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## The NSG commando who won't give up

December 11, 2008




Captain Amitendra Kumar Singh was one of the first National Security Guard commandos who took on the terrorists in Mumbai.

The captain and his team were airlifted from New Delhi [\[Images\]](#) at 1 am on November 27 and arrived in Mumbai at around 5 am. After spending about two-and-a-half hours discussing the situation on the ground with the police and other authorities, the NSG team was split into two groups.

One was sent to battle terrorists at the Taj, while the other, which included Captain Singh, was sent to the Oberoi and Trident hotels.

Upon reaching the Oberoi and Trident hotels, the commandos were met by the Indian Navy's Marine Commandos who showed them the location of the terrorists and the secured fire exit route to enter the hotel. As soon as they entered the hotel, Captain Singh remembers the grenades being thrown from top of the building. A decision was made to start the search at the top instead of the bottom.

Once at the top, searching each floor was a long, tedious and depressing process;



there were 6, 7 bodies that they stumbled upon on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor itself, and the sounds of the terrorists's firing was never far away.

Many long hours and two floors later, the commandos made their first contact with the terrorists. Bullets came whizzing out of a particular room on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor, and the commandos ducked for cover.

Once the commandos assumed their positions, they returned fire and tried to blow open the door open with explosives. However, the enemy had barricaded the door with heavy furniture. Another quick decision was made -- to increase the amount of explosives and bring the door down. While this maneuver worked, it only destroyed the upper half of the door. The NSG team was still outside, firing and throwing grenades in return at the ones that came from within the room. By now it was getting dark, and the commandos had to strain to see in the dim corridor lights.

Captain Singh was under cover behind a pillar, following the tactics and precautions of a firefight -- he was wearing bulletproof headgear and jacket, keeping the noise and lights low, trying to gain the advantage of surprise, and moving away after firing. None of this helped when one of the terrorists flung a grenade at the commandos outside.

He felt as if someone had punched him hard in the eye. He immediately lay down flat, and felt the warm trickle of blood on his cheek. That is when he knew that he had been hit in the eye by a piece of shrapnel, and had to be evacuated immediately. At some point during the evacuation, he fell unconscious and woke up to find himself in the Bombay Hospital.

For two days afterwards, the injured captain was in agony. The excruciating pain in his eyes, coupled with the worry of not being able to get in touch with his family, made these two days insufferable. It was only two days later that he could open his right eye, and the hospital walls were the first thing he saw after the terrible incident.

Captain Singh was still groggy from surgery the previous day as he recounted the horrors of that fateful evening for *rediff.com*

Doctors at the Bombay Hospital have now confirmed that the optic nerve in his left eye has been damaged very badly, and that he will probably not regain vision in that eye.

However, this brave soldier assures us that he will not lose hope, and that he will go to Chennai for further treatment at the city's Sankara Netralaya Eye Hospital. "Please pray for him," says his fiance Dr Madhu Singh quietly.

She exudes strength and understanding when she recounts how she never stopped Amit (as she fondly calls him) from following his passion of joining the army. She plans to join the armed forces herself as a dentist next year.

The plucky young woman, who comes from an army background, smiles as she remembers how she first met Captain Singh at the coaching class for the medical entrance exam. The young man's mother wanted him to become a doctor so he would attend classes to pacify her, while preparing for the army on the side.

"Of course, I used to feel scared that something might happen to him, but I understand his dream. So I have never stopped him from joining the army," says Madhu.

The commando, who put himself in the line of fire and fought bravely with everything he had, now has his life turned upside down. The future holds several weeks of treatment in the hope that his eye can be saved.

If that unfortunately does not happen, Captain Singh will be declared a battle casualty and not permitted to participate in any future NSG or army missions. The commando will be assigned administrative tasks and other such duties. However, he will be entitled to all the perks, promotions, and benefits of the army. He may also be entitled to compensation. "*Abhi toh mujhe service mein paanch hi saal hue the -- nobody thinks anything will happen to them so soon,*" he says. "*Is liye maine pata bhi nahi kiya tha ki kya compensation hain.*" (*I have been in service for only five years. Nobody thinks anything will happen to them so soon. That is why I haven't even found out what the compensation is.*)

**Image: Captain A K Singh with his fiance Dr Madhu Singh at the Bombay Hospital. Text and photograph: Insiyah Vahanvaty**

**Also see:**

- [Our earlier feature on Captain Singh](#)
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