

## BATTLE OF SARAGARHI



### Issue

The 124th anniversary of the Battle of Saragarhi was recently observed on September 12. The battle is considered one of the finest last stands.

### Background

The battle has inspired a host of armies, books and films both in India as well as abroad.

### Details

- In the battle, twenty-one soldiers were pitted against over 8,000 Afridi and Orakzai tribals. They managed to hold the fort for seven hours.
- The Sikhs were outnumbered heavily but they managed to kill 200 Afghan tribals and injure 600. The regiment of 36th Sikhs (now 4 Sikh), led by Havildar Ishar Singh, was involved in the battle.
- Military historian and CM of Punjab, Capt. Amarinder Singh says that the soldiers knew that they were looking at a certain death but did not surrender.

### Importance of Saragarhi

- Saragarhi was a communication tower built between Fort Lockhart and Fort Gulistan in North West Frontier Province (NWFP), now in Pakistan.
- The post was usually manned by 40 soldier platoon but on the day of battle there were only 21 Sikhs and a non-combatant Pashtun.
- The two forts were important for British security and had large number of troops, including family of commanding officer of 36th Sikh, Lt Col John Haughton.

### Unfolding of events

- The sentry at Saragarhi saw a thick haze of dust and knew it was caused due to a marching army of about 8,000-15,000 troops.
- A message was sent through the Morse code to ask for reinforcement. The tribals wanted to cut off communication between the two forts by capturing Saragarhi.

### Odds staked against the soldiers

The soldiers were outnumbered heavily. In addition, their ammunition was also limited with around 400 rounds per person.

### Honours

- The 21 martyrs were given Indian Order of Merit along with two 'marabas' (50 acres) and Rs 500 each. This was against the tradition of giving the award posthumously.
- September 12 has been declared Saragarhi Day by the Punjab government in 2017. This day is declared a holiday.
- Pakistani army mounts a guard at the Saragarhi memorial close to Fort Lockhart. The British built an obelisk for the martyrs using burnt bricks of Saragarhi.
- Gurdwaras were commissioned at Amritsar and Ferozepur in the honour of the martyrs of the battle.

### NOTES

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