



# 1962: The War That Wasn't

By Shiv Kunal Verma

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On 20 October 1962, high in the Himalayas on the banks of the fast-flowing Nam Ka Chu, over 400 Indian soldiers were massacred and the valley was overrun by soldiers of China's People's Liberation Army. Over the course of the next month, nearly 4,000 soldiers were killed on both sides and the Indian Army experienced its worst defeat ever. The conflict (war was never formally declared) ended because China announced a unilateral ceasefire on 21 November and halted its hitherto unhindered advance across NEFA and Ladakh. To add to India's lasting shame, neither Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru nor the Indian Army was even aware that the 'war' had ended until they heard the announcement on the radio—despite the Indian embassy having been given the information two days earlier. This conflict continues to be one of our least understood episodes. Many books have been written on the events of the time, usually by those who were involved in some way, anxious to provide justification for their actions. These accounts have only succeeded in muddying the picture further. What is clear is that 1962 was an unmitigated disaster. The terrain on which most of the battles were fought (or not fought) was remote and inaccessible; the troops were sorely underequipped, lacking even warm clothing; and the men and officers who tried to make a stand were repeatedly let down by their political and military superiors. Time and again, in Nam Ka Chu, Bum-la, Tawang, Se-la, Thembang, Bomdila—all in the Kameng Frontier Division of NEFA in the Eastern Sector—and in Ladakh and Chusul in the Western Sector, our forces were mismanaged, misdirected or left to fend for themselves. If the Chinese Army hadn't decided to stop its victorious campaign, the damage would have been far worse. In this definitive account of the conflict, based on dozens of interviews with soldiers and numerous others who had a first-hand view of what actually happened in 1962, Shiv Kunal Verma takes us on an uncomfortable journey through one of the most disastrous episodes of independent India's history.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

*Having destroyed its combat readiness by tampering with the military hierarchy, the Indian Army was deployed in both NEFA and Ladakh as a glorified police force. More than half-a-century later, shorn of the myths and half-truths, this is a superbly told story that needs to be understood by future generations (General (Dr) VK Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs & Former Army Chief)*

### From the Author

*Riveting in both its style and substance, the story of an Army that was let down by those in power and some senior officers, many of them virtual political appointees. Certain post-1962 reports may still be under the wraps for touching on certain subjects this book fearlessly exposes (Ashali Varma? Author of *The Victoria Cross: A Love Story and the Daughter of Lt Gen Prem Bhagat*, VC who wrote the *Henderson Brooks/Bhagat Report*)*

### From the Inside Flap

*A story that needed to be told. Superbly written and brutally honest - by far the most definitive book on the subject. Removes the fig leaves and sets the record straight, something that today's context will profit by emulating (Dr YSP Thorat, Former Chairman NABARD)*

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