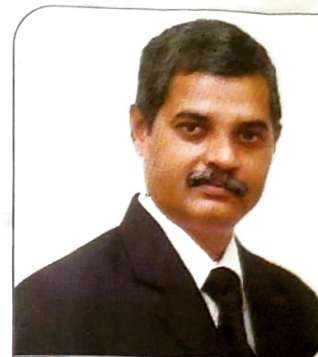


INS KHUKRI (F149) AND BRAVE CAPTAIN MAHENDRANATH MULLA

INS *Khukri* was a British Type 14 (Blackwood-class) frigate of the Indian Navy. She was sunk off the coast of Diu, Gujarat, India by the Pakistan Navy Daphné-class submarine Hangor on 9 December 1971 during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. This was the first warship sunk in action by a submarine since World War II. It remains the post-Independence Indian navy's only warship to be lost in war to date.

INCIDENT

After the beginning of hostilities on 3 December 1971, Indian Naval radio detection equipment identified a submarine lurking about 35 miles (56 km) south-west of Diu harbour. The 14th Frigate Squadron of the Western Fleet was dispatched to destroy the submarine. It normally consisted of three ships *Khukri*, Kirpan and Kuthar, but at the time of the incident *Kuthar*'s boiler room was being repaired in Bombay.



Vikram Datta



In the early hours of 9 December, *Hangor* picked up two sonar contacts in the area. The sonar and radar transmissions identified them as warships but *Hangor* failed to intercept them and lost contact when the range increased.

The submarine sighted the squadron on the evening of 9 December. *Khukri* was still not aware of the submarine's presence and continued slowly on a steady course because she was testing an improved version of the 170/174 sonar, which required a slow speed increase detection, despite the fact that moving on slow speed was against Indian anti-submarine doctrine. At 19:57 *Hangor* fired a homing torpedo on a sonar approach at *Kirpan*. The torpedo failed to explode and was detected by *Kirpan* which turned away and fired anti-submarine mortars. *Khukri* increased its speed and turned towards the submarine, which then fired a second torpedo directed at *Khukri*. The torpedo struck *Khukri* and exploded under its oil tanks. *Khukri* was struck by three torpedoes before going down.

After a few minutes, *Kirpan* turned back to attack *Hangor* with depth charges, as her anti-submarine mortars had broken down. *Hangor* then fired another torpedo at *Kirpan* before turning away and exiting at maximum speed. *Kirpan* outran the torpedo and quickly disengaged returning later with another ship, *Katchal*, to search for the survivors from *Khukri*.

Casualties

To date, *Khukri* is the only ship lost in combat in the history of the Indian Navy. Over 18 officers and 176 sailors were lost in the sinking. The captain, Mahendra Nath Mulla, chose to go down with the sinking ship. He refused to abandon ship, and passed his life-jacket to a junior officer. He has remained so far the only Indian captain to go down with a vessel. He was posthumously awarded India's second-highest military honour, the Maha Vir Chakra. A memorial to the dead sailors exists at Diu. The memorial consists of a scale model of *Khukri* encased in a glass house, placed atop a hillock facing the sea. The memorial was inaugurated by Vice Admiral Madhvendra Singh as the flag officer commanding-in-chief.

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