine.

However, it should be noted that over time, the SSG doctrine and tactics have evolved quite independently of the influences of any of the worlds' other prominent SF outfits. In 1966, after their less than favorable operations against the Indian Army in the September war, SSG went under a major reorganization and expansion. Two new battalions were raised. Cherat was maintained as the HQ, and the Attock Fort as a secondary base for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Commando Battalions (Cdo Bns) of the SSG. Each battalion comprised of 700 men led by a Lieutenant Colonel. In 1970, the SSG formed an independent combat diver unit by re-designating the old scuba company which was known as the Musa Company. This company was given the task of operating within Pakistani riverine areas while Pakistani Naval SSG undertook the responsibility of

coastal operations to minimize overlap in their tasks. In 1980, a decision was made to incorporate a combat diver company within each of the SSG battalions. This allowed the Musa Company to be relegated to a new anti-terrorism role which came up as a result of increases in terrorist incidents worldwide.

In this new role, advisors from the British Special Air Service (SAS) helped train the Musa Company operators. On May 29th, 1989, SSG suffered the tragic loss of its commanding officer, Brigadier Tariq Mahmood as a result of parachute failure. The incident happened during a demonstration jump from a helicopter when both his main and reserve chutes failed to deploy. The Brigadier was the commander SSG during the operations against the hijackers of Air India flight in Lahore as well as the Pan Am flight in Karachi. The current SSG strength has been maintained at 3 battalions with approximately 700 men each. These battalions are further divided into 4 companies each that are split into platoons consisting of 10 man teams. The battalions continue to be commanded by officers of the rank of Lieutenant Colonel while a Brigadier (Commander SSG) oversees the SSG as a whole from the Group HQ in Cherat. The independent Musa Company has evolved into a genuine and sole counterterrorism capability within Pakistan. During any given year, the three SSG battalions are constantly rotated through bases at Cherat and Attock Fort. One battalion is generally kept in training and another on operational duties along the Indian and/or Afghan border as well as on any UN peacekeeping deputation, while the third battalion is used for security of strategic locations such as the nuclear power plants etc. Due to the immense experience gained as a result of the many wars with India, an ongoing conflict on the Siachen glacier, the Afghan war, the war on terrorism and many deputations in the Middle East, the SSG has evolved into a SF to reckon with and in the eyes of many observers, easily ranks as one of the finest special forces in the world.

## Training and Missions



A small team of SSG operators during a Raid, Rescue and Sabotage exercise.

The training of SSG cadres is rigorous and special emphasis is placed on the efforts to mold the soldiers into individual commandos capable of taking independent initiative. SSG operatives are all volunteers from other Pakistan Army formations. The officers must have at least two years of military service and if selected, are assigned on a three-year posting within the SSG. The enlisted men, including the NCOs serve permanently in the SSG for as long as they can keep up with the tough physical regimen and retain medical category of "Aye". Typically within a given year, two batches of officers are selected to undergo the SSG training. The selection process begins with the GHQ screening through scores of applications and allowing approximately 100 or so to undergo the entrance tests. The entrance tests are spread over a few days. Interested

candidates are grilled with intelligence and aptitude tests continuously over these few days and nights.

The candidates are also pushed against strict timelines and mentally and physically exhausting tests. At the tail end of the selection process, the candidates are put through physical tests that include negotiating obstacle courses and individual and group tasks. Of the initial number put through the selection process, only a small fraction is actually inducted for training. All trainees undertake an eight-month course at Cherat for basic commando training. Attrition is usually very high during this part of the training due to the intense and demanding regimen. The basic SSG course emphasizes tough physical conditioning including grueling forced 36-mile marches (post exercises) to be completed in 12 hours, a practice first institutionalized by the 19th Baloch. The SSG candidates are also required to run 5 miles in under 40 minutes with full gear. At the end of this eight month course, all SSG candidates must take and pass the four-week para-training course at the Airborne School in Peshawar. SSG members gain their wings and the coveted maroon berets after completing five day and two night-jumps (non-SSG members only have to complete 5 day jumps). After the completion of the basic commando course, the newly inducted commandos are put through their paces in the advanced commando course which runs an additional 25 weeks. Only at the end of these two grueling phases are operators considered to be integral members of the SSG.

Many SSG operators are also HALO (High Altitude Low Opening) and more recently HAHO (High Altitude High Opening) qualified. The HALO course consists of five free fall jumps that earn the commando a 'skydiver' tab. Additionally, many SSG operators also participate in the courses conducted at the Army's Mountain Warfare School in Abbotabad. SSG operators in the diver companies attend the SSGN course (described separately) at Karachi to earn the 'Combat Diver' badge. Currently there are three classes of combat divers. The 1st Class is those who finish an 18-mile swim, 2nd Class combat divers are required to finish a 12-mile swim while the 3rd Class divers undertake the 6-mile swim. Another High-Altitude Mountain Warfare School has been established at Khappalu to train the SSG and other Army units for operations on the Siachen Glacier. Other areas of the commando training include internal security, assault

and small unit tactics, sniping, demolition, survival, languages, small arms familiarization, Fighting In Built Up Areas (FIBUA), Close Quarter Battle tactics (CQB), Long Range Recce Patrol (LRRP), Martial arts, espionage, psychoanalytic training, and criminal psychology courses.

As a result of exposure to a wide range of training, the SSG is capable of carrying out a variety of missions. These include unconventional warfare, long-range reconnaissance and intelligence gathering missions, riverine operations, counterterrorism, and tactical assaults against enemy positions. Another possible role would be to act as target designators for the Air Force and artillery observers. SSG personnel are also tasked with protection of vital points (VP) such as nuclear installations and dams. SSG also provides a security detail for the CoAS. In the past, SSG members have also been deployed aboard airlines to act as Air Marshals however this practice has been stopped. The SSG has been used as an instrument of influence and assistance to friendly countries on behalf of the Government of Pakistan. SSG has been deployed in many countries for training of the host nations' armed forces and advisory roles. In the mid-80s, SSG helped train members of Sri Lankan Special Forces to counter the Tamil Elam fighters in that country. Similarly, in early 1994, the SSG was tasked to train the Special Services Regiment of the Malaysian Army in high-altitude warfare in preparations for their deployment and operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of the United Nations peacekeepers.

SSG interaction with foreign Special Operations units



SSG Operator greets a Special Operator from the Chinese Spec Ops before the joint Youyi (Friendship) IV Exercise in 2011. Both SOF outfits carry out regular exercises to hone their skills and to share knowledge

SSG has been conducting regular (bi-annual) exercises with the Turkish Special Forces, which have been designated as the "Ataturk" series. The first of these exercises was held in December, 1998. The Turkish force included 21 officers and 14 non-commissioned officers. The second exercise of this series was held in November of 2000, while Ataturk-III concluded in September 2002. During the 80's and then into the 90's, SSG held many similar training exercises with U.S. Special Forces called "Inspired Venture". These exercises were usually held during the early months of January and February with approximately 150 U.S. troops. The exercises were focused on weapons familiarization and use, mountain-warfare along with tactics, raids and ambushes, and eventually airborne operations.

SSG has also been reported to training with the Jordanian and Iranian Special Forces and regularly conducts training for Special Forces of other friendly Middle Eastern countries who opt to come to Cherat even though other venues such as Fort Bragg (USSF) and Crendenhill (SAS) are also available. In addition, during the 80's and early 90's scores of SSG officers were sent to the US for advanced training with the US Rangers and other special forces. Training was also imparted to the SSG personnel in the UK and Malaysia. With a new phase in Pak-U. S. Relations, military cooperation has been restarted and joint exercises have already started anew. SSG also maintains a joint training program with the Chinese Special Forces codenamed 'Youyi exercises'. SSG also maintains close training relationship with numerous Middle Eastern Spec Ops units including Saudi and Jordanian. SSG operators regularly train at Jordan's King Abdullah Special Ops Training center in Jordan.



SSG HALO jumpers pose for the camera prior to a jump from 10,000 feet from the belly of a Pakistan Air Force C-130 Hercules

## 1965 Indo-Pakistan War

Way before the initiation of hostilities, a plan had been conceived by the Pakistan Air Force to use SSG to sabotage five forward air bases in India in case of conflict. The orders for planning of such an operation were transmitted to the SSG through GHQ. The plan was discussed at length at the Parachute Training School at Peshawar with senior army and air force personnel. The SSG command was of the notion that strikes on the lines of a similar Israeli operation against Arab countries during the 1956 Arab Israel War would be successful in case they were doing preemptively. However, that decision could only be taken by the President himself. The details of these plans were kept totally confidential and the team leaders found out about the specifics of the mission the day they were to go into action. The intelligence provided to the SSG operators about the targets was very outdated and inaccurate. In some cases, the teams had to make do with maps dating back to 1909/1912.

On the fateful day of 6th September 1965, when hostilities finally commenced, it was decided that three air bases at Adampur, Halwara and Pathankot were going to be targeted by SSG commandos airdropped at night. The plan was to destroy Indian Air Force combat aircraft on the ground and put the bases out of action and then exfiltrate back into Pakistan following the various waterways found in Punjab that flow from India to Pakistan. For this, three teams of approximately 45 commandos each were air dropped by C-130Bs in the early morning hours of September 7th. Due to the difficult terrain and very low visibility, none of the teams were able to regroup after the drops. The Adampur group was unable to assemble at night and waited the following day out hiding in the cornfields. However, most of the commandos were rounded-up and captured, including their commander Captain Assad Durrani. The Pathankot group faced a similar fate and most of the SSG operators were taken as POWs, including their commanding officer Major Khalid Gulrez Butt. Many in the group designated for assault on Halwara actually landed around the airfield perimeter itself, but did not have any wire-cutters and were easily captured by the alerted Indian defenders.

The leader of the Halwara team, Captain Hasan Iftikhar was bayoneted and taken prisoner while he attempted to meet up with the rest of his team. Only a few made it back to Pakistan. Captain Hazur Husnain (2nd-in-command to Captain Hasan Iftikhar)

and a few jawans were able to commandeer an Indian Army jeep and made it back via Fazilka. At the end of the raids, most of the commandos were taken as POWs, while 20 or so were KIA. Some 22 commandos were able to make their way back to Pakistan over the next few days after the drop. From its very inception, the operations were bound to fail. The commandos were sent into enemy territory without proper planning and even less intelligence about the terrain or the enemy defenses. Even according to SSG's own assessment of these operations before the war, they were bound to fail if general hostilities had been initiated before these operations were executed as the enemy would be at full alert after the war began. Thus para-dropping the SSG without the element of surprise into enemy territory, lacking local support or appropriate exfiltration plan resulted in this tragedy.

## 1971 Indo-Pakistan War

1971 Indo-Pakistan War When the border war between India and Pakistan flared once again in 1971, the SSG had already undergone a major expansion. During the years leading to war, Pakistani regulars were already facing a full-fledged civil war in its Eastern wing. The 3 Cdo Bn of the SSG had been deployed at Chittagong since April 1970. Later it was put under the command of the 14th Division in Comilla. It then consisted of only two commando companies; Hamza and Ibrahim, unlike the 1 and 2 Commando Battalions, a headquarter platoon, a signals platoon and a frogman platoon. Every two years, half of the personnel of the 3 Cdo Bn were rotated through West Pakistan. Personnel coming from West Pakistan who were unfamiliar with the region usually had local guides to help them navigate through the country. On 23rd March of 1971, two more Companies of the 2 Cdo Bn, Ghazi and Shaheen, were airlifted to Chittagong to assist with the Pakistani operations.

The 3 Cdo Bn, then under a new commander, was trained in close quarter combat, demolition, and night time operations among other training. As such, the battalion came to East Pakistan with a mission profile of a 'stay behind' force, operating within enemy controlled areas in case East Pakistan was overrun by the Indian Army.

However, their deployment and usage in subsequent operations was not too different from that of a typical infantry unit, and for the most part they were used as such. Before the start of the war, the 2 and 3 Cdo Bns were used to secure strategic locations such as the airport and the naval docks at Comilla. During the brutal and common urban warfare that followed after the initiation of hostilities, some SSG members were killed in ambushes and fire fights. These included the CO of 2 Cdo Bn, Lieutenant Colonel Suleiman. After this incident, the two companies associated with this battalion were brought under the command of CO, 3 Cdo Bn.

Once the SSG complement grew in East Pakistan, the SSG operators were henceforth ordered to wear their distinctive maroon berets, as to announce to everyone that the Commandos had arrived. This step was taken to boost the morale of the regular troops and was also used to serve as a warning to those bent upon creating trouble in the areas where SSG had been deployed. Upon the start of the hostilities, division and brigade commanders in East Pakistan always wanted to have the SSG personnel at their beck and call for use in normal infantry and COIN roles to avoid the use of their own troops. SSG forces were thus improperly utilized and stretched thin. Despite that, SSG units successfully conducted many rescue missions for stranded officers and men in various parts of the country. In many instances, when the regular military units could not achieve their objectives, the SSG was called in for support. SSG was called in twice by Major General Abdul Rahim Khan, once to secure the bridge over the Mehgna at Bhairab Bazaar going to Chittagong and then when his brigade failed to capture the Belonia salient even with artillery support. This latter task was accomplished by two platoons of 3 Cdo. Due to such tactically incorrect use of the SSG, the full potential was never fully realized. Near the end of the war, the 3 Cdo Bn, initially of two company strength, was eventually reduced to five platoons and even with this diminished strength, cleared more than 2,000 square miles from the Indian supported rebels in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Overall, the SSG performed very well in the 71 War and its members set themselves apart from others both in terms of personal conduct and operational effectiveness. However, due to various reasons, they were not used in many operations that would have realized the full potential of their skills and training.

Of the few special operations conducted during this war was one where the SSG operators safely extracted Bengali leader Sheikh Mujeeb-ur-Rehman from his stronghold. Other planned missions such as one that aimed to put the Calcutta Radio Station out of commission was turned down by General A.K. Niazi who did not fully appreciate the strategic and tactical value of the SSG.

## Post war period

Pakistan's support of the Afghan mujahedin during the Soviet invasion is well known. However the exact nature of the SSG role in opposing the Soviets is not an open account. It is well known that SSG regularly trained the Afghan fighters in guerilla tactics that proved quite successful against the occupying army. SSG officers and men were sent to 'Extra Regimental Employment' (ERE) duties in Afghanistan and took part in the actual fighting. Since then, this elite force has been used in various other theaters.

## 1979 Grand Mosque Seizure

SSG took part in the operation Clean wash along with the French forces to eliminate a group of takfeeri terrorists inside the Holy Kabbah who had ceased Islam's holiest site. All terrorists were killed in the operation.

## Soviet-Afghan war 1979-1989

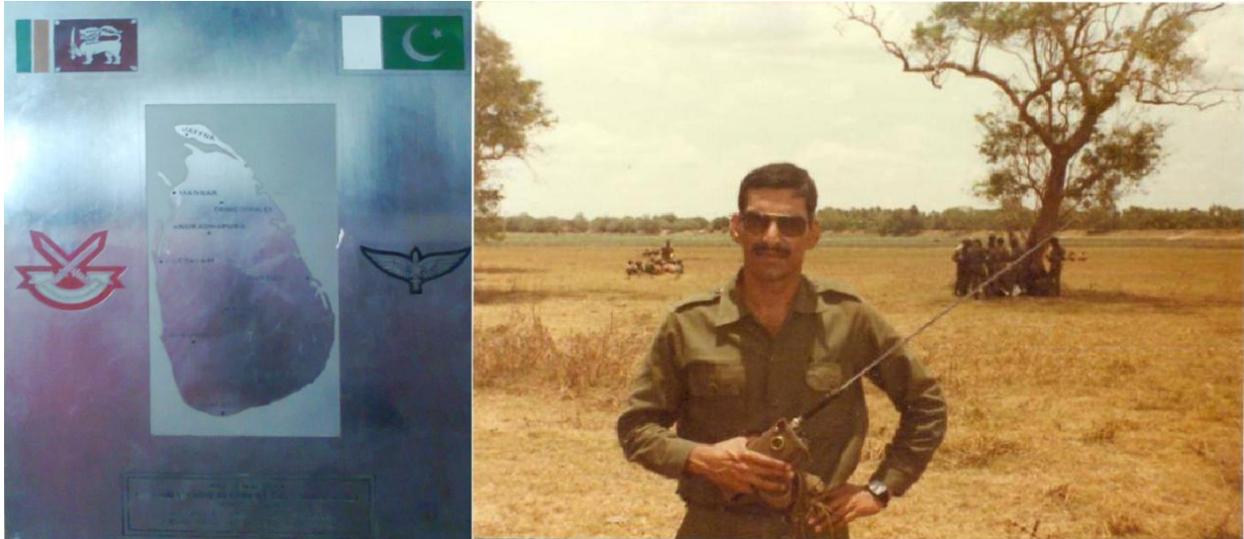
During the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the SSG was deployed to stop the Soviet march in Afghanistan, which Pakistani establishment thought would be a stepping stone for the invasion of Pakistan by Soviet forces. The SSGs disguised as Afghans, fluent in Pashto and Russian were deployed on recon duties and to provide support and training to the

Mujahideen fighting the Soviets. The SSG instructors were in charge of training the Afghan resistance fighters on the newly procured military hardware from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The training was mainly conducted at secret facilities under the control of the Pakistan Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

The SSG operators also carried out sabotage and psychological warfare operations against the Soviet and Afghan communist forces. The American Author Aukai Collins, who fought in the Afghan Jihad, later worked for the CIA, notes in his book 'My Jihad', that Pakistani SSG Commandos have engaged the Soviet Spetsnaz backed airborne forces in a battle that had taken place in 1986 or 1987, when the Soviet Army had inserted about three thousand Spetsnaz-aided paratroopers in an attempt to advance all the way to the Pakistani border. About three hundred Pakistani SSG Special operators teamed up with five hundred mujahedin and fought the Spetsnaz for twenty seven days. No soviet soldier left the valley alive, which was filled with all sorts of Soviet made weapons.

## 1980s, Sri Lanka's war against the Tamil Tigers

In the 1980s, much to India's chagrin, the SSG started a large scale training program as an extension of the Pakistani govt's comprehensive program to support the Sri Lankan govt in order to defeat the Tamil Tigers. A large cadre of Sri Lankan soldiers was trained to fight against the Tamil Tigers, who in turn were supported by India. In an official acknowledgement written to the SSG trainers in October 1986 by the Sri Lankan Army's Director of Operations and Training, notes that the contributions the SSG has made towards training the Sri Lankan forces 'would always be remembered and will undoubtedly strengthen the bond and the good relationship between the two countries'



On the left, a shield of cooperation between Pakistan and Sri Lankan Special Forces located in the SSG's headquarters. On the right an SSG operative snapped in Sri Lanka during a training mission

## Counter Terrorism Operations

### 1974 – Counterinsurgency operation against Marxists

Afghanistan's communist inspired government had started a Marxist insurgency in Pakistan's Balochistan province to destabilize the country. The insurgency swept the countryside, wreaking havoc and terrorizing citizens. The Pakistani command responded by deploying two SSG battalions on a rotation, which carried out a successful counterinsurgency operation which resulted in stability returning to the province.



ZARRAR, is Special Service Group's elite counterterrorist unit. ZARRAR operators qualify after specialized training in counterterrorism, hostage rescue, intelligence recon, sabotage and other high risk operations. ZARRAR is thought to be the SSG's equivalent of the Russian FSB's Alpha Grupa and Israeli Shayetet 13. It has a long record of success, having carried out successful operations in Pakistan and abroad.

## 1981 Indian Airline Hijacking

On Wednesday, September 30th, 1981, An Indian Airlines Boeing 737 plane carrying 111 passengers and a crew of six was hijacked by five knife-wielding Sikh terrorists who advocated of a separate Sikh homeland called Khalistan. They forced the pilot to fly to Lahore Pakistan where they released all but 45 passengers as a result of negotiations and demanded the release of their comrades back home while they refused to negotiate further. As the negotiations fell through, the SSG's counterterrorism specialist company Musa which was already on the standby stormed the aircraft. Using a technique earlier used by the 4<sup>th</sup> Baloch regiment in an early hijacking response operation, they clandestinely infiltrated into the aircraft disguised as the 'cleaning crew'.

In a flawless climax the Musa operators after a brief fight pinned down and arrested all five terrorists, while all 45 remaining passengers exited unharmed. The Indian cabinet commended Pakistan for its response to the hijacking crisis.

## 1986, PAN AM Flight 73 Hijacking

In September 1986, a group of four Palestinian hijackers commandeered the Pan Am Flight 73 at Karachi airport. The flight was en route from Bombay, India to New York and had stopped in Karachi to refuel and pick up more passengers. Close to the aircraft, the Palestinians took out their weapons and firing onto the tarmac rushed into the plane as the passengers were being boarded. The control tower, learning of the shooting immediately notified the cockpit. Due to the fast response, the crew members were able to escape through an escape hatch landing some 36 feet down on the tarmac and effectively grounding the aircraft. The terrorists had planned their operation very well, as it was later realized. Karachi airport had passed the U.S. government security inspections with high marks. Following a general warning issued by the Federal Aviation Authority, all American airlines were on a higher state of alert as well.

The terrorists, however, had been able to bypass these security measures by coming onto the tarmac from the airport's perimeter. They began their operation in the early pre-dawn hours, at about 5 a.m. on a Friday when the security is more lax. Two of the terrorists were dressed in airport security uniforms and they drove up to the aircraft in a rented van that was disguised as a security vehicle. In the hours preceding the attack, the atmosphere was calm but tense. After nearly five hours, negotiations finally began first with the Pan Am representatives and then with Pakistani officials. It was learnt that the hijackers wanted to fly the aircraft to Larnaca, Cyprus and demanded the release of their comrades held in prison there. Lacking the cockpit crew, they also demanded that an Arabic speaking crew be provided for them for the rest of the trip.

Cyprus on the other hand had conveyed to Pakistan that it would under no circumstances allow the plane to land on their territory. Pakistani negotiators therefore

tried to stall the hijackers by telling them that a crew was on its way from Frankfurt to Karachi and did not tell about the Cypriot refusal. The hijackers thus set a deadline of 7:00 p.m. before they would start killing more passengers. Earlier on, the hijackers had already killed an Indian born U.S. national Rajesh Kumar and thrown his body out of the plane as a show of their resolve to kill innocent people. The 7:00 p.m. deadline came and passed with no sign of a new flight crew and so the hijackers set a new deadline of 11:00 p.m. By that time, Pakistani authorities had already decided upon a commando style raid on the plane, similar to the one during the 1981 hijacking at Lahore. For this, a small force of SSG was already practicing for the raid under mock conditions at another part of the airport. Earlier, there had been reports that the U.S. would itself be sending in a team of Delta Force commandos from bases in Germany. However, the time constraints did not allow for such delays and Pakistani authorities could not wait for help to arrive from outside. Tragedy struck during the 17th hour of the crisis as the generator that supplied power to the aircraft's lights and air conditioning ran out of fuel and the plane plunged into darkness.

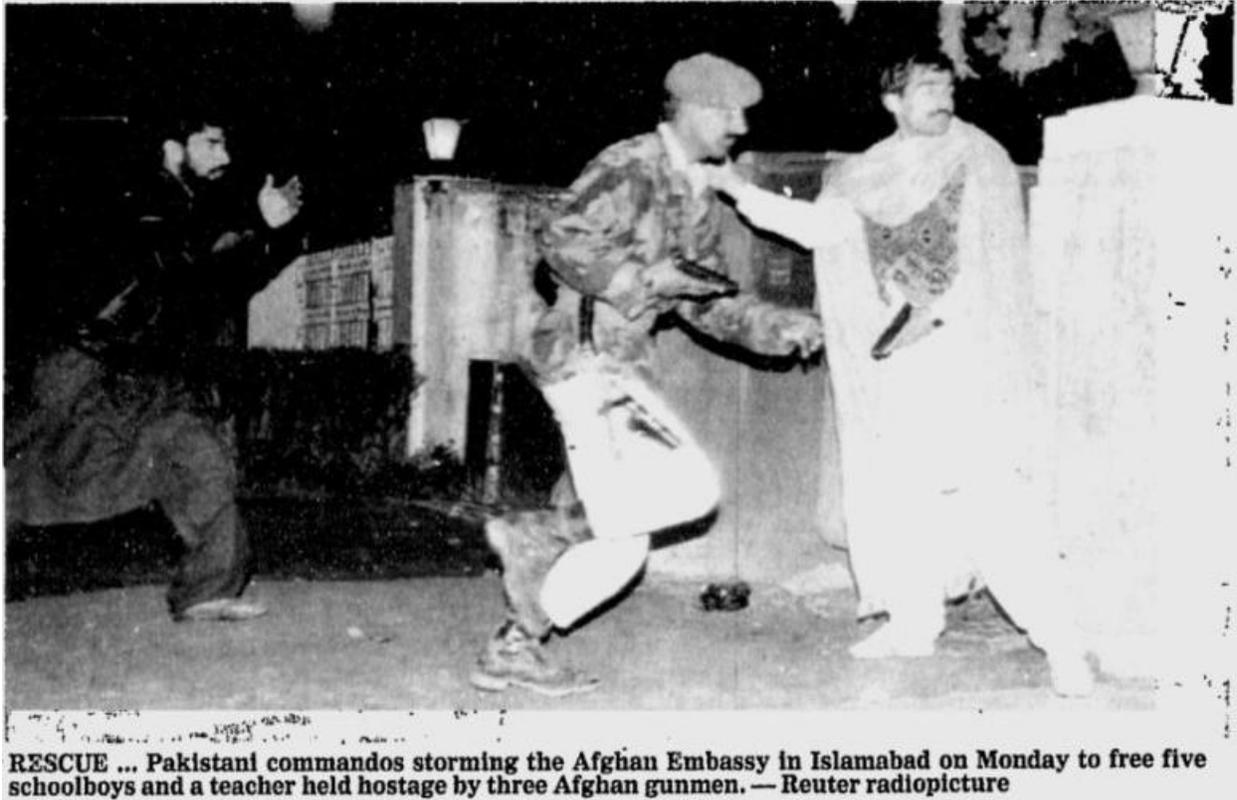
It also caused the radio contact to be lost with the hijackers. Suspecting an assault on the aircraft was in progress, the hijackers started rounding up people in one corner and started firing indiscriminately, hurling at least two grenades in the process as well. In the mayhem, some passengers managed to open an emergency door and get out using an escape slide. Pakistani officials were clearly taken aback by the setback. Pakistan's chief of civil aviation, retired Air Marshal Kurshid Anwar Mirza, who had been acting as negotiator ran out on the tarmac with a megaphone to warn the hijackers not to panic. However, the shooting had already started and the commandos preparing for the raid were nowhere near the Pan Am flight at that time. It was almost fifteen minutes later that the Pakistani commandos arrived at the scene and stormed the plane. In the resulting shootout, the SSG members killed one of the terrorists immediately and captured two others in a short time.

The last hijacker tried to escape with the passengers, but was apprehended as well. Two groups claimed responsibility for the attack: the Jundullah Organization, a pro-Iranian Moslem group active in Lebanon, and the Libyan Revolutionary Cell, a

previously unknown group. Pakistani intelligence officials identified the gunmen as Palestinians but the spokesmen for Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat denied responsibility. Due to the firing, almost a hundred passengers and crew members received injuries, about half of them seriously. By September 11th, a total of 21 people had died. The majority of the dead were Indian nationals, while at least two Americans, several Pakistani and Mexican citizens also died. Autopsy results indicated that 10 of the victims had died from gunfire, seven died as a result of shrapnel from the grenades and a further four from injuries when jumping out of the plane. In the aftermath of the hijacking, many inadequacies within the SSG regarding such missions were revealed. Many analysts pointed out the 15 minute delay in the boarding of the plane after the lights went out and attributed the deaths of the passengers on the SSG performance.

However, it is unjust to lay the blame on the SSG. Evidence suggests that the authorities had expected the generator to lose power, but not as quickly as it did. The SSG was in fact going to use the lights out to make their move against the hijackers. The SSG was however both ill-trained and ill-equipped for such missions. In fact, the team boarded the plane with an astonishing assortment of weapons ranging from H&K G3s to AK-47s. These high caliber weapons are not suited for such close combat encounters, especially when there is a high risk of collateral damage. They were also not equipped with stun grenades, silencers, or flash bangs, all of which could have resulted in lesser casualties.

1994, Islamabad, School Bus Hijacking



**RESCUE ... Pakistani commandos storming the Afghan Embassy in Islamabad on Monday to free five schoolboys and a teacher held hostage by three Afghan gunmen. — Reuter radiopicture**

Three SSG operators, two of them disguised in civilian clothes rush into the Afghanistan embassy, where a hijacked school bus with Pakistani school kids and teachers on board was taken by Afghan terrorists.

On Sunday, February 20th, 1994, three Afghans kidnapped a school bus with seventy four students, six female teachers, a male teacher and an office clerk. The hijackers took control of the bus at the Haji Afghan refugee camp on the outskirts of Peshawar as it was picking up students from school. Afterwards, they forced the bus driver to drive to Islamabad. There the hijackers took the bus to the Afghan mission in Islamabad and conveyed their demands to the government. Initially, the hijackers' demands included the opening of the Pakistan-Afghan border to allow more refugees to enter Pakistan, and well as highlight the poor conditions of the refugee camps in Pakistan. Pakistan's then Interior Minister, Naseerullah Babar, was heading the negotiations which were fruitful as the hijackers released 57 of the hostages.

However, the hijackers kept 16 boys and a teacher with them and issued new demands, including \$5 million dollars in cash and a helicopter to take them into Afghanistan. They

were to exchange the students with new hostages once the helicopter had arrived, including the Afghan ambassador and some senior Pakistani officials. Later, through further negotiations, the hijackers released more hostages and kept five children and a teacher.

However, as the hijackers started becoming more hostile and impatient, the decision was taken to quickly neutralize the threat with a commando raid on the hijackers. The decision to carry out the operation was taken by the corps commander in consultation with the Afghan ambassador. The operation took only a few minutes to complete its objectives and none of the hostages were hurt. All three hijackers, however, were killed in the exchange. The Pakistani authorities had somehow managed to inform the children of the impending raid. The SSG commandos used a secondary explosion as a distraction and entered the room at the Afghan embassy where the hostages were being held, killing the three hijackers.

## 1998 Fokker Friendship Hijacking

On May 1998, at the height of tensions with India and nearly a decade in passing since its last hijacking crisis, Pakistan found itself in a similar situation as a Pakistan International Airlines flight from the coastal city of Gwadar to Karachi was hijacked by three terrorists from the province of Balochistan as a protest against the nuclear testing in the province. However, by this time the Pakistani authorities were ready to deal with such situations. The speed with which all members in the chain-of-command reacted speaks highly of their professionalism, and the SSG redeemed its image once again as one of the most effective elite force. On May 24th, three members of the Balochistan Students Federation took control of the PIA Fokker 27 Friendship fifteen minutes in its flight from Gwadar to Karachi. One of the hijackers came into the cockpit and ordered the pilot, Captain Zuhair Ahmed, to fly to India. The pilot immediately gave in to their demands and pacified them by following their directions.

Soon afterwards, the pilot was able to contact the authorities in Karachi and tell them of the hijacking. Preparations were then set in motion of the plane to land in the Pakistani city of Hyderabad, 160 km northeast of Karachi. On the ground, signs and billboards in Urdu were taken down and the airports closed-off to all other traffic. During the flight, Pakistan Air Force F-7P interceptors had taken to the air, escorting the plane the rest of the way and finally ordering it to land in Hyderabad. Around 7:50 p.m. local time the aircraft landed at the Hyderabad airport, which was now plunged into darkness so that the hijackers could not make out their location. Immediately following touchdown, security personnel from the army surrounded the aircraft. Since the hijackers were armed with guns and explosives, no move was made to board the plane and risk civilian casualties.

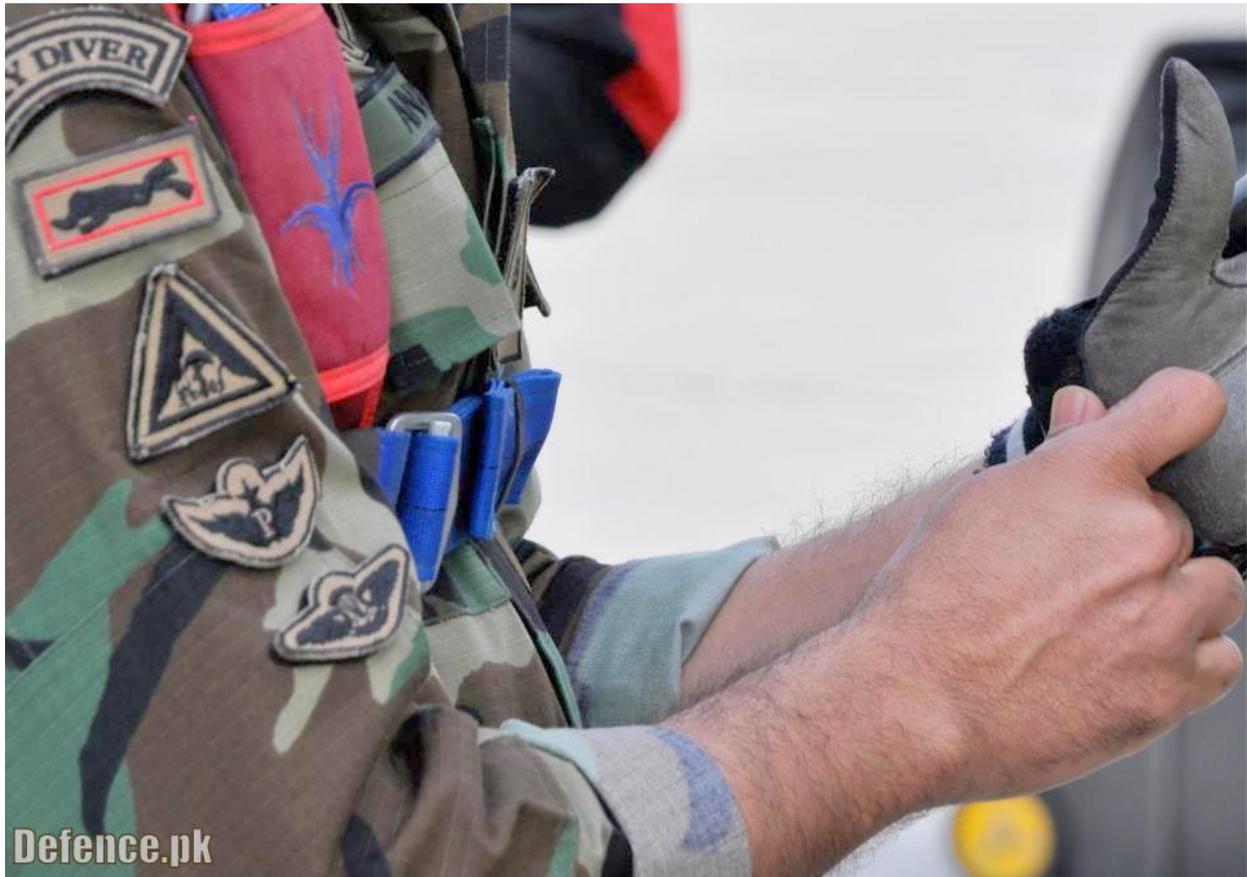
Contact was made with the hijackers who demanded fuel for the plane so that they could fly to New Delhi. They were told by the authorities that it would take some time to meet their demands at the "small" Bhuj airfield. In the negotiations with the hijackers the Sindh Chief Secretary and SSP (Hyderabad) posed as Pakistan's Ambassador to India and "Mr. Ashok, SP (Bhuj)" respectively. The hijackers, feeling confident, sent out the flight engineer in order to get water and a generator to provide power to the aircraft. After eight long hours of negotiations, during which the hijackers told the authorities of their reasons for hijacking, they let eight passengers, women and children, out of the aircraft. Around 3 a.m., the negotiators persuaded the three men to come out as well. The SSG commandos, seizing their opportunity, rushed the hijackers and placed them under arrest. In the scuffle, one of the hijackers, Sabir Ali was injured and taken to the local hospital, while one commando was injured by a gunshot wound from the hijackers. The other two hijackers were identified only as Shahsawar and Shabbir. However, all 29 passengers and their 3 man crew received no injuries.

## 1999 Kargil Operations

During the winter of 1999, Pakistan Army started conducting covert operations inside Indian occupied territory in the Kargil region around the line of control. The incursion was based on the premise of capturing a few key positions atop Kargil hills that would give Pakistan Army a distinct advantage in that theater. The idea was to block the logistics efforts of the Indian Army for keeping the units based on the Siachen glacier supplied. The Indian forces had been abandoned these posts in the winter months due to the extreme cold, coming back in the spring to man them again. Pakistani strategists taking this window of opportunity sent in volunteers from various units and guerillas already engaged in the Kashmir Theater to occupy and further strengthen these posts and bunkers and use them as defensive positions against the Indians who would return the following spring.

Although no official report or findings has been made public in Pakistan about the Kargil operations, it is generally believed that the plan was very well thought-out on the operational side, yet proved to be a real embarrassment for the Pakistani government on the political front as it had to withdraw its support for the operation despite the army's annoyance. SSG operators undoubtedly took part in these covert operations as they have unique mountain warfare and high-altitude training. Capt Ammar Hussain, an SSG officer among many others, was awarded Sitara-e-Jurrat posthumously for inconspicuous bravery during these operations.

## War on Terrorism from 2001 – 2015 (Ongoing)



An SSG operator gearing up for a helicopter drop over the area of operations during operation Zarb-e-Azb

The SSG has been the spearhead during the war on terror from 2001 to 2015 (ongoing). The SSG has participated in every high profile operation carried out against the terrorist organization named Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan including countless covert operations to arrest or kill top tier terrorist leadership of this consortium of terror. SSG's operations during the battle of Swat, battle of Bajur among other major operations including the killing of Al-Qaeda's Global Operations Chief, Adnan Al-Shukrijuma during the Operation Zarb-e-Azb, remain the notable highlights of its success. In Operation Rah-e-Raast in Swat, the notably successful action by the SSG was its surprise assault on the Peochar heights, a dominating position occupied by the insurgents.

Descending from helicopters, the commandos quickly secured the heights, then attacked downhill, forcing the insurgents to descend into the waiting arms of the infantry in the valley. This ultimately led them to flee and live to fight another day. In the two Waziristans, the SSG's employment started in 2002, leading up to Operation Rah-e-Nijaat in 2009. During Rah-e-Nijaat, the SSG was mostly employed in support of the infantry columns that advanced from three directions to secure the 'critical space' of the insurgents in the triangle formed by Makeen-Ladha-Sararogha. Detailed information on the operations carried out during this period remains classified.

## Reorganization of SSG

It was decided to upgrade the command structure of SSG to better support the newly created units by raising it to the Divisional level of Brigade level. The re-structuring plan was approved in June 2003 and now the SSG command structure is very similar to any traditional Divisional HQ. The re-structuring plan also included the creation of sub-HQ's to support various SSG units during operations since it was understood that re-structuring would also entail additional duties for subunits.

3 Commando Battalion was converted into a Special Operations Battalion (Spec Ops Bn) to deal with Low Intensity Conflicts (LIC). After converting 2 Commando Battalion into Spec Ops Bn, a need was felt to create another Battalion for its replacement in the army to deal with the traditional style operations. 4 Commando Battalion was raised to fill this gap. The manpower for this 4 Commando battalion was raised by taking one Company each from other three Battalions. In this process a special meeting of CO's was OC's was held and Company names were selected via a draw. SSG is now believed to have 10 battalions. After the draw, 4 Commando Bn got the following Companies:

1. Shaheen Company (from 1 Commando Bn)
2. Jungju Company (from 2 Commando Bn)
3. Yaqub Company (from 3 Commando Bn)

After these 3 Companies went to 4 Commando Bn, it was decided to raise another 4

additional Companies, one each for every Battalion. This resulted in the creation of the following new Companies:

1. Mitha Company (went to 1 Commando Bn)
2. Bilal Company (went to 2 Commando Bn)
3. Easa Company (went to 3 Commando Bn)
4. Yusuf Company (went to 4 Commando Bn)

As of 2004, the structure of two brigades of SSG and Div HQ is as such:

#### 1st Commando Yaldrum Battalion

- Ayub Company
- Liaqat Company
- Kamal Company
- Mitha Company

#### 2 Commando Rahbar Battalion

- Ghazi Company
- Tipu Company
- Quaid Company
- Bilal Company

#### 3 Commando Powindahs Battalion

- Hamza Company
- Ibrahim Company
- Zakria Company
- Easa Company

#### 4 Commando Yalghar Battalion

- Shaheen Company

- Jungju Company
- Yaqub Company
- Yusuf Company

5 Commando Zilzaal Battalion

6th Commando AL Samsaam Battalion

7th Commando Babrum Battalion

5 Div Troops

- Zarrar Company
- Iqbal Company
- Musa Company
- Special Operations School
- Para Training School

Additional brigades are also being created. 1, 2 and 4 Commando Bn are under the command of one brigade and 3 Commando Bn and Karrar Company under the command of other brigades.

## Weapons and Equipment

The SSG uses a top-notch arsenal of weapons and equipment. Due to the wide range of capability that exists within the ranks of SSG, an extensive variety of hardware is at the disposal of these operators. It includes modern assault rifles, Sniper rifles, Designated Marksman Rifles, Personal defense weapons, Corner shot weapons, Handguns, Grenade launchers, Shotguns, Frequency hopping radios, Night vision equipment, Thermal imaging seekers, Laser target designators, Ballistic body armor, GPS navigators, Nuclear, Biological, Chemical warfare equipment, integrated field carriage gear etc.



SSG Operators armed with Colt M4A2 tactical assault rifles, Glock-17 handgun, tactical carriage, woodland and night strike camouflage, tactical gloves, modular body armor integrated vest, jam proof radio communication, ballistic knee, elbow, eye protection, Kevlar helmets with integrated night vision devices.

## Close Quarter Combat Weapons



A Chinese Special Operator, tests a POF-Eye corner shot weapon. This weapon is used by SSGs and SWAT teams during hostage rescue and CQC operations to negotiate targets hiding behind the structures. POF-Eye can also be armed with an SMG and a grenade launcher.

The primary weapon of choice for IS and counter terrorism roles is the ubiquitous Heckler & Koch MP5 (and its sub-variants like MPK5, SMG-PK and MP5-SD10) that are locally produced by the Pakistan Ordnance Factory (POF). Other weapons used by the SSG in counter terrorist operations include newly developed POF-EYE corner shot weapon, FN/FNP 90 and Colt M4 Commando.



A team of two SSG operators of ZARRAR Company carry out a hostage rescue exercise in a simulated Close Quarter Combat setting.

## Assault Rifles

SSG operators, train to operate around 30 different rifle platforms. Some of the rifles in services with the SSG are Fabrique National's 5.7mm FN/P90 SMG. Assault rifles in use include the 5.56mm M16A1 and the newly introduced Steyr AUG, 7.62mm Heckler & Koch G-3A3 and the Type 56 tactical (Chinese AK-47 variant), Ak-47, AK-74 and Colt M4 variants. Locally produced version of Rheinmetall 7.62mm MG-3 is the standard LMG in use by the SSG.



A team of three Special Operators from SSG's Yaldrum Battalion, take positions. One operator is armed with a Colt M-4A2 Commando, the other two operators pack the NORINCO Type-56 Tactical assault rifles.

### Sniper/Marksman Rifles.

The role of the Sniper has always been pivotal in the battlefield, from the battle of Stalingrad to the American invasion of Afghanistan and the war on terrorism. Pakistan's realization of the need for Snipers was quick. Today the Pakistani SSG snipers use scope-equipped G3s, Finnish Tikka bolt-action rifles as well as Heckler & Koch PSG1 and Steyr SSG 69 7.62mm (0.308 wins.) bolt-action rifles, Barret M-82, Accuracy International Arctic Warfare 7.62mm bolt action sniper rifle, Dragandov SVD semi

automatic marksman rifles and RPA Rangemaster.50 caliber long range sniper rifles. SSG also employs state of the art thermal imaging seekers, range finders and spotting aids, to facilitate their sniper operations on the battlefield. In the recent times the SSG has focused greatly on professionally trained snipers, designated marksmen and sharpshooters in order to prepare itself for the ever evolving threat from the terrorist outfits. The SSG has employed its sniper tactics in Operation Black Thunderstorm, Operation Rah-e-Rast, Operation Rah-e-Nijat and Operation Zarb-e-Azb with great success against the terrorist outfits operating under the umbrella of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

With ever growing demand for Snipers,Marksmen and Sharpshooters, the SSG have taken a lead role in training snipers from other services, including Army, Law Enforcement and other Spec ops units like PAF's Special Services Wing (SSW), Navy's Special Service Group Navy (SSGN) and Frontier Corp's Special Operations Wing (SOW) and Ranger's Rapid Action Team (RAT) to name a few. SSG's Sniper teams armed with Barrett M82, PSR-90s, spotter scopes and Styr SSG 69s, IR beacons for Combat identification & NVGs played a critical role during an operation to capture Al-Qaeda's top tier suicide vest expert.



A camouflaged SSG Sniper on the right snapped with his Accuracy International Arctic Warfare 7.62mm Sniper Rifle while on the left an SSG Sniper carries the Barret M-82 Sniper Rifle. The Arctic Warfare and

M-82 rifles have become increasingly popular among the SSG operators due to their worthy battle performance, during SSGs operations against the terrorist Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan organization

Shown here are some of the Sniper Rifles currently in service with the SSG

## List of Sniper/DMRs in Pakistani service



*Barret M-82 .50 Cal*



*Steyr SSG 69 7.62x51mm*



*Dragunov SVD 7.62x54mm*



*Accuracy International  
Arctic Warfare .308 Winchester*



*POF-PSG-1 7.62x51mm*



*RPA-Rangemaster .50cal*



*Truvelo CMS .338 Lapua*



*Truvelo CMS .308*

Aeronaut



An SSG Sniper and a spotter locating and negotiating long range targets with an RPA-Rangemaster .50 caliber Sniper Rifle, during the Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan against the TTP terrorists.

## Handguns



Seen on the left an Austrian Glock, 19 seen with a thigh mounted holster, while a Sig P250 is seen on the right side along with SSG badges and a tactical watch.

Handguns currently in the SSG use vary, ranging from Austrian 9mm Glock 15,17,19 to the Beretta M9 (M92Fs), FN-Five Seven, Hk USP-45 and SIG Pro 226 and SIG-250.

## Heavier armament

Heavier armament is available in the form of French LRAC 89mm rockets, RPG-7s, MILAN ATGMs, Mistral and variants of Strella SA-7 and Anza II shoulder fired SAMs. Combat support is also provided by 60mm mortars and 106mm RCLs. The SSG units work very closely with the Pakistan Air Force to direct precision air strikes as well as to aid the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) reconnaissance. For nocturnal operations, a variety of local and imported night vision goggles are being used heavily to increase the effectiveness of the special ops at night times. The use of frequency-hopping radios, GPS units and other high-tech communications equipment is also entering wide-scale service in the ranks of SSG.

## Role in training other Special Ops Units in Pakistan

SSG has been at the forefront of training other Spec Ops units from other Pakistani armed services. The Special Services Wing (SSW) of Pakistan Air Force, Special Service Group Navy (SSGN) of Pakistan Navy, Special Operations Wing (SOW) of the Pakistan's Frontier Corps as well as the Rapid Action Teams (RAT) of Pakistan Rangers and Elite units of the Pakistan Police are trained by instructors from SSG. The services SSG has rendered in training other SOF units in Pakistan is highly valuable as it has made easier for Pakistani command to employ those units in support roles or independently for Special Ops which has reduced the work load on the SSG as an organization.

## Uniforms and Insignia



A common set of SSG patches seen on the standard woodland camouflage include Sky Diver, Mountain Warfare, Undersea ops, Glider and Para wing. Seen on the right is the SSGs official beret badge.

The Pakistani Special Forces members are easily distinguishable by their maroon berets with a silver metal tab on a light blue felt square. Initially, the 19th Baloch Battalion and later the SSG members wore the traditional khaki uniform similar to the regular army. In 1972 a new disruptive pattern combat tunic was introduced to the entire Army, however, for various reasons, including cost, it was abandoned in 1979. The current uniform of the SSG features the US woodland pattern camouflage combat dress. A variety of other operational dresses are also available depending on the terrain the SSG commandos are operating from. A bullion SSG para-wing with a dagger superimposed on a black cloth background is worn on the right chest. A red-cloth version of the same wing is worn by the master parachutist (or paratroopers) with at least 50 jumps, while the SSG Riggers wear a wing with 'Rigger' stitched across the wings. These are the dress version of Bragg & Turner. The distinctive SSG badge, used since 1964, featuring a dagger framed with lightening bolts goes on the left shoulder. Other qualification badges such as Skydiver, SCUBA, etc go on the right shoulder. A silver SSG insignia is worn on the shoulder straps.

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This document was researched and prepared by Horus from Pakistan Defence administration team.