

A Treasure Trove of Military Tales

Maj Gen Baindur Nagesh Rao
AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)



ABOUT THE 'TREASURE TROVE OF MILITARY TALES'

After retirement, on the urging of the family, my father, Maj Gen Baindur Nagesh Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Gen Rao) brought out an anecdotal collage of incidents from his personal and military life which taken holistically gave a good idea of his life and career. The anecdotal accounts were in book form, titled "Lock, Stock and Barrel".

About that time, Gen Rao also approached the Editor of Kanara Saraswat, the monthly community magazine of Saraswat Brahmins hailing from Karnataka with his offer to act as the Defence Correspondent for the magazine merely as a service to the community. He would offer one article every month on a defence related issue 'to inform, educate and entertain' – gratis: as a labour of love. He wanted to 'return something to society' and writing for the Kanara Saraswat gave him great joy and satisfaction. Shri Gurunath Gokarn the then Editor very readily agreed to Gen Rao's request and since then his articles under the generic title of Military Musings have become a regular feature of the magazine.

The articles proved very popular and there was a demand voiced by many that he put all the articles together and publish the 'Musings' in book form. The Editor of Kanara Saraswat when consulted felt that buying and reading books was passé and not worth the effort and expense that would go into publishing it. Instead he suggested that creating an e-book could be easily handled and uploaded on the internet at no cost to the reader.

Gen Rao's vast collection of military articles are contained in a special folder on his computer titled 'Treasure Trove of Military Tales'. Apart from the 'Musings', the Treasure Trove also contains the many military articles he has received through the open media/e-mail from friends and colleagues, as also forwards on WhatsApp.

This e-book is a selection of Military Musings from his Treasure Trove. He has also quoted/borrowed some of the really good articles he received from others which had no copyright restrictions. Nevertheless wherever the writer's name was available, they have been named and full credit given to them. According to Gen Rao, every article is a gem and readers may want to read them again and again.

Accordingly the book has been divided into two parts. Part 1 – Military Musings, containing original articles penned by Gen Rao himself. Part 2 – Gems

from the Treasure Trove, which incorporates articles received from the environment.

Gen Rao prides himself to be a story teller of military tales much in the fashion of Louis L'amour and Jeffery Archer. His writings are simple and direct combining his story telling ability with a sense of humour. The articles encompass various facets of military life in all three services making it very readable and interesting with something for all.

Here's hoping that readers enjoy these Military Musings as much as Gen Rao has enjoyed scripting them.

Since Gen Rao's articles are a narration of his personal experiences, it is necessary to have some information about his military background so that the reader better understands the context of what is being put across. There is no fiction in Military Musings. Gen Rao has named places, people and dates of various happenings. So the credibility and authenticity of events described are beyond doubt.

Lastly, since Gen Rao served in the Army Ordnance Corps (AOC), the reader will find a few articles relating to the AOC under the group heading Ordnance Matters (pun intended).

Pune

Date – 13 June, 2026

Col Ashwin Nagesh Baindur (Retd)



Maj Gen BAINDUR NAGESH RAO, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

LIFE AND CAREER: AN OVERVIEW

On completion of his schooling in Poona, Gen Rao joined the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla as a Cadet, in Jan 1957, with the 17th Course. However, he got relegated in the very first term to the 18th Course. He passed out of NDA in June 1960 and was commissioned into the Army Ordnance Corps (AOC) from the Indian Military Academy (IMA) Dehra Dun on 11 Jun 1961.

Gen Rao has had an enviably successful career in the army. He excelled in all the Army courses that he attended and gained a competitive vacancy for Staff College, A decade later he was posted as GSO-1 (Instructor) in that very institution as a Lt Col, and earned his dagger. He was very successful in his command appointments. He Commanded 15 Field Ammunition Depot (FAD) with distinction for which he was awarded his first VSM. As a Brigadier he commanded Central Ordnance Depot (COD) Kanpur from where he was selected to attend the National Defence College (NDC). He further commanded Karnataka and Goa (K&G) Sub Area after completing NDC and then proceeded to Northern Command on promotion as MG AOC.

He participated in the 1965 and 1971 wars. In 1965 he served with HQ 51 (Independent) Parachute Brigade at Dharchula on the UP-Nepal-Tibet border in the Central Sector and in 1971, he was DAA&QMG of HQ 330 Infantry Brigade in the Barmer Sector of the Western desert as part of 11th Infantry Division which went on the offensive against West Pakistan. He also served for a year as DAA&QMG of 64 Mountain Brigade in Sikkim after the delineation talks with Pakistan were concluded and the captured territories returned to it.

From Sikkim Gen Rao was accredited to Bangladesh as the Assistant Military Adviser in the High Commission of India at Dacca. Here he served from Jan 1974 to July 1978 before being repatriated to India.

Gen Rao was selected to attend the NBC warfare course in Russia and on return raised the NBC Cell at Army HQ. His pioneering work in the new field won much acclaim and he was awarded a Bar to his VSM.

It was in Northern Command that he was awarded AVSM by the President of India in recognition of his contribution to Ordnance logistics. At this time Gen

Rao was also elected as the Colonel Commandant of AOC which was a singular honour.

His last posting was as Additional DG OS at Army HQ from where, though approved for promotion to the lofty rank of Lt Gen, he superannuated in August 1996 for lack of vacancy.

Gen Rao has a few other feathers in his cap as well. He authored Volume II of the History of the AOC, He was awarded the Brig Rodrigues Trophy when he was Commandant COD Kanpur, being adjudged the Best Ordnance Officer of the Year. He won prizes in military essay competitions by USI and the COAS. He ran Part D cadres to help Ordnance officers get promoted and helped many others to prepare for the challenging Staff College entrance examination.

Gen Rao kept himself busy even after retirement. He was Logistics Consultant for Calcutta based INDAL. Later he was Shivaji Chair Professor in the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies in Pune University, He was Director Training in Queen Mary's Training Institute for disabled soldiers.

On the social work side, he was the Resident Administrator of a senior citizens' facility named Punya Dham Ashram, a registered charitable and welfare NGO. He led rescue and relief teams from Pune at the start of the millennium, to areas affected by natural disasters; earthquake affected Gujarat, Tsunami-struck Little Andamans and Flood inundated Bihar after the river Kosi breached its bank.

He was also elected Chairman of the Army Welfare Co-operative Housing Society for three years during which time his committee brought about numerous changes for the betterment of the veterans residing in Salunke Vihar AWHO Colony.

And now in his twilight years, he continues to contribute military articles to Kanara Saraswat, his community magazine which gives him great satisfaction and contentment.

Pune

Date – 13 June, 2026

Col Ashwin Nagesh Baindur (Retd)



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Shri Ramkishore M Mankekar, Editor of the Kanara Saraswat magazine who advised me to go in for an e-version over a publishing and printing option, given today's changed environment, wherein digital consumption takes precedence over hard bound copies.

Above all, I am indebted to the many authors whose stories I have included in Part 2 of the book. Full credit has been given and authors and sources named where available. Inevitably, some articles were anonymous. To these writers also, I extend my thanks for their contribution.

Shri Abhijit Roy, a Visual Artist who helped me with all the computer work involved to produce this e-book of military tales containing stories worth narrating and re-narrating for generations to come.

My son Col Ashwin Nagesh Baindur, a retired Bombay Sapper, who constantly advised me on layout and design and more importantly perused the entire contents from the point of view of the lay reader's ability to understand military terminology, nuances, multi-language phrases, and intended puns.

Special thanks to Smt Roopali Kapnadak Sawant who conceptualised and designed the artwork for the cover.

Shri Praveen Kalawar of Thane, Mumbai, who is one of the many who thoroughly enjoy reading the Military Musings in the monthly issues of the Kanara Saraswat. He forcefully urged me to put them together in book form and even volunteered to bear whatever costs were involved in the project. Thank you Praveen.

Last but not the least, a special thanks to my wife Asha, who patiently put up with my being on the computer at all odd hours and more importantly, who acted as my sounding board on various issues I consulted with her.

Pune

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Date – 13 June, 2026

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BN Rao', with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom right of the signature.

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Part 1

Military Musings

Military Musings

**NATIONAL DEFENCE ACADEMY, KHADAKVASLA
(THE CRADLE OF LEADERSHIP)**

DOWN MEMORY LANE

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)
(18th Course/Easy Squadron)

I have often confided to my wife and sons that if I could repeat any three years of my life again, I would take the three years in the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla.

Three marvellous years. No responsibilities; only games and studies and of course, thoroughly enjoying oneself. I recollect most fondly that though cadets love their sleep, I used to wake up at 5 am on Sunday mornings and make a dash for the squash courts. After playing eight or nine hard games of squash, we used to swim in the beautiful Olympic sized swimming pool, then hog in the canteen and again have breakfast in the Cadet's Mess. After a bath and changing into civvies we proceeded on 'liberty' to Poona to lunch in a restaurant, take in an afternoon movie and ogle at the girls in Main Street or Deccan Gymkhana. We returned by taking the NDA bus in the evening, arriving in time for dinner.

How proud we felt in our grey flannel trousers, blue shirts and smart, dark blue blazers, wearing the Academy tie. It was an indescribably great feeling as only the young and successful could experience. Keen, lean and mean we prided ourselves to be. We were in the army (or navy or air force) and our whole lives lay before us. We had the world at our feet and we felt that we were a special lot.

But all that was still in the future. We reported to the NDA on a Sunday afternoon in the first week of January 1957. Being a local cadet, the parents of a friend of mine, Anil Koshti, drove me over and delivered me to the steps of the Cadet's Mess where a reception centre had been established. I hardly got an opportunity to thank them properly because we were all being ushered hurriedly and a very imposing personality in uniform with a red band around

his peak cap standing on the steps was impatiently shouting orders in a thunderous voice. It was RSM Ayling of the Grenadier Guards on loan from the British Army. (It was after his tenure that we started getting Drill Subedar Majors from our own army. Sub Maj Bora of the Assam Regt was our first Subedar Major, with the 18th Course).

At one of the reception desks, I was told that from then on, I was Cadet No. 2722 of the 17th course and assigned to Item (I) Squadron in the 3rd battalion. (Each battalion had three or four squadrons, named alphabetically). After all new cadets had been mustered, the person in uniform whom we now recognised as Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) Ayling of the Grenadier Guards, addressed the motley lot of us gathered there. I do not remember much of his welcoming speech except for the promise he held out to 'convert us from 'milk-shake drinking schoolboys into whisky guzzling soldiers'. We sniggered when we heard that and were promptly ordered to shut up.

We were told to pick up our bags and follow the guides assigned who would lead us to our respective squadrons. We just dropped the bags in the common ante-room and were told to immediately 'fall-in' outside. For the first time we were formed into squads and taken 'on the double' to the barber's shop where all of us were given haircuts. Our hair was cut so short; we felt that it would grow into a crew-cut in a few weeks' time. We were issued arm bands bearing our personal number which had to be worn at all times whether in uniform or in civvies.

That first day was unforgettable. After being allotted our divisions (each floor of the squadron building was a different division and had its own number. The divisions were rotated every year so that cadets got to live on all three floors during their three year stay in the academy). I was assigned to a Division on the first floor and quite pleased to see the smart cabin which was to be all my own. But as yet we had made no friends and hardly knew anybody. Venturing cautiously into the corridor, I was confronted by a couple of seniors who had come early for their re-test. One of them asked me if I knew who he was. No, I replied. "It's no 'Sir', you Mohenjo Daro Relic. Remember that. You first termers are the low life. So everybody is 'Sir' to you. Now go find out my name and do a front roll for every alphabet in it so that you never forget it". He happened to be Cadet APSKJ Nadar of the 16th course. I forget now how many alphabets were there in his full name but I do remember that I went front rolling along the entire length of the corridor; which left me feeling dizzy.

Ragging was an accepted way of life and the juniors soon became accustomed to it. But before that, the constant moving from one event to the other, on the double, orientation to the academy, lectures from how to tie one's bootlaces to how to tie a turban (for Sikh cadets), the ragging and constant hunger and lack of sleep broke one down. I remember one night, about ten days after I had joined the academy, I actually cried quietly in my bed. What had I got myself into? I asked myself and did a bit of soul searching. Was I going to be a coward and run away or be a man and face it? Once I had resolved on the latter option, there was no looking back. I later learnt that I was not the only one to confront myself. Some others had also faced their moment of reckoning.

The cadets who best adapted to the ragging were the Rimcolians. Ex-RIMC types. Arvind Dabir was one such Rimcolian. We had both been relegated in our first term for flunking in academics and transferred to 18th course in Easy (E) Squadron. One Sunday morning we were both caught by a sixth term and put to work stitching all the missing buttons on his khaki uniforms. We wasted our Sunday morning doing it and Arvind felt we had every right to have our revenge. So we slashed all the brass buttons from his blue blazer and side cap and threw his tooth brush and cream bottle out of the window before the senior returned. That incident transformed me into what is commonly known as an 'NDA crook'.

We became adept at avoiding seniors, at shamming, not volunteering for any work, having a ready-made excuse for everything, and surreptitiously getting our back at seniors who ragged us. Such was our reputation that one Brigade Commander is said to have groaned aloud when he discovered that a GSO-3 newly posted to his HQ was an ex-NDA type. "They are known for taking the path of least resistance" he moaned.

Cadets are also good at bluffing. One of the cadets who had received joining instructions but, failed to report to the Academy was one 2815 Cadet A N Dhindsa. Most 18th course cadets were quick to cotton on to the fact with the result that whenever someone was checked by an appointment, especially after dark, he gave his name as A N Dhindsa and thus escaped punishment. It took well over a week for the senior appointments to realise that it was a ghost name and they were being taken for a ride.

When I look back at my life I realise the meaning of the phrase 'Man proposes; God disposes'. Since the age of four I wanted to be an important surgeon, gaining fame by conducting important life-saving operations. But the Gods

must have had a good laugh at my ambition. My closest friend Ashok Mahajan and I cycled to the academy to see the 10th course passing-out parade in Dec 1955. We were mesmerised. By God! If there was one career that we wanted to pursue, it was in the armed forces. That passing out parade motivated and inspired us like nothing else. All previous resolutions were forgotten.

We filled in the forms for the 16th course and passed the written exam. Both of us were rejected in the interview. Only two were selected from our batch in Bangalore; the Isaacs brothers; Sudhir and Sushil. The latter rose to become the Naval Chief (Admiral Sushil Kumar).

We were disappointed, yes; but not deterred. We filled the forms again for the 17th course, passed the written exam again and were again interviewed. This time we were both selected. Our joy knew no bounds. In Jan 1957 we joined as cadets in the NDA. Ashok Mahajan went into Able Squadron and we got separated; Ashok ultimately got commissioned in Signals but we remain life-long friends.

The suspense of waiting for your chest number to be called as one of the successful candidates after the interview at the SSB is the most excruciatingly suspenseful experience in life. The only other time I experienced such suspense was when I was awaiting the Staff College results. I was in Ladakh when the results were declassified and when I learnt that I had got a competitive vacancy, I found it difficult to fall asleep that night. Such was the euphoria.

I had opted for the Navy as my first choice. I realised how fate takes a hand in the scheme of things when I went for my medical examination. The doctor took one look at my eyes and scribbled 'unfit for Navy and Air Force'. So I was destined to become an army cadet; a 'pongo' in NDA parlance.

Since I got relegated to 18th course and spent all six terms with the 18th, I identify myself as from the 18th course. Most of the tales and yarns that follow pertain to these course-mates. But before I launch myself on 18th course stories, I must narrate what happened in Item Squadron. Of the lot of us who joined 17th course in Item squadron six of us were marched up to the Deputy Commandant, yours truly included, for being ordered to appear for a re-test in the two subjects that we had failed and were put on warning of relegation. All the rest, bar one cadet, were marched up to the Battalion Commander for failing in one subject. They were warned to improve; or else. The sole

exception who excelled in studies, was marched up to the Commandant for being weak in OLQ (officer like qualities) because he was weak in PT. So each one of us ended being marched up to one authority or the other. A record of some sort, surely.

Whereas I was very bitter at being relegated and determined to show the academy the stuff that I was made of, it was really this kick in the backside that made me take my studies, and later, the courses of instruction, very seriously; and I rose to two-star rank (approved for promotion to three-star General). The story of my relegation and its consequences is related elsewhere in this collection. Suffice to say that it took me almost 10 years of service to shrug off that chip from my shoulder. After that I did not have to prove myself to anybody. I knew what I was capable of.

NDA was an age of idealism. We read, we learnt, we experimented as we grew into young adults. My favourite military hero was Field Marshal Rommel. And I decided to fashion myself after him. For a week I pretended to myself to be Rommel in thought, word and deed. The result? A very unhappy cadet. I realised that I could never be anyone else but me. I could, however, appreciate the military traits in great Generals and try and mould myself accordingly.

There were several hobby clubs in the academy to choose from and I chose to become a member of Western Music club for no other reason than that the officers' wives taught the cadets how to dance. Western ball room dancing was in fashion in those days. The Hunt Ball and end of term socials were greatly awaited. The very first lady that I danced with was Sai Paranjpe. We were in Fergusson College together and she had come for one of the dances to the academy. Happy memories.

However I gave up western music in the second term and joined the sailing club and spent many happy afternoons on the Khadkvasala Lake sailing Excalibur boats. At least once a term we had a sailing regatta and the whole academy turned out to witness the boat races. Once, our boat overturned in a stiff wind as we tacked around a buoy and both crew fell into the water. We sat on the upturned hull, thoroughly drenched and shivering, till the rescue motor-launch pulled up alongside our capsized boat and picked us up.

The inter-squadron cross-country races were also great fun. The Academy was large enough for the race to be run within its boundary walls. The undulating and lightly wooded terrain was ideal for this. Every one ran for all his worth,

because the points counted for the final Chiefs-of-Staff Banner awarded to the best squadron. But Easy squadron suffered a malaise. No matter how hard we tried we never became the champions. We normally ended up eighth out of the ten squadrons in the final listing. I often wondered whether it was because we prided ourselves in being 'Easy'.

Academy life is full of many small indelible memories. Cadet Akeel Sheikh, once when we were working on a lathe machine during workshop practice ambled up from his work bench and said "Benny, shall I throw a spanner in the works?" he jokingly asked me picking up a large spanner, while making a mock throw at the lathe machine. This was witnessed by the civilian Workshop Officer who had no sense of humour. He put us on a charge for "attempting to destroy Government property" We both got punished by the Academy Adjutant: six extra drills each.

Once Lt Cdr Bahl (actress Nutan's late husband) was standing in for an Air Force officer during an Air Force class. The subject was jet engines. He had just finished explaining the venturi effect when a loud snore was heard. Cdr Bahl asked the cadet to explain the principle of the jet engine. "Sir, the air goes in from the front and comes out of the back. Due to Newton's third law, the plane moves forward". Cdr Bahl commented without batting an eyelid. "If things were that simple, you should take off from your throne every morning." How much we laughed.

The Squadron spirit was very strong as also the course spirit. I remember once the Squadron CSM trying to find the culprit who had hidden his bicycle. He realised it was somebody from the 18th course but did not know exactly who. He punished the whole course after dinner for an entire week trying to break us down. It only helped to strengthen our resolve for none of us squealed. He finally gave up. The moment the punishment was discontinued his bicycle mysteriously re-appeared in the squadron cycle racks.

Cadet C S Baweja, a fourth term, was very fond of using others' articles. He would simply help himself to my tooth paste every morning without so much as by your leave. One day I got up a bit earlier, before the lights came on at reveille. Placed my shaving cream in place of the tooth paste tube and went about my business. When I returned Baweja's mouth was foaming and he asked me if I had changed my brand of tooth paste. It gave me great pleasure to inform him that he was brushing his teeth with my shaving cream. I laughed

for a whole week whenever I thought of the incredulous look on his face. Anyway it broke his habit of using others' tooth paste.

Tea and biscuits served in the academy were very welcome. Morning and evening tea was served in the squadrons. But mid-morning tea was served near the class rooms. It was not to be missed. Once during Chemistry class, the Instructor Mr. Bhavnani, was going on and on and Cadet K K Mehta fearing that the tea would get over, reminded the instructor that time was up. "Whose time is up?" exploded Mr Bhavnani. "If this time is not enough you can have six months more (implying relegation) or if that is not enough you can have all the time outside the academy (meaning withdrawal)." He then calmed down somewhat. "But you are all good lads; uncut crystals; potential Generals, Admirals and Air Marshals. K K Mehta included". K K Mehta tried to sink into his shoes.

English was a problem with some, like our CSM Khurana for example. Once when reprimanding cadets for taking short-cuts across the lawn to the 3rd Battalion Mess, which was forbidden, he said "I see everybody taking shortcuts. I see myself taking shortcuts". That produced some laughs.

Shram Daan or voluntary labour was a strange concept in the NDA. It was a laugh. There was nothing voluntary about it. In the games period the squadron players were all detailed for their various sports; boxing, cycle polo, swimming, hockey etc. The handful of cadets who were not good in sports and got left over were 'detailed' for Shram Daan. And through such 'voluntary' labour came up initially the outdoor amphitheatre en route to Peacock Bay and later the magnificent Hut of Remembrance behind the Sudan Block.

Only once was I hospitalised in MH Poona for a sprain in the sacroiliac joint. The beam broke when we were hanging on it, curled up to do the toe touch. The treatment? Sleeping on a hard bed. Being a local cadet, I was lucky because I could get an out pass and visit home. Amongst the four of us was Ajay Modi. He had fractured his ankle. When on out pass to meet his girl friend, he would slip off his plaster cast. Then come back to the ward and hammer his ankle with a spoon and slip on the cast again so that his ankle would swell up by the time the doctor saw him next morning. He thus managed to prolong his stay at the hospital by an extra week, and got to visit his girlfriend.

Novices boxing was compulsory in the Academy. I went through five rounds in the Bantam weight series before I got eliminated. As an officer, I became a paratrooper. I always felt that both boxing and para-jumping should be made compulsory for all officers along with the Commando course. Makes them physically and mentally tough, courageous and aggressive soldiers.

Cabin and cupboard inspections, study periods, ante room procedure, cinemas on weekends, frequent rig changes throughout the day, spills in the riding school, WT in FSMO, passing the drill square and being allowed to wear a lanyard in the second term, the relatively relaxed third and fifth terms, PT, dinner nights, starched khakis, Camps Greenhorn, Rover and Torna, and trying to manage in the forty bucks monthly allowance that we were allowed; these are now all frozen frames, indelibly embedded deep in memory.

One can go on endlessly narrating many more incidents or whatever else comes to mind. But as I go down memory lane, I also realise that time has taken its toll. Some of my Easy Squadron course-mates who are no longer with us include NK Agarwal, T K Burdhan, Mohan Verghese, B K Khullar, Arvind Dabir, Debesh Bannerji and Mohan Singh Bath. The rest of us still living are now in our mid eighties and we revel in our course get-togethers and zoom meetings to remain in touch. The bonding is ever lasting. What does NDA spirit truly mean? A definition is elusive, but it can be illustrated in many ways. I have tried to do so elsewhere in this collection of articles.

The strain of Auld Lang Syne at our passing- out in June 1960 still haunts us. I was a Divisional Cadet Captain, a cane appointment, when I passed out and my father felt so proud of me.

The academy taught us many things; duty, honour, integrity, winning, loyalty, moral and physical courage, obedience, discipline as also camaraderie. It taught us to take defeat in competitions sportingly and to be magnanimous in victory. The Academy was undoubtedly successful in making us, in the words of Rear Admiral B A Samson, the Commandant, “to be humble enough to eat with the poor and fit enough to dine with kings”. Most importantly, the Academy also taught us to put ‘Service Before Self’. And I am proud to claim that every one of us without exception made it his motto in life and lived by it. Nation first, always and every time. The NDA prepared us to sacrifice everything for the service and country; even our lives if need be.

Military Musings

THE RELEGATION

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

I was recently hospitalised in the Army Institute for Cardiac and Thoracic Sciences (AICTS) (new name for MH CTC) in Pune Cantonment. And in the Officers' Ward, opposite my room was the Cadets' Room. Its sole occupant was Gentleman Cadet Rishabh Sharma. He received a severe blow on the heart during Novices' Boxing in the Officers' Training Academy (OTA), Chennai and fell unconscious. He was immediately removed to MH Chennai and further evacuated to AICTS, Pune.

Rishabh, it turned out is the son of an AMC JCO hailing from Dewas in Madhya Pradesh, who had recently retired after completing an assignment with the UN peace keeping mission in South Sudan. After completing his B Tech, Rishabh had opted to join the army and was duly selected for OTA. Being a mechanical engineer, he harboured hopes of getting commissioned in the Corps of Electronic and Mechanical Engineers. And now he was floundering because life had served him a curved ball. He had got relegated and lost six months seniority, since he would have to repeat his first term with the next junior course. He was having difficulty adjusting to the new set of circumstances. He needed a bit of pepping up and I decided to help him get things in proper perspective by sharing my own experience in life.

At the outset, I assured him that relegation was only a setback: not the end of the world. I helped him to take a holistic look at what life may hold for him. Being a SSC officer, that too in the EME, becoming Chief of the Army Staff was out of the question. But he was young enough, and if he got his permanent commission and progressed well in his army career, he could aspire to rise by the time he retired, to the lofty rank of Lieutenant General, the highest possible in that corps. If per chance, his army career did not progress satisfactorily, he was already qualified to get a well paying job in civil industry. He could possibly get some additional management qualification or even M Tech, by taking paid study leave.

I said, looking at me, a thrice decorated General Officer, who had served in a diplomatic assignment, done courses abroad, and had the best of command,

staff and instructional assignments, visited many foreign countries while serving in the army, attended courses for specially selected officers like Higher Command and National Defence College and finally been elected Colonel Commandant of the AOC, my life would have been a bed of roses. But not so, I told him. I stumbled at the very start of my career and almost got slung out of NDA.

When I joined the 17th course at the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla near Pune, in early January 1957, life was full of promise. We were young and idealistic and our life was secure; we had made it and we had it made. The sky was the limit. But I failed in Maths and Science in the very first term and was relegated to 18th Course. And I was warned that should I fail again, I would be withdrawn from the Academy. A fate, too dire to contemplate.

Like Rishabh, I felt bereft. Never in my life had I ever failed earlier. I did not know how to break the news to my father, and what's worse live with that knowledge myself for the rest of my life. I recollect sitting on the bank of Khadakvasla Lake in abject despair and cursing the Commandant, Maj Gen Enayat Habibullah, The NDA, the marking system and my bad luck. But through the gloom I finally did some honest introspection and analysed the basic reason for my relegation. The fault was nobody's but my own.

Having joined the Academy we thought that academics were of little consequence. Studies were behind us. Since most cadet appointments were decided mostly on basis of sports achievements, we set about trying to prove our prowess in sports. I went in for boxing and went through five rounds in the bantam weight series in the novices' boxing championship before I was eliminated and with it, any hope of becoming a squadron boxer. But I loved squash and swimming and these two sports became my favourite pastimes for decades thereafter.

Attitudinally, studies were tolerated and one just needed to get through. But the busy academy routine did not give us too much extra time to catch up on our studies and the inevitable happened. I failed in maths and science.

The relegation was the biggest blow to my self-esteem. Life had been a breeze. Suddenly everything looked dark and bleak. If I failed to pull my socks up, my career in the army was finished. It was in a black mood that I sat in a secluded spot on the banks of Khadakvasla Lake. It was the pits. I sat there for almost five hours trying to make out the meaning of it all. What was life all about?

Where and how had I floundered? The fact that large number of cadets got relegated those days made little difference. The fact was that I was one of the failures. I even thought of jumping into the water and ending it all, once and for all, then and there.

But through the haze appeared light. As I unscrambled my own attitudes, a great truth dawned on me. I was catching the wrong end of the stick. Even if I were to become a Dhyan Chand (hockey supremo) or a Himu Adhikari (famous cricketer) I would retire as the senior most Major in the army. But if I got through my promotion exams, did well on courses in the service I could rise to become a General without ever touching a hockey stick in my life. It was not in sports but in academics that I needed to prove myself. I was convinced that I was not all that useless as the relegation seemed to imply and got up with a fierce determination to prove the Academy wrong in its assessment of me. Though I must admit that to this day, I have not forgiven Maj Gen Enayat Habibullah, the then Commandant of NDA, for relegating me for falling short by just two marks in Maths, in the re-test.

After repeating my first term with the 18th course my performance was so good that I was upgraded from Arts 5, Science 5 to Arts 2, Science 2. Thereafter, I was always Arts 1 Science 1. When I was marched up to the Commandant for being taken off the warning of withdrawal, the Commandant had changed and Rear Admiral B A Samson who interviewed me said “Son. I am so proud of your performance. Aim high and you will achieve much. Well done. Congratulations. March out”.

It was a defining moment in my life. “Aim high and you will achieve much’ became my personal credo and I set my aim high in all things I did. Studying for Staff College later in service, my personal aim was “Camberley or bust”. I missed going to Camberley (UK) but got a competitive vacancy and did my Staff College at Wellington (Nilgiris). But I digress.

As I left the Commandant’s office, I determined that I would win the Commandant’s Silver Medal for standing first in the order of academics. I did not win the Silber Medal but passed out very high in the order of academics in the 18th course.

I carried the relegation chip on my shoulder for a long time. I had to prove myself at everything; not just academic but also physical activities. I volunteered for the paras and jumped from aeroplanes. I became an

ammunition expert; carrying out proof test of ammunition, demolition of explosives and defusing IEDs. I excelled at courses. It was only when Staff College was nearing an end in 1971 that I was able to shrug off any feeling of inferiority in my own mind. I was one of the best and I needed to prove it to no one any longer.

Today whenever I am motivating youngsters I quote my own example of how to turn failure into a stepping stone for success. But I candidly admit that had I not got a timely kick in the pants when I did, I might well have retired as a Major instead of Major General.

I was approved for promotion to the rank of Lt Gen but superannuated before I could pick up my rank. Professionally, I was at par with the best. A very satisfying military career.

So my advice to youngsters is not to get too upset with adversity but persevere; re-chart your course with conviction and commitment to attain your goals in life. Convert the threat into an opportunity and evolve from the ordeal, a better and more successful person.

Military Musings

A BROTHERHOOD BEYOND COMPARE – THE SPIRIT OF NDA

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Esprit de Corps is to be found in various military groupings. A bonding forged by training together, eating together and living together; further cemented by undergoing hardships together and facing common dangers, fueled by pride in the institution and believing themselves supremely capable of achievements of the highest order. Such pride or bonding or net-working, call it what one may, is to be found pronouncedly amongst Paratroopers, Infantry battalions, Armoured Regiments, Mechanized Forces, Special Forces and Staff College Instructors perhaps more than others. But the special spirit, the feeling of oneness, exists in all army units, though differing in degree. It is found equally in Navy and Air Force units.

But of all the primary training institutions, the spirit of NDA is most prevalent and pervasively found in all three services. The NDA bonding is so real that it is life-long and veterans bask in the glory of being identified as ex-NDA. Entire courses of Ex - NDA veterans have course get-togethers and remain in touch all their lives. So much so that there is wide spread belief that one may leave the NDA but the NDA never leaves him. What is this marvelous spirit common to officers who have passed out of NDA? How does one recognize it? In fact this collection of stories has come about because that special spirit is so elusive to define. One cannot see it but it is omnipresent and all too evident.

Late Lt Gen Hanut Singh, MVC who commanded the Poona Horse in the 1971 Indo-Pak war has written about the spirit of the Poona Horse. That got me to attempt to define the spirit of NDA. Though difficult to enunciate, it is possible to show that wonderful spirit that binds ex-NDA types together through citing actual examples. These few stories/anecdotes reflect the effect of the long lasting camaraderie developed while training together for three formative years in the Academy.

Airlift to Thoise

The three years spent in the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla are the best in the life of a service officer. The NDA cements life-long friendships and officers are willing to take risks and make sacrifices for their NDA mates. The NDA spirit is difficult to define; yet the NDA net is an acknowledged fact of life in the Armed Forces. The example below is illustrative of the NDA spirit.

In 1969, I was posted to Ladakh as OC 14 MARS (Mobile Ammunition Repair Section); I was a Captain then. Being an ammunition specialist I had been assigned a special task to demolish some old ammunition and explosives left over from the 1962 war at Daulat Beg Oldi, a remote area close to the Chinese border. This involved flying to Thoise and a ten-day march thereafter over a glacier, Saser Brangsa, at approx. 18,000 feet, to Chung Tash; and finally, another three-day high altitude trek via the Depsang Plains, to my destination Daulat Beg Oldi.

In those days, one needed to first fly from Leh to Pathankot and then take another IAF flight to Thoise. The flights were irregular and I was dreading the possibility of getting stuck at Pathankot indefinitely. I was having a cup of hot coffee at Leh airport when I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was Flight Lieutenant Utful Dabir who happened to be the younger brother of a naval course-mate of mine, Arvind Dabir. We met every now and then whenever Utful came over to Easy Squadron to meet his brother. We had all been in the Academy together. After a happy hug, as old friends are wont to greet each other, we picked up the threads about how life had treated us after leaving Khadakvasla.

Inevitably, he asked me what I was doing at Leh airfield and I told him about my need to get to Thoise. To my astonishment he asked me to hop into his aircraft, a C-119 Fairchild Packet; he said he would drop me at Thoise and then return to base. But what about clearance from the ATC and all that? I enquired. He winked in reply implying that his radio was on the blink.

An hour later I was at Thoise. He waved aside my profuse thanks. 'What are friends for anyway?' He asked. Utful gave me the 'thumbs up' sign, revved his engines and took off into the wind. In later years, I have often pondered over the enormous risk that Utful Dabir took, just to give his brother's course-mate an air lift. But then, that's what the NDA spirit is all about.

Navy to the Rescue

As a Brigadier, I was Commander of Karnataka and Goa Sub Area. When visiting Goa for the first time, as per custom of the service, I paid a courtesy visit to the senior naval officer in station, FOGA (Flag Officer Goa Area) who happened to be Rear Admiral Peter DeBras. He was slightly senior to me but we had been in NDA together. I was well received and afforded every courtesy including being shown the Harrier Simulator. Being a naval air station, I was informed that they always had a helicopter with a doctor standing by for emergency air-sea rescue.

In 1995, I was a Major General posted at Army Headquarters. As Colonel Commandant of the Army Ordnance Corps, I had flagged off an adventure rally from Khardung La, the highest motorable pass in Ladakh. The adventure activity was in three phases. The first phase was a high altitude trek across three states, from Leh to Pithoragarh (UP); the second phase required the participants to cycle down to Delhi and the third phase was on Honda motorcycles to Kanyakumari and culminating at Secunderabad, coinciding with the AOC Reunion in December.

Just as the motor-cyclists had crossed Belgaum, Major Vishwanathan met with a serious accident. I got a call from the team leader, Major Gulati, informing me that they had brought the unconscious officer who was bleeding internally to the District Hospital but the facilities were woefully inadequate. Unless Major Vishwanathan was evacuated by air, he was a goner. I told the officer that I would get back to him. I pondered over the problem for a few seconds and recalled that Goa always had a helicopter in state of readiness for emergencies. I immediately dialed Commodore Franklin an Ex-NDA colleague. We had also been instructors in Staff College together. Franklin was NA to CNS (Naval Assistant to Chief of Naval Staff). I told Franklin my problem and requested for a helicopter lift for Maj Vishwanathan. Without a second's hesitation, he asked me to speak to Rear Admiral Mohanan, who was in charge of Air Operations, and tell him that it had the CNS' OK..

Admiral Mohanan asked me where we needed the chopper to land. I gave him whatever information I had. He asked me to tell the team leader to create some smoke to attract the pilot's attention. To cut a long story short, the helicopter landed within 30 minutes and the officer was evacuated to Naval Hospital in Goa.

This was inter services networking at its best. Just two phone calls and action was speedily taken. No questions asked. It was the NDA association that initiated the rescue.

Disaster Relief in Andamans

Commodore Debesh Banerjee and I were of the same course and in the same squadron in NDA. 18th Course/Easy Squadron. He retired as DG Coast Guard and settled down in Port Blair. I was unaware of this fact even though Debesh and I had kept in touch for a few years after leaving NDA. We maintained contact for some time after commissioning. Debesh had visited my home in Poona and I had once visited him in Bombay. He married Shobha Thapar (daughter of former COAS Gen P N Thapar and sister of Karan Thapar) and thereafter we lost touch.

In Dec 2004, eight years after I had retired, when the Tsunami devastated the Andaman and Nicobar islands, I was associated with an NGO which was a registered charitable and welfare organization. We received a cry for help from someone in Little Andamans which had apparently not received any aid even a week after the Tsunami struck. I headed a team from Poona to Little Andamans. The team carried trucks full of relief material first to Chennai by train and then by sea to Port Blair. I flew ahead to tie up the arrangements at Port Blair.

You can imagine my happiness when of all the persons in the world, I met Debesh Banerjee in Port Blair. But I was horrified to learn from him that his bungalow which he had built close to the seashore had got completely submerged and destroyed by the Tsunami with all that he had possessed. Shobha and he had been forced to abandon the bungalow and shift into small hired flat and were trying to pick up the threads of life again. Notwithstanding their great loss, Shobha and Banner devoted their entire attention to me and my mission for the three days that I was In Port Blair. Banner (I used to call him Banner) acted as my self-appointed Liaison Officer and arranged for me to meet the Fortress Commander of Andaman and Nicobar Command, to have dinner with the Chief of Staff; meetings with the Lieutenant Governor and the Chief Secretary. He also introduced me to a few other influential citizens that we came across. Banner helped make all the arrangements for my team which composed mainly of civilians. I was put up in the VIP room in the Navy mess and given a staff car to run around. My team was put up in an army unit.

Banner's help was indispensable considering I had no acquaintance with anyone on that island or in the corridors of power at Port Blair

Thanks to Banner, I was provided a naval helicopter for my advance reconnaissance of Little Andamans: a separate island to the South of the main island. My stores were ferried by a ship of the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) on priority and on completion of our mission, again thanks to Banner's help, we got a Pawan Hans helicopter to ferry the entire team back to Port Blair and again, priority for the return flight to Chennai by Indian Airlines.

I attribute much of the success of our mission to Cmde Debesh Banerjee without whose help, I would have had to make many cold calls and we would have faced many bureaucratic hurdles, procedural delays and avoidable expenditure.

The Banerjees ultimately shifted to Delhi to set up their new home. Banner passed away a few years ago and is sorely missed.

In the ultimate analysis it was the NDA spirit that manifested itself and made Banner go to help another course-mate even when he himself was in acute distress.

EXTRA DRILLS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Extra Drills are a common form of punishment meted out to Cadets in all the training academies for minor misdemeanours; be it NDA, IMA or OTA. It requires cadets to report in full drill order to report for an hour's extra drilling in non working hours for the required number of days as per the number of extra drills awarded.

Almost everyone in authority seemed to have the power to accord extra drills starting from the Academy Adjutant, the Academy Drill Subedar Major, Squadron Commanders and Divisional Officers, and of course the higher cadet appointments like the Academy Cadet Adjutant or the Battalion Cadet Adjutant. In IMA the appointments were known as Senior Under Officers and Junior Under Officers.

More serious crimes attracted restrictions (gating in IMA) or relegation and withdrawal on disciplinary grounds. Lower forms of punishment meted out by the lesser appointments like Sergeants and Corporals were more physical in nature to be executed immediately on the spot. Like lifting ones bicycle overhead and running to the squadron for being out of squad or doing push-ups by the road side for marching in a slovenly manner to the Cadet's Mess.

There are a whole lot of faults or mistakes for which extra drills were awarded. But once somebody was awarded extra drills the trend seemed to continue throughout the term for one reason or the other.

My tale of woe began in my very first term in NDA. Monday mornings inevitably started with drill in the first two periods. Turn out had to be impeccable. One Sunday evening I checked that the dhobi had delivered the starched khakis, my boots and belt were polished to mirror finish and all the brass was shining bright. What I failed to check was the buttons on the shirt. As I donned my khaki shirt on Monday morning, I was horrified to notice that the top button of my shirt was missing. In a panic I immediately grabbed my 'housewife' (a pouch containing needle thread and buttons for emergency repairs) and hastily put on the button with just one stitch through opposite

holes of the buttons. I was very short of time and I dare not be late. Suffice to say that there was a button hanging in place.

To my misfortune I happened to be in the front rank that morning. RSM Ayling of the Irish Guards, 6'2" tall and reputed to have the eighth loudest voice in the world who also had eyesight sharp enough to put an eagle to shame, made a beeline straight for Easy Squadron and halted right opposite me. I felt dwarfed by his height. He was followed by an NCO with a notebook and pencil. The RSM took one look at me and shouted "Put him down in the book for loose button". He then grabbed the button between his thumb and forefinger and tried to pull it off: the button broke into two pieces "Put him down for broken button" yelled the RSM. When he removed his hand the two pieces of the button fell to the ground. "Naked on Parade!" thundered the RSM – "Six extra Drills". "Cadet! Shout name and number" barked the NCO. "Cadet B N Rao, No 2722, SIR !" I shouted back at the top of my voice.

That wretched button was the start of numerous extra drills that I did in my first two terms. They tapered off in the third term and I was finally free of extra drills in my fourth, fifth and sixth terms. Of course by then I had also become senior enough to hold rotational appointments of Corporal in the fourth term, Sergeant in the fifth term and Divisional Cadet Captain in the sixth term.

Yet another incident that I vividly recall occurred in the third term. During workshop practice, I was shaping a piece of steel rod in the turner lathe machine when my friend and course mate Cadet Akeel Sheikh ambled over from his workbench nearby to borrow a spanner. Akeel picked up a large spanner, looked at it and jokingly asked me "Benny. Shall I throw a spanner in the works?" and made a mock motion of chucking the spanner at my lathe machine. My laugh was cut short by the scowl on the civilian Workshop Officer's face. He had absolutely no sense of humour and put us both on a charge for 'attempting to destroy government property'. Fortunately the Academy Adjutant had a good laugh when he asked us to explain the incident and we got away with six extra drills each.

Extra drills continued to bug me in IMA also. Ex NDA Cadets go directly into the third term at IMA. In the third term, it started with "moving eyeball on parade" for sneaking a peek at the time on the clock tower of Chetwode Hall while drilling on the parade ground. It was followed by extra drills for dirty rifle and being late for class.

But what was astonishing was that I was awarded three extra drills in the very last week of my fourth term, just before commissioning. Reason? Gentlemen Cadets (GCs) of the passing out course were invited in batches to dinner at the residence of the Commandant and a written invitation by name went out to each of the passing out Gentlemen Cadets. The GCs had to give a formal written reply to the invitation and I faulted on two counts. I mis-spelt the name of the IMA Commandant and the reply envelope had to be addressed to the lady of the house whereas I had addressed it the old man himself.

I remember the IMA Adjutant giving me a dressing down and telling me “let it be a lesson for life. When sending out formal invitations or their replies - double check the rank, name and decorations of the officer and what is to be written on the invitation card/reply and whom the envelope is addressed to”. I recall his exact words to this day.

Extra drills were freely and liberally dished out for even the smallest wrongdoing. While we cadets all cursed and grumbled when awarded extra drills, we all took the punishment like men. I remember how much we used to laugh at our own ill fate.

But there is no denying that punishments drove home important lessons and put starch in us. I do believe that they served the purpose.

Military Musings

BASANT BAHAR

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Few things feel as luxurious and refreshing as a lovely cold water bath after being out on a military exercise and sweating it out for a day or two in the hot sun. The bath restores one's morale like nothing else. Conversely, absence of adequate bathing facilities affects a soldier adversely. He is unclean and irritable, grumbling about life in the army, feeling stale and unhappy. So he seeks out ways with typical soldier's ingenuity to find water and alternate bathing facilities.

When I took over 15 FAD, towards the end of the 1970s, our unit in Jammu district was located in a place which had the mighty Tawi River flowing alongside our depot. Yet our unit lines experienced water shortage for days together. The reason was that the MES which was responsible for water supply had put a submersible pump in the Tawi and it got periodically washed away with the force of the current. Replacement of the pump time and again was a time consuming and costly process needing explanation and sanction of the appropriate financial authority. A more permanent solution was required to be found.

And what did the men do in the meantime? They started going to the village well in Kanyhala nearby and have their bath there. The villagers were very hospitable and accommodating but having 500 odd jawans trooping to their water well daily was totally undesirable. And there were women in the village. I just kept my fingers crossed hoping that I would not get any complaint about any untoward behaviour from my troops.

We had only one 3000 litre water truck mounted on a 3 ton Shaktiman chassis and one 1000 litre water trailer which after making several trips a day to the water point just about met our emergency needs. Being an ammunition depot, we were very conscious of the fire risk and our reserve water tanks at various locations for fire fighting also needed filling periodically to make up for evaporation loss..

At the first opportunity possible, I met my immediate superior in the chain of command, the Sub Area Commander at Udhampur and apprised him about our problem. He was fully with me and promised to immediately take up the matter with the Chief Engineer in HQ Northern Command and get some emergency work (Para 11 work in army parlance) sanctioned to supply water to 15 FAD from an alternate source of supply. But it would still take a little time, the Commander warned me.

I could not permit my troops to have a bath in the Tawi because of its depth and dangerous current and I certainly did not want any drowning incidents. The river was placed out of bounds. The men were warned to be on their best behaviour whenever they went for a bath. We formalised the timings with the village headman and explained that it was a temporary measure for a few weeks only. We also set up tented partitions so that the men could bathe and change with reasonable privacy.

The army has a system wherein every unit holds a monthly Sainik Sammelan. It is a very formal affair with flags flying and red carpet laid out and the bugler announcing the arrival of the CO. The senior most officer present gives the verbal parade state and announces that the Sammelan is ready for his address. The CO is escorted the short distance into the hall by ceremonially dressed stick orderlies. A mike and loud speaker is set up so that even people seated furthest away can hear the CO. The CO is normally seated at a small table on a low dais facing the audience with JCOs and officers sitting on both sides along the walls of the hall on chairs. The soldiers sit cross-legged on tarps or durries spread on the ground. The Sammelan is 'at attention' and once the CO orders them to sit easy, everyone becomes all ears to hear what the Old Man has to say.

The Sainik Sammelan is used by the CO to explain the security situation, forthcoming inspections and visits, any special orders, matters of discipline and the like. The CO compliments the men who have done well on courses or brought praise and kudos to the unit. It is also used for discussing welfare points. Jawans are not allowed to air individual problems or grievances; for that, they may seek an individual interview with their immediate officer and if he is unable to handle it at his level, the matter is referred to the CO.

I took the opportunity of the Sainik Sammelan to express my anguish at the state of water situation in the unit and that they had to go to the village well for their bath. I informed them that I had taken up the matter with the Sub

Area Commander and action was in hand to get a better and more permanent system installed at the earliest. I also told them that I had approached Army HQ to sanction us an additional 3000 litre water truck by surrendering one 3 ton load carrier in lieu. But in the meantime, if anybody had any suggestion about what we could do from within our unit resources to resolve the bathing problem I was open to suggestions.

One jawan seated in the rear hesitantly put his hand up. I asked him to stand up so that everybody could see him properly, give his name and number and share his thoughts loudly so that everybody may hear what he had to say. He elaborated that being an ammunition depot we had a lot of land. We were in a hilly area. Just outside the depot perimeter, but close enough to the living lines, between two jutting spurs there flowed a perennial underground spring which meandered its way over-ground through a nullah into the Tawi. It was hidden from sight being below normal ground level. It was on depot land. If the place where the spring made its appearance could be developed into a bathing point, the unit would never need to depend on the MES.

My happiness knew no bounds to hear his suggestion. Immediately after the Sainik Sammelan, I asked the Adm Officer, my Senior JCO and the jawan to accompany me and show me the perennial spring. It was on our land and had a good strong flow of water all the year round. And it could easily be developed into a beautiful and convenient bathing point.

Ammunition depots are fortunate to have a few platoons of Defence Security Corps (DSC) for guard duties. The DSC personnel are retired servicemen of all arms and services who have been reemployed. So we have a wealth of talent. Amongst my DSC Personnel I had a JCO from the Corps of Engineers (Bengal Sappers) who had experience in construction work. I entrusted the task of creating a water point at that location and immediately sanctioned the money he required for buying bricks, cement pipes, taps etc from our regimental funds and gave him one week's time to complete the job. I told him that I would be inaugurating the project myself and I wanted a really good job done. I directed the Senior JCO to detail the necessary men and provide all help to the Engineer JCO. The Adm Officer was directed to detail a vehicle for going to Jammu to help with the purchases.

The rest is history. I was unable to inaugurate the project myself since I was called away on temporary duty to Army HQ, New Delhi. But I did not want to disappoint the men who awaited the event with such happy anticipation. So I

deputed my Second-in-Command to stand in for me. However, I visited the bathing point immediately on my return. It was beautifully done up with several water outlets allowing a number of jawans to bathe simultaneously. It was well designed making use of the lay of the land, gravity feed and the force of the flowing water itself for the showers as well as drainage. It had a stone flooring and rails to hang towels etc. In due course we made arrangement for heating water nearby for winter months and provided overhead cover and shelter from the cold breeze.

The men were so enthused and proud of the water point that they named the facility Basant Bahar.

At the next Sainik Sammelan, I awarded one stripe to the jawan who had suggested the location and promoted him to Lance Naik. The entire unit applauded enthusiastically at this gesture. And the Engineer JCO was rewarded with the Chief of Army Staff's Commendation Card.

I do believe that it was the best welfare measure that I provided to my men during my command given that the bathing point is still in use; half a century later.

Military Musings

EMPRESS OF BLANDINGS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Jeeves and Bertie Wooster fans would no doubt be well acquainted with P G Wodehouse, the humorous British writer, and his many stories set at the fictional location, Blandings Castle; home of Lord Emsworth. Lord Emsworth was very fond of his pigs and the Empress of Blandings was his favourite prize sow.

When as a Lieutenant Colonel, I was commanding a Field Ammunition Depot at the tail end of the 1970s, we were located in a remote area of Jammu District. The unit was quite isolated in a hilly location and difficult to access even by road. Being an ammunition depot, we had a lot of land and no other units located close by. A small village named Kanhyala was our only nearby contact with civilisation.

And in 15 FAD we reared some pigs. We had a very neat pigsty and being an ardent P G Wodehouse fan, I named it Blandings Castle. It goes without saying that our prize sow was also referred to as the Empress of Blandings. The Empress was a very prolific breeder; she would deliver a litter of upto 12 piglets at a time. She was huge in size and ponderously heavy. I was not surprised to learn therefore, that she snuffed the life out of a couple of her offspring simply by rolling over them in her sleep. But what I was shocked to learn was that she ate up two of the weakest in her litter; a phenomenon, not uncommon amongst pigs, especially with large broods, I was told. The handler we had appointed for the pigs was hard put to keep the babies safe from her, as much as possible, in the first few weeks after they were born.

The pig handler was a jawan of our depot who had a way with animals. In his village they reared pigs; so he had the knowhow and was familiar with all that needed doing. He always carried a five-foot long, stout staff with him to keep away dogs, snakes, predators and poachers alike.

It was amazing to see how the animals responded to him when he whistled or clucked at them not to stray too far or to call them to have their feed. It was a gift that not everyone is endowed with. He would keep track of all the pigs and count them every time before closing them in the pigsty at night. He would herd them out for their morning exercise in the open field to feed upon the grass and shrub and herd them back after a couple of hours in the open. While the pigs were away, the unit sweeper would thoroughly sweep out and clean the stalls in the pigsty and fill fresh water in their troughs.

Food was no problem. All the kitchen waste and leftovers from the Officers' Mess, the JCOs' Mess, the NCOs' Mess, the jawans' langars and family lines were all routed to the pigsty after every meal, as a drill. And the pigs would grow fat and contended on army leftovers. Pigs are the most efficient converters of waste food into edible meat; and they eat whatever is fed to them.

The jawans were also very protective about our pigs and made sure that no villagers or unauthorised personnel approached the pigs or the pigsty or tried to steal them or harm them in any way.

We slaughtered a pig or two for pork and bacon on non-meat days when we did not have meat-on-hoof (army terminology for live goats), or to celebrate an event like Raising Day or after a sports victory, or at a bara-khana and other special occasions. We took great care to ensure that the pigs were healthy and free of disease. We even got a Veterinary officer to periodically come and advise us about the hygiene, cleanliness and maintenance of the pigpen as also to have a 'dekho' at the pigs.

We had constructed a wallowing-pond close to the pigsty. It was a shallow muddy dip in the ground, filled with water, in which the pigs would go and roll and immerse themselves on hot summer days. It was a wonderful sight to see how happy and contended they appeared wallowing in that muddy pond. And as they came out of the pond reluctantly in the evening, with patches of wet mud on their backs, they were hosed down before being allowed to enter their home for the night.

Some of the unit's children also had a wonderful time chasing the little piglets squealing and running helter-skelter as the children tried to catch them; but seldom succeeding.

Being in field, as is the usual army practice, I used to get an all-correct report each day, after the roll call, late in the evening. All the men were accounted for, all the unit vehicles were back safe and sound, all the arms and ammunition had been deposited in the kot (armoury) counted and locked up and armed sentries had been posted. And as night fell over Blandings Castle, I would also get a report that all the pigs were safe.

One morning, my Adm. Officer Maj R S Tehlan, approached me with a worried look. His opening words "Sir, one tricky problem" boded of ill tidings. He was having difficulty to find the right words for what he was about to tell me so I urged him to come straight out with it. Apparently the Empress had vanished in the night. She had pushed her way out of a weak spot of her thatched abode and gone somewhere; nobody knew where she was.

No need to panic I told him. Send out a small search party. Knowing her habits and limitations of size and weight, I was sure that she would not have strayed too far. Also the men knew most of her favourite hiding places. Sure enough, I got a report a little later that Her Highness had been found below a culvert on the road leading to the depot main gate: where she had delivered her latest litter.

Military Musings

MIRACLES AT JINDRAH

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

You Tube airs a lot of 'miracle' movies at Christmas time and I am rather fond of them. Seeing one such movie last Christmas, I got to thinking about miracles and thought I'd share two of my experiences with the readers.

What are miracles? A miracle is simply a happening that one considers impossible, so much so that it is believed to be caused by God; an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs. It is definitely an occurrence where the odds of its happening are heavily weighted against it. Yet many miracles occur in daily life and most of us have experienced something miraculous in our lives at one time or another. I feel blessed to have experienced a few miracles myself.

The two episodes I am about to relate occurred when I was a Lt Col, commanding 15 Field Ammunition Depot (15 FAD) at a remote location in Jammu District, in 1980. The depot was located in a desolate area in the back of beyond, in the middle of nowhere, in the Shivaliks: nevertheless an ideal location for an ammunition depot. But from its location, one got a clear view of the three peaks of Mata Vaishno Devi: a Goddess greatly revered by Hindus all over and an important shrine in J&K. In fact my very first act on taking over the depot was to visit her shrine and seek the Goddess' blessings for a successful command tenure.

One winter morning, 15 FAD was scheduled to host an important event for all Commanding Officers in the Sub Area. It was a demonstration on how to defeat an infiltration attack on the depot. The demo was to be followed up by display of innovative storage of ammunition and explosives in the field and a visit to the unit lines (it was our boast that we had created the best facilities in the Sub Area). The event would culminate with a lunch in the Officers' Mess.

The Sub Area Commander himself was going to witness the presentation and we were determined to put our best foot forward.

Everything was got readied and rehearsed and arrangements perfected the previous day. It was almost midnight when I bid good night to my officers who were gathered together at the helipad in front of the Officers' Mess. I ended by saying that we had done everything possible and I was sure that everything would go well on the morrow. We have the Goddess' blessings. One of my junior officers had the gumption to ask how could we be sure of the Goddess' support. I drew their attention to the three peaks. There was a shapeless cloud floating lazily near the three peaks. I told them that at exactly at 6 am next morning, the cloud would be precisely 12 O'clock of the highest central peak. That would be a sign that we have her blessings. And we broke off.

Having said it, I couldn't believe what I had done. How could I be sure that the cloud would even be there next morning? If there was no cloud, the men would treat it as an ill omen. But being too tired, I fell asleep. At 6 am, when I woke up on the day of the great event, I hesitantly looked out of the window and lo and behold! There was a perfectly circular cloud framed by the golden sun exactly over the highest peak. I called up my officers and told them to see the phenomenon. We had the Goddess' blessings.

Needless to say, despite so many events taking place in the unit that day, it was the most perfect day of my command: everything went off like clockwork; exactly as rehearsed, without any hitch. The demo was perfect and much appreciated. The depot came in for so much praise that it became the cynosure of all eyes in Northern Command.

Much later, I was mulling over the matter and wondering what caused me to foretell such an impossible happening. My wife attributed it to my absolute faith in Mata Vaishno Devi, the Guardian Goddess of the depot. But whatever the rational explanation for my utterance, the perfectly round cloud illuminated by the sun at that exact point predicted and precisely at 6 am, was no coincidence. It was undoubtedly a miracle.

Yet another instance when Mata Vaishno Devi came to our aid was when I was planning to set up a Tiny Tots School for the small children of the few Jawans who were permitted to bring their families to the field area on compassionate grounds. The Sub Area Commander advised me to hold on because, with the Army School coming up at Udhampur, they desired to

adjust the Balwadi which had become surplus to requirement. He said he would recommend that the Balwadi be transferred and relocated at Jindrah. When three months had passed and we still had no news of its transfer, I pondered over the matter. The head of all Balwadis in J&K was Smt Mekhala Jha, wife of the then Governor of J&K, Shri L K Jha. It was not possible for a mere Lt Col to approach her directly, by-passing all the higher HQ in the chain of command. I said a silent prayer to Mata Vaishno Devi to help find a way out of the impasse.

The Goddess must have heard my plea because two days later, one of my officers, Capt Victor Pitchai, approached me requesting for two days casual leave. I was intrigued by his request because he hailed from Andhra Pradesh and I wondered what he was planning to do with a mere *do din ki chutti* in Jammu. It transpired that he his sister was visiting Jammu. She happened to be the Inspector of Balwadis in India; since she was a guest of the Governor's wife, she was staying in the Raj Bhavan and had asked Victor also to join her there. My heart leaped with happiness at this God sent opportunity. I could not approach the Governor's wife directly but I could certainly write to Victor's sister. I pulled up my printed letter pad and there and then laid out on paper all that had transpired and requested her to urge Smt Mekhala Jha to expedite the transfer of the surplus Balwadi from Udhampur to Jindrah.

One month later Smt Mekhala Jha inaugurated the Balwadi at Jindrah. It was a grand, well-attended function. Her only request was that we should also accommodate the children of neighboring Kanyhala village. I assured her that we would look after the village children; not only that, I was prepared to spend regimental funds to provide the children a mid-day snack. Smt Jha was delighted to hear that. She said she had access to lot of aid from UN and would regularly supply powdered milk and biscuits etc. Believe me when I say we had good and regular attendance at the school mainly because of the mid-day snack which was a big attraction and motivator to the poor hungry children.

That Victor had a sister who should visit Jammu as a guest of the Governor's wife, just when we needed to break the impasse, and that she happened to be the Inspector of all Balwadis in India – too many coincidences for it not to be a miracle.

Vaishno Mata ki Jai!

Military Musings

PANEER-BAAZI

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

\When I was commanding 15 Field Ammunition Depot (FAD), as a Lt Col, at the tail end of the 1970s, the depot was located in a remote God forsaken corner of Jammu District, in the foothills of the Shivaliks. We were off the main Jammu Srinagar highway, about 60 kms from Udhampur. And close to the depot in the middle of nowhere was the village of Kanyhala, our closest connection to civilisation.

Kanyhala's claim to fame was its excellent paneer which was much in demand and required by the Officers' Messes of higher formation headquarters located at Udhampur. So whenever there was a party in either the Command Headquarters or the Sub Area Headquarters, 15 FAD was contacted to supply a kilo or two of the same and we would procure it from a shop in the village and send it across with our motorcycle Despatch Rider (DR) who as it is had to make a daily trip to Udhampur to deliver and collect the dak (official and private mail).

15 FAD was located in field and there was no family accommodation. Only a very few families of jawans were permitted on extreme compassionate grounds and they had to rough it out in temporary bashas. Bashas were thatched roof mud huts with mud floors. Except for a Balwadi for a handful of tiny-tots (courtesy the Governor's wife), there were no schooling facilities for children. Medical cover was, however, provided by the male unit doctor. All the troops were located in temporary barracks.

One raising day, during our customary bara-khana, when all the officers, JCOs and men of the unit dine together on langar food in a festive atmosphere, the jawans responsible for entertainment put up a Hindi skit. The scene depicted was that of a jawan who is at home, saying good-bye to his wife since his leave had come to an end and he was preparing to return to the unit.

"So, when will you come again?" asks his tearful wife. "Well now that I have finished my annual leave, I doubt whether I will get any casual leave before five or six moths" explains the jawan.

“Five or six months!” exclaims the wife. “Can’t you come sooner?” she asks feeling miserable. “Not much chance of that” insists the jawan. “Why don’t you do something?” *“CO Saab ko thoda makkhan lagav na”* suggests the wife.

“Ab main tumhe kaise samjhaoon Gori? Unit mein to makkhan-baazi ek dam bandh hai. Wahan to sirf paneer-baazi chal raha hai.”

There was a hush when the skit ended. The men were wondering what my reaction would be to the leg-pulling. But my loud and instantaneous laughter lightened the mood and restored the joyousness of the occasion. The men were gleeful for days after that they had pulled one over the Old Man and got away with it.

Military Musings

OP SINDOOR: ONE OF ITS KIND

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Op Sindoor was retribution for the brutal, targeted execution of 26 identified Hindus at Pahalgam in Kashmir on 22nd April, 2025 by five Pakistani terrorists. Op Sindoor was unique in many ways; so much so that it took not only Pakistan but also much of the world by surprise. It conveyed to Pakistan and indeed to the rest of the world that India had reached the limit of its patience. It would not tolerate terrorism in any form any longer; particularly cross border terrorism from Pakistan. India had been suffering cross border terrorism ever since President Zia-ul Haq enunciated the doctrine of making India bleed through a thousand cuts: the infamous Op Gibraltar launched in 1965.

Operation Gibraltar was a covert military operation designed to incite a rebellion in Jammu and Kashmir against Indian rule. The operation involved the infiltration of armed personnel, into Indian-administered Kashmir. The goal was to destabilize the region and ultimately provoke a large-scale uprising. However, the operation failed due to factors like local resistance and the Indian Army's counter-infiltration efforts, ultimately culminating in the outbreak of the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War.

India's immediate retaliatory response to the Pahalgam massacre was spectacular and all encompassing. It covered diplomatic, economic, political and social measures before taking kinetic action. All the Defence Advisers in the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi were expelled and ordered to quit India within a week, along with their staff. The strength of the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi was also halved. Simultaneously, the PM announced scaling down our High Commission in Islamabad. All Pakistani nationals in India were told to return to their country. All visas stood cancelled after specific dates. The Wagah border was closed. The Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan was declared held in abeyance. All Pakistani aircraft were banned from landing in or overflying India. Pakistani shipping was banned from Indian ports. Postal service between the two countries was discontinued. All trade between India and Pakistan was suspended.

In anticipation of Pakistani air attacks, Civil Defence drills were ordered by the Home Ministry in selected districts of all Indian states and UTs commencing 8th May.

And on the Night of 7th/8th May, India launched Op Sindoor.

The nine identified terrorist strongpoints used by Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) that were targeted were all either training areas with facilities, or staging areas or boot camps for the Fedayeen. They were located right across the length and breadth of Pakistan including POK, and in a space of less than 25 minutes, all were hit simultaneously by precision air/missile/drone strikes in a joint operation by the Air Force and Indian Army. Over 120 terrorists are believed killed including some famous big-wigs of the major terrorist organizations.

The planning was superb. It must be remembered that there was a need to hit hard while ensuring that Pakistan did not cross the nuclear threshold. It was, what is described in military parlance, a cold start. The targets were very carefully chosen, the response was punitive but proportionate and the attacks were considered non-escalatory in nature.

The political aim was to restore deterrence and impose caution on Pakistan. It was therefore decided to initially hit only terrorist locations and not military targets. Use of precision munitions ensured that there was no civilian collateral damage. There was no air space violation: all missiles/air attacks/drones were launched from own side of the border. There was no cross border movement of troops.

It was repeatedly stressed that India had no desire to fight a war against Pakistan, Its actions were directed against terrorists. However, instead of seizing the opportunity to eradicate terrorism from its soil, Pakistan openly sided with the terrorists and chose to escalate the conflict by launching drone and air strikes against a whole lot of civilian and military targets right from Thoise to Bhuj. India's very effective Air Defence system Akashteer, rendered these attacks ineffective and India suffered a total of only 20 casualties, counting both, military and civilian. India intercepted and shot down 99% of all incoming missiles and drones. What further angered India was Pakistan trying to target Delhi using its Fateh missile which was intercepted over Haryana and brought down near Sirsa.

Kinetic Follow Up

On the night of 8th/9th May, India retaliated forcefully, hitting and rendering non-operational, 11 airbases, five radar sites and other military and logistic targets across the length and breadth of Pakistan from Skardu to Karachi. The airbases hit included Nur Khan (Chaklala), Rafiqui, Murid, Sukkur, Sialkot, Pasrur, Chunian, Sargodha, Skardu, Bholari, and Jacobabad. These sites were chosen for their operational importance, including drone warfare command centres, air defence nodes, proximity to nuclear weapons storage facilities and aircraft deployment hubs. Pakistan's Air Defence systems were unable to detect and defeat India's assault by aircraft, missiles and drones and was literally driven to its knees. It is estimated that 20% of its Air Force infrastructure and several aircraft were destroyed.

Given its weak economy, water woes, lack of ammunition and fuel combined with the hammering that the Pak army was getting from the Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) in the West resulting in low morale amongst its forces, Pakistan appealed to Saudi Arabia and the US to intervene and get India to stop firing. Added to their fears were reports of their nuclear weapons storage facilities having been hit by India's Brahmos missiles. Phones buzzed urgently between Islamabad and Washington as also between Washington and Delhi and president Trump triumphantly announced that the US had succeeded in enforcing a cease-fire between India and Pakistan and preventing a nuclear war. He said talks would take place over a wide range of issues in a neutral country and he hoped to resolve the Kashmir issue.

India was quick to clarify that it was not a ceasefire in the accepted sense but a mere pause in the fighting and if Pakistan violated it, India would respond in full measure. Op Sindoor was not ended. India reiterated that it would not accept third party mediation but would only hold direct talks with Pakistan. The only two issues that merited discussion were cessation of terrorism and return of POK to India. Terror and talks or terror and trade could not go together. The Indus Water Treaty was also not on the Agenda. Water and blood would not flow together.

India conveyed very forcefully to the world that it had only temporarily stopped firing at the request of the Pakistani DGMO and that Op Sindoor was not over. The armed forces were given full authority by the PM to retaliate against any cease fire violations by Pakistan. It was made clear that any terrorist attack will be treated as an act of war and India would retaliate in full

measure. The PM who made his first speech on 10TH May after cessation of hostilities said India wanted peace. And to maintain peace India had to be strong and if necessary, it would use that strength to maintain peace. No more sabre rattling; India would not succumb to nuclear blackmail.

Op Sindoor displayed the jointness and integrated functioning of not only the three services but also the synergy between DRDO, ISRO, BEL, HAL, the private sector and academia. Indian munitions, equipment and systems succeeded beyond our expectations; notably the Brahmos missile; Indian made drones; the extended, integrated, multi-layer Akashteer Air Defence system; the innovative use of 1970 vintage anti-aircraft guns to successfully ward off swarms of drones; and NavIC (Navigation by Indian Constellations), an indigenously developed GPS system using Indian satellites providing real time information) stole the show.

India for the first time struck targets deep inside Pakistan across the IB/LoC in large volume and with lethal ferocity sending a clear message that India could attack any target in Pakistan, no matter where it was located without even physically crossing the border.

For the first time, in the history of Indian warfare, air power played the leading role. Long distance, stand-off, high precision weapons were extensively and effectively used. Offensive air operations received a fillip. The army and BSF were mostly employed in action on the borders.

Many people have wondered how-come the Indian Navy did not fire a single shot in Op Sindoor when they had an entire carrier based battle group prowling the Arabian Sea with complete domination of the waters and Karachi was there for the taking? The answer is because it was not an open all out declared war. The action was retribution for the brutal Pahalgam killings of 22nd April 2025. The navy was held back as a strategic threat in being; to be actively involved should the conflict escalate into a major conflagration.

Western military analysts with real knowledge of happenings, planning and execution by both sides have declared that India indisputably came out victorious in the four day conflict. It is estimated that India has destroyed 20 percent of PAF infrastructure and the total cost of replacing lost aircraft, repairing all air bases and runways, radar sites, command and control centres etc. would be in excess of 6 Billion USD.

The Indian success has sent alarm bells across the world and foreign armies are studying how India so efficiently conducted the war, with the aim of revising their own doctrines/methodology/templates.

In the meantime, Op Sindoor is still an ongoing operation as the no-war, no-peace scenario continues. India is prepared. *Goli ke badle mein Gola.*

Military Musings

NEW AGE TECHNOLOGY IN OP SINDOOR

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The political aim of Op Sindoor was to restore deterrence and it was therefore decided to initially strike at only terrorist locations and not military targets. This would offer Pakistan the option of not escalating the issue and also prevent use of nuclear weapons.

India attacked and destroyed nine terrorist camps inside Pakistan/POK, on the Night of 7th/8th May 2025, in an unbelievable and spectacular fashion.

The airstrikes/drones/artillery shelling/missiles – everything was fired/launched from own side of the border. Use of precision munitions ensured that there was no civilian collateral damage. There was no violation of the LOC. Our troops never crossed the border. Yet, with pinpoint accuracy, our munitions targeted their objectives tens of kilometers away, deep inside Pakistan and decimated them. All the Paki anti-drone/anti-aircraft/anti-missile measures failed to detect our missiles and projectiles and to neutralise them before they hit their targets. All targets were hit and destroyed using long range precision munitions.

The same story was repeated on the night of 8th/9th May when India retaliated against Pakistan's military airbases, radar sites and other logistic and strategic targets.

Conversely, on the Night of 7th/8th May when Pakistan escalated the conflict by targeting civilian and military facilities using drones en-masse and missiles on multiple and widely dispersed civilian and military targets, the Indian Air Defence system detected, tracked and destroyed nearly every drone/aircraft/missile. Thus India suffered minimal infrastructure damage and loss of lives.

Foreign military analysts expressed their opinion that it was a decisive military victory for India since neither the American nor Chinese systems used by

Pakistan proved effective against the Indian onslaught and Pakistan suffered heavily both in terms of property destroyed and lives lost.

How was this possible? How did India achieve this marvel? What magic was this? The world looked askance at these happenings.

In his first address to the nation after launching Op Sindoor, on 12 May 2025, the PM congratulated and praised the performance of the Armed Forces and the Border Security Force. He also mentioned that India had successfully used new age AI technology and felt proud that India made weapons, equipments and systems had performed so well. It had changed the way the world looks at India. He had a word of praise for all those who made it happen.

The new age technology embraced by India encompassed a wide variety of issues: like aircraft design and modifications, missile technology, navigational inertial guidance, geographical mapping, radio and satellite guidance, aerodynamic design, external and terminal ballistics etc. Experts believe that it is the successful synergy and culmination of years of investment and research in AI, space technology, aeronautics, avionics, missile development and weaponry. DRDO, ISRO, defence labs, PSUs the private sector and academia, all had a role to play in this success story; proving that atma-nirbhar Bharat is working and indeed, worth pursuing.

The weaponry and strategy involved is looked at separately for offensive operations and defensive measures.

India used Rafale fighter aircraft to launch two types of missiles; namely the Scalp and Hammer.

Scalp is a Long Range Autonomous Cruise Missile System. Jointly developed by the French and British; in the UK it goes by the name of Storm Shadow. It has a range of 250 to 560 kms and has variants. It is a sophisticated weapon, designed for stealth and precision hits of high value stationary targets. Its principal feature is that it evades radar by flying at low level and uses infra-red terminal homing for high accuracy. The scalp missile payload consists of a 450 kg Broach warhead. The warhead is designed to penetrate hardened structures before detonating, making it effective against dug down bunkers, command centres and airbases.

The Hammer missile is also launched from a Rafale fighter aircraft. AASM (Armement Air-Sol Modulaire) Hammer is a French, all weather, smart, air-to-

surface, stand-off weapon developed by Safran Electronics and Defense Group. It sets new standards in close air defence and deep strike missions with its family of warheads and guidance kits. Safran has also developed a Hammer bomb which stands for Highly Agile Modular Munition Extended Range. It employs a combination of GPS, inertial navigation and laser guidance to achieve pin point accuracy. It has a range of 70 kms. It can be used in all sorts of terrain and in all weather conditions.

The IAF launched Brhamos missiles from Russian SU 30 aircraft

India's deception plan to confuse Pakistani radar and Air Defence systems proved extremely effective. It deployed several dummy/robot drones to confuse enemy radar which made it difficult to locate our fighters to shoot them down. This EW subterfuge paid good dividends. Basically, two pilotless aircraft were flown against Pakistan. The Banshee (imported) and Lakshya (indigenously developed by the Aeronautical Development Establishment of the DRDO); they mimicked real aircraft and lit up the radar screens in Lahore and Rawalpindi who launched fighters and interceptors but only succeeded in shooting decoy drones. Hence the initial reports by Pakistan that it had shot down five Rafales whereas in reality they had shot none.

Indian missiles played a stellar role in Op Sindoor. India's missile family encompasses a diverse array of ballistic, cruise, anti-tank, surface-to-air, and anti-ballistic missiles, all developed under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP). Key families include Agni (ballistic missiles), Prithvi (ballistic missiles), BrahMos (cruise missiles), and K (submarine-launched ballistic missiles).

Key Missile Families:

- **Agni:** A series of ballistic missiles with increasing range, including Agni-I (700 km), Agni-II (2,000 km), Agni-III (3,000 km), Agni-IV (4,000 km), and Agni-V (5,000 km).
- **Prithvi:** A family of tactical ballistic missiles, including Prithvi-I and Prithvi-II.
- **BrahMos:** A supersonic cruise missile developed jointly with Russia, used for both land and sea-based attacks.
- **K:** Submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) designed to enhance India's second-strike capability.
- **Akash:** A medium-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system.

- **Trishul:** A short-range surface-to-air missile system.
- **Nag:** An anti-tank missile.
- **Astra:** An air-to-air missile.

The two missiles which were employed very successfully in Op Sindoor and gained fame were the Akash and the Brahmos. Indeed they proved so effective that there is an increased clamour from friendly countries to purchase these from India.

With regard to defensive operations noteworthy is India's innovative use of L 70 AD guns of 1970 vintage along with Zu 23 and Shilka multi-barrel AD guns, modified for use against drones en-masse. They were integrated with the Extended Multi-layer Air Defence system and with their extremely high rate of fire they successfully attacked swarms of incoming drones with swarms of accurately aimed bullets. If media reports are to be believed, India downed 99.9% of the incoming Pakistani drones and missiles; numbering over 400.

India's Air Defence system Akashteer has come in for much praise. It acknowledgedly played the most important role in the intense four-day confrontation.

Akashteer is an indigenous system designed to automate detection, tracking and engagement of enemy aircraft, drones and missiles. Akashteer gathers data from multiple sources, processes it and allows for automated, real-time engagement decisions. It is intended to intercept and neutralise incoming aerial threats with precision, and that is exactly what it did.

Akashteer is the result of meaningful collaboration mainly between DRDO, ISRO and BEL.

Yet another praise worthy Indian innovation is NavIC the Indian version of the GPS system.

NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation) is India's regional satellite navigation system, providing positioning, navigation, and timing services. It was formerly known as the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS). NavIC offers two service levels: Standard Position Service (SPS) for civilian use and a Restricted Service (RS) for strategic users.

Key features and details of NavIC:

- **Purpose:** To provide India and its surrounding regions with an independent and accurate navigation system.
- **Coverage:** Covers India and a region extending 1500 km around it.
- **Satellite Constellation:** Composed of seven operational satellites, with plans to expand to 11.
- **Accuracy:** Offers positioning accuracy of better than 10 meters within India and better than 20 meters within 1500 km of its borders.
- **Interoperability:** NavIC's Standard Position Service (SPS) signals are compatible with other global navigation satellite systems like GPS, GLONASS, Galileo, and BeiDou.
- **Services:** Offers Standard Position Service (SPS) for civilian users and a Restricted Service (RS) for strategic users. It also offers Satellite Navigation Services

All in all, India can pat itself on the back for its indigenous development efforts.

The IAF will have extra cause for celebrating Air Force Day this year because for the first time in the history of Indian warfare, the Air Force played the predominant role in Op Sindoor. Besides, offensive air operations got a fillip. And with what spectacular success!

Military Musings

PAHALGAM FALLOUT - THE NEW NORMAL

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The Pahalgam Massacre

India was shocked and enraged by the dastardly attack by five Pakistani terrorists, on innocent tourists in the Baisaran meadows of Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir, on 22 April, 2025, leaving 26 dead and many more injured. It was the brutality of the execution that made India see red. The men who were holidaying with their families were segregated, asked their names and religion, asked to recite a verse of the Koran, then shot in the head, in cold blood, in front of their wives and children. Further, the killers had the audacity to tell the survivors to go and complain to the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, if they so desired.

Given the gravity of the situation, the PM who happened to be on an official visit to Saudi Arabia at that time, cut short his engagements and returned to India immediately on getting the news. It was the first major terror attack since Article 370 was repealed from the Indian Constitution in Aug 2019.

India had suffered enough of these cross border attacks ever since Pakistan's President

Zia-ul-Haq had enunciated the infamous Op Gibraltar doctrine of making India bleed through a thousand cuts. India had generally refrained from crossing the LoC and tried to contain the terrorism within its borders. The 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi and the heinous Mumbai attacks of 1993 and 2008 which resulted in death and injuries in hundreds are indelibly etched in memory.

However, after the Modi government came to power in 2014, India started retaliating. Notable major infringements that provoked reprisal were the Uri attack by Pak terrorists on 18 Sep 2016 and the Pulwama ambush on a CRPF convoy in 2019 that resulted in a surgical air strike on Balakot.

But this time Pakistan, grossly underestimated India's anger and response. They had crossed the red line and deserved no mercy or leniency. The PM was

firm in his resolve to search out the terrorists, their backers and over-ground helpers wherever they may be, to hound them down and to neutralize them. Their hide-outs and launch pads would be reduced to dust, he promised.

Immediate Retaliatory Measures

The Pahalgam incident triggered multi-pronged retaliatory measures including diplomatic, economic and political steps before taking kinetic action. All the Defence Advisers in the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi were expelled and ordered to quit India within a week, along with their staff. The strength of the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi was also halved. Simultaneously, the PM announced similar measures for our High Commission in Islamabad. All Pakistani nationals in India were told to return to their country. All visas stood cancelled after specific dates. The Wagah border would be closed. The Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan was declared held in abeyance. Subsequently, in a tit for tat action, all Pakistani aircraft were banned from landing in or overflying India. Pakistani shipping was banned from Indian ports. Postal service between the two countries was discontinued. All trade between India and Pakistan was suspended. Indeed, India went to the extent of denying Pakistan, access to Indian goods from third countries.

In anticipation of Pakistani air attacks, Civil Defence drills were ordered by the Home Ministry in selected districts of all Indian states and UTs commencing 8th May.

And on the Night of 7th/8th May, India launched Op Sindoor.

Nine identified terrorist strongpoints right across the length and breadth of Pakistan including POK, were attacked and in a space of less than 25 minutes, all were hit simultaneously by precision air/missile/drone strikes in a joint operation by the Army and Air Force. Over 120 terrorists are believed killed including some famous big-wigs of the major terrorist organizations.

The planning was superb. It must be remembered that there was a need to hit hard while ensuring that Pakistan did not cross the nuclear threshold. It was, what is being described in military parlance, a cold start. The targets were very carefully chosen, the response was punitive but proportionate and the attacks were considered non escalatory in nature.

The political aim was to restore deterrence and it was therefore decided to hit only terrorist locations and not military targets. Use of precision munitions

ensured that there was no civilian collateral damage. There was no air space violation: all missiles/air attacks/drones were launched from own side of the border. There was no cross border movement of troops. The nine terrorist sites used by JeM, LeT and HM that were targeted are listed below; these were all training areas with facilities, or staging areas or boot camps for the Fidayeen:-

In POJK –

1. Sawai Nala Camp in Muzaffarabad.
2. Syedna Bilal Camp in Muzaffarabad .
3. Gulpur Camp in Kotli .
4. Barnala camp in Bhimber.
5. Abbas camp in Kotli.

In Pakistan –

6. Sarjal Camp in Sialkot.
7. Mehmoona Joya camp in Sialkot.
8. Markaz Taba camp in Muridke.
9. Markaz Subhanallah camp in Bhawalpur.

It was repeatedly stressed that India had no desire to fight a war against Pakistan, Its actions were directed against terrorists. However, instead of seizing the opportunity to eradicate terrorism from its soil, Pakistan openly sided with the terrorists and chose to escalate the conflict by launching drone and air strikes against a whole lot of civilian and military targets right from Thoise to Bhuj. India's very effective Air Defence system Akashteer, rendered these attacks ineffective and India suffered a total of only 20 casualties, counting both, military and civilian. What further angered India was Pakistan trying to target Delhi using its Fateh missile which was intercepted over Haryana and brought down near Sirsa.

Kinetic Follow Up

The following night (Night 8th/9th May) India retaliated forcefully, hitting and rendering non-operational, 11 airbases, five radar sites and other military and logistic targets across the length and breadth of Pakistan from Skardu to Karachi. The airbases hit included Nur Khan (Chaklala), Rafiqui, Murid, Sukkur, Sialkot, Pasrur, Chunian, Sargodha, Skardu, Bholari, and Jacobabad. These sites were chosen for their operational importance, including drone warfare

command centres, air defence nodes, and aircraft deployment hubs. Pakistan was unable to detect and defeat India's assault by aircraft, missiles and drones and was literally driven to its knees. It is estimated that 20% of its Air Force infrastructure was destroyed. The Indian Navy's carrier battle group of 36 ships prowled the Arabian Sea and kept tabs on Karachi harbour. The naval domination was indisputably absolute.

Given its weak economy, water woes, lack of ammunition and fuel combined with the hammering that the Pak army was getting from the Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) in the West resulting in low morale amongst its forces, Pakistan appealed to Saudi Arabia and the US to intervene and get India to stop firing. Added to their fears were reports of their nuclear weapons storage facilities having been hit by India's Brahmos missiles. Phones buzzed urgently between Washington and Islamabad as also between Washington and Delhi and president Trump triumphantly announced that the US had succeeded in enforcing a cease fire between India and Pakistan. He said talks would take place over a wide range of issues in a neutral country and he hoped to resolve the Kashmir issue.

India was quick to clarify that it was not a ceasefire in the accepted sense but a mere pause in the fighting and if Pakistan violated it, India would respond in full measure. Op Sindoor was not ended. India reiterated that it would not accept third party mediation but would talk to Pakistan directly. The only two issues that merited discussion were cessation of terrorism and return of POK to India. Terror and talks or terror and trade could not go together. The Indus Water Treaty was also not on the Agenda. Water and blood could not flow together.

In his first address to the nation after launching Op Sindoor on 12th May, the PM clarified that India had agreed to temporary cessation of hostilities only after the Pak DGMO had called up our DGMO on 10th May, and literally pleaded for mercy. The PM was very angry that Pak had escalated the conflict instead of acting against the terrorists. He was very straightforward and minced no words when he declared that If Pakistan attacked, India would hit back hard. He further stated that India would not tolerate nuclear blackmail anymore. Enough was enough. More importantly, it was clear from photographs and video clips of Pak Generals attending the funeral of terrorists who were draped in Pakistani flags and buried with full state honours, that these were not non-state actors. Henceforth any attack by terrorists hereafter

would be treated as an act of war and reacted to appropriately. Zero tolerance to terror! Every global terror attack could be linked to Pakistan. Pakistan was indeed the epicenter of terror he declared.

The PM congratulated and praised the performance of the Armed Forces and the Border Security Force. He also mentioned that India had successfully used new age AI technology and felt proud that India made weapons, equipments and systems had performed so well. It had changed the way the world looks at India. He had a word of praise for all those who made it happen.

The PM's talk was on the day of Budh Purnima. He said Lord Budha advocated peace and we want peace. But to maintain peace we need to be strong and at times, if necessary we shall not hesitate to use our strength to maintain peace.

The PM gave free rein to the Armed forces to react as they thought fit to any ceasefire violation. Goli ka Jawab Gola se: he advised.

Given the efforts of Dr S Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs and the MEA, there was wide spread world support to condemn terrorism and bring the perpetrators to justice. Only Turkey was openly helping Pakistan. China expressed condolences for the Pahalgam victims but their sympathies lay with the Pakis for understandable reasons. Russia offered total support and USA declared itself a friend of both India and Pakistan. Afghanistan also condemned the Pakistani terrorist attack.

Two events merit mention here.

- (a) There are reports of Pak nuclear weapons storage facilities having been hit resulting in radioactive leaks around those facilities. India has denied that nuclear arsenals were targeted by the IAF. A special aircraft of the US Department of Energy is measuring the radioactivity around these sites. Egypt has also supplied plane loads of Boron (Boron mixed with sand and lead absorbs nuclear radiation).
- (b) At this time, the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) which is agitating for independence from Pakistan, stepped up its attacks at tens of locations and gained control of its capital, Quetta and almost the whole of Baluchistan. Baluch flags have been hoisted on all public buildings and it has declared independence on 14 May 2025. It has asked for UN recognition as a separate country and requested for a peace keeping force.

Pakistan thus appears to be caught between a rock and a hard place. A situation, entirely of its own making.

Much of the Indian populace was disappointed at the suddenness and untimely announcement and acceptance of cessation of hostilities, just when India was having the upper hand and in another day or two would have forced Pakistan to cry Uncle. The unhappiness was perhaps on an emotional level because noted foreign analysts and historians have declared that India achieved a decisive diplomatic and military victory. Besides, the immediate aim of achieving deterrence had been achieved; at least for the time being. And India has its options open. Should Pakistan show aggressive designs, Op Sindoor is still an ongoing operation. It is estimated that India has destroyed 20 percent of PAF infrastructure and the total cost of replacing lost aircraft, repairing all air bases and runways, radar sites, command and control centres etc. would be in excess of 6 Billion USD.

In the meantime, the no war-no peace scenario continues.

Military Musings

UNSEEN HANDS THAT POWER THE ARMY'S PUNCH

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

On 8th April 2024, my wife and I attended a grand dinner hosted by the Head of the Army Ordnance Corps (AOC) in Pune, MG AOC HQ Southern Command. The gala was in celebration of completing 249 years since the Ordnance Board was first established in 1775 AD. The celebration is an annual event with all the serving and retired officers of the Corps coming together in the Officers' Mess of the Central Armoured Fighting Vehicles Depot (CAFVD) at Khadki (Pune).

The Corps anniversary is celebrated every year in all major military stations where the Ordnance has a sizeable presence and also in every Ordnance unit, wherever located, by the men of the Corps who wear the double scarlet lanyard as part of their uniform.

Since the army is not a commercial organisation, its units do not purchase their requirements from Ordnance Depots. There are various equipment tables which specify the items and quantities authorised to different types of units like Infantry Battalion, Field Artillery Regiment or an Armoured Regiment. Based on these tables, units demand the quantities required to make up their deficiencies upto their authorisation from the dependent depot which issues the items to them. It is what is described as a 'pull' system as against a 'push' system which can result in creation of surplus and needless wastage at the user's end; not to mention avoidable expenditure to the state.

Put succinctly, it is the job of the Ordnance to issue the right item, to the right unit, in the right quantity, in the right condition, at the right time, at the right place, in the right packing, and at the right cost.

The Army Ordnance Corps is a logistic service of the army and arguably the largest materials management organisation not only in India but in all of South Asia. It handles an inventory of well over half a million items (other than rations, fuel, medical requirements and specialist technical equipment) processed through a network of over a hundred central and regional depots, and field ordnance units till the concerned item reaches the soldier/animal/equipment/repair organisation in the field.

The AOC procures all the items from varied sources like import, DGOF, PSUs, DGS&D, trade, local manufacture and even retrieval from salvage if necessary. In addition to normal working stock for issue to units, the AOC holds and maintains all the army's store reserves.

The depots are also charged with the responsibility of making, initial issues to new raisings, special issues to units (snow clothing), issues against repair programmes to EME workshops, advanced winter stocking (to areas like Ladakh) and issue of seasonal items (extra blankets in winter) or issues to formations (camouflage equipment and camping items) taking part in exercises. It is also responsible for equipping Indian Army units proceeding abroad to participate in UN peacekeeping functions.

It is an onerous duty which is met by the AOC by largely dealing with the items in five separate basic verticals. (a) General stores and clothing including expendable items. (b) Combat vehicles which include every vehicle from jeeps to load carriers to armoured personnel carriers to battle tanks. (c) Aviation to include helicopters and drones. (d) Technical stores such as radars and communication sets, armaments and their spares, engineering items, optical and night vision devices, counter-bombardment equipment and the like. (e) All types of ammunition and explosives, bombs, grenades, mines, rockets and missiles as also demolition stores. In the party we attended in April 2024, the invitees were shown a brief 20 minute film outlining the progress of the AOC over the centuries, from its inception to date and touching on the important milestones in that historical journey.

The corps traces its origin to the East India Company in the early 17th century which set up manufacturing units for canons and guns in the forts and arsenals, as also magazines and warehouses in its three presidencies (Bombay, Bengal and Madras). Since 8th April, 1775 when a Board of Ordnance was first set up to coordinate the ordnance functioning of the three presidencies, the corps has undergone constant transformation in responsibilities, in organisation, in range and depth of stores held, in manpower authorisation and various procedures for provisioning and procurement as also salvage and disposal. New weapons systems have been added to the inventory and technology has imbued store keeping practices and functions in a big way. With modernisation today, computers are providing total asset visibility and many of our modernised depots have fully automated storage systems.

In keeping with the changing inventory and operational requirements, the corps has adapted to these requirements by making changes in its organisation. E.g. tank regiments have replaced horsed cavalry units resulting in vast increase in spare parts for different types of battle tanks this required designated depots with associated infrastructure for handling and storage of tanks and their accessories. Again, creation of the Army Aviation Corps for example resulted in induction of helicopters necessitating the creation of a Central Aviation Stores Depot and Aviation Store Sub Depots in selected regional depots. Similarly, new regional depots have sprung up to meet operational requirements and some old depots have been closed down. Transportation, provisioning and procurement as also auction and disposal procedures are undergoing continuous change with the introduction of newer technologies and management concepts, resulting in vast savings in government spending and leading to increased efficiency in ordnance functioning.

As the range and depth of inventory increased over the decades, in order to enhance ordnance functioning, it became necessary to pare down some of the responsibilities of the Army Ordnance Corps by taking away manufacturing, quality assurance and finally repair and maintenance of technical items by transferring these to the Director General of Ordnance Factories (DGOF), Director General of Quality Assurance (DGQA) and Director General of Electronic and Mechanical Engineering (DG EME) respectively.

With time and political changes, the name of the corps has also undergone change but its basic functioning has remained unaffected; Thus the Indian Army Ordnance Corps of yesteryears became the Royal Army Ordnance Corps when the British government took full control of India. The prefix 'Royal' was dropped when India became independent.

From Siachen in the North to our off shore islands in the South, from the Rann of Kutch in the West to Nagaland in the East, across the length and breadth of the country and to our forces deployed overseas on UN or foreign assignments, in war and in peace, Ordnance has always proudly lived up to its original motto 'Sua Tela Tonanti' meaning 'To the Thunderer, his Arms' or in plain language - 'to the soldier, all his fighting needs'. The Ordnance always delivers and Commanders never have to look over their shoulders for logistic support to their field formations.

Military Musings

ENGINE TROUBLE

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The army is known for improvisation and in the operational commands, the Ordnance and EME working together have solved several serious equipment problems. Two incidents linger in my memory to this day. These problems occurred when I was MGAOC Northern Command.

There was once an emergency at Siachen. The generator of the Medical Aid Centre (MAC) at the base camp, Hunder, had packed up, plunging the facility to below freezing temperatures and endangering the lives of patients. Flash messages were sent to the Command HQ requesting immediate help. The MGEME and I were summoned by the Chief of Staff. What can be done and immediately the COS enquired? I was constrained to tell him that the equipment was not supplied by the Ordnance but had been imported by DRDO when MAC Hunder was set up. So, we really had no knowledge of it nor did we hold any back-up spares for it in the Command. The ball was in the MGEME's court. Being a resourceful and a technically proficient person, he offered to get the equipment serviceable again provided he could get two Shaktiman vehicle engine assemblies. "Done" I said with alacrity. I ordered two engine assemblies to be moved from the DOU at Leh, on operational-immediate basis, by road to Thoise for issue to the workshop supporting the base. The engines left the DOU within the hour. And everyone concerned heaved a great sigh of relief when within 24 hours, the MGEME's improvisation was declared successful. MAC Hunder was functional again.

At the field level such improvisations are often necessary, particularly when the equipment is very old, costly and imported. Take for instance the prime mover for a P-15 radar in a Jammu based formation that had been reported off-road for some time. Ordnance just didn't have the spares for this Russian equipment which was nearing obsolescence. The MGEME approached me for issue of two CJ3B Jeep engines. He hoped to be able to carry out suitable modifications and get the tractor on road again. We had surplus Jeep engines at that moment of time and since these were of indigenous manufacture, I had no hesitation in

issuing them. After all we were on the war system of accounting. Needless to say, the prime mover was repaired and became serviceable again.

The DGOS was grudging in his appreciation of what we had achieved and I had to justify my giving Jeep engines to repair a Russian tractor. I explained to the DGOS that the Russians were not manufacturing that particular equipment or spares for it, being an obsolescent item. India was very short of foreign exchange at that particular point of time and import from some other country, if at all possible, was a long and arduous process. Jeep engines were indigenously manufactured and held surplus to requirement. So it was put to good use to repair equipment which was critical to the war effort. Regarding approval of HQ Technical Group, New Delhi I mentioned to the DGOS that it was between the MGEME and the DGEME.

As MGAOC, the buck stops with me I explained. In both the above cases, Ordnance could not quote rules and regulations or express helplessness. In the field army, we had to act and solve the problem. The Army Commander was fully appreciative of our efforts and we came in for high praise.

The DGOS' comment? "Gen Rao thinks and acts more like a formation commander than as an Ordnance representative". I took that as a left-handed compliment.

Military Musings

SPECIAL STORAGE SOLUTIONS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Every now and then, Ordnance officers come across some items, which provide special storage challenges where rules do not provide solutions. Especially with respect to stores that need to be issued as soon as the balloon goes up. Some challenges that we faced and how we successfully overcame them are narrated below.

CLMC

A Charge Line Mine Clearing, or CLMC for short, also referred to as Giant Viper, is an ammunition item used for making safe lanes through minefields. It is a 'controlled store' and very important to the war effort. If and when ordered for issue by the General Staff, the depot would have to issue it in a hurry. When I took over 15 FAD, I noticed that we were holding CLMCs in our inventory. I wanted to see this newly introduced item and asked my Deputy to have one laid out for my inspection.

When even after eight days nothing happened, I knew that something was amiss. The problem, I discovered, was that a single CLMC came in 48 boxes of varying sizes comprising 3 X 3 ton vehicle loads. Further compounding matters was the fact that some items were non- explosive stores (NES) which were kept separately with NES items. Also, the explosive items had got mixed up with other ammunition items when the depot shifted locations. A totally unacceptable state of affairs.

Over the next few days, we urgently located all the boxes of all the CLMCs that we held on charge and segregated these wherever they were located. Each item / CLMC was inspected for serviceability, so certified and repacked. We then selected a large, secure, road served, explosive storehouse, that met all the field storage requirements, specifically and exclusively for storage of CLMCs. Each CLMC was numbered and we had all 48 boxes of each CLMC also suitably numbered.

We then did something exceptional.

We stored all the CLMCs along both sides of the shed, perfectly aligned and stacked, in mirror image fashion. Each CLMC was stacked in three lots, each lot making up one vehicle load. The oldest lots of CLMCs were placed near the doors and the CLMCs were to be issued sequentially in the order in which they were placed on the ground; such that the oldest lot would automatically be issued first. This aspect was tied up with the Control Officer so that issue vouchers identifying lot numbers would also be made out accordingly.

I forbid the storage of any other ammunition or explosives in that shed to avoid any inadvertent mixing up of the boxes. We also put up a board on the wall itemizing the list of individual components that made up a CLMC so that even the most mediocre storekeeper would have no difficulty in issuing the CLMCs without any problem. The arrangement of stacking the CLMCs in vehicle loads on the grounds ensured that vehicles could be loaded even in the dark without any difficulty in identifying the stores and without the necessity of re-counting.

This exemplary form of storage of CLMCs, which so greatly facilitated speedy issue of CLMCs to user units, came in for a great deal of praise from senior visiting officers.

Rockets BM-21

Such was also the case with storage of BM 21 rockets, which were stored in such exemplary fashion that that one entire first line could be issued and loaded in a flat 45 minutes, in the dark, as against six hours earlier. The depot then held one first line and one second line for a Rocket Regiment. The rockets were stacked according to vehicle loads. These rockets presented another problem. The first line rockets were loaded as rockets (unpacked and ready for use) in special racks in the special ammunition tractors of the rocket regiment, which meant leaving the containers behind. A special procedure was evolved to take such empty rocket containers on charge and move the empties to RE&AA.

The second line was to be issued in their containers. All rocket stacks were designed as per vehicle loads

15 FAD became the trendsetter in rationalization and storage of ammunition.

Defence Store Bricks

In COD Kanpur, the nature of stores were of non-explosive variety but the problem was similar. Like the CLMC, also to be issued on priority in case of war, Defence Store Bricks composed of a large number of disparate items stored in different sheds of different sub depots, held by different storekeepers. Issuing a single defence brick of approximately 60 items would have taken at least two days. Worse, since all items were uncontrolled stores, we could have had a possible stock-out of some items, which would be unacceptable in war. We listed all the items in a defence brick and had the required quantities transferred to a suitable rail cum road served shed, on an arterial road of the depot. Again we resorted to beautiful, perfectly aligned, mirror image, brick-wise storage. Each defence brick was stacked in two equal halves, each half having every item of the brick, so that even if we were ordered to issue a half-brick we could do so instantly. A board in the shed listed all the items that constituted a defence brick.

When the then Central Army Commander, Lt Gen Sammy Khan saw it, he was very impressed that our storage was so oriented towards making speedy issues in war. He even admitted that it was the first time that he himself had seen a complete defence brick.

We were immensely proud of our innovative storage solutions for meeting the special needs of the Army. This was indeed Ordnance functioning at its best, even if we said so ourselves.

Military Musings

DIFFICULT MOMENTS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Mustering-in

In the early sixties when I was yet a Captain, I was posted as the Administrative Officer (Adm Officer) of 2 FOD (Field Ordnance Depot) in Srinagar. The depot was located in a prestigious and beautiful area called Badami Bagh. A hundred metres away from the depot on Gupkar Road was a bungalow owned by late Shri D P Dhar, then a powerful central minister.

My duties as the Adm Officer amongst other things, involved industrial relations i.e. dealing with the civilian workforce and ensuring that they adhered to all rules and regulations at the work place. I was unhappy with the fact that although the depot opened at 8:30 AM, no work got started till after 10 AM. The reason? Civilian workers enter the depot following a process known as 'mustering-in'. They come one by one through the main gate, are checked by the security personnel and then proceed to the ticket board to hang their numbered discs that record their arrival. With the gates opening at 8 AM, the mustering-in process needs to get over by 8:30 AM. What was happening was that the first person would enter the depot at 8:30 and the rest would then follow at regular one yard intervals. It was almost 9:30 by the time mustering-in was completed. It took them another 20 to 30 minutes to go to their sub-depots, leave their lunch boxes, change into working clothes and start work. Being mostly Muslims, at 10 they held a prayer break

The root of the problem was a clause in the Factories Act, which is also applicable to army depots having civilian workers. It states that once the workers start entering the depot, the gates cannot be closed, even if it's past closing time, unless there is a 'clean break' in the chain. Compounding the problem was a privilege granted by a previous COO (Chief Ordnance Officer) allowing the workers to come in up to 15 minutes late because of snow and the intense winter cold. So in winter the first worker would enter at 8:45 further adding to the delay.

I had raised this problem with the COO, Lt Col Jagir Singh, a tough no-nonsense person. He agreed that the state of affairs needed to be corrected. So a date was set for ensuring that all the workers were in by 8.30 AM from that day onwards. This was widely publicized through the civilian welfare committee and the official daily orders. On the appointed day, I was personally present at the gate and was happy to see that all but a handful of workers were mustered in by the correct time. The handful of workers, 15 to 20 of them, deliberately did not enter and started shouting slogans “Adm Officer *Murdabad*”. They then proceeded to Shri D P Dhar’s residence and continued raising a ruckus in front of his entrance gate.

I was amazed at the speed at which subsequent events developed. D P Dhar apparently spoke to the 15 Corps Commander at Udhampur; Lt Gen Bikram Singh, a person feared by every officer in the Corps Sector. Gen Bikram Singh rang up the Sub-Area Commander in Srinagar who in turn called the Officiating COO, since, to my bad luck, the COO was away on casual leave on that date. (I sometimes wonder whether it was on purpose) I was sent for by the Officiating COO and told that it would be in the fitness of things that I go and apologize to Shri D P Dhar. I resented this injustice and argued with Maj Venugopal, the Officiating COO, about the unfairness of it all; that a junior officer who was only doing his duty, with the COO’s approval, instead of being protected, was being sent to apologize to a *politician*. He however, being an officiating incumbent, was unable to take a principled stand against the Sub Area Commander. Instead, the Officiating COO prevailed upon me claiming that I was too young to understand J&K politics and it would be in everyone’s interest to do as ordered by the Corps Commander. Politics I may not understand, I told him, but I do understand what is militarily correct or incorrect.

It was in a black mood that I went over to Shri D P Dhar’s residence. It was a different matter that he was sitting relaxed in an easy chair on the verandah of his house, smoking his pipe and reading a newspaper. I saluted and introduced myself and stated the purpose of my visit. He was thoroughly charming and understanding. He surprised me by stating that he realized how I must hate being sent to him in this fashion. No apology needed, he said. This was just to satisfy the civilian workers and the depot could continue to adhere to the newly promulgated timings. He offered me a wonderful cup of fragrant hot coffee and we chatted about this and that for the next 30 minutes. I left his residence with a tremendous amount of respect for him.

But the humiliation and anger of the Army throwing me at the Minister's mercy never left me. I resolved there and then that I shall never, ever, throw to the wolves, any junior serving under me.

In later life, when I was in command, there were at least two instances when I had to protect my officers from the powers that be. I stood like a rock, irrespective of consequences, insisting that in my command, any mistake could constructively be only attributed to me. If any junior officer needed to be sorted out, that would be done by me and me alone; provided I was convinced of his fault. To this date, the stand that I took on both occasions gladdens me no end.

Dealing with a Bad Hat

Strange as it may seem, I also had occasion to prevail upon the authorities to support me, as the COO of 15 FAD, in one case. An incident occurred in the unit whilst I was away attending the Senior Ordnance Officers' Course at AOC School, Jabalpur.

We had a bad hat who was a muslim jawan, who wrote a letter making all sorts of frivolous allegations against the Offg COO. Apparently, angered by something the OR had done, the Offg COO had taken him to task. The false letter was in retaliation. Copies of the letter were endorsed to the DGOS, CBI, Prime Minister and other dignitaries, and posted in Jammu. When the Offg COO heard of it he immediately despatched an officer to the postal authorities in Jammu to retrieve all the letters; which he did; all excepting the letter addressed to the Prime Minister. That letter trickled down through the MoD to the DGOS to investigate the matter.

When the MGAOC Northern Command received instructions from the Ordnance Directorate to look into the matter, he asked me for my comments; since I had returned from Jabalpur by then. I wrote to him to ignore the contents of the letter in its entirety because every allegation was false. The MGAOC informed Army HQ accordingly and recommended dropping the case. I presumed that would be the end of the matter.

But I was mistaken. A few days later the MGAOC received another communication from the DGOS asking the MGAOC to visit the unit and investigate the matter personally. When the MGAOC told me of it, I wrote back to him that I was appointed as COO of the unit and once my comments were asked, my word must carry. Was it to be my word against that of an OR? Or

were communal politics coming into the army? I asked. I demanded that the MGAOC support me fully. Of course I told him he was welcome to visit the unit but the day he did so, for this purpose, he may consider my resignation effective immediately.

The MGAOC, Maj Gen B N Dhar, was a man of stature and he persuaded Army HQ to drop the matter. But the MGAOC deterred me from taking any disciplinary action against the OR. I then insisted that I didn't want the OR in my unit. He was attached to another depot at Pathankot and we were all happy to learn some months later that he had sought early discharge and gone home.

Employment Hassles

We were employing workers in 2 FOD in 1964. The procedure required us to approach the local Employment Exchange which would send us 10 people against every vacancy to be filled. On the appointed day, we were surprised to see thousands of civilians thronging the gate. We had to call in the police to maintain law and order.

The employment procedure is that when a person registers he gets what is called a 'registration card'. When he is specifically recommended for employment he gets what is called an 'introduction card'. So for 50 vacancies we should have been recommended no more than 500 names at best. But given the corruption in the employment agency, they give introduction cards to all and sundry. When we saw 2000 people at the gate we were forced to call the Employment Officer to come to the depot and personally call out the names of the 500 people actually recommended. Those whose names were left out were so incensed that the crowd vented its anger on the Employment Officer by giving him a thorough thrashing, there and then.

Now it so happened that the final 500 named by the Employment Officer, a Mohamedan, were all Muslims. Muslims were in the majority in the Kashmir Valley. One of the minority Hindus who was not recommended wrote a letter to Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda who was then the Home Minister in the Central Government stating falsely that the Adm Officer was thoroughly corrupt and all those who shouted 'Pakistan Zindabad' were selected and all Hindus were left out. Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda had set up the Sadachar Samiti, an organization dedicated to rooting out corruption.

A few days later after the selection of workers, the depot exchange operator informed me that DDOS 15 Corps from Udhampur was paying a surprise visit to the depot the next day. When I asked why, I was informed - to conduct a personal inquiry against me. That shook me. And I informed my COO, Lt. Col. Jagir Singh. "Don't you worry about it" he assured me. "You don't know me. When I was the Adm Officer in OD Allahabad, I once had to order firing to restore law and order in the depot".

Since the DDOS had given no previous information of visiting the depot that day, the COO claimed he was too busy to see him immediately. Instead he requested the Brigadier to settle down in the VIP room in the Officers' Mess and invited him to dinner at his residence that evening. Over a drink, The COO explained the ground realities to the DDOS and wished that the DDOS had squashed the whole thing at his own level instead of making a wasted trip to Srinagar. And that was the last we heard of the matter,

Military Musings

COLONEL COMMANDANT

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

It was a proud day for me when the Director General of Ordnance Services and Senior Colonel Commandant handed over to me, in front of other General Officers of the Corps, the baton of the Colonel Commandant of the Army Ordnance Corps. It was a handsome, specially designed baton made of black ebony with several silver bands around it; on each of which was etched the name of a previous Colonel Commandant, affixed in the order of seniority. The silver band with my name inscribed on it was the last, at the bottom. The names were all reminders of the responsibility shouldered by those who had gone before me in shaping the Corps and looking after its welfare.

In the fighting arms, the appointment is termed as Colonel of the Regiment but in the services, the appointment is referred to as the Colonel Commandant of the Corps. The function is the same. The Colonel Commandant is a Godfather figure with certain regimental responsibilities, rights and privileges.

The process of election of the Colonel Commandant commences whenever a vacancy occurs. If an event can be foreseen, such as retirement of one of the Colonel Commandants, then the election process commences well in advance so that the name of the new Colonel Commandant can be announced at the earliest, on occurrence of the vacancy. But it often happens, for various reasons, the election gets delayed and the announcement of the next Colonel Commandant also gets delayed.

Small regiments / corps may have only one Colonel Commandant. But some decades ago the rule was changed and depending on the strength of the regiment or corps, a regiment / corps could have more than one Colonel. Thus the number of Colonels of the Regiment or Colonels Commandant for each arm or service is fixed by the Adjutant General with the approval of the COAS.

Earlier, regiments were free to select any officer of their choice, serving or retired, to serve as their Colonel. But this rule was changed in the 1970s and

only serving officers can now be elected to the post. Any officer of the rank of Brigadier or above, who is closely associated with or belongs to the regiment /corps could be elected to the post. It is understood that this rule has also since been changed and only the five senior most serving officers of the Corps are eligible for consideration, even if they are close to retirement.

The post of Colonel of the Regiment is the only elected appointment in the Army. All officers of the rank of Lt Col and above of that particular regiment /corps are eligible to vote. In the Ordnance Corps, the names of officers who are eligible for election to the post of Colonel Commandant are circulated by Army Headquarters to those officers who are eligible to vote. They send in their choice in a closed ballot and on the appointed day, when the votes are counted, the officer polling the largest number of votes, normally, gets to become the Colonel Commandant. But the name is not immediately announced. The result of the polling is confidentially conveyed to the Adjutant General by the DGOS and Senior Colonel Commandant and is approved by the Chief of Army Staff. Only then is the name of the appointee made public. The Adjutant General maintains a list of Colonels so appointed.

It must be remembered that the appointment of Colonel Commandant is a regimental procedure conducted for the benefit and welfare of the Corps. So the person polling the largest number of votes may not be automatically appointed if the DGOS and Senior Colonel Commandant feels strongly for some justified reason that such appointment may not be in overall interest of the Corps. I discovered this when (late) Lt Gen Virender Pratap who was DGOS and Senior Colonel Commandant when I was a Brigadier commanding COD Kanpur, confided to me that though I had polled the largest number of votes, he had recommended to the COAS that a General Officer who had the next highest number of votes be approved Colonel Commandant; since I was yet a junior Brigadier and my appointment would have caused resentment amongst the senior officers which could even prove to be detrimental to my own career interest. He was sure that I would be elected again sometime in the future. His faith in me proved to be prophetic.

I felt the full moral weight of becoming the Colonel Commandant when soon after my name was announced, I was accorded a special guard of honour at AOC Centre, Secunderabad. It was a singular honour and my heart swelled with pride when I inspected the perfectly turned out troops on parade. The colours were trooped for the occasion. I pledged silently to myself that I would never let them down and do everything in my power to justify their faith in me.

I was fortunate that when I finished my tenure in Northern Command, I was posted to Army HQ, New Delhi as Addl. DGOS (CN&A). The reason I say that the posting was fortuitous is that as Colonel Commandant I received a lot of informal feedback from the corps and the environment and as Addl.DGOS (CN&A) I could take official action to bring about improvements. At that time Lt Gen Surender Verma was DGOS and Senior Colonel Commandant. I always had his fullest understanding and backing. With his support I looked forward to being an effective Colonel Commandant and doing something truly useful for the troops.

Take for example my visit to an FAD located at Khundru in a remote corner of the Kashmir valley. The route to it was infested with militants and military personnel could only come and go in armed convoys, that too after the roads had been cleared and secured by road opening parties. The depot was literally cut off from the civilian world. The constant tension and concern for the protection of the depot and its personnel was telling on all. The depot personnel were considerably harassed on account of various security restrictions. The harsh field conditions were tough. The NCOs and OR were not even getting two nights of continuous sleep in bed due to being detailed on some special patrol / guard duty / QRT every alternative night.

After I had addressed the depot personnel in a special Sainik Sammelan, I asked them if they had any special problem that anybody would like to bring to my notice. One NCO raised his hand and I allowed him to speak. He said that EME had laid down a two-year tenure for its personnel posted in the Kashmir Valley whereas Ordnance had a three-year tenure. Given the harsh field conditions due to the ongoing insurgency, could Ordnance also consider a two-year tenure for its personnel? I assured the troops that I felt that the request was reasonable and justifiable and I would see what I could do about it.

Immediately after my return to Delhi, I discussed the matter with the DGOS and Senior Colonel Commandant who concurred with my recommendation to reduce the tenure of Ordnance personnel in the valley also to two years. Instructions were issued to AOC Records to control postings accordingly. That single measure greatly raised the morale of the corps.

One matter of concern to us senior officers at that time was the large number of anonymous letters and court cases amongst lower ranks. We took deliberate measures to discourage such activity and through letters and talks assured everyone that their genuine problems were always heard. All that the

OR needed to do was give a simple application addressed to the DGOS and Senior Colonel Commandant through the CO and if their grievance could be redressed, it would be done speedily. Over a period of time the number of anonymous complaints came down noticeably.

Yet another distressing problem was that some ordnance unit or the other was always getting into trouble for one reason or the other. Loss of a classified document sent by JCO courier, industrial unrest, rifle being fired inadvertently in the armoury while unloading it to deposit the weapon, fraud of imprest money and so on. The earlier tendency was to hush things up or not speak about them. It was like an ostrich burying its head in the sand. Instead, with the support of the DGOS and Senior Colonel Commandant we took two measures that improved matters greatly. One was a general letter that we issued to all units listing the sort of problems repeatedly occurring in ordnance units and also the contents of draft audit paras that we were dealing with in Army HQ. This was to create awareness in units about the sort of things to avoid.

The second measure that we adopted was issue of DO letters by me to all officers individually, who were newly posted as Commandants, Deputy Commandants or as Administrative Officers of depots and DOUs emphasising the responsibility of their job and guiding them on specific issues that were concerning the Corps. One thing we made abundantly clear. If things went wrong in units due to their carelessness or due to deliberate wrong-doing, they could expect no help from higher headquarters. They would have to face the music and suffer the consequences. Such straight talk helped considerably.

Some officers who received such a DO letter from me later admitted in private that it was a big help and timely reminder of their responsibilities. They were guided by my advice.

I often used to reflect on why things go wrong in units. My own conclusions? Unit problems could be attributed to one or more of the following factors: -

- Everyone was in a chain of command but there was failure of control at some level or the other.
- Weak Commanding Officers not following laid down practices.
- Lack of professionalism.
- Lack of regimentation.
- The mistaken belief that if something went wrong, someone higher up would bail them out.

But the happiest part of my being a Colonel Commandant was being able to help officers and men in real distress who would approach me with their problems asking for postings or detailment on courses. I would make appropriate recommendations to the Col MS 15 / OS 8 who controlled Ordnance movements. It also gladdened me no end to congratulate the achievers; a competitive vacancy in Staff College, scaling the mountains in adventure activities, selection on UN/foreign assignments or courses, and of course, promotions. I flagged off adventure activities, visited units, enforced improvements and really felt that I had put in my bit. Gen Verma and I took special care to offer timely advice to Commandants of depots/DOUs who we felt were weak or trying to be unconventional in solving problems or departing from time tested and officially approved store-keeping procedures.

There is a view in a section of the Army that the practice of appointing Colonel Commandants is unnecessary. After all, every senior officer has equal responsibility in the welfare of the Corps. Yet the system has endured. So much so that what was only an Army tradition has now been adopted by the Air Force and Navy too.

I finished my tenure as Colonel Commandant on a high note with the crowning success of the sixth AOC Reunion. A thoroughly satisfying experience. When I look back over the years I feel a flush of pleasure remembering the very special privilege that I enjoyed as Colonel Commandant of the Army Ordnance Corps for almost three years.

The Colonel Commandant's baton is a very prized possession.

Military Musings

ORDNANCE ODDITIES

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Night Training

Ordnance depots often have to issue Non-Availability (NA) Certificates to units when there are stock-outs and issue such stores later, on materialization of stocks.

Now, the Sub Area Commander in Srinagar was a stickler for night training and he was insistent that service units also carry out night training religiously.

So, it came to be that the Chief Ordnance Officer (COO) of the local Field Ordnance Depot decided to make night issues once a month. Wanting the first training event to be a success, the COO told his Deputy to ring up a particular battalion commander, his friend, and request the battalion to collect their stores that night.

The CO of the infantry battalion was skeptical when he received the request *“Din mein to NA detey hain, raat ko kaunse stores issue karengey?”*

Not Available

Receiving an NA certificate instead of the indented store, bugs combat units no end; as brought out in this limerick by Major Ashok Mahajan in his book *“Uniformly Crazy”*

Every article in the Army has an ordnance label
You must know the part and catalogue and table
But why rack your brain
It's all in vain
Any item you demand is not ava'ble.

Issue in Lieu

When I was Brigade Ordnance Officer in a field area, our ‘sparrow’, the Signals officer, was a close friend of mine. One day he confessed to me his great desire to display a battle tank at the entrance of his unit and requested me to arrange to issue one to him.

“You must be nuts” I told him. “How on earth do you imagine I can issue you a tank?” I asked.

“Simple” he replied. “I’ll demand a Tank Mule (water pakhal) – you say “NA - issued Tank Sherman in lieu”

Meaningful Monogram

Newly raised units are required to collect their stores from the Central Ordnance Depots (CODs) directly. Collection of stores from Ordnance Depots can be a harrowing experience at most times. It takes days at times after meeting the Deputy Commandant, visiting the Control Branch, various sub-depots, Traffic Branch and so on. The sub depots are located far apart and even the store sheds are well spaced out. In the heat of summer, it is a trying experience, walking around from one store shed to another.

Now, every depot has its own unique monogram e.g. COD Agra is represented by the monogram AGD, meaning Agra Depot. Similarly COD Kanpur is represented by KND meaning Kanpur Depot.

When I was Commandant of COD Kanpur, as I drove into the depot one morning, my staff car passed two infantry subalterns, on foot, who had apparently been sent by their newly raised units to collect stores for their respective units.

It was later reported to me by one of my own officers that the Subalterns had been in the Depot for the past few days and were experiencing frustration in collecting their stores given the heat, the distance they had to walk and the inevitable NAs. They noticed the depot monogram KND in brass letters on my staff car as I passed them. One Subaltern enquired from the other what KND stood for? “*Kuch Nahin Deta*” was the immediate clarification from his exasperated companion.

Giant Vipers

No one loves secrecy, as do the Armed Forces. Sometimes it affects its own efficient functioning. Import of warlike stores is one aspect of logistics that is often draped in secrecy. So much so that even the Ordnance Corps which is supposed to receive and hold the equipment learns of it only after the stores have actually arrived at some port and the Army is incurring huge wharfage charges. This incident which I heard when I was once in Army Headquarters is one such laughable example

The Embarkation Headquarters in Bombay was once very agitated that a consignment of 'giant vipers' was not being collected by the Ordnance. The Embarkation Headquarters reported the matter to the Quarter Master General (QMG) who in turn informed the Master General of Ordnance (MGO). The MGO asked the Director of Ordnance Services (DOS) about it. The query trickled right down to the relevant section in Army Headquarters, which dealt with provisioning of MT (Mechanical Transport) stores. The MT Section had to refer it to the Weapons and Equipment Directorate to ascertain details about the imported item and the combat vehicle that the wipers were meant for.

After a few days and much expediting by the bosses it was finally revealed that the item was not an MT spare after all but an explosive item used in the clearance of minefields. Giant Viper was a colloquial term used to describe a Charge Line Mine Clearing, or CLMC for short. Needless to add, matters were speedily resolved thereafter, much to the relief of the harassed Embarkation Headquarters.

Bi-annual Provisioning

In the seventies, the Army appeared to be continually plagued by shortage of tyres. Different sized tyres, pertaining to various vehicles were not available at different times. Fed up with receiving complaints about tyre shortages, the Director of Ordnance Services decided to bring about a basic improvement in the provisioning procedure itself. So the concerned depot, COD Bombay, was directed to go in for bi-annual provisioning, as against annual provisioning, in the case of tyres only i.e. provisioning of all types of tyres every six months instead of once every twelve months. Thus, in effect, tyres would be provisioned, and procured, twice a year thereby ensuring better availability.

When the situation was still not improving enquiries were made from the depot if the new bi-annual provisioning practice had been adopted. The depot replied in the affirmative. Half the total number of tyres in the inventory were being provisioned in the first six months and the balance tyres in the second half of the year.

The Lady LDC

All ordnance depots follow a practice called mustering –in. Every morning, when the workers are streaming into the depot, all officers from the COO downwards are required to be present at the main gate. One morning in Ordnance Depot, Talegaon Dhabade, when I was DCOO, a very smart and impressionable young woman, a newly recruited South Indian Lower Division Clerk (LDC), walked into the depot, resplendent in a new sari. She was the cynosure of all eyes.

Posting of all civilians was my responsibility. Immediately after the COO had driven off to his office, two of the sub-depot commanders reminded me that they were short of clerks. I batted them off on one pretext or the other. Secretly, I planned to make up the existing deficiency of one lady clerk in Ex-Branch, my own office secretariat.

When I reached my office, I was handed a note by my PA which had been sent to her by the COO's PA. The COO desired that the new lady clerk be posted to the HQ Section attached to his office.

Trendsetter

2/Lt Dilip Manjrekar had just been posted to AOC Centre. When he entered the officers' mess, he found a very senior officer, Major Dhaiya, in the anteroom, reading a newspaper. Major Dhaiya was a cynical superseded old man, close to retirement.

The subaltern greeted the officer and Major Dhaiya asked him who he was. "2/Lt Manjrekar Sir. I have been commissioned into the AOC and this is my first posting Sir".

"You must have passed out at the bottom of your course".

“No Sir” refuted Manjrekar. “I was a JUO in IMA and have passed out high in the merit list. I am a sportsman. I played cricket in IMA which is why I have been posted here”.

“Oh I see” sighed Major Dhaiya. “Trend is changing”.

Trousers on the Table

Just before taking over 15 FAD on promotion to Lt Col, I was attached to MG/OS-14, the coord section of the Ordnance Directorate. The duties of the coord section as the name implied, implied coordinating all the official matters of the Directorate to ensure its smooth functioning.

As narrated to me by late Col M S Murthy, one evening, just before closing hours, the then DGOS Lt Gen S S Sandhu, a fire-breathing dragon who required everything completed yesterday, told the Director Coord that he had a meeting in the Ministry of Defence the following day at 10 am. He wanted a particular file on his table by 0930. “The matter is very important” said Gen Sandhu “tell the Director of the section that if the file is not on my table by 9:30 sharp, I’ll have his pants”. The orders were dutifully passed on to the concerned section.

Next morning when Gen Sandhu entered his office, instead of the file he found a neatly folded pair of trousers on his table.

Military Musings

CHANGE FRONT

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Gentlemen Cadets in the Indian Military Academy attend a lot of tactical exercises with troops to learn the various operations of war in different types of terrain and weather conditions e.g. mountain warfare, jungle warfare, warfare in the plains etc. The aim is to teach company and platoon level tactics for day as well as night operations.

Panipat Company and Sinhagarh Company were occupying positions in the Tons Valley near Dehra Dun for a defence exercise in the plains. Panipat Company was deployed on the frontline facing the enemy. Sinhagarh Company was located in depth and acting as the reserve company.

I was the platoon runner of one of the platoons of Panipat Company. The job of the platoon runner is conveying messages from the platoon commander to subordinate section commanders deployed in the field as also carrying and firing of a Very Light pistol to illuminate the battlefield at night, firing success signals etc on orders of the platoon commander. My close friend and course mate, Corporal Ramdas Mohan was the platoon commander for this exercise. Between the two of us we created a shambles, the likes of which may not have been seen for many years in IMA. It certainly caused our Panipat Company Directing Staff (DS), Maj (later Lt Gen) Vijay Madan of the Gorkhas, to tear his hair in anger and despair.

Our battalion was depicted as occupying a defended area for plains warfare. We were overlooking a shallow valley supposedly occupied by the enemy. The Gorkha Demo Troops who were acting as enemy were probing our front and trying to assess our strength. In the pitch dark of the night they opened fire (blank rounds) at us and with our fire discipline being what it was, the whole battalion front erupted with our return fire. Cpl Mohan was going hoarse, running from section to section and personally shouting at everyone to stop firing. Hardly anybody could hear in all that din. I told Mohan the only way to control the firing was to fire a red Very light. "So do it" he barked at me.

I felt for the cartridge in my pouch and in all that excitement couldn't rightly figure out the symbol embossed at the top of the cartridge for the red Very light. What I fired by mistake was a green Very light which needless to say had exactly the opposite effect. Instead of stopping fire, now everyone fired off their remaining ammunition with renewed vigour. It took some doing and firing of the red Very light finally, to bring things back under control. The battlefield fell ominously silent.

There was a lull in the battle after that. After about fifteen minutes when I looked back I was aghast to see troops attacking us from behind. I tapped Mohan on the shoulder. "We are being attacked from the rear" "Don't be stupid" he told me "the enemy is in front of us" "So look for yourself" Mohan turned back and nearly did a summersault to see figures in extended line advancing on us with fixed bayonets.

Mohan was nothing if not a man of action. He gave a command which had never been given by anybody manning a defence line before. "Change Front" he thundered. The sections were wondering if he had gone bonkers. "They are behind us" shouted Mohan goading them into fast action. LMGs were removed from their fixed lines and entire sections turned about and pointed their weapons rearwards.

Just then we heard the voice of the reserve company commander shouting at us in the dark. "Don't shoot. We are Sinhagarh Company counter attacking to recapture the area" "What counter attack? What recapture?" shouted back Cpl Mohan "We haven't even been attacked yet". He tried to remedy the situation by ordering "Change Front" yet again. By this time Sinhagarh Company was almost upon us. The resulting chaos was complete and beyond description.

The exercise had to be frozen, Panipat and Sinhagarh companies had to disengage and return to our original positions but mercifully daylight prevented us from having to enact it all over again. Our DS, Major Vijay Madan was livid at us; he swore that he would see that Mohan and I never got commissioned into the infantry.

Although pretending to be suitably chastised at the mouthful we got from the DS, I was secretly thrilled because all along I wanted to be commissioned into the Army Ordnance Corps. Mohan, however did get commissioned into the Madras Regiment and retired as a Lt Gen, I might add, after a very impressive

military career in which he fought three wars and distinguished himself: once against the Chinese in 1962 and twice against Pakistan in 1965 and in 1971. He retired as the Director General of the National Cadet Corps.

Military Musings

TRAINING TALES

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Manning the Mast

Excellent eyesight was not the only gift that God had blessed him with. RSM Ayling was reputed to have the eighth loudest voice on earth. We tended to believe it, because once, during a rehearsal in NDA for the forthcoming passing-out parade, the first termers who were manning the mast had to shout 'passing out course ki Jai' in unison, to cheer the passing out cadets, as they passed out in slow march over the Quarter Deck. The RSM was furious that the cadets were not shouting loudly enough.

"You're bloody whispering" shouted the RSM and his solitary voice resounded several times times in the surrounding Khadkvasla hills. Indeed, his voice was so loud, that the cadet who was closest to him on the mast, was so startled that he lost his footing on the rope ladder and fell into the safety net below.

Jungle Warfare

An exercise in IMA was our first experience in the jungle. The dark of the jungle and sounds of the night are a frightening experience for the uninitiated. Even before we entered the jungle we were warned of wounded tigers and rampaging elephants. The GCs tended to bunch up and keep in close proximity of each other. No one wanted to be the last man on the march lest a prowling tiger quietly pounce upon him from the rear.

After a long and weary march we entered a clearing where we were to halt for the night. After preparing defences, posting lookouts, digging shallow trench latrines and pitching our bivouacs we settled down for some welcome rest. But sleep eluded us. We had elephants on our mind. Just as we were nodding off there was a blood curdling yell in the night. GC Thapliyal thought that he had been bitten by a snake; actually it was only a scorpion. He shot up so fast he upturned the entire bivouac. It was after two in the night when we finally fell

asleep. Suddenly someone yelled “Hathi” and the whole camp dashed about hither and thither, like headless chickens, in total pandemonium. One GC climbed a low tree as if that would have prevented an elephant from getting at him. I swear that I actually saw a charging elephant and ran pell-mell into a tree and knocked myself out cold. I must have seen it in my mind’s eye because when sanity returned, we discovered that there was never any elephant attack. It was simply an attack of nerves.

Two other incidents that I shall always remember from our jungle training is that on the third day we were chased by a swarm of bees and I was bitten on my hand which swelled up like a bun. That was not funny.

What was funny was that when we were finally striking camp to return to IMA, we could not find the shallow trench latrines. We had to recover the angle iron pickets and hessian cloth, picks and shovels and other defence stores left there. The detail which was ordered to dig the shallow trench latrines had proceeded on a compass bearing at night in the unfamiliar jungle, measured off the distance in their minds by counting the steps taken and dug the pits at what they thought was the designated location. No one could find the latrines by daylight for the rest of our stay in the jungle. We ended up using the facilities of the adjacent company; much to their disgust.

But our Company Commander, who was made of sterner stuff, would brook no suggestion to simply abandon the ‘shit pits’. The defence stores had to be recovered and accounted for. So in extended line we combed the forest in the approximate direction till we stumbled across the latrines quite far away; and not quite in the same direction either.

Distances and direction in the dark of the forest and at night can be very misleading indeed.

We were the last to return to IMA and we never forgave the characters who were detailed for that particular task.

Ganga Jal

GC Acchu Nair was an adorable rascal. He was always up to mischief. At end of term in IMA Dehra Dun, just as we were all preparing to pack up and leave for our term break, Acchu Nair was spotted filling a bottle of water from one of the East Block taps. But what made everyone curious was the fact that he had with him a box of matches and some red sealing wax.

As Acchu put it, his father found it very difficult to part with money. Since he did not have enough cash to enjoy himself during the mid-term break earlier that term, he had to cook up a sob story for his grandmother of how he wished to go on pilgrimage to the holy city of Hardwar but was unable to do so because he was broke.

The ruse worked. His grandmother obliged him and Acchu Nair went to the hill station of Mussorie and had himself a grand time. But his grandmother had requested him to get her some 'Ganga Jal', water from the holy Ganges River at Hardwar, which is sacred to all Hindus. Being an obedient grandson, he was collecting 'Ganga Jal' for his grandmother from the company tap.

Upraised Tank Gun

The Armoured Regiment had returned from an exercise after several days. The tank crews were busy cleaning their tanks. One crew, the Squadron Commander was surprised to notice, was cleaning their tank with the main gun fully elevated. He asked to know the reason why?

Apparently the tanks were in a defensive role during the exercise and the tank men, who would have preferred to charge through the deserts unfettered, were hunkered down in defensive positions. Apparently they were fed up of hearing orders like dig down, head down, hull down, periscope down, turret down, sun down and stand down. The sikh troops thought that it would be good for morale to have something up. Hence the tank gun pointing to the sky.

Military Musings

INCREDIBLE INDIA

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

India has done it again. The alacrity with which India responded to the earthquake disaster in Turkey and Syria on 6th Feb 2023 amazed even the Turkish Ambassador in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi displayed strong political will in doing so which was much appreciated by all. Turkey called India its 'dost' (friend) and that word became the name of the disaster relief operation in Turkey: Operation Dost.

Giant C-17 Globemasters of the IAF took off from Hindon airbase in India carrying tons of relief material, medical aid worth crores of rupees and NDRF teams with sniffer dogs to help in the immediate relief and rescue efforts. The army medical team consisted of 99 personnel including one lady doctor of 50 (Independent) Parachute Brigade which set up a 30 bed field hospital in the Hatay region of Iskenderun immediately on arrival and started working sleeplessly round the clock aiding injured victims and even other non-earthquake related cases who flocked to the hospital for medical assistance. Turkey has repeatedly expressed appreciation of India's superb reaction. Many ordinary Turkish citizens who were treated by Indian Army doctors felt overwhelmed by the care and attention they received. By the time the hospital wound up its activities to return to India on 18th Feb, the doctors had treated almost 4000 patients. They came in for much praise and adulation from the Turkish citizens.

However, this article is not about earthquake relief to Turkey. It is about intervention in the Maldives in Nov 1988; a different type of real-life success story code-named Op Cactus: but just as exciting as any television thriller. The facts about Op Cactus are extracted from Gen V N Sharma's personal account of the event, retrieved from the internet.

A few weeks ago, my wife and I had occasion to host Ronen Sen, an old friend and a retired Foreign Service officer, and his wife Kalpana, who were on a visit to Pune: at the Rajendra Sinhji Institute, our army club. Over pre-lunch drinks we got to reminiscing about our old eventful days in Dacca in the 1970s when he was the First Secretary and I was AMA in the High Commission of India in

Bangladesh. Ronen went on to become a part of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's team in the PMO at New Delhi and later India's ambassador to USA.

It was Ronen Sen when he was in the PMO who called up Gen V N Sharma, COAS, on a fine winter morning on 3rd Nov 1988, using the RAX secure communications system, just as the Chief was about to leave Army House for his office in South Block. Ronen informed the Chief that there was an emergency in the Maldives. The capital, Male, had been taken over by some 100-200 terrorists, apparently from Sri Lanka. President Gayoom had gone into hiding in a civil home. His headquarters, palace and security services headquarters had been captured and a number of his ministers taken hostage. The PMO had received an SOS for help on a tenuous satellite phone from their Tourism Minister's house. The PM was asking if the military could help? The NSG had also been alerted.

The Chief immediately replied in the affirmative and suggested 1100 hours in the Army Ops Room for briefing the PM. Even before he left Army House, the Chief had called up Lt Gen S F Rodrigues (later COAS), the then Vice-Chief of Army Staff, to alert the DGMO, Lt Gen V K Singh (later COAS) and Brig Faroukh Balsara, Commander of 50 (Indep) Parachute Brigade at Agra and alert the formation on short notice for deployment. Brig Balsara would lead one self-contained Parachute Battalion Group to Male for the rescue attempt.

Gen Rodrigues went on to meet the Cabinet Secretary, Shri B G Deshmukh whilst the Chief dialled the VCNS, Vice Admiral Gulab Hirandani and the VCAS, Air Marshal Nirmal Suri on the RAX, to join him in his office to plan for an immediate operational task. (The Chiefs of the Navy and Air Force were both on tour abroad). By 0845 hours they were poring over the naval charts (survey land maps of the islands not being immediately available) and formalising initial plans. They studied the various sea passages and islands of the Lakshadweep, Minicoy and Maldives. The islands were depicted in outline devoid of any physical features. The main island of Male was two nautical miles distant from Hulule, the small coral airport island. The runway of the airport extended for half the length into the ocean.

Ronen was immediately contacted at the PMO and asked to enquire from the Tourism Minister the location of all boats used to convey tourists and visitors from the airport to Male. The boats were all found to be at the Male docks as the international flights had arrived that morning. Instructions were passed to move all boats back discreetly from Male to Hulule without raising suspicion

and for all boats to remain at the airport till further instructions. This would restrict movement of terrorists to Hulule.

On getting the message, Brig Balsara immediately cancelled an airborne exercise and returned by special IAF helicopter to Agra. 6 Para was nominated and the group along with weapons, ammunition and equipment was assembled. The CO was briefed and they were ready to take off by evening. Speed and surprise were the essence of the operation to prevent own casualties and not to give the terrorists any inkling of what was happening.

Since total flying distance was some 3000 kms from Agra, with some 2000 kms to our last airfield at Tiruvantapuram in Kerala and 1000 kms across the ocean to Hulule in the Maldivian Islands, the transport fleet would require refuelling en route to allow aircraft to return to Tiruvantapuram if landings were not possible.

Air Marshal Suri also stated that Hulule was a foreign airfield and the IAF pilots would have to use international coordinates and air routes to locate it. In case daylight landings were not possible the airport lights would be needed to be switched on just before the landings. It was decided to have naval air surveillance established by first light next day and selected warships on standby for contingencies based on the way the situation developed. The crux of the plan was the successful landing of the troops-carrying aircraft at Hulule since a parachute drop was ruled out; The VCAS was confident that his pilots would succeed.

PM Rajiv Gandhi and his colleagues in the Cabinet Committee for Political Affairs (CCPA) arrived at the army ops room at 11:15 hours with the Cabinet secretary and Secretaries of the concerned ministries. Shri KC Pant the Defence Minister and Shri Arun Singh, the Raj Raksha Mantri (RRM) were present along with the Navy and Air Force Vice Chiefs with their operations staff. Gen Rodrigues and the DGMO briefed the gathering of the outline plan on the naval charts. Gen Sharma also emphasised that a positive political decision was the right course and must ensure open and public use of our military and not clandestine forces such as the NSG which may give a false view to the international community of India's intentions in a foreign country which had sought its help.

The PM agreed with the Chief but stressed that a large number of casualties were not politically acceptable. The COAS was frank that there could be some

casualties but he felt confident that if surprise was achieved, casualties could be totally avoided. The military risk was acceptable. The PM gave his immediate assent to the operation. Thereafter the DGMO and the staff of the other two services got down to planning the nitty-gritty of the operation and issuing necessary orders.

There had been a call from the Foreign Ministry that India's diplomatic representative in Maldives was in Delhi and could be of help. The DGMO had arranged for him to reach Agra by an Air Force aircraft to coordinate with Brig Balsara. He flew in the lead aircraft with the Brigade Commander and was indeed of great help at the Maldives as he personally knew everyone there including the President and acted as contact man for both governments.

The Defence Secretary, Shri T N Seshan kept regularly enquiring about the progress of the preparations from the Ops Room throughout the day and kept the PM continuously informed.

The Para Brigade contingent was able to take off at about 1800 hours. They staged through Tiruvantapuram civil airport where the Air Force had taken over the air traffic control and established arrangements for refuelling, maintenance and final briefing of air crew and troops. Information regularly came into the Ops Room till the departure of the transport planes across the ocean to the island of Hulule .

After some meticulous navigation and expert flying in a dark night, the huge IL-76 transport piloted by Group Captain Anant Bewoor (son of late Gen GG Bewoor, former COAS) came in vicinity of Hulule. The pilot's request for switching on the runway lights was efficiently conveyed to the ATC through the Maldives Tourism Minister. The landing, shortly after midnight, was also smoothly conducted with no ground opposition, and the remaining stream of transport aircraft flew in at regular intervals. The Para Battalion quickly secured the airfield and commandeered all available boats for crossing the sea to Male.

The terrorists in Male were panic stricken when they saw the landings of large transport planes at Hulule. They took immediate action to round up all their armed personnel and board their merchant ship which was standing by at anchor. They took all hostages including five ministers of the Maldives Government on board and made haste to sail away towards Sri Lanka. The paratroopers saw this and attempted to engage the ship with anti-tank

recoilless guns from Hulule but with little effect because the rebel ship was already out of range.

The Navy was tasked to intercept the hostile ship. At first light next morning the ship was sighted by naval surveillance planes well out to sea, sailing in the direction of southern Sri Lanka. Two frigates, INS Betwa and INS Godavari were tasked for this job. One sailed from Kochi Naval Base and the other was returning from a ceremonial visit to West Australia and happened to be rounding the Southern coast of Sri Lanka, sailing for Kochi. Both frigates closed in at full speed and were able to intercept the hostile ship. The terrorist captain initially refused to surrender threatening to kill the Ministers and scuttling the ship. After some adroit handling of the situation by the captains of the warships, including some effective firing which damaged the bridge and disabled the communications and control systems of the hostile ship, it finally surrendered.

It was boarded and towed back to Kochi with all hostages freed and the terrorists in captivity. The ship and terrorists were all handed over to the custody of Male authorities and hostages returned to their homes. President Gayoom profusely thanked PM Rajiv Gandhi and requested that CO 6 Para and essential troops be permitted to stay on in Male to train and reorganise the security forces for protection of the country. This was agreed to and these troops returned to India only in June 1990, over a year after completing this task and making many friends amongst the Maldavians.

Operation Cactus was India's most successful tri-service military intervention across the ocean in a foreign country on its plea for help. It was executed brilliantly without a single mishap, with great speed and no casualties, with all military objectives effectively achieved. The operation succeeded despite no forces or procedures existing for rapid deployment and execution of military tasks, no maps, no actionable intelligence, that too on a dark moonless night.

Gen V N Sharma recounts that it was made possible because there were very firm and quick political decisions and clear directions at the highest level, total cooperation between the Defence and Foreign ministries, the three armed service headquarters and all troops involved. Above all, good personal relations and humour among all political parties, the service chiefs, diplomats and concerned bureaucrats. There were tremendous 'guts', quick initiative and bold effective action among junior commanders and troops. The success vaulted India into the ranks of great powers who could respond with speed

against criminal acts against weak independent nations well beyond our borders. This achievement was politically and militarily adroit and backed by all powerful countries including USA and the Soviet Union who were themselves unable to act from afar.

There is no doubt that India can achieve any task with such cooperation amongst all stake holders. Luck also favoured India: as also the bold plan.

Op Cactus was simply flawless.

Incredible India.

Jai Hind.

Military Musings

SHABASH INDIA

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

“All Indians evacuated from Sumy in East Ukraine” “PM Modi holds back to back talks with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin” “Immaculate diplomatic effort” “Bangladesh Prime Minister thanks PM Modi” screamed the headlines in press and media lauding India’s Operation Ganga in March 2022.

India needs to feel proud of this outstanding achievement. Can one imagine the Prime Minister of any country speaking to the heads of two bitterly warring nations, arranging a ceasefire and safe corridor for evacuation of its nationals? Well, India pulled off this seemingly impossible feat.

I marvel at it particularly since I have had some diplomatic experience and realise the difficulties and intricacies of bringing about this desired result. Also, as a military man who has participated in wars, I well realise the military angle to the happenings. As a logistician who has been involved with military logistics for decades I am acquainted with the difficulties of organising food, transport, shelter, medical aid, water and communications for thousands of people, at short notice who are being evacuated from different adjoining countries. I have also seen at first hand the distress of thousands of people suffering during natural calamities. Hence I can well appreciate the effort in all its dimensions. The coordination effort required is herculean and requires delegation of emergency financial powers and delegation of authority for taking decisions, to committed people on the ground. The Government of India and our diplomats in particular certainly deserve a pat on the back for it.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine brought about untold suffering to almost 20,000 Indian students mainly studying in medical colleges in different cities of Ukraine. They suffered aerial bombing, missile attacks and artillery shelling along with other common Ukrainian citizens and were forced to hunker down in bunkers and air raid shelters while the cities were destroyed around them. They ran out of food and starved for almost five days. At least one Indian student got killed and one suffered a bullet injury. Electricity got cut off and

the mobile batteries went dead. It was very cold without heating, and some reported having to melt snow to obtain drinking water. They suffered untold privation and battle fatigue from loss of sleep and mental weariness. With their fate being uncertain, many started making their own way toward the Ukrainian border, to the nearest country possible for safety and shelter. According to an UN estimate, over three million Ukrainians have fled their country, and along with them, Indian citizens and students: to adjoining Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Moldova and Romania.

The Prime Minister, realising the immense coordination efforts required in the growing Ukrainian crisis, deputed four of his ministers to go to the countries involved and help in the safe evacuation of Indians from there. Gen V K Singh, Minister of State in the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways was deputed to Poland, Shri Kiren Rijiju, Minister for Law and Justice, to the border of Slovakia, Shri Hardip Singh Puri, Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas as also Housing and Urban Affairs to Hungary and Shri Jyotiraditya Scindia, Minister for Civil Aviation to Romania and Moldova.

Operation Ganga was organised to provide humanitarian relief to Indian nationals stuck in the war zone in Ukraine. It involved the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Indian Air Force. 76 flights of Air India, Indigo Airlines, Spice Jet, Air India Express, Vistara, Go First and Air Asia, supported by three giant IAF C-17 Globemasters commenced operations on 26th Feb 2022 and ended with the last flight of evacuees of Sumy being brought home on 12th Mar 2022. Some 22,500 Indians along with almost 2000 foreigners including Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Pakistani and African students were also evacuated by Indian aircraft. The human remains of the dead student and the injured student were also brought back to India. Out bound IAF aircraft were utilised to carry relief materials and medicines for Ukraine. The Government of India was in touch with the Red Cross both in Geneva as well as Ukraine.

Op Ganga was preceded By Mission Vande Bharat. While Ukraine airports were still open, on 18th Feb 2022 Air India had announced that it would operate three flights to Ukraine on Feb 24th, 25th and 26th under Vande Bharat, to bring back Indian Nationals from that country. Ukrainian air space was shut to international air traffic thereafter.

The Government of India established separate help lines to keep anxious relatives informed about the safety of their wards, developments in the war

zone and progress of talks and the evacuation from the different countries. It is also taking special measures for the Ukrainian returnees to continue their medical education uninterrupted in Indian medical colleges, which is laudable.

Reflecting on this evacuation brought to mind a video clip I once saw of late Mrs Sushma Swaraj, when she was External Affairs Minister, addressing an audience at some forum. She was of course speaking in Hindi but the gist of what she said has remains etched in my memory.

She said people ask her why does the PM go out of India so often? What does India gain from such visits? She clarified to the audience that the PM does not go abroad for a holiday or for sight- seeing. It is for establishing rapport with world leaders, learning about each other's capabilities and compulsions and for building trust and improving relations, cementing friendships, promoting trade opportunities between the respective countries and bringing in investment. And she claimed that she had repeatedly seen the impact of such rapport at work in the five years that she was Minister for External Affairs.

She cited the example of Yemen. When war broke out in that country, bombs were raining from the skies, fierce fighting was taking place on the ground and the seas were infested by pirates. How was one to evacuate the Indians from Yemen?

She spoke to the PM and reminded him that he had met the Saudi King in Australia and established a good understanding with him; why not call him and ask for a cease fire for seven days? The PM spoke to him and the King promised to get back to him within an hour. The Saudi King, true to his word, called the PM within the hour and stated that he had discussed the matter with his people. An outright cease fire for seven days was difficult but he could guarantee a two hour respite in the fighting for seven days continuously, at fixed times, so that we could evacuate the Indians in that time window.

The rest is history. Sushma Swaraj spoke to the Yemeni authorities and got the airport opened for Indian aircraft in those time slots. She told Gen V K Singh, then a Minister of State in the MEA, that she would coordinate the evacuation from Delhi and he should immediately proceed to Djibouti to control operations in the field.

India succeeded in evacuating approximately 5000 Indians and 2000 foreigners from 48 nations because western nations pleaded with India to get their citizens out also. Some Pakistanis were also evacuated. Mrs Sushma

Swaraj ended her talk by reminding the audience that the success of the mission was entirely because of the understanding that the Prime Minister had developed with the Saudi King in Brisbane.

India seems to be uniquely placed in the world because massive air/sea operations to evacuate Indians from war zones/distress areas appears to have become a somewhat common occurrence in the recent past. More and more countries are turning to India in times of crisis for help in getting their nationals evacuated.

In 2006 India launched Operation Sukoon for the Indian Navy to rescue Indian, Sri Lankan, Nepalese and Lebanese nationals from Lebanon. In Feb 2011, Operation Safe Homecoming was launched by the Indian government to evacuate its citizens who were fleeing from the Libyan war. The evacuation was conducted by the Indian Navy and Air India.

In 2013, Operation Rahat was the name given to Indian Air Force's rescue operation to evacuate civilians from the flood affected hill states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Thousands of pilgrims were stranded in various valleys. It was the largest rescue operation in the world by any Air Force to rescue civilians using helicopters. The flooding occurred on 16th June and from 17 June onwards, while the army helped on the ground, the IAF flew 2140 sorties rescuing 19,600 stranded pilgrims and dropping/landing 3,82,400 kg of relief material and equipment.

In April 2015, Operation Maîtri was a rescue and relief operation conducted in Nepal by the Government of India on account of a massive earthquake that hit our Himalayan neighbour. The operation was organised by the Indian Armed Forces immediately on getting information of the calamity.

2021 saw Operations; Samudra Setu and Samudra Setu II.

Samudra Setu missions were undertaken by the Government during the COVID pandemic in 2021 using nine Indian Naval Ships. INS Airavat, Kolkota and Trikanth reached Indian shores carrying liquid medical oxygen cylinders from Singapore, Kuwait and Qatar respectively. INS Jalshava brought back 687 Indian nationals from Iran. INS Airavat brought back 198 citizens from Maldives. INS Kesari evacuated our people from Port Louis, Mauritius and Port Victoria in Seychelles. INS Shardul brought back another 233 nationals from Iran. Some ships were despatched to Brunei and the Far East to embark medical supplies.

On 16th August 2021, the Government of India sanctioned Operation Devi Shakti for the Indian Armed Forces to evacuate Indian citizens from Afghanistan before Kabul, the capital city, fell to the Taliban.

All these operations reflect the care and concern of the Government of India for its citizens caught in war zones or in difficult circumstances and also reflects its political will to go the extra mile to do the needful to ensure the safety of its citizens; whatever the odds. Great going indeed!

Shabash India! Proud to be an Indian.

Military Musings

INDIA'S ROLE IN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

It was only when I was posted in Army Headquarters, New Delhi in 1994-96 that I became truly aware of the large number of Indian Army units that were deployed on UN Missions worldwide. As Additional Director General in the Ordnance Directorate it was my responsibility to undertake emergency procurement to make up critical deficiencies of stores and equipment authorised to units before they left India. A total of almost 200,000 Indian troops have served in at least 43 countries over the years. India is one of the largest contributors to UN military missions and there is such a clamour for Indian troops that at times the Government of India has had to turn down requests for providing more combat or support personnel.

What makes the Indian Army so popular? There are several reasons why Indians are so much in demand. The first of course is professionalism and impartiality. The Indian Army ranks with the best in the world in terms of leadership, operational experience, equipment, organisation, training and motivation. Our soldiers are incredibly brave and fierce warriors. And make no mistake; peacekeeping missions are no cake-walk. Units get involved in actual war fighting and Indians have a reputation for meeting challenges head on. Several of our officers and men have been decorated for their role in peace keeping missions. In 1962, my own course mate, Capt Gurbachan Singh Salaria, was awarded the Param Vir Chakra posthumously in Katanga, Southern Congo.

Even the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka, during Op Pawan, got involved in fierce fighting with the LTTE almost immediately after its arrival on the island. The liberation of Jaffna cost many precious Indian lives.

Indians are also very friendly, open and serve in international organisations loyally, without any conflict. They are highly disciplined, pick up the local language more easily, they are adaptable and mix well and have a sense of humour. The fact that English is widely spoken and understood by most is a big help in communicating with foreigners.

In 1950-54, India's 60th Parachute Field Ambulance, a medical unit, was deployed in the Korean War. The unit participated in Operation Tomahawk with the US 187 Airborne Regiment and was awarded citations by the General Commanding US 8th Army and the ROK Army. A special mention of the unit was made in the House of Lords in London and it received commendations from various commanders under whom the unit functioned. The number of individual awards won by the unit gives a fair idea of the intensity of warfare the unit was involved in. Individual decorations included 4 US Bronze Stars, 2 Maha Vir Chakras, 6 Vir Chakras and 25 Mention-in- Despatches. The unit was awarded the President's Trophy by Dr Rajendra Prasad on 10th March 1955.

The South Korean government is honouring Indian Army's contribution to the Korean War on the conflict's 70th anniversary. This month, i.e. July 2020, Lt Col A.G. Rangaraj, India's first paratrooper, will be celebrated across South Korea as the 'Korean War Hero for the month'.

A decorated soldier and recipient of the Maha Vir Chakra, Rangaraj commanded the 60 Para Field Ambulance — a medical unit of the Army now known as 60 Para Field Hospital — that treated an estimated 2.2 lakh patients during the Korean war. The decision to honour Rangaraj has been taken by the Korean Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs to mark the 70th anniversary of the Korean War next year.

During the month of July 2020, Lt Col A.G. Rangaraj's photo will be put up in the war memorial and other public places in Korea. This gesture is meant to be a token of appreciation from the heart of Korean people for the sacrifices made by the participating nations.

The most famous Indian personality to have served on UN peacekeeping missions was late General K S Thimayya, former Chief of Army Staff. He was a Lieutenant General when he was first appointed as Chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission in Korea and provided with an Indian Custodian Force under Maj Gen (later Lt. Gen) SPP Thorat. The Indians performed brilliantly and came in for much praise from US President Dwight Eisenhower and also US General Douglas McArthur. Both Indian Generals were decorated by the President of India.

After his retirement, General K S Thimayya was appointed Commander of the United Nations Force in Cyprus. Gen Thimayya died in Nicosia during that assignment. The General was held in very high esteem by the people of Cyprus

as well as the entire UN Force. A 10 day mourning period was declared in Cyprus and flags were flown at half mast. Wreaths were placed on his body on behalf of the UN Secretary General and the Government of India. Archbishop Makarios, President of Cyprus was amongst the mourners. His body was guarded by UN troops as it lay in state in Nicosia and was flown to India by special aircraft escorted by a contingent of Indian soldiers. Befitting honour; worthy of a great soldier.

Between 1954 and 1970 India provided an Infantry Battalion and supporting staff for control of Indo-China comprising three states of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The tasks included monitoring, ceasefire and repatriation of prisoners of war. Needless to add, the Indians excelled in their mission.

Between 1956 and 1967, Indian troops were deployed in the Middle East with the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF).

Two Infantry Brigades were deployed in Congo between 1960-1964. Mozambique, Somalia, Rwanda, Angola, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia-Eritrea followed thereafter.

Since 1998, Indian troops, military observers, and support staff have operated / are operating in Lebanon, Congo, Sudan and South Sudan, Golan Heights, Ivory Coast, Haiti and Liberia.

Lt Gen Satish Nambiar has served as UN Protection Force Commander in Bosnia-Herzegovina and was also nominated to the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change: of the Peace-building Commission. Other senior officers have also served in various capacities at different times in different countries. They are too many to name individually in this article.

Indian Army officers and men have also served in several other countries either on special deputation, or as Military Attaches/Advisors or as training instructors or as UN Observers. But there is one common characteristic throughout. They have without exception won accolades for their superlative performance and are a credit to the country.

It would be in order to mention an incident related by Lt Gen Ata Hasnain (Retd) who commanded India's 15 Corps in the Kashmir Valley and is today a prolific writer on military affairs. He is currently the Governor of Bihar.

In March 1995 a briefing was to be conducted at HQ UNAMIR II at Kigali; a very detailed and important brief on the security situation.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda II (UNAMIR II) was then headed by Mr Shahryar Khan of Pakistan as the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG).

Mr. Sharyar Khan was earlier Pakistan's Foreign Secretary. A Mohajir from the Bhopal Royal Family, Shahryar Khan was known for his finesse and correct ways.

Col Hasnain was the Sector Cdr of No 3 Sector and commenced his briefing in typical Indian Army style, introducing the map, giving the situation, the threats perceived, actions in hand, the infirmities, requirement of resources and finally recommendations. He could see Mr Shahryar Khan's face light up and he complimented him on the quality of the very comprehensive brief.

Thereafter seven more sectors were to brief on their areas of responsibility. None of the Sector Commanders stepped forward.

The briefing for all was done by seven outstanding officers of the Indian team, all of whom were performing duties of Operations Officers of their respective sectors.

Every Sector Commander felt that if an Indian Army Officer was with him everything would go well and all loose ends would be tied up.

As Mr Shahryar Khan watched Indian after Indian troop in and out, to and from the rostrum, he kept looking at me appreciatively. Then he asked publicly - "Isn't there an Operations Officer from any nation other than India"?

When he got a blank look and a smile from the Canadian Force Commander, Maj Gen Tousignot, he stated - "I must really appreciate the Indian Army's quality of selection of its officers. I have not seen this quality of briefing anywhere in my service".

Turning to me he said - "Colonel Ata Hasnain please accept my compliments for this outstanding display of professionalism, I hope every officer here takes note of the way these officers have shown their grasp over the situation in Rwanda".

He then took Col Hasnain to a side during the inevitable tea and snacks break and told him - "You should be proud of your professional culture; I can admit I would never have found such a standard of conduct of briefings in Pakistan". Coming from Shahryar Khan, that was high praise indeed!

The Indian Army is second to none in planning and executing military operations. It makes us proud of our men and women in uniform.

Jai Hind.

Military Musings

THE WATER TRAIN

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

This is a war story. It is a true story of the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict. The action took place in the desert area of the Barmer Sector. The reader may well ask what has triggered memories of the 1971 war at this moment when Indo-Pak ties are hopefully on the mend? The answer is - the news item that India and Pakistan have agreed to start a bus service between Munabao (in Rajasthan, India) and Khokrapar (in Sind, Pakistan). That was part of the battlefield in 1971.

The 11th Infantry Division crossed the border at Munabao immediately on the outbreak of war and advanced into Pakistan towards Hyderabad City in Sind. Munabao was the last Indian railway station and Khokrapar was the first station on the Pakistan side. I recollect coming under almost continuous Pakistani air attacks daily whilst we were at Khokrapar. Movement was extremely tough in the desert. It could take up to 24 hours to move a column of vehicles a mere 10 kilometres. Given the complete absence of roads across the border, the Army had to create special 'duckboard' track-ways as the advance progressed. Keeping the division supplied with ammunition, food, petroleum products, warlike stores and above all water, was truly a logistician's nightmare.

The greatest difficulty was making water available for the advancing troops. As the division struck deeper into Pakistan, the greater the difficulties we faced in supplying water conventionally in vehicles and water trailers. The Pakistanis destroyed the few water sources that were available as they withdrew, often throwing dead bodies of humans and carcasses of animals into the wells to make the water un-potable for the Indians following close on their heels.

A logistic solution was found by the General Staff by organising a water train. One water train composed entirely of water tankers (BTWs in railway parlance) would leave from Jodhpur every day and come South to Barmer, running roughly parallel to the border. At Barmer the train would turn West towards Gadra Road, a small watering station a little short of Munabao and refill the tanks to make

up for evaporation loss, spillage and theft of water by villagers en route. From Gadra Road the train would proceed to Munabao and beyond into Pakistan.

But before any train could cross over into Pakistan, the railway line between Munabao and Khokrapar first had to be connected. And that is where the Railway Engineers of the Territorial Army did some sterling work. Their morale was, like the rest of the division, incredibly high. After a long wait of many months the war was finally upon us. We had already suffered pre-emptive air strikes at Uttarlai and other airfields and we were like tigers unleashed, spoiling to come to grips with the enemy. But I digress.

Soon after the advance began, the Railway Engineers (TA) deployed their personnel speedily and connected Munabao to Khokrapar, a distance of approximately 20 Kilometers, in what appeared to be record time. The railway line was now operational and a big boon for our advancing troops. The water train could now provide water daily right up to the forward most troops, since we were advancing astride the single railway line.

The Pakistanis, however, had other ideas. One of the single most bombarded targets of the 1971 war was our water train. To deter Pakistani fighters from interrupting our lifeline, it was decided to fly a Combat Air Patrol (CAP) over the train all the time that it was in Pakistani territory. Two fighter aircraft from Uttarlai would fly circles over the train till their endurance ran out. As our fighters would turn for home, the Paki aircraft waiting on their homside, would dive to attack the train. They in turn would be driven off by the next CAP to arrive on the scene. The Pakistani pilots took great care in avoiding dogfights with Indian fighter pilots flying the CAPs.

Later reports informed us that the Pakistani pilots were extremely frustrated because despite several hits with bullets, cannon fire and bombs, the railway tankers refused to catch fire. They were under the mistaken impression that the tankers were carrying petrol. It took them about four days to realise that the wagons were carrying water and not petrol. Alarmed, this realisation resulted in their taking immediate defensive measures on the ground to try and halt our advance.

As we advanced deeper into Pakistan and distance from our fighter fields increased, it became more and more difficult to provide adequate air cover and a change in strategy was called for. Accordingly, anti-aircraft guns were mounted throughout the train and on the sand dunes alongside the railway line.

The AD Gunners proved their bravery by facing the air-attacks head on. The PAF suffered many losses. Yet the enemy fighters continued to attack in droves. They took to low level flying and confusing the gunners by flying in from different directions just above the sand dunes. Often the Gunners were firing over open sights and at times even at depressed angles. Lines of tracers criss-crossed the sky above the train.

The enemy fighters swarmed like flies at the water train while the ground troops pumped hundreds of shells and bullets at them. It was also difficult to distinguish own aircraft returning from strikes inside Pakistan and I dare say that our pilots faced some very real danger flying through friendly fire on occasion. When troops are constantly under air attack day after day and several times a day at that, nerves tend to get a bit frayed; also given the very few seconds for aircraft recognition through the smoke and dust of battle troops tended to shoot first.

The General Staff then took a decision, which solved the problem satisfactorily. The train would leave Jodhpur every morning and finish topping up at Gadra Road by evening and creep up to Munabao at the border, just as the sun was setting and the enemy fighters, who apparently had no night fighting capability, had to call it a day. Thereafter the train would charge into Pakistani territory stopping only to uncouple the BTWs at locations indicated by the Division staff.. Three water wagons at Mile 5. Five water wagons at Mile 15, seven wagons at Mile 35 etc. Eager troops would unload the water into large capacity canvas storage containers before the engine started pushing back the empty BTWs on its return journey. After reaching the last delivery point and completion of unloading, by about 1 AM, the engine would start reversing along the single track, back to Gadra Road. It would not even waste time to stop and re-couple the BTWs but just kept pushing them back in loose shunting style till the entire train was safely back across the border in Indian territory, by first light.

The ground fighting greatly intensified as we approached the Green Belt. The war came to an end at that time and place. The water train continued to provide water to the troops who held on to the captured areas for an entire year till the delineation talks were concluded and the territory was handed back to Pakistan in December 1972.

Some of the Railway personnel were awarded medals for gallantry. Fully deserved. Despite the engine, BTWs and railway line being damaged on a daily basis, the train just kept doing its job. How the Indian Railways managed that miracle is a case study worth looking at.

Through this article I salute the Indian Railways who have always performed superlatively in all wars.

Military Musings

DESERT PULLOUT

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The end of the 1971 Indo-Pak war found the forward elements of the 11th Infantry Division in the desert, just short of the green belt at Naya Chor, almost half way to Hyderabad city in Sind. The division, less a brigade, was strung along the main axis from Munabao in India through Khokropar in Pakistan and on to Naya Chor, astride the only railway line in that area. One brigade, which had advanced along a subsidiary axis, was at Chachro, further West.

After India declared a unilateral cease-fire, the fighting ceased. Pakistani morale was shattered. East Bengal had been wrenched away to become Bangladesh, and India held over 93,000 Pakistanis as prisoners of war. The war in the West also had not gone well for the Pakis.

After the cease-fire, Indian troops were idling in the desert. Their morale was extremely high but the wear and tear of the year-long wait in the desert prior to the war and the war itself had worn them out some; they longed for some rest and recreation. The powers that be therefore decided to withdraw the division to their peace locations leaving a self-contained Infantry brigade group to hold the entire captured area till the delineation talks with Pakistan, headed by Lt Gen P S Bhagat, VC, PVSM, were successfully concluded. That took all of one year.

330 Infantry Brigade was given the task of holding and guarding the captured territory of the entire sector. The brigade headquarters were at Gadra Road, just a little distance short of Munabao, which was on the border. Some of the division's administrative elements were already located at Gadra; more importantly it had an Inspection Bungalow which became our Officer's Mess, and Gadra Road was a major railway water refilling stop. It had trees and some greenery. As the DQ of the brigade, my time was fully taken up. We had a varied assortment of almost 45 units including a BSF battalion, a camel battalion, artillery units, an armoured squadron, engineers, service units etc. But, it was fun. As the saying goes, "nothing succeeds like success in war".

Once the delineation talks were over and it was decided to return the captured territories to Pakistan, planning for the pull out began in earnest.

Pulling out of the desert was a first time experience for me as indeed was the war in the desert itself. But what impressed itself upon my mind was the meticulous planning and coordination for the pull out both at division and brigade level. Also, there was a certain amount of time required for preparing for the pull out. The reason was that it was an administrative cum tactical pullout. It was not a tactical withdrawal in the classical sense, but was planned in such a fashion that should the Pakistanis decide to indulge in mischief and involve the division in a running fight, then it could halt at pre-determined defensive lines and regain the initiative. This required the Divisional headquarters and some required units to return to their positions from their peace locations.

Once the Division was back in its op location, the preparations started in full swing. Graves of Pakistani soldiers were distinctly marked and done up, the little villages were spruced up, mosques were white-washed, water sources were cleaned up, the Indian civil administration pulled out, non essential military units began thinning out, the camels were withdrawn. In their place, we had a battalion with APCs (Armoured Personnel Carrierirs). All troop carrying vehicles which were not in Class I condition were replaced with brand new vehicles; hard hitting mobile para-commandos came in to provide flank protection, the BSF battalion was taken away. Duck board tracks laid in the desert for facilitating movement of vehicles were to be removed and taken away; heavy time-consuming work requiring engineer and infantry effort; so much so that a deliberate decision was taken to leave the duckboard track on the main axis as it was, and only to lift the duckboards from the subsidiary axis. Similarly railway facilities installed by the Railway TA battalion also had to be wound up. Minefields had to be marked or demined.

Basically the plan was to fall back to a defensive line already held by own troops till another line well back was occupied and the forward troops again pulled back through that line; a sort of reverse leap-frog. Three such defensive lines were to be held /crossed before the last forward units made a final dash across the border to the Indian side. Defensive positions and gun areas were accordingly prepared as necessary. Units were not allowed to make their own way back. Movement was strictly controlled, routes were specified, road space was allotted, timings were laid down, temporary TCPs were established. The pull out was a mix of tactical and administrative measures.

While the main division was to withdraw along the main axis, 330 Infantry Brigade was to pull back along a subsidiary axis from Chachro to Chhotan. It was stressed to all that not a single vehicle, rifle, compass or piece of equipment should be lost or left back for the Pakistanis to find or use. 'All-correct' reports from Commanding Officers were sought for personnel, vehicles, armament as also equipment at various stages. After the pull-out was completed written 'all-correct' reports were submitted/messaged by all.

The fact that nothing was to be left to the Pakistanis even inadvertently created some special problems. These were discussed in a conference in the brigade headquarters. What was most worrisome, I stated, was that since the duckboard tracks would have been lifted, it made recovery of vehicles well nigh impossible because in case of a breakdown towing is a stupendous job in the desert. So how do we meet this problem asked the Commander? I had a few suggestions to make. Firstly that every vehicle be provided with a large red flag which the driver would immediately put out of his window in case of a breakdown. Secondly we provide first line emergency repair kits to every driver with items like a spare fan belt, spark plugs, distributor cap and about 10 other assorted items as per experience. We would also have mobile EME detachments patrolling the axis. Radio communication was to be provided to all concerned including administrative elements.

Two special measures were necessary, I emphasised, and were accepted. A helicopter patrolling the entire front line continuously and guiding help where required to the driver requiring it. Also, should it come about that a vehicle had to be towed through the sandy track, then there was only one vehicle which had the brute force to accomplish such a task. That was the Russian Kraz vehicle used for towing 130 mm medium guns. The BM who was an Artillery officer warned that the Gunners would howl and resist giving their gun towers. It's not just one gun tower I insisted. We would require two because God forbid, if something happened to the Kraz itself and needed to be towed away, only another Kraz could do that job. I am glad that all the measures suggested were accepted by the Division and the gunners were prevailed upon to provide two Kraz vehicles for the operation. The foresight paid off because one three tonner had to be towed all the way back by a Kraz. The helicopter patrolling the front line effectively monitored the pull out and commanders received continuous feedback of the progress.

Once we were back on our own side of the border, the war had truly and finally ended. It was a time to celebrate and rejoice, go on leave and spend some time with our families; time for the battalions to regroup and regain command and control; make up their deficiencies and become fighting fit again. Time to plan the move back to our permanent peace locations.

It brought to mind what one British officer is reported to have flippantly exclaimed long ago. "Thank God the war is over. Now we can get back to some serious soldiering."

Military Musings

WARTIME SNAFUS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

SNAFU. The acronym once meant 'Situation Normal and Fully Understood' but it is today generally considered to mean 'Situation Normal All Fouled Up'

My first experience of participating in a real live war was as DAA&QMG of an infantry brigade in the Barmer Sector during the 1971 Indo-Pak war. It is common belief that things seldom go as planned in war; nevertheless there are instances when foresight, application and coordination could have saved some ugly situations from occurring. A few examples are given below.

Under the Big Guns

As the 11th Infantry Division advanced into Pakistan along the Gadra – Munabao - Khokrapar axis towards Hyderabad city in Sind, the division was subjected to intensive air attacks from dawn to dusk by the PAF, trying to thwart the division's progress. Movement in the desert was painfully slow; it could take up to 24 hours to move a column of vehicles a mere 10 kms. Duckboard tracks were very limited and extricating loaded vehicles which got stranded in the sand was a herculean task. They were often abandoned wherever they were stuck, to be retrieved later. To avoid air attacks, the logistic 'B echelons' which were brigaded, were ordered to move mostly at night.

The brigaded B echelons leap-frogged from bound to bound once every three or four days, in consonance with the division's progress. As the advance progressed deeper into Pakistani territory, and we had to move each time, we were given a new map reference for our next location by the Q branch of the division. Navigation was extremely difficult. We maintained direction with the help of compass and stars, high sand dunes outlined against the night sky (always in a NE – SW configuration), and estimated own position by the sound of gunfire since we knew the locations of our own gun positions. We estimated distance covered by the odometer of the vehicle.

At one time during the advance we received intelligence reports of small, mobile, hard-hitting tank based Pakistani marauding groups attempting to disrupt the advance by striking at the soft administrative echelons in the rear. It was a matter of grave concern to me because none of the elements in the entire brigaded B echelons held a single anti-tank weapon. Not even for repairs in the workshop element. I shared my concern with my Brigade Commander at the earliest opportunity.

Since tactically, in an advance the B echelons are always some distance behind the main body, the Commander felt that the tactical solution to the problem was either that the B echelons stay well behind and out of range of Pakistani marauding troops or stay well forward, tucked right behind the main body and hence under its indirect protection. Since movement in the desert presented immense problems, staying well back was not an acceptable solution. The Commander ordered the B echelons to move to a new location close behind the main body of the brigade.

I approached the AQ in the divisional headquarters asking for allotment of road space and a new location for us to establish ourselves. We were given new map coordinates where we were to finally position ourselves. We moved at dusk and arrived at our allocated map reference while it was yet dark.

We were barely able to get a few hours rest after organizing our perimeter defence when at first light, we woke to the thundering noise of firing of own 130 mm medium guns just a stone's throw away from us. I hurriedly scrambled the B echelon elements knowing that the guns which were dug in were not going to vacate their position, and decided to clear out of there and out of harm's way. Our action proved timely because by 8 am, Pakistani fighter bombers were pounding the gun positions with bombs, canon and rocket fire and had we remained there we would have definitely suffered collateral damage. We got a ring side view of the Pakistan aircraft attacking our medium guns. Just like in the movies. We joined in by firing our rifles and machine guns at the Pakistani aeroplanes and we cheered madly when we saw one aircraft trailing smoke, explode into a sand dune. No one was really sure who had actually shot it down.

After the war, when armies inevitably go over their actions again and learn lessons from the mistakes committed, the lack of coordination between the Q Branch and GS Branch in our division was starkly brought out. The Q Branch had given us the same map area to deploy the B echelons as the GS Branch had given to the gunners.

However, as the saying goes: nothing succeeds like success. Since we had won the war and the B echelons had not suffered any casualties, the snafu was glossed over and soon forgotten.

Water Woes

The forward brigade leading the advance had two infantry battalions with similar names; 10 Sikh and 10 Sikh LI; each battalion on either side of the main axis. When the advance was finally halted, these two leading battalions astride the centre line were just a few kilometres short of the green belt ahead, at Naya Chor. Availability of water was a major problem and 10 Sikh LI was sending SOS after SOS for water. It was decided by the GOC, Maj Gen RDR Anand, to commandeer all the water bowzers available in the rear and send a water convoy to the battalion.

When after two days the battalion was still reporting that the situation was desperate, the GOC wanted to know where the water bowzers had reached and to the shock and dismay of the entire divisional staff it was discovered that the convoy had reached 10 Sikh instead of 10 Sikh LI. The letters LI were forgotten along the way. It took another day to correct the situation. Needless to say that heads rolled in consequence.

Supply of water played a major role in the desert war. We heard later that a neighbouring brigade which was advancing on a subsidiary axis was also in dire straits for lack of water. The Army and Air Chiefs in Delhi agreed to divert air effort for an air drop. But when the huge four engine transport plane carrying the water containers arrived at the designated location it had to abort its mission and return to Delhi because the brigade had failed to prepare and mark the dropping zone. The Brigade commander had to pay the price for such ineptitude.

Logistics in the desert is extremely difficult; truly a nightmare. And as the fighting intensifies and distances increase it boils down to the very basics; supplying hot food, water, ammunition and FOL. Treating and evacuating casualties, as also disposal of the dead and evacuation and repair of damaged equipment. A lot of engineer and infantry effort had to be deployed in the desert, to lay duckboard tracks and keep it serviceable. Water had to be ultimately supplied by a specially organised water train.

Diesel Dilemma

As the division advanced deeper into Pakistan, we received information one day that a newly raised independent armoured squadron was soon to be attached to our brigade for a special operation. I dreaded the thought. Looking after the logistics of almost two brigades (the leading brigade as well as my own which was following closely on its heels) was bad enough but an armoured squadron which is so fuel guzzling and equipment heavy, I could well do without. And as I had feared, as soon as the squadron arrived, the tank crews demanded fuel for topping up. The total fuel requirements of an entire infantry brigade could be transported in just two x three-tonner vehicles but to just 'top up' the tanks we required almost 15 vehicles. We approached the division and were allotted some third line transport for the purpose.

We sent our collection party with an indent back all the way to Gadra Road to collect the diesel. When the convoy reported with the diesel, 12 hours later, I was horrified to be told that they had brought the wrong type of diesel. There are two types of diesel; one for normal trucks or 'B' vehicles in military parlance (DHPP-B) and another type for tanks i.e. 'A' vehicles (DHPP-A). They had brought DHPP B instead of DHPP A.

It was providence that the special operation was called off for some reason and we got enough time to exchange the fuel for the correct type. This snafu therefore went unnoticed by the powers that be. God was surely watching over us.

Load Tables

Having joined the brigade directly from Staff College I had a very up-to-date Staff Officer's Handbook which gave much useful military information and tables on various subjects required by staff officers. Information such as the number of casualties that could be loaded into different types of aircraft for evacuation by air.

Some casualties had just reached the brigaded B echelon area when we were told that an aircraft was expected and we could evacuate any urgent case by air. I looked up my staff officer's handbook and wondered whether it would be some STOL aircraft landing on the flat, hard, dry, lake bed nearby or a helicopter. Imagine our dismay when the aircraft turned out to be a small Air OP, fixed-wing

Otter. With great difficulty we loaded one walking wounded casualty into it. The others were sent back by road transport.

Military Musings

THE ARUN KHETARPAL STORY

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

17 Poona Horse is one of India's most famous armoured regiments. It has participated in the Afghan wars, fought in Persia, in China and in the two world wars. Post independence, it proved its mettle once again and covered itself in glory in both major wars against Pakistan; in 1965 and in 1971. Amongst several decorations, the regiment claims two Param Vir Chakras; a proud and rare distinction indeed.

In 1965, its Commanding Officer, Lt Col Ardeshir Burzorji Tarapore distinguished himself in the battle of Chawinda in the Sialkot Sector which is considered the second largest tank battle in military history, since the battle of Kursk during World War II

Lt Col Tarapore was awarded India's highest gallantry award posthumously since he was killed in his blazing tank on 16 Sep 1965. The citation reads "for outstanding courage, leadership, indomitable spirit and supreme sacrifice". Though wounded several times, Col Tarapore continued to lead his regiment and fought on to the end. A major road in Pune Cantonment perpetuates his memory.

17 Poona Horse won laurels afresh and covered itself with glory in 1971 during the Indo-Pak war when it was commanded by another brave and indomitable CO Lt Col Hanut Singh (later Lt Gen). The regiment was ordered to construct a bridge along with 47 Infantry Brigade, across Basantar River in the Shakargarh region near the international border. After building it, engineers were to tackle the enemy mine-field. Half way through, the enemy attacked. Even though the mine-fields were only partially cleared the regiment advanced in the darkness of the night, not knowing what lay ahead. By first light on 16th December 1971, the tanks were able to pass through and the army was able to successfully establish a bridgehead on the enemy side of the obstacle. Col Hanut Singh personally led all his tanks through the minefield, without lights, in the dark of the night. At 8 am a Pakistani combat force confronted the Indian

troops. Our troops being out numbered, Khetarpal's Squadron Commander requested assistance from 2/Lt Khetarpal who was close by in the battle field.

As soon as he got the message, Khetarpal drove his tank into the enemy's midst to clear up the opposition. On the way, he overran some strong points and captured enemy soldiers. During the process, his troop's second tank was knocked out and the tank commander was killed, leaving Khetarpal alone facing the Pakistanis.

But Khetarpal, undaunted, went in single handedly to ambush the area with his tank. A tank to tank battle ensued and 2/Lt Khetarpal destroyed four enemy tanks in the first go. The Pakistanis then wrecked the two following Indian tanks and also bombed Khetarpal's tank, setting it aflame. Khetarpal refused to give up and went on fighting.

When his tank flamed up, his Squadron Commander ordered him to abandon the burning tank and get out. But he proclaimed "No Sir. I am not going to abandon my tank. My gun is still working and I'll get these bas---ds." He destroyed three more Paki tanks by direct line of sight firing before his own tank blew up. The fearless officer met his death: successfully denying the enemy access to the Indian bridgehead.

For this gallant action and sacrifice he was awarded the Param Vir Chakra posthumously. But Poona Horse led by Lt. Col Hanut Singh coming through the bridgehead in the manner that it did in the dark of the night, completely surprised, demoralised and decimated the Pakistani opposition. Lt Col Hanut's bravery and leadership earned him the Maha Vir Chakra. The battle of the Basantar river is one of the fiercest tank to tank battles in the history of independent India.

Arun Khetarpal was born in Poona in on 14 Oct 1950. He was the son of Lt Col (later Brigadier) M L Khetarpal of the Corps of Engineers. He was the school prefect of Lawrence School, Snawar, where he studied. Joining NDA in June 1967, he was Squadron Cadet Captain of Foxtrot Squadron at the time of his passing out. He was commissioned into the Poona Horse from IMA Dehra Dun, in June 1971; the very year he went to war and made the supreme sacrifice for the country.

Khetarpal's bravery has been immortalised by naming the parade ground in the National Defence Academy after him. The Indian Military Academy at

Dehra Dun has also named the auditorium and one of the academy's main gates after him.

Arun Khetarpal's brave actions will continue to inspire generations of cadets.

Military Musings

SOLDIER TO SOLDIER

The undermentioned is a true life story was received though Social Media.

In 2001, Brig M L Khetarpal (father of late 2/Lt Arun Khetarpal, PVC), now 81 years old felt a strong urge to visit his birthplace at Sargodha, now in Pakistan.

At Lahore airport. Brig Khetarpal was met by Brig Khwaja Mohammad Naser, who took it upon himself to be Brig Khetarpal's host and guide. Brig Naser really went out of his way to ensure that Brig Khetarpal had a satisfying and nostalgic visit to his old house in Sargodha. Upon his return to Lahore, brig Khetarpal was once again the guest of Brig Naser. Brig Khetarpal was overwhelmed by the extreme kindness, deference, courtesy and respect bestowed upon him by Brig Naser and by all the members of his family and his many servants.

However Brig Khetarpal felt that something was amiss but could not make out what it was. Was it the long silences that punctuated their animated conversation? Or was it the look of compassion in the eyes of the women in the family. He could not make out but he was sure that he was being treated as someone very special.

Finally on the night before Brig Khetarpal's departure, Brig Naser said "Sir, there is something that I wanted to tell you for many years but I did not know how to get through to you. Finally fate has intervened and sent you to me as an honoured guest. The last few days we have become close to one another and that has made my task even more difficult.

It is regarding your son, who is of course a national hero in India. However on that fateful day in 1971, your son and I were soldiers, unknown to one another, fighting for the respect and safety of our respective countries. I regret to tell you that your son died in my hands. Arun's courage was exemplary, and he moved his tank with fearless courage and daring, totally unconcerned about his safety. Tank casualties were very high till finally there was just the two of us left facing each other. We both died simultaneously. It was destined that I was to live and he was to die. It was only later that I got to know how young he was and who he was. I had all along thought I would ask your forgiveness but in telling the story I realise there is nothing to forgive."

“Instead I salute your son for what he did at such a young age and I salute you too because I know how he grew into such a young man. In the end it is character and values that matter.”

Brig Khetarpal was silent as he didn't know how to react. To be enjoying the hospitality of the person who had killed his son was a confusing feeling. However being a soldier himself, he genuinely admired the chivalry of an officer whose complete squadron had been decimated by his son. Both the Brigadiers retired for the night deep in thought. There are never any victors in war. Both sides lose and it is the families that have to pay the price and suffer the most. As someone once said, ‘wars are created by politicians, compounded by bureaucrats and fought by soldiers.’

The next day photographs were taken and Brig Khetarpal returned to Delhi. Later the photos reached Delhi along with a note from Brig Naser that read – “With warmest regards and utmost sincerity to Brig M L Khetarpal, father of Shaheed Second Lieutenant Arun Khetrapal, PVC (who stood as an insurmountable rock between victory and failure of the counterattack by the SPEARHEADS’ 13 LANCERS on 16 Dec 1971 in the Battle of Bara Pind as we call it and the Battle of Basantar as 17 Poona Horse remembers)”.

This is what soldiers are made of: gallantry and chivalry.

Military Musings

UNDER FIRE

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

As a young Captain, when serving in the Kashmir valley in the early 1960s, I once had occasion to visit an Infantry battalion deployed in the Uri Sector. The battalion was 20 Maratha LI. The CO was Lt Col NPP Thorat (younger brother of Lt Gen SPP Thorat). And while we were assembled in the Officers' Mess that night, a patrol led by Maj Vasankar had just returned to the unit. There had been a firing incident and the Maratha patrol had exchanged fire with some Pakistanis who were trying to probe the Maratha defences. Maj Vasankar reported that the exchange of fire had lasted for about 20 minutes. And as the patrol closed in on the Pakistanis, the enemy decided it was prudent to withdraw to their own side, rather than fight it out. The Marathas had not suffered any casualties but had probably wounded one of the enemy.

Col Thorat was keen to know how a newly posted young officer who was in the patrol had fared under fire? Maj Vasankar reported that the young officer was full of 'josh' and did not display any lack of courage. Of course he was tense, experiencing a live exchange of fire for the very first time but he conducted himself creditably and kept a cool head. His men had faith in him and followed his orders loyally.

The question "How did he behave under fire?" had me thinking. Every army man sooner or later has occasion to wonder how he himself would behave if and when he came under enemy fire.

The first time that I came under enemy fire was in the 1971 Indo-Pak war in the Barmer Sector of the Western front. On the evening of 3rd Dec 1971, Pakistani Fighter Bombers returning from a pre-emptive strike on Uttarlai airfield, bombed our Brigade Headquarters at Chottan. It was dusk, there were no lights and the bombing was more opportunistic rather than deliberate, hence lacked accuracy. We suffered no casualties. Smt Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister, declared war against Pakistan soon after.

The very next day 11 Infantry Division crossed the international border at Munabao and commenced its advance into Pakistan. As 11 infantry Division

advanced deeper into Pakistan, we were subjected to daily bombardment by the Pakistan Air Force. It was at Khokrapar, on 4th December 1971, that I experienced coming under direct enemy air attack for the first time. We were bombed, strafed and subjected to cannon and rocket fire. But we had two great advantages. The first was a lot of trenches/pits easily dug up in the desert sand, and every time there was an air raid, we just jumped into the nearest trenches (sometimes one on top of another.) The second advantage was the desert itself. All the bullets and bombs got buried in the sand, thus there were no ricochets and sand contained the blast of exploding shells and limited the spread of splinters. Of course there was a lot of sand and smoke in the air as each shell detonated. The sound of bullets zipping through the air and explosions were always in our ears.

The sand dunes in the Thar Desert are all in parallel NE- SW configuration. Since we could see the Paki Sabres circling overhead choosing their targets, it gave us time to seek shelter on the reverse slope of the sand dunes which provided natural protection.

It is amazing how quickly troops get used to being under enemy fire. Within two days we had discerned the pattern of Pakistani air attacks. They came punctually after 8 am in flights of four or five aircraft, and circled above the target before attacking. Before firing, the aircraft adopted a diving stance and we could easily make out whether we were the intended targets or not depending upon the direction of the attack.

I remember, we had one soldier (cook) who was petrified of air attacks and would cower in the trenches in fear whenever aircraft flew overhead. So one morning at 8 am, I pulled him out by the collar and ordered him to gaze up at the skies. We stood above the trenches boldly and could see the fighters circling above us. I forced him to open his eyes and count the aircraft. Five. I also told him to notice how the aircraft adopted a peculiar firing stance before opening the attack. But just as we thought that the air raid was over and we were out of danger, a sixth unspotted fighter aircraft dived out of the sun and stitched up the sand with two parallel rows of bullets; one on either side of us. It was a very close shave and baptism by fire for the soldier cook. He was amazed that he had survived the strafing and it cured him of his irrational fear. After that incident, he would bravely dance about whenever aircraft roared over our position and I had to order him to seek cover.

Since II infantry Division was advancing tactically, 330 Brigade Headquarters was well forward and I was commanding the B echelons in the rear. Movement in the desert was painfully slow; it could take up to 24 hours to move a column of vehicles a mere 10 kms. Duckboard tracks were very limited and extricating loaded vehicles which got stranded in the sand was a herculean task. They were often abandoned wherever they were stuck, to be retrieved later. To avoid air attacks, the logistic 'B echelons' which were brigaded, were ordered to move mostly at night.

The brigaded B echelons leap-frogged from bound to bound once every three or four days, in consonance with the division's progress. As the advance progressed deeper into Pakistani territory, and we had to move each time, we were given a new map reference for our next location. Navigation was extremely difficult. We maintained direction with the help of compass and stars, high sand dunes outlined against the night sky (always in a NE – SW configuration), and estimated own position by the sound of gunfire since we knew the locations of our own gun positions. We estimated distance covered by the odometer of the vehicle.

At one time during the advance we received intelligence reports of small, mobile, hard-hitting tank based Pakistani marauding groups attempting to disrupt the advance by striking at the soft administrative echelons in the rear. It was a matter of grave concern to me because none of the elements in the entire brigaded B echelons held a single anti-tank weapon. I shared my concern with my Brigade Commander at the earliest opportunity.

The Commander ordered the B echelons to move to a new location and tuck itself close behind the main body of the brigade for inherent security. I approached the divisional headquarters asking for allotment of road space and a new location for us to establish ourselves. We were given new map coordinates where we were to finally position ourselves. We moved at dusk and arrived at our allocated map reference while it was yet dark.

We were barely able to get a few hours rest after organizing our perimeter defence when at first light, we woke to the thundering noise of firing of own 130 mm medium guns just a stone's throw away from us. I hurriedly scrambled the B echelon elements knowing that the guns which were dug-in were not going to vacate their position, and decided to clear out of there and out of harm's way. Our action proved timely because by 8 am, Pakistani fighter bombers were pounding the gun positions with bombs, canon and rocket fire

and had we remained there we would have definitely suffered collateral damage. We got a ring side view of the Pakistan aircraft attacking our medium guns. Just like in the movies. We joined in by firing our rifles and machine guns at the Pakistani aeroplanes and we cheered madly when we saw one aircraft trailing smoke, explode into a sand dune. No one was really sure who had actually shot it down.

When we finally closed up with the Brigade Headquarters, we came within range of enemy medium guns. And the first time we came under artillery shelling we all cheered and celebrated. This was the real war and now we could all truly claim to be war veterans.

At this location, the BM and I had a harrowing experience. While we were standing on a sand dune one evening, discussing the next day's plans, we came under heavy anti aircraft fire from our own guns atop higher sand dunes in the rear. They were firing at a Pakistani aircraft who was daringly jinking between the dunes to avoid getting shot down by the Indian ack-acks. It came from our rear and was flying back to its base. The guns were firing at depressed angles, which is what saved us. Hundreds of bullets went into the dune on which we were standing before the aircraft pulled away and the fire shifted. God was surely watching over us.

The only other event etched in my memory is when I was moving the B echelons early in the war, by daylight, when we were strafed by a lone Pakistani fighter along the main axis of advance. It was a frontal attack by a low flying fighter jet. My jeep was shot up and my young, unmarried, Mahar Regiment driver was killed in the air attack. I felt extremely sad at the loss of this precious life. He had so much to live for. But such is the nature of war.

Even as the sound of rattle of machine guns, the dull thudding of bullets and the roar of the receding aircraft filled my ears, my wrecked jeep with the dead driver at the wheel slewed off the track and ploughed into a heap of sand by the roadside; its engine hissing furiously and spewing clouds of steam into the desert air. It was all over in seconds. Miraculously, I was totally unhurt; not even a scratch. And while I sat in the jeep, momentarily dazed, I could see men from the stalled convoy rushing towards us to render help.

I silently thanked God for saving my own life, but I couldn't help wondering how He decided who should live and who should die?

Military Musings

THE 'BM' SYNDROME

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

In earlier days, before brigades were authorised a Deputy Brigade Commander, a Brigade Headquarters, the smallest formation in the army, was only authorised two main staff officers. The Brigade Major or the BM and the Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter Master General, the DAA&QMG: further abbreviated to DQ. Of course there was a smattering of Captains but it was the BM and DQ who ran the show. This was true for all types of brigades; be it infantry brigades, mountain brigades, armoured brigades, parachute brigades, engineer brigades or artillery brigades.

The Brigade Major dealt with all operational matters including operations, intelligence, communications, weapons and equipment, training, staff duties, VIP visits, conferences and the like. Per force the BM was the senior staff officer (irrespective of actual inter-se seniority between the BM and the DQ). Consequently it was the BM's responsibility to ensure the smooth and coordinated functioning of the brigade headquarters; and indeed the brigade. The duties of the DQ were more mundane in nature if not less important: transport, personnel, financial matters, discipline and courts martial, barrack accommodation for troops, supply of stores, water and rations and in war, also, track maintenance, traffic control, evacuation of casualties and disposal of the dead.

It was but natural perhaps, that Brigade Commanders tended to lean heavily on the BM. After all, it was mostly between the two of them that all secret operational matters were finalised and executed as per the Commander's orders. They were closeted together most of the time in the Commander's office or in the Ops Room. There had to be total trust and real close understanding in the relationship. If the Commander was away from the headquarters visiting forward troops or the Divisional Headquarters, it was ensured that the Commander and the BM were always available to each other by line or on radio.

The post of BM was considered the most important of the staff appointments in the army because of the responsibility that the appointment carried and therefore the very best officers from the fighting and supporting arms were posted to it after completion of Staff College. The best officers from the services were normally posted as DQs. Having had the opportunity of serving as DQ in both infantry and mountain brigade headquarters with very able commanders, I had occasion to study the styles of leadership and interplay of forces between the Commander, BM and the DQ at first hand. I was fortunate in four respects; three of the brigade commanders I served with rose to become Army Commanders. In all cases, the BMs were truly very capable and excellent military officers and also, they all happened to be senior to me so there was no misunderstanding between us. And lastly I served as DQ both in war (desert) and in hard field in peace (mountains).

But my first experience in a brigade headquarters as Brigade Ordnance Officer was profound. Because it was 1964-1965 and the storm clouds were gathering. Brig Onkar Singh Kalkat of 8GR was the Brigade Commander of 104 Infantry Brigade in the Tangdhar Sector of the Kashmir Valley and Maj Adi Homji, a Gunner, was the BM. Brig Kalkat's trust in Adi Homji was absolute. The Commander was stubborn in some matters and even when battalion commanders pleaded with him, he was averse to changing the course of action. Adi Homji was the court of last resort. Whenever an impasse was reached, the Commander would turn to Adi Homji for his opinion. And if Major Homji felt that the battalion commanders had a point and it needed be taken into consideration, the Commander would relent without further ado. Trust was evident not only between the Commander and his Staff officer but also between the battalion commanders and the BM.

I have also seen the adverse impact on a brigade headquarters when a hot headed Parachute Brigade Commander and a stubborn Brigade Major did not pull along together. Everyone suffered in the vitiated atmosphere.

It was during the 1971 war, once when I was DQ of 330 Infantry Brigade, I remarked to the BM that I had noticed that every draft the BM puts up to the Commander comes back with some remark like 'good show' or 'excellent' but there was never a remark on any letter that went on A and Q issues, no matter how perfect the drafting or how good the major and minor staff duties.

It so happened that after the war, and after we had handed over all the captured areas back to Pakistan, the BM had to go on a few days casual leave

and I was officiating as BM in addition to my own duties as DQ. Suddenly, 330 Infantry brigade was alerted for IS duties in Andhra Pradesh and we were put on short notice for move. I immediately informed the Commander, Brig Gurjit Singh Randhawa (of the Sikh Regiment) and called a conference of battalion commanders. After the Brigade Commander had briefed the COs it fell upon me to draft and issue the move orders. I worked well into the night and produced the move order and sent it to the Commander for his approval before issue. It came back with just one word in red ink. 'Perfect'.

As luck would have it, we were stood down; apparently the emergency had passed and there was no need to call in the army. As soon as the BM returned from leave and he went through all the pending dak (paperwork) he saw the Commander's remark on the draft move order. And with a broad grin he later told me that he had seen it. "Well done". He added.

I was AMA in the High Commission of India in Dacca Bangladesh when in 1976, Brig Sukhomoy Mazumdar of the Engineers (Later Adjutant General) took over as the Defence Adviser. He was Commander 121 Infantry Brigade in Kargil before he was moved to Dacca.

As AMA, I was his only staff officer. But he would often tell me how much he missed his BM. One day, in jest, I suggested that he get the post of AMA re-designated as BM. And that settled it. But that notwithstanding, we got along very well together and we both ended our tenures smelling of roses. Indeed, when he took over as GOC 22 Inf Div he got me posted as his AQMG.

When I became Commander of Karnataka and Goa Sub Area in Jan 1990, I had four Colonels performing under me. The Colonel GS, The Colonel Q, the Colonel A and the Adm Comdt. Inevitably, I found myself also leaning heavily on the Col GS but I took pains to ensure that all my staff officers had easy access to me and I dealt with matters of their responsibility with them directly instead of going through the Col GS. Everyone experienced a close and satisfying working environment.

Military Musings

THE FIGHTING SPIRIT

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Major R D Law (later Brigadier, VrC) and I together attended the year long Staff College course at Wellington in the Nilgiris, in 1971. By July that year, more than half our course was over and we were looking forward to receiving our posting orders by September. We were blissfully enjoying the salubrious summer hill climate even as a lot of hush-hush activity was going on in the army. Given the developments taking place in East Pakistan, we all knew that something was brewing because key unit personnel people were being recalled from leave, we heard of the cancellation of an odd training course, units were being brought up to strength and equipment deficiencies were being made up speedily. Military Special trains were moving in the night. The signs of preparation for battle in full swing. War clouds were gathering on the horizon.

Maj Law was an Armoured Corps officer; a tank man. He was suddenly taken off the course and whisked away to Ahmednagar on 'operational immediate' basis to raise a new Independent Armoured Squadron and I lost touch with him briefly after that. I was hoping that I too would get posted to an active formation in the war zone and God heard my prayer. On the evening of 3rd Dec 1971, even as I was reporting at Chotan in Rajasthan to the Headquarters of 330 Infantry Brigade, which was then a part of 11 Infantry Division, in the Barmer Sector of the Western Front, we were bombed by Pakistani aircraft returning from their pre-emptive air strike on Uttarlai airbase. It signalled the start of the 1971 Indo-Pak war which ended with the liberation of Bangladesh and India taking over 93,000 Pakistani prisoners of war.

In the Western desert sector, 11 Infantry Division was deep inside Pakistan fighting its way towards Hyderabad city in Sind. The leading elements had temporarily halted at Naya Chor, just short of the commencement of the green belt. And lo and behold! It was here I met Maj RD Law again. His armoured squadron had been attached to my brigade for a special operation. However

the war came to a halt at that juncture with India declaring a unilateral ceasefire.

Col Dharam Raj Singh of 17 Raj Rif (Sawaiman) very graphically narrates the story of 6 (Independent) Armoured Squadron.

“6 (Independent) Armoured Squadron (later part of 75 Armoured Regiment), one of the Indian tank units completed its raising on 13th November 1971 at Ahmednagar. Immediately thereafter, it moved to its battle location in Jaisalmer Sector.

“The Squadron reached Jaisalmer on 01 December 1971. Since most officers and men had been milked from other armoured regiments, they were yet to be drilled into a cohesive team. The officers of the squadron forming part of Major Law’s team were:-

- Captain A.K Bhatia- Second in Command.
- Lieutenant Ved Pal Singh Dahiya- Troop Commander.
- Second Lieutenant K.R Bhadbade- Troop Commander.

“Even though war was imminent, most tank crews had yet to remove the insignias of their original units. Old loyalties take time to die. As such they still stuck on to what they had learnt in their previous units. The squadron was in throws of initial teething problems that normally plague new raisings. Requisite governmental orders, authorizing the raising too had yet to arrive. Consequently, the squadron found it difficult to draw the much needed spares, fuel and ammunition. To sort out these problems, the Squadron Commander liaised with everyone that mattered, but in-vain. As a last resort Major Law sent an ‘Un-fit for War Report’ to the Division. Fortunately, he found a patient listener in Colonel Dev, the Colonel General Staff of 12 Infantry Division. He arranged for him to meet the GOC and explain his problems. The shocked General got into ‘direct control mode’. He bulldozed his way through all resistance to meet the squadron’s needs. And just as well.

“An exercise was organized for initial running-in and the first oil change of its new tanks. This was also the first opportunity for Major Law to exercise his command. The squadron commenced its exercise on 1st December. Constant intervention and coaxing by Major Law to sort out inter-personal issues also formed its part. The art is known only to those who have raised new units.

“They reached Tanot the next day i.e 2nd Dec 1971. The same day, Lieutenant Dahiya had to be evacuated to Military Hospital Jodhpur. He had acute piles, the bleeding variety.

On the morning 4th December, the squadron was ordered to move to Kishengarh to be launched towards Rahimyar Khan. It formed part of 30 Infantry Brigade.

“However that night, i.e. 4th / 5th Dec 1971, the Battle of Longewala happened. About four kms short of Kishengarh, the Squadron was ordered to change its axis of advance by 180 degrees & head for Longewala. It reached Longewala after last light & harboured inside the area defended by 17 RAJ RIF (Sawaiman) for the night. The tanks had done approximately 160 Km of move on track under battle conditions. They had just completed their initial running in. Its crew too were now fully integrated for battle on the morrow.

“On 8th Dec 1971 the Squadron was grouped with 6/5 Gurkhas to assault its objective. The attacking Companies of the unit (‘A’ and “D” Companies) were led by Major D S Drall and Major J S Hamal.

“Major Law’s squadron joined them at the assault line. Though the H-hour was still 5 minutes away, the troops were ready in the forming-up-place. Major Law came on the radio to obtain a ‘Ready for Assault Report’ from his leading tanks. He was surprised to hear Lieutenant Dahiya’s voice among those who reported. The officer had just deserted from Military Hospital, Jodhpur to join the squadron in action. It was almost H-hour and there was no time for further questions. The Squadron Commander asked the officer to ‘see him’ during the reorganization stage of the battle after the actual assault had been executed.

“6/5 GR with 6 (Independent) Armoured Squadron attacked and captured the objective. Large amounts of arms and ammunition abandoned by the enemy were also captured. Thereafter the combat group started reorganizing itself. Soon, a lone figure jumped out from one of the tanks and approached the Squadron Commander’s tank. Major Law peeped out of the cupola to find Lieutenant Dahiya before him.

“Maj Law enquired from him how he happened to be there, when he should have been in MH Jodhpur? Lieutenant Dahiya gave his explanation and reasons to leave the MH without orders. The reason for his desertion was “How could I show my face to my ancestors and my village?” His village had enjoyed a long military tradition. The officer desired to avoid a loss of face before his ‘kith and

kin'. Thereafter Lieutenant Dahiya joined every attack that the Squadron launched. The last one was on 9th Dec 1971 at B.P 638. After that he had to be forcibly evacuated back to MH Jodhpur since he was suffering from excessive loss of blood. Lieutenant Dahiya escaped punishment for being AWOL from the hospital on recommendation of Maj Law, his Officer Commanding. The desertion was not cowardice. The officer had returned to rejoin his unit in the battlefield.

"The CO, MH is reported to have gone to Dahiya's sick bed personally and exonerated him for the offense: telling him not to do it again. Accepting his fault, the officer agreed. However CO, MH returned to ask once again, "Are you sure you will keep your word"? Though weak due to loss of blood, Dahiya shouted 'No Sir': forcing the doctors and nursing staff of the ward to burst out in laughter."

Lt Dahiya is but one example of the praiseworthy, indomitable, fighting spirit of our young Indian Army officers.

The squadron had also been baptised by fire and a raw, brand new, raising had been woven into a battle hardened fighting unit in a very short time. The stories of valour and successes in war scripted the squadron's name into the regimental history books. Thanks to exemplary leadership in war.

After the war, a regrouped 330 Infantry Brigade (my formation) was left to hold on to the entire Pakistani occupied area whilst the majority of 11 Infantry Division units returned to their permanent locations. The armoured squadron was also left in location to support the brigade. 330 Infantry Brigade held the captured areas till the delineation talks with Pakistan were completed a year later.

After the brigade had settled into its new role, the units were given some time to regain command and control and make up their equipment and ammunition requirements. The troops also deserved a little well earned rest.

The Brigade Commander, Brig Gurjit Singh Randhawa, of the Sikh Regiment, then decided to invite the commanding officers to Gadra Road in the makeshift Brigade Officers' Mess for an informal Sunday brunch. Maj R D Law drove up in his battle tank at high speed and suddenly slewed around and came to an abrupt halt in front of the mess entrance; the tank tracks churning up a virtual sand storm. The thick cloud of sand descended on the mess building and

everybody in it. RD Law jumped out of the cupola with a big naughty grin. His black beret and bushy moustache covered in sand, he cheerfully greeted everyone.

Everybody cursed RD Law as they brushed of the sand from their persons. The Commander was livid because he had to wash out his hair and beard a second time that morning. However, the Commander also had a good laugh later as we raised our beer mugs to say 'cheers'.

After all, we had won the war!

Military Musings

HIGH MORALE

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Morale is an oft used word in the army. But what is morale? The dictionary defines morale as a noun meaning the confidence, enthusiasm and discipline of a person or group at a particular time. E.g. the side's morale was high after winning the football match.

But any military man will agree that the definition absolutely fails to convey what in essence is morale; the willingness to fight, the aggressive spirit irrespective of likelihood of loss of life or limb, the readiness to sacrifice one's life for one's comrades, the will to fight on despite being involved in a long war, separated from family and loved ones, in awful inclement weather, without proper habitat and perhaps even adequate clothing to protect from the snow, heat or rain, low on ammunition and without chances of reinforcements turning up in time to save the situation and finally, in the end, still willing to fix bayonets and take on the enemy in hand to hand combat, facing certain death; to the last man and the last round.

The key factor is good leadership with continuous motivation together with a strong regimental spirit and loyalty to the community. There is no other explanation for soldiers displaying high morale and fighting spirit despite long periods of deprivation, harsh living conditions and losses amidst all the death and destruction.

Morale is a state of mind and heart. It cannot be physically measured. But it can be recognised when one sees it. And high morale in units and formations is something truly exemplary and laudatory. A few instances of high morale which I experienced first hand during my service are elucidated below.

As a Captain in mid 1964, I was posted as Brigade Ordnance Officer to HQ 104 Infantry Brigade Headquarters at Tangdhar in the Kashmir valley.

As the Indo-Pak war of 1965 drew closer, tension on both sides of the border was becoming palpable. Firing incidents were inevitable and getting to be more

frequent. Morale was extremely high and the troops were straining at the bit to get to grips with the enemy.

It was against this backdrop that the First Battalion of the Sikh Regiment, 1 Sikh, relieved a battalion of the Bihar regiment at Chamkot on the Kishenganga in Sep 1964. That night the battalion front exploded to the sound of mortar and machine gun fire. When the firing continued unabated for over 15 minutes, the CO of the Sikh Battalion was contacted by the Brigade Commander, Brig Onkar Singh Kalkat, to ascertain what was going on. "Nothing Sir" replied Lt Col Karnail Singh Sidhu. "We are just letting the Pakis know that we are back". The battalion had won a Param Vir Chakra at Titwal and theatre honours in that very sector in 1948. "But you are wasting a lot of ammunition" insisted the Commander. "No worry on that score, Sir. We brought our surplus training ammunition from our last location." was Col Sidhu's reply.

Two days later, the Pakistanis retaliated and subjected Chamkot area to heavy artillery and mortar shelling. Every officer and JCO of the battalion from the CO downwards was out in the open, dancing the 'bhangra' with gay abandon in the open field even as the shells rained down; daring the Pakis to kill them. The Brigade Commander had to expressly forbid them from exposing themselves recklessly to enemy fire in that manner. Their bravery and valour was not in question, the Brigade Commander reminded them.

But such was their high morale. There was no stopping them.

Apart from 1 Sikh, we had 4 Kumaon, 7 Jat and 3/8 GR in the brigade at that time. Each battalion as good as the other; all tried and tested in war. As the 1965 war approached, there were several raids, ambushes and skirmishes in the brigade sector and every battalion participated and proved its war worthiness in these actions.

Our Commander, Brigadier Onkar Singh Kalkat, was a tough Sikh officer of the 8th Gorkhas, who had served in the Frontier Forces before partition and was a veteran of the Second World War. Fearless, a thorough soldier and an immensely inspiring leader who could speak Hindi, English, Pushto, Punjabi and Gorkhali with equal fluency; the troops were ever willing to go on the offensive under his leadership. His problem was generally on how to hold them back on a leash.

The Commander got incensed one morning, when he received a report from an UN Observer that the Pakistani Commander opposing him had made a statement that once war broke out, he (the Pakistani Brigade Commander) would have his breakfast in Tangdhar that very morning. Brig Kalkat directed the UN officer to tell his Pakistani counterpart in no uncertain terms that it was going to be the other way round. It would be he, Brig Kalkat, having breakfast at Muzzafarabad in POK.

A plan was therefore hatched to bring the Pakis to heel. This resulted in planning and ambushing and destroying a large Pakistani road convoy across the Kishenganga without any casualty to own troops, weapons or equipment. There were celebrations at the success of the operation that evening and again a few weeks later, when we heard that the Pak Commander opposite our brigade sector had been sacked.

In early 1965, GOC XV Corps, Lt Gen KS Katoch, who was visiting 19 Infantry Division from Udhampur flew into Tangdhar one morning to visit 104 Infantry Brigade. The IAF helicopter pilot dropped the GOC and flew away; he was to return in the evening to pick up the VIP, but bad weather prevented him from doing so and the Corps Commander was forced to spend a night at Tangdhar. Inevitably, an impromptu party was arranged in the Brigade Officer's Mess. That night the Corps Commander was besieged by the Battalion Commanders and young officers alike, just pleading for a green signal to allow them to cross the line and sort out the Pakis.

Gen Katoch before leaving next morning admitted that he had never before witnessed morale as high as in 104 Brigade. He said it made him proud to have such troops under his command.

The armed forces are full of stories about high morale, courage and sacrifice. But high morale is not limited to the army alone. It was so noticeable amongst civilians also. Both during the 1965 as well as the 1971 war against Pakistan

Just short of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, I was posted to HQ 51 (Independent) Parachute Brigade at Gwalior. The war was passing us by and we were impatient to be deployed in battle. Frustrated with the inactivity in Gwalior, many of us officers from the Commander downwards, officially applied for posting to any active formation on the front. But before the MS could act on any of our applications, the Chinese delivered its ultimatum to India, and 51 Para Brigade was ordered to move immediately to the UP-Nepal-Tibet border

at Dharchula. That day there was great jubilation amongst the troops in happy anticipation of at last getting into the fight.

We moved out of Gwalior next morning by road, for Bareilly. En-route we were to have a night halt at Agra.

To say that we were surprised at the reception we received at Agra would be an understatement. We were simply overwhelmed. We were swamped by civilians on the convoy ground; we were greeted with garlands and teekas and rakhis, and given sweet-meats and blessings by thousands of people who had heard that we were moving to the front. The rich and the poor, the young and the old, men and women; thousands of ordinary Indians who despite not having much had even donated their gold and jewellery for the cause.

These men and women were the salt of the earth. How could we ever let them down? We drove away next morning with renewed determination and vigour to give the Chinese a bloody nose.

1971 was simply a fabulous experience. The whole of India was united as never before. The morale of the Indian Armed Forces was at its highest when it went to war and nothing succeeds like success in war. When East Pakistan surrendered, West Pakistan - battered and bruised, lost the will to fight. Bad leadership and low morale made it difficult for them to digest defeat. If morale was at its zenith in India it was certainly at its nadir in Pakistan.

In the ultimate analysis, it was good leadership at all levels, both political and military, that created and sustained the high morale that resulted in that resounding Indian victory.

Military Musings

MEMORIES OF TANGDHAR

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar

Tension in Tangdhar

Tangdhar. Few Indians would have even been aware of this place in the Kashmir Valley before it was severely affected by the October earthquake in 2005 that devastated Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and Uri, Baramulla and Tangdhar on the Indian side.

Tangdhar invokes various unforgettable memories in my mind. As a Captain in September 1964, I was posted to an infantry brigade headquarters at Tangdhar. My first impression of Tangdhar as I gazed down at the Tangdhar valley from the Nastachun Pass (nicknamed Sadhna Pass by the troops after a popular actress of those years) was its incredible beauty. Tall beautiful firs and poplars densely populated the green valley. The track descending into the valley met a sparkling stream of breathtaking beauty. The lofty snow capped Shamsabari mountain range loomed over the valley to the left. We could see the mountains on the Pakistan side clearly; and between the two countries flowed the Kishenganga River.

As the Indo – Pak war of 1965 drew closer, tension on both sides of the border was becoming palpable. Firing incidents were inevitable and getting to be more frequent. Morale was extremely high and the troops were straining at the bit to get to grips with the enemy.

At about this time a battalion of the Sikh Regiment relieved another infantry battalion at Chamkot on the Kishenganga. That night the front exploded to the sound of mortar and machine gun fire. The CO of the Sikh Battalion was contacted by the Commander to ascertain what was going on. “Nothing Sir” replied the CO “We are just letting the Pakis know that we are back” The battalion had won a Param Vir Chakra in that very location in 1947.

Two days later, the Pakistanis subjected Chamkot area to artillery shelling in retaliation,. Every officer and JCO of the battalion from the CO downwards was in the open, dancing the ‘bahngira’ with gay abandon on their open football

field as the shells rained down; daring the Pakis to kill them. The Commander had to forbid them from exposing themselves recklessly to enemy fire in that manner. But such was their high morale.

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An Officer's Funeral

Etched in my mind is a funeral that took place on one cold winter morning even as heavy snow fell, by the side of a stream in the Tangdhar valley. An officer of the Sikh battalion had slipped while patrolling his piquet and fallen into the minefield on the forward slope facing the enemy. A JCO of that battalion, without thinking of the danger to himself, plunged down into the minefield on the slope, picked up the injured officer in a fireman's lift and started climbing up to safety. Alas! He himself stepped on a mine. His leg was blown off and the officer he was trying to rescue was killed in the explosion. The JCO displayed the type of heroism for which the Sikhs are famous and such stories abound. The officer's body was cremated with full military honours; save that the battalion had to pour as much petrol on the pyre as *ghee* to coax the flames in the miserable weather.

Inauguration of the Motorable Road

On the flip side; a new motorable road had been built over the Nastachun Pass and our new Brigade Commander, Brig Bhumi Chand Chauhan, was to inaugurate it that morning by being the first to drive over the road from Tangdhar to Chowkibal on the other side of the pass. Even as we were all waiting to give the Commander a ceremonial flagging off, we were all shocked to see a Jeep coming towards us over the road which was yet to be inaugurated. It transpired that two officers of the brigade who had been sent back from Staff College, were feeling disgruntled enough not to wait till the completion of the ceremony. The Commander, though initially angry at the audacity of the two officers was gracious enough to take the incident in the right spirit and see the funny side of the incident. He later had a good laugh along with the rest of us. The breach of protocol was ignored and the officers were let off with a warning.

The Indomitable Sikh Troops

It was my very first experience with Sikh troops. I found them an extremely tough lot, with a sense of earthy humour who firmly believed that no task given to them was impossible to accomplish. They were also very hospitable, religious, and just as compassionate as they were ferocious. They are terrific fighters and do the Indian Army proud.

Soon after the battalion arrived, I needed to visit a post in the battalion area to hold a condemnation board. I 'married up' with my escort in the battalion headquarters and we set off. I was told that the climb would not take more than two hours; but we went up hill and down dale and waded through a couple of icy streams. We reached the piquet after a tough climb almost four hours after we had started. The Platoon Commander at the post told me that it was just the boys having their fun and wanted to see if I would measure up to the rigors of the hard climb by a longer route. It was their way of accepting me.

Apart from the steaming hot mug of tea and pakoras served immediately on our arrival at the piquet, after my work was done and before setting off on the return journey, I was fed a sumptuous lunch. The memory of the large glass of salted lassi, and deliciously flavoured hot mutton curry with langar cooked chapatis, still lingers in my mind. The company cook had even made some 'phirni' as a sweet dish in honour of my visit..

Lt Col Karnail Sing Sidhu, a grizzly old soldier; was the tough and fearless Commanding Officer of the battalion. He once officiated as Brigade Commander when Brig Kalkat was away on annual leave. One morning he asked me to accompany him to two posts that he was visiting. The Protection Section led off and it took us a couple of hours to reach the first post. After The CO had inspected the post and discussed operational matters with the Company Commander, we had an informal lunch with the troops. It was then time for us to move on to the next piquet. When the patrol got together, Col Sidhu smelled rum on the breath of his Protection Section Commander. I was taken aback by the CO's outburst of anger; he slapped the Havildar hard, tore off his stripes and placed him under arrest; he was sent back under escort to be jailed in the battalion Quarter Guard. "He has no business to have a drink when he is on protection duty" Col Sidhu was livid as he explained to me while we made our way along the mountain ridge to the next post.

Some ten days later I had to go to 1 Sikh to meet the Officiating Commander to obtain his signature on some official documents, I was surprised to see the very same Protection Section NCO wearing his three stripes again. I hesitantly asked Col Sidhu how come the NCO was a Havildar again? "Rao" said the CO. "have no doubt that this man will give his life for me. I would want none other as my Protection Commander. But he did a wrong and he had to realise it." I realised then why his men literally worshipped the ground he walked on.

Conclusion

I was fortunate to get a chance to serve with such brave and outstanding troops so early in my career. Apart from 1 Sikh, 7 Jat, 3/8 GR and 4 Kumaon were the other battalions in 104 Infantry Brigade at that time. All these battalions also had equally superb war records and it was a great education for me serving with them, seeing their characteristics, attending their festivals and understanding their customs and military traditions.

1 Sikh, is famously known for saving Kashmir from the Pak intruders in 1947. It was the first infantry battalion to be airlifted to Srinagar to counter the threat to the valley. The battalion was awarded the Battle Honour Srinagar in 1947 and Titwal in 1948. It won 1 PVC, 7 Vrcs and 13 mention-in-Despatches in that theatre of operations.

1 Sikh has since been converted into a battalion of the Mechanised Infantry Regiment.

Military Musings

THE SAGA OF DHAN SINGH THAPA, PVC

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

I first met Mrs Shukla Thapa, wife of late Lt Col Dhan Singh Thapa, Param Vir Chakra, some years ago when I was the Resident Administrator of Punya Dham Ashram, a senior citizens' facility with all modern amenities and the best Shiva temple in Pune.

I was in my office, I remember, one morning, when someone informed me that one Mrs Thapa was visiting the Ashram and was having a cup of tea with Mrs Krishna Kashyap, the founder of Punya Dham Ashram. Mrs Kashyap was herself an army wife; her husband had been a Bengal Sapper before taking premature retirement to become a businessman and passed away in UK. But I digress.

I was intrigued to hear that Gorkha surname and I enquired if this Mrs Thapa was also an Army wife? On receiving an affirmative reply, I left my office and went to meet her. She was just getting into her car to leave when I fetched up and introduced myself to her. I asked her to pardon me for enquiring but was she the wife of Lt Col Dhan Singh Thapa, Param Vir Chakra? She smiled, happy to be so recognised, and replied that she was. I then told her that it was a great honour for the Ashram to have her visiting us and invited her to make a second visit so that I could personally give her a complete guided tour. Mrs Thapa was very happy at the invitation and promised to do so. Indeed she made more than one visit to the Ashram. Moreover, she introduced the Ashram to her husband who loved its beautiful architecture, spacious landscaping and well managed facilities.

After retirement from the army, Lt Col and Mrs Thapa had decided to shift from Lucknow and finally settle down in Pune. He was a life time director of Sahara Group and had an office in Amby Valley, I was given to understand. Col Thapa was very happy with his job and his lot in life; as he had every reason to be. Few people get the second chance that he did.

Dhan Singh Thapa was an officer of the First Battalion of the Eighth Gorkha Rifles (1/8 GR). In 1962, as a Major, he was 'D' Company Commander, in

command of an isolated, but strategically important outpost at Srijap, on the Northern bank of Pangong Lake in Ladakh. On 20 October, 1962 his post was surrounded and attacked by the Chinese during that India-China Conflict. The post was subjected to intensive artillery and mortar shelling before being attacked by overwhelming odds. Waves of Chinese troops kept assaulting the post till it was finally captured.

After repulsing two waves of attackers, the post was considerably battered and the Gorkhas had suffered heavy losses. Though depleted in numbers, there was grim determination to fight on to the end under Major Dhan Singh's inspiring leadership. In the third wave the Chinese brought up a few tanks to assist the infantry. Overwhelmed by numbers, out of ammunition, before they succumbed, the remaining Gorkhas, with Maj Thapa in the lead, pulled out their Kukris and got out of their trenches, and took the Chinese head on. Cries of 'Aiyo Gorkhali' and 'Jai Maha Kali' rent the air. They killed several Chinese in brutal hand to hand fighting. Finally, the last round had been fired and the last man had fallen; all was still. Most of the Gorkhas had been martyred in that action, a few were wounded and taken prisoner. As is inevitable in all wars, some were missing in action believed to be killed. Major Dhan Singh Thapa was one of them.

Back in Dehra Dun, the family of Dhan Singh Thapa, which was living in fearful suspense knowing that his battalion was deployed in Ladakh, kept praying for his safety. The news of the post being over-run was a bitter blow and since Major Dhan Singh Thapa was declared missing in action, feared to be dead, Mrs Shukla Thapa went through the rituals of becoming a widow.

Major Dhan Singh Thapa was awarded India's highest gallantry award, the Param Vir Chakra, posthumously. His wife received his medal and citation on his behalf in January 1964.

It was a couple of years later when the Indians and Chinese decided to exchange prisoners-of-war that everyone was surprised to see Major Dhan Singh Thapa's name figuring in the list provided by the Chinese authorities. Apparently he had been over-powered during the fighting and though wounded and unconscious, captured alive by the Chinese. Although he was treated for his injuries, he was also subjected to torture during captivity: but he never buckled under it.

News of his being alive was received with great joy back home and when Major Thapa finally returned to Dehra Dun, on leave, after completion of debriefing and other repatriation formalities, Major and Mrs Thapa were quietly reunited in marriage for a second time. In due course he was also promoted to the rank of Lt Col.

Lt Col Dhan Singh Thapa liked Punya Dham Ashram so much that he had his private religious functions organised in the Ashram mandir, including a big celebration on their 50th wedding anniversary.

When Lt Col Thapa passed away in Sep 2005, his memorial service was held by the Amby Valley officials in the modern state-of-art, multi-purpose hall of Punya Dham Ashram: so loved by the late officer.

Lt Col Thapa is survived by his wife, two daughters and a son.

A great soldier, I found him a humble, soft spoken man who was always grateful to God for his bountiful blessings. He never boasted about his bravery but believed that ordinary people can become extraordinary men under compelling circumstances. He loved music and dancing with his Gorkha troops; he lived for his Gorkhas. He was fiercely patriotic and a military man through and through.

Several roads have been named after Lt Col Dhan Singh Thapa, PVC in Shillong, Darjeeling and in Nepal. And in Dec 2022, when the Government of India decided to name 21 uninhabited islands of the Andaman Nicobar Group after PVC winners, one of the islands was also named after Dhan Singh Thapa.

His life and bravery is an inspiration not only for the troops of 8 GR but also for Gentlemen Cadets of the Indian Military Academy where stories of outstanding valour and leadership are nurtured through the ages. Indeed, the saga of Dhan Singh Thapa is legend.

Military Musings

COLONEL BHAVANI SINGH, MVC

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Col Bhavani Singh of Jaipur. How does one describe a legend? Formerly India's ambassador to Brunei, Col Bhavani Singh was royalty with a capital R. Paratroopers loved him. His qualities of head and heart, his cheerful and friendly attitude, his generosity, his gentlemanliness and his soldierliness were all beyond praise. It was as if he was born to lead. He commanded 10 Para Commando (SF) in the 1971 Indo-Pak war and he kept flitting in and out of my formation, 330 Infantry Brigade of 11 Infantry Division in the Barmer Sector of Rajasthan. We were halfway to Hyderabad city in Sind in Pakistan, when I first met him. Wherever Bhavani Singh set foot in Pakistan, the villagers fell at his feet in droves. He was their beloved prince, bringing succour and hope.

In 1974, I was marking time in Delhi, completing the formalities, en route to Dacca. One day, coming out of South Block, I ran into Col Bhavani Singh. He put his arm over my shoulder, happy to meet again, and insisted that I accompany him to his office for a cup of coffee. After exchanging stories as soldiers are wont to do, he asked me what I was doing in Delhi? I explained that I was then AMA designate in the High Commission of India in Bangladesh and was completing the formalities awaiting departure. He was genuinely pleased to hear the news and conjured up happy visions of a diplomatic life. Not so! I moaned. Due to change of rules by the Ministry of External Affairs, I was being sent of an official passport; not a diplomatic passport. And even the powers-that-be in Army headquarters were unable to convince the MEA otherwise.

"What nonsense" exclaimed Col Bhavani Singh. "This needs to be set right". He picked up the phone and dialled Shri Alirajpur, his cousin and Joint Secretary (Administration) in the MEA at that time. All he said was "Highness! Good Afternoon. Bhavani here. I am sending Major Rao to you. He has a problem. *Zara dekh lena*". And my problem was magically resolved.

That was Bhavani Singh. Although from a royal family there were no airs about him. He was everybody's friend.

Sawai Bhawani Singh was the first male heir born after 100 years to a reigning king in the Jaipur royal family. On 22 October 1931, Maharani Marudhar

Kanwar, the first wife of Maharaja Sir Sawai Man Singh II, gave birth to the first male heir born to a reigning king in the Jaipur royal family in almost 100 years. The heir's birth marked a pompous celebration for the whole royal estate. So much champagne flowed in the city that the heir was nicknamed 'Bubbles'. And Bubbles he remained to his friends and peers, all his life.

Sawai Bhawani Singh started his early education at Sheshbagh School in Srinagar and later at The Doon School in Dehradun. He later completed his education at Harrow School in London.

The title 'Sawai' was bestowed upon the kings of Jaipur by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1699. 'Sawai', originating from Sanskrit roots, means a man holding one and a quarter over all other averages in strength and intelligence.

Bhawani Singh became the first prince to convert the Rambagh Palace into a top-of-the-class luxury hotel in 1958. He then started running many of his other royal residencies such as Raj Mahal Palace as luxury hotels, a trade that helped him become one of the richest royals in post-independent India.

Bhawani Singh had many roles in his life: a prince, hotelier, and diplomat. But it was in the Army where he earned his laurels.

Born into an illustrious line of kings of the Kachwaha clan of Rajputs, who are known for their valour and bravery, on his return from London in 1951, Bhawani Singh was commissioned into the Indian Army as a Second Lieutenant in the 3rd Cavalry. Bhawani Singh soon gained acknowledgment for his warfare skills.

He was selected as President Rajendra Prasad's Bodyguard in 1954. He was Bodyguard to the President till 1963. He kept getting promoted during this period. By 1958, Bhawani Singh was a captain of great repute. Brigadier Sukhjit Singh, a military writer, pays tribute to him by stressing that "military punctilio, ceremonial exactitude, precision and elegance, all came naturally to him."

Bhawani Singh's military career spanned over 35 years. In 1963, he was posted to the 50th Independent Parachute Brigade.

What perhaps became the crowning moment of his military life was the 1971 India-Pakistan War. During the war, Bhawani Singh commanded 10 Para Commando as a Lieutenant Colonel. On the night of 5 December 1971,

Bhawani Singh and his battalion started their arduous expedition of four days and nights and finally laid siege on Chachro and Virawah in Pakistan, regions deep inside enemy territory, and were successful in capturing the regions. For his fearless, bold and exemplary leadership, Lt Col Bhavani Singh was honoured with the nation's second-highest gallantry award, the Maha Vir Chakra.

Col Bhavani Singh was an accomplished horseman and polo player. It was he who started the world cup in Jaipur; a hobby which he passed on to his adopted male heir, his grandson. He married Princess Padmini Devi of Sirmur in 1966. And the couple had a daughter, Princess Diya Kumari. Bhawani Singh adopted his daughter's son, Padmanabh Singh, who, much like his grandfather, also has a unique nickname: Pacho.

Col Bhavani Singh passed away on 16 April 2011 after a month-long period of hospitalisation. The government of Rajasthan announced two days of state mourning. He was cremated with full royal and military honour at Gaitore Ki Chhatriyan, the crematorium of the Kachwaha clan.

He will long be remembered by all who had known him for his professionalism, compassion, affable nature and elan.

Military Musings

TIMMY AND KIPPER

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

In the January 2019 issue of the Kanara Saraswat, Shri Satyanarayana Pandit mentions the name of two great army Generals hailing from Kodagu; Gen K S Thimayya (Timmy to his friends) and Field Marshal K M Cariappa (referred to as Kipper by his peers). Mention of these names triggered memories that I share with the readers here.

General Kodendra Subayya Thimayya, was Chief of Army Staff from 7th May 1957 to 7th May 1961. He was a towering military figure comparable with the best in the world.

Soon after taking over as Commander of Karnataka and Goa Sub Area, in January 1990, my Colonel (General Staff) informed me at a morning conference that a contingent of a few soldiers from the Kumaon Regimental Centre at Ranikhet, were expected to arrive in Bangalore for a short stay of two or three days. "And what is the purpose of the visit?" I enquired.

"They are a working party sent to maintain General Thimayya's grave in the Wilson Garden Cemetery. Although he belonged to Coorg, he was buried in Bangalore as per the wishes of his next of kin." "But why get men from Ranikhet when we have enough manpower in Bangalore itself?" I enquired. "Surely we could detail a few recruits from one of the local Regimental Centres to clear the area around the grave and ensure its upkeep?"

"A matter of pride" replied my Colonel GS. "Gen Thimayya belonged to 19 Hyderabad Regiment which was converted into the Kumaon Regiment. Given his immense military stature and the fact that he was Chief of Army Staff for four years, the regiment not only takes great pride in owning him but also insists on maintaining the grave site itself".

I expressed my desire to visit Wilson Garden Cemetery and lay a wreath at the grave of this great soldier and former Chief. My Colonel GS laid on a visit accordingly and I paid my respects to the late General at his grave. But I was

quite appalled to see the conditions in the cemetery itself. What I saw was not what I expected. The graves were jostling for space and looking very unkempt. Gen Thimayya's grave was simply one among many in that shabby civilian graveyard. Grass was growing everywhere and the recent rains made it difficult to walk on the muddy pathways. But for the guide, so thoughtfully placed by the Colonel GS, it would have taken us a while to locate it. I felt deeply sorry that this outstanding General's mortal remains were interred at such a nondescript site in a civilian cemetery. He deserved better.

We immediately sought permission of his nearest surviving relatives to shift the grave into an army location as befitting his rank, position and stature. Having obtained their okay, we sought permission of Army Headquarters to shift his grave to a specially selected piece of ground in ASC Centre (South), in Bangalore Cantonment. Simultaneously we also sought permission of the Ministry of Defence to re-categorise the piece of land where we intended to relocate the grave. Given the chain of command that processes such requests, obtaining permission was a time consuming process. Consequently, I was posted out on promotion before it came through and it fell upon my successors to complete the task.

Not being an operational matter, the grave shifting was taking some time to complete. I believe the whole project got an impetus when a delegation from Cyprus was due to visit India and Archbishop Makarios desired to pay homage to Gen Thimayya at his grave. (Gen Thimayya had died in Cyprus while on a UN assignment after retiring as COAS and was held in the highest esteem).

But it gives me great satisfaction to say that General Thimayya's mortal remains rest today on military land, in secure, serene and picturesque surroundings. The specially chosen location is exclusive, well protected, and maintained in proper military fashion.

The only time I saw General Thimayya was when he came for his farewell visit to the Indian Military Academy at Dehra Dun, in May 1961, just before he retired. A special military parade had been organised in his honour. At that parade, General Thimayya addressed the Gentlemen Cadets (GCs) of the Academy who were formed up in a 'hollow square' before him. He spoke extempore; very authoritatively and inspiringly. He was an eloquent speaker with excellent command over the English language. Indeed, he made such a deep impression on our minds, that many of us final term GCs (who all thought

ourselves to be future Generals) adopted him as our role model. Who needed a Rommel or a Zukhov or a Patton when we had our very own Thimayya?

I first met General Kodendra Madappa Cariappa in 1966, after his retirement. I was a Captain serving in 51 (Independent) Parachute Brigade, which had just returned to its permanent peace location at Gwalior, after the 1965 Indo-Pak war. The Para Brigade was celebrating its safe return and General Cariappa who happened to be visiting Gwalior, was invited as Chief Guest.

General Cariappa was reputed to be a stickler for correctness, protocol, proper dressing, military discipline and mess etiquette. We paratroopers were dressed in our customary informal open collar white full sleeve shirt and black trousers with regimental cummerbund for the club evening: but General Cariappa was 'properly' dressed in a formal lounge suit.

After the victory over Pakistan and on account of being back home, we paratroopers were in high spirits. As the evening wore on, the party became quite garrulous. We were feeling concerned that he might be annoyed by the officers' behaviour because in the bar, the officers had got to the stage where they were saying 'bottoms up', downing their drink in one gulp, and smashing their glasses at a duck in a picture on the wall. There was a hush when the General walked into the bar but he also downed his drink and let the duck have it. It restored the gaiety of the party and he left soon thereafter.

My second meeting with him was when he was a Field Marshal; old and ailing. Special arrangements had been made for his stay in the Command Hospital (Air Force) at Bangalore. Soon after taking over the Sub Area in Bangalore, I paid him a courtesy call. To my surprise the Field Marshal was fully dressed in blazer and tie, and graciously poured out cups of tea for me and my staff officer, who was accompanying me.

That visit is sharply etched in my mind because just before we left, the Field Marshal picked up a small pair of scissors from a table and snipped off a lock of hair from my staff officer's head saying "You are the Colonel A; the custodian of discipline. You cannot go around with long hair!" He spared nobody.

This narration will be incomplete without recollecting a story related to the 1965 Indo-Pak war. His son K C Cariappa, an IAF pilot, (retired as Air Marshal) was shot down over Pakistan and taken POW. On realising the identity of the wounded flier, Pakistan's Field Marshal Ayub Khan who had served under

Cariappa before independence, offered to release his son immediately. Field Marshal Cariappa is reported to have scoffed at the idea. “He is my son no longer. He is the child of this country” the old soldier is reported to have thundered, “a soldier fighting for his motherland like a true patriot. My many thanks for your kind gesture, but I request you to release them all or release none. Give him no special treatment.”

Such was the measure of the man.

Military Musings

**UNDERSEA HEROES: OUR SUBMARINERS
(PART - 1)**

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

"Submariners are a special brotherhood, either all come to the surface or no one does" ~ Vice Admiral Rudolf Golosov of the Russian Navy

In December 2019, my wife Asha and I attended a recital by Shri Shankar Mahadevan, organised by the Ritwik Foundation of Performing Arts at our math in Pune. As we were exiting from the venue, we met a couple who had come all the way from Bangalore. It happened to be **Commodore Chaitanya Shivram Shiroor, IN (Retd)** and his wife Ameeta. Ameeta felt elated to meet Asha who was her geography teacher when she studied in St Columba School in Mumbai as a young girl, many years ago. And I was very happy to be introduced to another armed forces officer who professed to know me through my Military Musings in the Kanara Saraswat.

Cmde Chaitanya Shiroor is one of only five amchis who have served in the submarine arm of the Indian Navy. The other Amchi submariners being Cdr Ravindra M Harite (Retd), (serving) Capt. Chinmay Durgadas Kallianpur, and Surgeon Commander Chaitanya Shivshankar Kodange (Retd). We also have Capt. Prafullchandra Bhate (Retd) (who is married to an amchi) from the Submarine Arm. Their careers are briefly outlined herein.

In my reckoning, the submarine arm is the toughest branch of the navy to serve in. It requires a special brand of physical fitness and courage to live and perform in a sealed steel tube submerged for months on end. To be away from the family and cut off from loved ones, unable to see the sky and stars or breathe fresh air or bask in the sun or eat fresh food, can indeed be very stressful. Submariners do not even get to bathe/shave every day and are issued disposable cotton clothing which they use and discard every few days.

Submarines have a unique advantage though. They are difficult to detect and have the ability to operate independently by stealth which makes it very

suitable for covert operations. Submarines are designed for fast attack offensive action; striking the enemy by surprise.

Prowling the dark unfathomed depths of the deepest oceans and always aware that any mishap or a hit by an enemy torpedo, bomb, mine or missile could mean eternity in an unmarked watery grave, requires submariners to have a degree of mental toughness not common to all.

Underwater explosions are many times more powerful than bombs exploding on the surface. During hostilities, these underwater explosions in close proximity of the submarine hull can bend and damage the steel plates making it difficult/impossible to open the escape hatches. This together with flooding of the submarine compartments and fires can sink the submarine. Fires onboard are a big threat; if not controlled immediately, the fire could cause a major disaster resulting in loss of lives and in the worst case, loss of the U-boat itself.

The Captain of the sub is in absolute command and the entire crew has to work as a well coordinated and highly trained team. It is for this reason that all orders given by the Captain or Executive Officer (XO) are repeated verbatim so that there is no misunderstanding and are obeyed instantly without question.

Officers and sailors who suffer from claustrophobia are patently unfit for submarine service. The chosen few are put through a special training regime to train them not only in the performance of various tasks in the submarine but also how to deal with identified dangers. Dual tasking of sailors is common practice. Submarine crews are also trained to escape from a disabled submarine when underwater. However this is only possible in shallow water. If the submarine is very deep, a person will die of 'bends' as he shoots up to the surface. So it has to be a controlled ascent with stops at calibrated depths.

India has a mix of Russian, French and German submarines. These conventional submarines are non nuclear; diesel, electric or powered by batteries. They require to charge their batteries at regular intervals which power the propulsion motors. Battery charging is done by diesel engines which require air for combustion. This air intake and the battery charging evolution is done by the submarine rising to periscope depth (which is around 10 to 11 metres). At this depth it hoists the two retractable masts (The 'snort mast' to give fresh air to the diesel engines and the periscope to keep a look out). This evolution is generally done at night to escape detection by the enemy. In addition to

charging of batteries the submarine also gets fresh air in all its compartments. Maintaining the Submarine at a constant depth of 10 metres is quite an exercise especially if the sea is turbulent.

If detected while on the surface, the submarine has no choice but to 'Down Scope', batten the hatches and crash dive.

Little wonder that submariners wear their Dolphin submariner's badge with such pride. One has to grant them their swagger.

Chaitanya Shiroor did his schooling from Sainik School Bijapur and joined the National Defence Academy in 1972 (48th course). He joined the Electrical Engineering Branch of the Indian Navy, did his electrical engineering from INS Shivaji (Lonavala) and specialisation from INS Valsura (Jamnagar).

In 1980, he got his first appointment onboard INS Amba (mother ship to submarines). Here, he was selected for the Nuclear Submarine Project. In 1984, Chaitanya was sent to Vladivostok USSR for Nuclear Submarine Training. He was part of the commissioning crew of India's first Nuclear Submarine: INS Chakra. This Submarine was on lease to India from 1989 upto 1991 (for 3 years).

Nuclear submarines are high speed attack submarines, powered by nuclear reactors and therefore can remain dived for prolonged periods. They have systems onboard to make their own sweet water and fresh air. They are ideal for carrying nuclear weapons. Nuclear tipped Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) complete the triad of delivery systems; the other two being land based ballistic missiles and air delivered nuclear weapons. Having maximum survivability is what makes nuclear submarines the most potent threat for second strike retaliation: since India has an avowed 'no first use' doctrine regarding use of nuclear weapons.

Chaitanya Shiroor remained with the nuclear project and was appointed the General Manager at the Ship Building Centre which manufactures indigenous nuclear submarines; a post he retained till he retired from the Indian Navy as a Commodore on 30 Sep 2011.

Chaitanya Shiroor is currently the President of the Bangalore Chitrapur Local Sabha.

Capt Prafullachandra Bhate of the Executive Branch of the Indian Navy married Dr. Jyotsna Madiman, MBBS and is hence counted as an amchi by the Amchi Martial Clan. He is a hard core submariner and commanded not one but three submarines.

After matriculation from Poona, he joined 31st course NDA in Jan 1964. After commissioning, he initially served brief tenures on board IN surface ships, Vikrant, Mysore and Kadmat, and did Sub-Lieutenant's technical courses in 1968-1969. He joined the Submarine Arm in 1969. After specialising in Submarines, he received Submarine Dived Watch-keeping Certificate on board INSM Khanderi in 1970.

He saw active service during the 1971 Bangladesh war, carrying out operational patrols in submarines in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.

Praful attended the Anti-Submarine Warfare Course in 1973 and the Commanding Officers' Submarine Course and had the privilege of serving onboard IN Submarines Kalvari, Khanderi, Vela and Vaghsheer as Sonar and Torpedo Officer.

After completing the Defence Services' Staff Course at Wellington in 1981, he commanded submarines INSM Vaghsheer and INSM Vela. But the crowning glory was his selection to proceed to West Germany in 1984 as Commissioning CO of India's first German submarine, being built at HDW in Kiel, and later named INSM Shishumar.

In 1988, he stepped ashore on promotion as Captain, Submarine Base. He opted for voluntary retirement in 1991 and settled in Pune.

Jyotsna proved to be the ideal navy wife. In addition to looking after her family, she bore the separations bravely when her husband was away doing sea-time and worked in Family Clinics attached to Naval Hospitals. For a while, she also worked for an NGO after settling down in Pune. They have two sons, both settled in the US.

(to be continued)

Military Musings

**UNDERSEA HEROES – OUR SUBMARINERS
(PART – 2)**

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Yet serving, is navy Captain Chinmaya Durgadas Kallianpur, who since January 2022 is posted at the Naval Dockyard Vishakapatnam as Deputy General Manager, responsible for submarine refits.

Chinmaya quit MIT, Manipal to join the Indian Naval Academy in December 1999. After training to become an Electronics & Electrical Engineer at INS Shivaji, he was commissioned as a Sub Lieutenant on 01 Jan 04. After successful completion of the B.Tech in Jun 04, he continued his Electrical Specialisation at INS Valsura till Jun 06; at the end of which, he opted for Submarine Specialisation and passed his Submarine Medicals.

After further basic training to become a submariner in INS Satvahana at Vishakapatnam, Chinmay joined INS Sindhuratna for his afloat training. Here, apart from his Dolphin Badge he also earned his Dived Watch-keeping Certificate in Sep 2007.

In Mar 2008, Chinmay was again transferred to INS Satavahana for training on nuclear submarines in general and the Arihant class indigenous ballistic missile nuclear submarine (SSBN) in particular. Thereafter he joined Arihant as Assistant Electrical Officer (Design) in Jun 09 and continued till Jun 11. He then did his M.Tech in Signal Processing & Communication from Jul 11 to Jun 13 and was appointed Instructor for training future nuclear submariners at INS Satavahana.

In Jun 2015, he rejoined Arihant. This was a very challenging phase where the submarine underwent many drills and the crew was put through the paces, prior to commissioning of the platform. Chinmay was part of the commissioning crew when Arihant was commissioned into the Indian Navy in Aug 2016.

In 2017, Chinmay was selected to undergo the prestigious Technical Management Course (TMC) at Naval War College at INS Mandovi, Goa. On completion of TMC, he was appointed as the first ever Joint Director of Personnel for Technical Submarine Officers at Naval Headquarters, Delhi wherein he was responsible for appointment, transfers and career management of young technical submarine officers. His excellent performance in this post won him a Commendation from the Naval Chief.

In Dec 2020, he took over as HoD of Electrical Dept of INS Arihant. Chinmay says that it was the proudest moment of his Naval career to be HoD of the very department of the very platform in which he spent much of his submarine life. And as this issue goes to press, he stands selected to attend the Naval Higher Command Course at the Naval War College in Goa; yet another feather in his cap.

Chinmay is married to Shivani Kallianpur (nee Haldipur). She hails from a music loving family and is the niece of Pt. Nityanand Haldipur (acclaimed flautist). She is a Hindustani Classical Vocalist and is a student of Vidushi Ashwini Bhide Deshpande. Shivani is an 'A' Grade artiste (All India Radio grading) and teaches vocal music in the naval fraternity. Their seven year old son, Shaurya, attends the Navy Children's School, Vizag.

Also an experienced submariner is Commander Ravindra Mohan Harite (Retd). He was born on 23rd March 1960 and commissioned on 01st Aug 1982 in the Electrical Branch of the Indian Navy. He joined the submarine arm on 5th Dec 1984 and has served in several submarines including INSM Karanj as Deputy Electrical Officer and as Electrical Officer on INSM Khanderi and INSM Kalveri. He was Instructor in the Electrical Faculty at INS Satvahana, Vishakhapatnam

His other important assignments include Deputy Squadron Electrical Officer, 8th Submarine Squadron, INS Virbahu, Vishakhapatnam and Asst Manager Submarines, Naval Dockyard, Vishakhapatnam.

He served as Deputy Director Electrical at DMDE (Design and Machine Development Establishment) Secunderabad where he was associated with design and machine development of specialised electrical machines, cables and Controller Battery Monitoring System of our first indigenous nuclear powered submarine INS Arihant.

Ravindra also served at Naval Dockyard, Mumbai as Officer In-Charge Battery Commissioning Facility & handled high capacity, heavy duty submarine battery sets used on board Dieso-Electric conventional submarines.

While appointed at Director General Naval Project Vishakhapatnam, he was involved in setting up specialised infrastructure & shore support facilities for berthing of nuclear submarines at Vizag harbour.

He assisted in indigenisation by serving as Deputy Chief Quality Assurance Officer involving indigenous development of machinery spares as substitute for imported Spares for marine equipment through Indian SMEs

A welcome change from his electrical duties and submarines was a stint with a Naval NCC unit in Mumbai, training young cadets in naval orientation, team building, developing leadership qualities and personality development.

Cdr Ravindra Harite retired from service on 30 Apr 2008. Post retirement he joined NABARD as DGM Properties & Premises handling various upgradation & infrastructure projects of NABARD.

Cdr Harite travels far and wide in pursuit of his passionate hobby which is wild life videography.

Ravindra is married to Vidya Harite nee Rao (Kabad) who hails from Ahmedabad. She is a qualified teacher who has served as Pre-primary Teacher in various naval and private schools at Mumbai, Vizag and Pune. They have two sons. The elder son Aniruddha, having completed ICWI is working with Hitachi Energy at Bengaluru. The younger son Aniket is yet studying.

The Harites have settled in Pune.

But our boldest amchi who deserves the sobriquet of 'Doctor Courageous' is Surgeon Commander Chaitanya Shivshankar Kodange, IN (Retd), son of Air Commodore Shivshankar Kodange, IAF and Radhika, who have settled down in Pune after retirement. Chaitanya graduated from the Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), Pune in 1993 and after volunteering for the submarine course, qualified as a Submarine Medical Officer in 1995. He has sailed extensively in Kilo, SSK and Foxtrot classes of submarines. He also served with the Marine Commandos (MARCOS). Following his Post graduation in Marine Medicine (Diving & Hyperbaric Medicine, Submarine & Shipboard Medicine) in 2000 he was posted to the Indian Naval Diving School, Kochi for 6 yrs. He went on to do

a second specialisation in MD Psychiatry. He has headed the Medical Department in submarine bases and later served as Associate Professor in Marine Medicine & Psychiatry at the Institute of Naval Medicine, INHS Asvini, Mumbai.

He is not just a medical professional but also the first Indian Navy Medical Officer to qualify as a submariner, Ships diving officer and sky diver. A rare combination of skills indeed.

Chaitanya embraced danger by choosing to serve on submarines, and do the deep sea diving and sky-diving courses with the sole motivation of personally experiencing the stresses and strains that sailors underwent, in order to become an informed counsellor, an effective psychiatrist and better doctor. Commendable devotion to his profession.

Apart from his MBBS degree, Chaitanya holds a Diploma in Marine Medicine (DMM) from Institute of Naval Medicine, INHS Asvini, Mumbai (2000), MD(Psychiatry) from AFMC, Pune (2011); Post Graduate Diploma in Health Administration (PGDHA) from Medvarsity, Apollo Hospital, Hyderabad (2013); IIWCC (International Inter-professional Wound Care Course, Abu Dhabi (2019) from University of Toronto.

His academic achievements include Gold Medal from MUHS, Nashik for standing 1st in Medicine & Allied specialties. He stood 1st in Grading Exam and MD (Psy) exam of MUHS in Pune region. Stood 1st in course & best research project in the IIWCC course in 2018-2019.

For his outstanding professionalism and dedication to service he was awarded the CNS' commendation in 1999 and two commendations by the FOC-in-C (South & East) in 2002 and 2008 respectively.

He took premature retirement from the Indian Navy in 2017 & since then is working as Consultant & Head of Department in the Diving & Hyperbaric Medicine & Wound Care Unit and Psychiatrist at the King Hamad University Hospital, Bahrain.

He is one of the few International Medical Referees of the UK Diving Medical Committee (UKDMC). He is also a reviewer for the Medical Journal of Armed Forces of India (MJAFI); Journal of Marine Medical Society (JMMS); Advances in Skin & Wound care.

That Chaitanya was determined to become a submariner was apparent whilst he was studying in AFMC itself. He once accepted a dare that he could sit in a dark, cramped, claustrophobic space for eight hours at a stretch without any auditory or visual inputs (mimicking submarine conditions) to disorient his sense of time. All he was allowed to have was a bottle of water. He accepted the challenge and won the bet: winning the undying respect of his batch-mates.

Chaitanya is married to Meghana (nee Dhareshwar) and they have a son, Dhruv, who is studying Game Design in Canada.

Military Musings

AMCHI HELICOPTER PILOTS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

I was deeply pained to learn about the passing away of Colonel Dilip Kamlakar Gulwadi at the Command Hospital (Southern Command) in Pune on 31 Aug 2023. Dilip was a helicopter pilot belonging to the Army Aviation Corps (AAC) and was commanding his flying unit in Jammu, when I was Major General, Army Ordnance Corps (MG AOC) Northern Command in 1992-1994. I shall always remember Dilip as a jovial, moustachioed person, helpful, compassionate and a good human being. Responsibility always rested lightly on his shoulders. Dilip has actively participated in the 1971 Bangladesh war and has 5619 hours of flying experience including a full tenure in Ladakh. His son, Cdr Vikram Gulwadi of the Engineering Branch of the Indian Navy, post retirement, is employed in the Hindustan Shipyard Limited at Vishakhapatnam

Browsing through the Amchi Martial Clan Directory (AMCD), I discovered that though we have a fair number of officers who are fighter or transport pilots, one can count the helicopter pilots on one's fingers. Three: to be precise. Col Dilip Gulwadi was the senior most among them. Followed by Lt Col Kodange Arun Rao, SM (AAC) and finally Wg Cdr Atul Ajit Mudbidri of the IAF. The Naval officers in aviation all appear to be fighter pilots.

Artillery officers of the army, or 'Gunners' as they are colloquially known, fire their guns at long ranges, so they are unable to visually observe the effectiveness of the firing. Small fixed wing aircraft with trained artillery officers flying them, were therefore used to act as elevated posts to observe the fall of shot and correct artillery fire, by direct radio communication with the Gunners, to shift the fire accurately on to the enemy targets and neutralise them. These flights were named Air Observation Post or Air OP for short.

It was the then Army Chief, General J N Chaudhuri, In 1963, who first took up the case for raising of a separate air wing for the army, which would increase the firepower and mobility of the army. But it was only after a persuasive presentation by Gen K Sundarji to PM Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 that the AAC came into being and Air OP duties were transferred from the artillery to the AAC

which were now equipped with helicopters. Since its raising, helicopters of the AAC have participated in a number of military operations at home and abroad with distinction, as also participated in UN missions; and its pilots have been awarded numerous decorations.

In October 2001, the nomenclature of Air OP units was changed to R&O (Reconnaissance and Observation) and all army flying units became either Army Aviation Squadrons (R&O) or Army Aviation Flights (R&O). In August 2021, the responsibility of managing all Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) of the Indian Army, was also assigned to the Army Aviation Corps. This brought all aviation assets of the Army under one organisation.

The Army Aviation Corps performs combat search and rescue (CSAR), artillery lift, combat transportation, logistics relief, military prisoner transportation and medical evacuation in wartime and during natural disasters.

The Indian Air Force flies attack helicopters such as the Russian Mi-24/Mi-35, though under operational control of the army. American Apache attack helicopters have recently been inducted into the Air Force and as per reports, a few are on order for the Army as well.

The work horses of Army aviation for decades were the Chetak (Alouette III) for operations in the plains and the Cheetah (SA 315B Lama) for the mountains. Both these helicopters were manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited under license from Aérospatiale of France. These are now getting replaced by indigenously manufactured HAL Dhruv. In addition AAC pilots fly the ALH Prachand and HAL manufactured Rudra ALH-WSI (Armed Scout).

Armed Forces' pilots are known to try their utmost to evacuate a casualty no matter what the risk to themselves; sometimes their aircraft have to be lightened of unnecessary load, at times they have to fly without the co-pilot so that they can evacuate the casualty from very high altitudes. Naval pilots might be flying at extreme ranges without adequate reserve fuel, searching the ocean for crash victims. Operating in extreme conditions in bad weather, fog and rain is normal for helicopter pilots; where both man and machine are pushed to the limits of their performance.

And in such conditions our pilots, both Army and Air Force, operate for two to three years at a stretch in Ladakh; all accident free flying. Two such amchi

pilots who are a credit to the community are Lt Col (Retd) Kodange Arun Rao and Wg Cdr (Retd) Atul Ajit Mudbidri.

In fact once when I visited Siachen in my official capacity as MG AOC Northern Command, it was Arun who happened to fly me from Leh to Thoise (Siachen Base Camp) and back.

Born in March 1949, Arun was educated in Dehradun where his father (late) Kodange Ramesh Rao was working in the Forest Research Institute. Commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery in March 1971, Arun saw active combat in the Fazilka and Hussainiwala sectors in the Western Theatre during the Indo-Pak War of 1971. After being selected for flying duties in 1976 he underwent flying training at Bidar, Hakimpet & Deolali and was awarded the coveted pilot's wings in 1977. He built up useful hill flying experience during several consecutive postings to various bases in the North East. By the early 1980s he had landed at almost every helipad in Sikkim, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram & Manipur. He also gained more combat experience in Counter Insurgency operations in the hilly jungles of Nagaland & Mizoram.

Arun has flown extensively in Rajasthan, Himachal and J&K. He commanded the Army's Northern-most helicopter base in support of operations in the Siachen Glacier from August 1990 to December 1992. All pilots flew extensive combat sorties to army posts in the Glacier and the Saltoro Ridge. The missions were typically, casualty evacuation, direction of artillery fire from the air, carriage of essential stores & supplies, induction & de-induction of troops to forward posts not having foot-routes. Many flights were carried out under enemy fire from their ground weapons and in extreme bad weather and much beyond the prescribed performance capabilities of the Cheetah helicopters that were based there.

During Arun's Siachen tenure, he was recommended for gallantry awards several times and the instances cited below graphically describe the sort of missions he undertook:-

- On 5th October 1991, he flew a sortie to successfully engage an enemy artillery gun position across the AGPL (Actual Ground Position Line) for which he had to fly at 24,750 feet altitude (service ceiling of the Cheetah Helicopter is 23,000 feet). A citation for Sena Medal was initiated.

- On 31st December 1991, he successfully flew a total of 13 casualty evacuation missions on a single day from 6 am to 5.30 pm. A citation for Shaurya Chakra was initiated.
- On 8th February 1992, Sonam Post located at 19,500 feet AMSL came under heavy enemy mortar fire coupled with extreme bad weather & heavy snowfall. While other pilots made unsuccessful attempts to evacuate the personnel, it was Arun who braved enemy fire repeatedly and succeeded in getting the casualties as well as one dead body back to base. Arun was awarded the Sena Medal for Gallantry for this act.
- On 10th February 1992, he flew a sortie to successfully engage an enemy artillery gun position across the AGPL for which he had to fly at 26,300 feet altitude. A citation for Sena Medal was initiated.
- On 8th July 1992, during a combined training-cum-air maintenance sortie, his helicopter experienced the deadly emergency of an engine surge while landing at Amar post located at 19,400 feet, but he managed to land the helicopter safely. He thereafter flew his partially serviceable helicopter back to Base Camp; a daring and risky feat for which a citation for Sena Medal was again initiated.

His final assignment in uniform was as Senior Flying Instructor & Commander of the Aviation Training Wing of the Army in Deolali. During his military flying career he attained the highest military flying qualification of 'A' Master Green with over 6000 hours of flying experience.

After taking premature retirement in 1994, Arun was Vice-President of Deccan Airways upto 2013. Now he is full time immersed in music; he plays the bass guitar in a local rock band.

Atul Mudbidri, son of Late Gp Capt Ajit Mudbidri, joined the IAF directly after graduation and started his career flying Cheetahs and Chetaks. Like Arun Rao, Atul has also served a full tenure in Ladakh. Atul converted to flying ALH Dhruv at the time of its operational induction into the IAF. Apart from his service as a pilot in various IAF Squadrons, all over India, Atul has commanded a Surface to Air Guided Weapon (SAGW) Squadron and has been a flying instructor for training helicopter pilots: he being a classified Master Green pilot with about 4500 hours of flying experience. His last posting was in the National Defence Academy where he headed the Air Force Training Team responsible for the flying training of Air Force cadets on light, fixed wing, Super Dimona aircraft.

Atul has recently retired after over 25 years of service in the Air Force. Being a certified Advanced Level Open Water Scuba Diver, he now hopes to try his hand in adventure sports/tourism as a Scuba Diving Instructor once he obtains his Dive Master's certificate.

Coincidentally, both Lt Col Arun Rao and Wg Cdr Atul Mudbidri have also settled down in Pune after retirement.

Military Musings

OUR FIRST AMCHI WOMEN WARRIORS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Entry of women officers into the Armed Forces as doctors, nurses or into the specialised legal and education branches has existed in the past. Recruitment of women into the regular Armed Forces, however, is a more recent phenomenon. The first Short Service Commissioned Officers were inducted into the Army, Navy and Air Force only from 1992 onwards. Now, three decades later, in 2022, selected women short service officers are eligible for grant of a permanent commission. Moreover, they are also now eligible to apply for permanent commission in any of the three services through the National Defence Academy which till this year was the exclusive preserve of males only.

Amchi girls were not going to be left behind in contributing their mite for the defence of the nation. Sketched below are the profiles of the first two women of the Chitrapur Saraswat community to join the Armed Forces as Short Service Commissioned Officers.

Lt. Saachi Koppikar, AOC

Saturday, 30th July 2022 was a historic day for the Chitrapur Saraswat community. Lady Cadet Saachi Ranjit Koppikar scripted her way into history by becoming the first amchi lady officer to pass out of the Officers' Training Academy (OTA), Chennai, and join the Indian Army with the rank of Lieutenant as a Short Service Commissioned Officer. She was 'pipped' by her proud parents; her father putting the badges of rank on one shoulder and her mother on the other.

At first glance, this chit of a girl, hardly 5'2" tall with a pageboy haircut and a tom-boyish look about her, one would hardly guess that she is a military officer. But appearances can be deceptive. She is a tough girl; as good as they come; full of guts and gusto. One who has proved her mettle in the academy. She is a topper in her course, first in the order of merit and the best lady cadet to be commissioned into the Army Ordnance Corps (AOC). She was awarded merit cards for swimming and yoga and led her company to victory in the Weapons and Firing Championship for both terms. She won a Gold Medal in boxing; she

fought in the lightweight category. No surprise that she was leading her JESSAMI Company, Ranjit Singh Battalion, as a sword carrying appointment in the passing out parade.

Saachi is the daughter of Ranjit Koppikar an engineer, Business Line Head of a Division of ABB in Nashik and mother Aparna who is an official of the Union Bank of India. Saachi's maternal grandfather, Late Capt Ashok Nagarkar was commissioned into the Corps of Engineers (Bombay Sappers) in 1963. He served in J&K and Nagaland before being posted to CME, Pune, for his degree course. Unfortunately on 30 Jun 1967, while on a bridging training exercise, he passed away in a drowning accident.

Saachi has an unusual background. She did her initial education in Pune and Nashik and is a qualified architect from the Academy of Architecture, Prabhadevi, Mumbai. Early on, in her student days, she also participated in the Maharashtra State Level Swimming Competitions. She also completed the Basic Course in Mountaineering, and is an avid cyclist. She had already worked for two years with a designing firm but with a keen liking for adventure sports, she felt a strong calling to join the army.

Her parents were surprised when they heard of her intention to switch track and prepare for the Combined Defence Services Entrance Examination but they fully supported her. She secured Ninth Rank in All India Order of Merit in the SSB (Service Selection Board) Selections; just made it, because age-wise, she got in at the last chance. Saachi has a younger brother who is a qualified engineer working in a firm in Pune.

Her architectural background might have made her eligible to join the Corps of Engineers but she was influenced by her many acquaintances and well wishers in the military to opt for the Army Ordnance Corps, the materials management organisation of the Indian Army that handles everything from a pin to tanks and helicopters; from soldier's socks to special snow clothing and from a bullet to rockets and missiles – an inventory of over half a million items moving systematically through a large network of depots, ordnance units and stores sections before reaching the man/equipment/animal it is meant for. The system is highly computerised giving total asset visibility with many modern automated sub-systems.

Short Service Commissioned officers get to serve for a period of 10 years at which point there is a review and they are at liberty to opt out at that stage if

they so wish. If they choose to continue and provided the army assesses them as fit to do so, they get to serve for another 4 years. At that stage they are either selected for permanent commission or weeded out.

Opting for permanent commission is a moment of reckoning for all short service women officers since possibility of marriage, motherhood, periods of separation from the family due to military life, frequent postings etc are all pertinent factors which impinge on decision making. But given Saachi's strong attraction to the military and her determination to overcome all odds, chances are that she will opt for a permanent commission.

Saachi has a charming smile and impeccable manners. Brought up in the best amchi traditions with the right values imbibed by her distinguished parents, Saachi is simple person with a winsome personality who is willing to slog for what she wants and a person who knows her own mind.

This petite power package will go far in life.

Sqn Ldr Manali Bijoor, IAF

Squadron Leader Manali Bijoor has a double distinction. She is not only the first amchi girl to join the Indian Air Force but also the very first amchi girl to join any of the three services.

Manali is the daughter of Malati and Milind Bijoor; both are bankers, employed in different branches of SVC Bank in Mumbai. Manali was born on 15th January 1993 at Khar, Mumbai. She has a younger sister, Maithili, who is a qualified Physiotherapist. Manali did her initial schooling at Khar in Mumbai. She excelled in academics as well as extracurricular activities like dramatics and debates. After completing her secondary schooling through the Parle Tilak Vidyalaya English Medium School, Vile Parle, she attended a Career Guidance Lecture which veered her towards the armed services. Strongly motivated and focussed on joining the armed forces, she was a board ranker scoring 95/100 in English Language in her 10th Std in the year 2008. She was awarded a Gold Medal for this achievement by the then State Education Minister of Maharashtra.

She joined Ruia College after her 10th Std to pursue her B.Sc degree course. In her College days too she consistently performed well (1st Class in each year from First to Final Year of her Graduation) while continuing to participate in her favourite extracurricular activities.

She topped her college in her stream in Third Year Zoology. In the mean time she had also appeared for the IAF AFCAT (Air Force Common Admission Test) as well as Combined Defence Services (CDS) Exams, conducted through UPSC and cleared both.

In IAF AFCAT while the average scores for that year was at 145, she scored 220. She got through the SSB entrance in the very first attempt. She also cleared her PABT (Pilot Aptitude Battery Test) but lost out becoming a pilot by a whisker because of minimum height stipulations. However, having achieved and cleared all other stringent medical and Operational Qualifications and Tests, she was selected for IAF Training. She underwent a year's gruelling training at Indian Air Force Academy at Dundigal, near Hyderabad, which commenced in Jan 2014.

In Dec 2014, at age 21, at an impressive Passing Out Parade she was commissioned in the Indian Air Force as a Flying Officer. Thereafter she was deputed to Air Defence College at Lucknow for specialized training as a Fighter Controller. After completion she was posted to Ambala Air Force Station on her first posting as a Fighter Controller.

It was during her posting at Ambala she got the opportunity to prove her mettle and proficiency in her work. It was pure providence that during both, the infamous Pathankot Air Base attack in Jan 2016 and the Uri Attack in Sept 2016, she was on duty at the Ambala Air Base. She in her own way participated and contributed her services in the operations of neutralizing and sanitizing of the Pathankot Air Base as well as Uri Army Base. Her performance was acknowledged by a Commendation Certificate and a Silver Badge, being awarded to her by Air Marshal C Harikumar, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Air Command, for displaying commendable dedication and professional skills.

Her biggest hour of recognition came when she cleared the stringent Medical and Professional Exams to qualify for being trained for AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) (colloquially referred to as Eye in the Sky). In fact she has created a record by being amongst the batch of first three women Fighter Controllers to be trained for AWACS. She is currently posted to an AWACS Squadron.

A Fighter Controller has a crucial role to play. Fighter aircraft don't fly in isolation. They need a supporting environment to detect and identify enemy

intruders and guide own fighter aircraft towards them to knock them out of the skies. For this purpose they continuously scan their scopes, receive inputs from other airborne and ground based radars, interpret the information and effectively manage the entire airspace by guiding the pilots. In both, offensive and defensive operations, Fighter Controllers are indispensable. It is a very responsible and stressful job, requiring quick decision making and intense concentration when a number of fast flying enemy and friendly aircraft as well as missiles are operating in the area of operations. Only the very best are selected to become Fighter Controllers. And Manali obviously fits the bill.

Manali has a flair for languages; she is proficient in Sanskrit, English, Marathi, Hindi, Urdu and her mother tongue Konkani. She has done a course in Graphology. Reading, photography, philately and driving are her hobbies which she pursues whenever she can manage to take out time from her hectic schedules. She considers herself fortunate and blessed to have been listed as an Illustrious Alumni of Ramnarain Ruia Autonomous College, Zoology Department.

While we are safely ensconced in our homes enjoying the festival of lights this Divali, Saachi and Manali are unlikely to be with their families to share in the festivities. Saachi will be deployed in an active operational area in J&K while Manali will be maintaining her ceaseless vigil against hostile airborne intruders violating India's airspace. Their sacrifice ensures the peace and safety of the nation.

The Bhanap community is extremely proud of our women warriors and wish both, Saachi Koppikar and Manali Bijoor, the very best in the pursuit of their respective careers and personal lives.

And the Amchi Martial Clan welcomes these brave young ladies into its fold.

Military Musings

ANIMAL CRACKERS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The Indian Army uses a variety of animals to sustain operations; both in war, and in peace. Animals have provided sterling service during the two world wars and in independent India; they continue to do so even today. Inevitably, various animal 'stories' abound. Some of the more interesting ones are shared with the readers here.

Camels

I had personal experience in dealing with camels in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. I was the DAA&QMG (DQ) of an Infantry Brigade operating in the Barmer Sector. Soon after the cease-fire, 11 Infantry Division less our suitably regrouped infantry brigade returned to their permanent peacetime locations. Our regrouped brigade was left in situ to hold the entire occupied area, till the delineation talks with Pakistan were concluded and the captured territory returned to it. The process took an entire year.

We had one camel battalion in the division, which was deployed mostly for patrolling and raids during war. But the division also had to hire a fair number of local camels to provide administrative support in operations. Comparison in the performance of army camels and civilian camels was inevitable. We were amazed to see how spoilt the army camels were. Though bigger in size, better bred and better fed than the local camels, they thoroughly destroyed any myth about the camel being the 'ship of the desert' for it took real effort to provide for their needs of food and water. Army camels were looked after extremely well in peacetime; fed, watered, exercised and groomed daily. In consequence, they lost a bit of their 'desert worthiness' e.g. the army camels became extremely choosy about the water they drank. Not for them any brackish water from the village wells. They needed pure drinking water.

In the desert, providing fresh water to troops and animals involved detailed planning and a huge amount of effort. Water had to be brought by a special train daily, all the way from Jodhpur to Gadra Road in the Barmer sector and

then taken into Pakistan crossing the border at Munabao / Khokropar, at night, to avoid air attacks. And whereas water for soldiers was provisioned at a bare 20 litres per man per day for all purposes, army camels needed 60 litres per camel per day simply for drinking. At times, consumption of water by troops had to be restricted to 'hard scale' of only 10 litres per man per day but camels always got their full entitlement.

The writing on the wall was clear - the days of the camel in the Indian Army were drawing to a close. It was felt that it was better, whenever required, to hire local civilian camels which performed sturdily and were better adjusted to the desert than army camels. This also helped the locals to earn money. Their civilian handlers had good knowledge of the terrain and were also good sources of information. Civilian camels provided no logistic burden; they ate whatever fodder their civilian handlers fed them, rested in whatever little shade was provided by the scraggy desert vegetation and were quite used to drinking local water from the village wells. They could operate for days without any problem.

The incident that clinched the decision to do away with camels was that after operating in the desert sun for a few days, the vets of the RVC reported that the army camels were suffering from night blindness, making them unfit for night operations. Though it was a temporary and reversible condition, they had to be immediately administered huge doses of Vitamin D tablets; bought from the Southern Army Commander's welfare funds.

A battalion equipped with new BTR 60 PB armoured personnel carriers made its appearance in the divisional sector soon thereafter to replace the camel battalion.

Mules

The mule is a cross breed between a horse and a donkey, which is itself incapable of further procreation. It is the animal used most extensively for carrying loads in the army. The animals are tough, capable of carrying heavy loads, sure-footed and ideally suited for employment in mountainous terrain, where motorized transport cannot be used.

Army mules are divided into two main categories Mules GS (General Service) and Mules MA (Mountain Artillery). GS mules are held by Animal Transport (AT) Companies of the Army Service Corps whereas MA mules are held by

Mountain Artillery Regiments. The GS mules are used, as the abbreviation implies for general service; ferrying rations, small arms ammunition, bedding, tents, water, and the like as also for carrying personnel. MA mules are used for carrying mountain guns and howitzers in dismantled condition, and their ammunition.

A single dismantled gun is carried by several mules. The mules however are very well trained and the soldier handlers and mules work as a group in perfect unison. The mules are battle inoculated and trained to fall-in, always, in the same order and in an instant, to enable unloading and assembling the gun in a matter of minutes. The animals react to whistles and verbal orders so marvellously, that unless one sees for oneself these animals in action, one cannot believe how disciplined and capable they are. I had the unique experience of seeing the animals of 138 (Dehra Dun) Mountain Battery in action just prior to the 1965 war in the Tangdhar Sector of the Kashmir Valley. The battery's 3.7 in. howitzers were deployed in a direct firing role to help extricate some own troops from across the border.

All of us are familiar with the phrase 'as stubborn as a mule'. It is said that a Pakistani soldier realized to his discomfiture what the phrase meant when he succeeded in 'capturing' an Indian Army MA mule with a gun barrel on its back; in the Rajouri Sector, during the 1965 Indo-Pak war. He was highly ecstatic of his unique feat but did not reckon with the mule's stubbornness. It resisted being led away by this unfamiliar person and tried to pull away, bite, shove, stomp and kick the soldier and make his life miserable in a way that only mules know how. In the meantime the actual mule handler realized that his mule was missing and loudly whistled his shrill whistle that was a special signal known only to his mule. The moment the captured mule heard the whistle, it violently jerked the reins out of the Pakistani soldier's hand and raced back across the minefield to the Indian side bringing back the gun barrel intact.

The animal was cheered as it ran back and feted and made much of once it was safely back in its own lines. I daresay that that particular mule received some VIP treatment from the regiment in the days that followed

Muleteers have a special relationship with their animals. They have to load their animals, lead them to their destination, often along dangerous and narrow mountain paths, made more treacherous with snow or slush on the ground, unload the animal and bring it back to the unit. The process may take the better part of a day and when he gets back he has to first rub down the

animal, put a blanket over his back, inspect its hoofs and legs for minor injuries, feed and water him and only then attend to his own needs. The handler is totally responsible for his animal. He feeds it, he waters it, he grooms it and exercises it; if it is injured or sick or suffering from colic, he takes it to the unit vet and cares for it till it's on its feet again. There are no Sundays and holidays for the mule handler. Come rain or shine the muleteer and his mule perform their duty quietly and without aplomb. The mule and his handler even undergo battle inoculation together. It's a rough life for man and beast alike.

The bond of affection between man and animal is so strong that one muleteer broke down inconsolably when his mule died. It was like his having lost a member of his own family. He had to be sent on leave to recover but he became fully normal after his return only when he was allotted another mule to care for.

Mules have provided superb service to the Indian Army; notably in Burma and North Africa during World War II. After independence, mules have been employed to sustain troops along the Himalayan heights all along our Northern borders and in the Eastern sector.

The Indian Army, now and then, imports high quality mules from abroad; which gives rise to the saying that the Indian Army can produce Generals but not mules. But be it Generals or mules, the jawans strongly believe that both are to be avoided because both can kick. As the saying goes *"General Sahab ke aage our khacchar ke peeche kabhi mat jana, kyon ki dono laot marte hain"*

Mules can kick powerfully, as is borne out by the writing on a marker over the grave of a mule somewhere in Burma. "Here lies Jenny the Mule - which kicked four privates, three Sergeants, two officers – and one bomb".

Elephants

Elephants were used extensively in battles of yore in India and elsewhere. The lumbering but huge and powerful animals would intimidate the enemy confronting it. The charging elephant is truly a terrifying sight to face. Kings and commanders preferred the elephant since they could survey the battlefield from aloft its back. However with modernization and mechanization of warfare, elephants gradually lost their pride of place.

The Indian Army today does not use elephants; though in the 1960s civilian elephants were hired for carrying stores, rations and mail in the Eastern Sector where a number of streams had to be forded which were difficult for vehicles to cross. This was before development of communications in that part of India. To the best of my knowledge, elephants are no longer used for any purpose by the Indian Army today.

Sadly, the military and the pachyderm have landed in adversarial positions due to civilization invading the elephant's habitat. This is seen in West Bengal in the Sukna / Bengdubi Cantonment where wild elephants freely invade military camps. The initial years when man and beast were adjusting to living together were very trying. Elephant herds would block roads and halt vehicle convoys or stand astride railway tracks and force the trains to halt at a respectable distance. Even today we hear of the odd case of an elephant being killed after being run over by a train.

The elephants soon located the source of food, namely the ASC Supply Depot. Elephants would wander into the ASC depot and feast on atta and sugar. They soon got used to stealing rum from the rations. Fencing put up by units were trampled down by the elephants; barbed wire having little effect on their thick hides. Rations were shifted to the inner most rooms to deny access to elephants. But there was no stopping them. They just broke through doors, walls or whatever came in their way. If the larger elephants couldn't gain entry they sent the smaller elephants in to drag out the sacks of sugar which were then picked up by the larger elephants. The units tried to mount lights and loud horns on vehicles to frighten them away. Nothing worked. Not even electric fencing; because the elephants soon learned to break the fence with wooden logs and the walk over the obstacle. Amazing intelligence they displayed.

The troops were very wary of running into elephants particularly at dusk when the elephant merged into the background. One jawan going home on his bicycle failed to spot the elephant in his path and crashed into the beast. He abandoned his bike and ran for his life. Fortunately for him the elephant vented its anger on the bicycle and smashed it; which helped him to get away.

Some people were hurt initially in skirmishes with the elephants. An odd jawan was even killed by an enraged elephant. However, over the years, man and beast have learnt to live with an uneasy truce. Leave and let alone is the most accepted policy when elephants come visiting.

Higher authorities initially were perplexed about losses in rations being reported for writing off by units in Bengdubi and were suspicious. But visitors to Bengdubi soon experienced the truth themselves. An elephant damage committee was set up, akin to a storm damage committee, for recommending barrack damages and loss of rations for regularization.

Horses

Horses are truly military animals. For ages, they have been used for multifarious activities; as chargers in battle, for towing guns and carriages and even for sending dispatches. Horses which are comparatively easy to breed and train have been used for centuries by almost every army in the world. Horses have been used in the American Civil War, in the Russian snow clad plains, in the Arabian Desert, in the Burmese Jungles. Horses can function in all types of weather and literally, wherever man can go, so can the horse.

Alas, like the elephants, horses have also been overtaken by mechanization. Today, the Indian Army has only one horsed cavalry regiment left. All other horse regiments have long since been converted into tank regiments of the Armoured Corps. Today, horses play a more ceremonial role. The President's Bodyguard still has horses. Otherwise, horses are only found in the officer training academies and a few regimental centres. Some units having mules also have a few horses authorized to them.

No military parade is complete without horses. Horses participate in military tattoos, polo matches, horse shows, tent pegging events and the like. They never fail to excite. Horses such as the ones used by the Adjutants of the National Defence Academy and Indian Military Academy are truly special steeds. These magnificent animals can stand still in one place for hours or march in step with band tunes. They respond unfailingly to the slightest signal from the rider.

Their loyalty to the owner is as phenomenal as is the loyalty of dogs. They are obedient and can be driven hard, to death if need be. Army steeds are beautiful creatures to behold. Huge animals, strong sinewy bodies, muscles flowing, the skin shiny, mane and hair trimmed and groomed, hoofs shod and bearing well polished harness and sadlery. They make civilian horses appear puny, disheveled and underfed in comparison.

There is one scene which is etched indelibly in my mind. Readers will recollect that Gen B C Joshi when he was Chief of Army Staff died in office. The image is of his funeral; his horse with empty saddle following behind the gun carriage bearing his master's body. The empty riding boots were reversed in the stirrups and the horse was walking, head bent, to the beat of muffled drums.

Dogs

Dogs are everybody's favourite animal mostly because they can be trained to do tricks and make lovely pets; also there are several beautiful breeds to choose from.

The Army uses dogs for the serious work of sentry duty, as guard dogs and for detecting people and explosives. This detection work is done by specially trained dogs categorized as trackers and sniffers.

Dogs are held by Army Dog Units and dogs (along with their handlers) are assigned to various units for various tasks for the duration required.

The handler's love for his animal is an universal phenomenon. Man and animal understand each other perfectly; dogs particularly can act on verbal orders, or on signs. They sense the mood of the handler. One handler in a drunken fit kicked his dog and injured it. He was tried summarily and punished. The Army demands and enforces that handlers deal with their charges with kindness and patience.

Dogs are thoroughly reliable as night watchmen because of their acute sense of hearing and smell. In many static installations, the DSC sentries adopt little stray pups. They feed them and look after them. The dogs get used to them and grow up in the guard post which becomes their home. At the slightest sign of anything untoward, they bark their heads off in the direction of the threat alerting the sentries. They surely earn their keep.

Mascots

Units adopting an animal for a mascot is not an unknown phenomenon. There is generally some story about how that particular animal came to be associated with the unit. Horses, dogs and even billy goats have been adored and maintained by units. Some of the better trained mascots have even participated in parades.

Brig F T Rangwala, a retired ASC officer, narrates how one day, many years ago, when he was Adjutant of ASC Centre (South) at Bangalore, the Subedar Major after giving the morning all-correct report, stated that it was Jasper's birthday that day. "Who's Jasper" he enquired?

It transpired that the wife of a retired ASC officer, Brig Masters, who had settled in Bangalore, was a great animal lover. She had a menagerie of dogs, cats and birds. Amongst her animals was a pet donkey. Unable to keep the donkey with her at home, she offered the animal to ASC Centre and the then Commandant kindly agreed to accept and look after the animal. The ass was named Jasper.

And on his birthday every year, Mrs Masters would make an appearance, garland him and feed him cake and make a fuss over him. While Jasper never participated in any military activity, he had the free run of the Centre and all the jawans were familiar with the animal and its history. Jasper was spoiled thoroughly and he enjoyed being fussed over and caressed. He was a truly loved unit mascot all his life. Children loved him for his gentle nature.

A year later, when young Major Rangwala was selected for Staff College and he had to relinquish his appointment, he unfailingly mentioned 'looking after Jasper' as one of the points in his Handing - Taking over notes to his successor.

Pigs

Many units maintain a piggery to breed pigs for pork and bacon. Being army units, with adequate land and resources, many have well maintained piggeries with a wallow, kept in hygienic condition; and generally one soldier who has a way with the swine, is detailed to look after the lot of them. The waste food of the many langars in the unit provide food for the pigs which grow to become healthy and heavy animals.

In 15 FAD we had a piggery too. The pigsty was grandiosely named Blandings Castle - the name taken from a PG Wodehouse novel. The fattest and biggest sow was also dubbed Empress of Blandings. She was a prolific breeder and regularly produced a litter of 10 piglets or more. Often she would roll over one or two of her own offspring and snuff the life out of them; soon after delivery, she would even eat one or two of her babies. Her handler had a time to ensure survival of the piglets.

One day, my Administrative Officer came to me; I could tell from his serious countenance and hesitant manner that something was amiss. He hesitantly informed me that the Empress was missing. She was last seen in the pig sty the previous evening but had escaped and vanished during the night.

A small search party was organized by the unit. They generally knew all her favourite hiding places. The empress had not wandered far off. She had taken shelter under a culvert near the depot to deliver her latest litter.

Wild Animals

Ammunition depots have huge acreage of wooded scrubland within their perimeter wall, necessitated by mandatory explosive inside safety distances; the tens of acres of land is ideal for breeding wildlife, free of any danger of predators.. And the Army has enough wild life lovers and nature conservationists who are ever ready to render advice and lend a hand. The depots make elaborate arrangements from the animals in their depots from planting trees and shrubs with foliage that can provide shade and also which they can eat, grass that they can feed on, water ponds for their exclusive use and yes; also salt licks at suitable locations. Animals often water at the large open water tanks located all over the depot for fire fighting purposes.

Animal lovers can easily spot hordes of nil gai, spotted deer, buffalo and monkeys. The monkeys can be a veritable nuisance. One can also spot small animals like rabbits, monitor lizards and peacocks by the score. Central Ammunition Depot Pulgaon was famous for its table birds (teetar and batar) and wild boar which often found their way to the dining tables in the Officers' Mess. The practice of shooting wild life inside the depot, as sport, has long since been discontinued.

My elder son, Col Ashwin Baidur, whose passion is ornithology and is an active bird watcher, studied and documented the birds in 15 FAD. He spotted every thing from crow pheasants, to golden oriole to woodpeckers; owls, blue jays and bee eaters; 47 species of birds in all.

Snakes invariably find their way into the grassy areas which are a real danger for the DSC personnel patrolling the grounds and perimeter at nights. For many years, Commandant of Ammunition Depot Bharatpur in Rajasthan even had a python for a pet.

In 15 FAD we had a peculiar case of one DSC jawan being bitten by a snake. He was promptly administered first aid by the unit RMO and evacuated to the Command Hospital at Udhampur. The jawan was a bit shaken by the experience. After some months, the same jawan suffered another snake bite. Though he was saved with timely medical treatment, he needed psychiatric treatment to recover. He strongly felt that this posting was jinxed and the snakes were out to get him. We had him posted out to a relatively 'snakeless' peace unit.

Military Musings

MILITARY MASCOTS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Units adopting an animal for a mascot is not an unknown phenomenon. There is generally some story about how that particular animal came to be associated with the unit. Horses, dogs and even Billy goats have been adored and maintained by units. Some of the better trained mascots have even participated in parades.

I share with readers two true stories received from my military colleagues.

Corporal Wojtek: The Military Bear

In 1942, Polish soldiers serving in Iran picked up a new member for their group. There was nothing unusual in this except for the fact that the new member was a bear cub. The lost bear cub was found alone in the desert after the mother had been shot by hunters.

Luckily, the Polish soldier who adopted him ultimately joined what would become the 22nd Artillery Supply Company that allowed him to keep the bear cub. The soldier named his bear Wojtek which means Happy Warrior. The cub was like a pet dog. It was fed milk from a bottle. So wherever they went, the cub would feel like it was with its parents. The cub became very soldier friendly. Growing up with soldiers, Wojtek adopted some rather curious habits. The bear loved eating cigarettes and drank beer straight from the bottle and got a kick out of wrestling and jostling with soldiers. Wojtek spent evenings sitting around campfires with the men and around sleeping tents with the rest of the soldiers. Whenever the unit marched out on a mission, Wojtek would march alongside them.

In 1942, the Corps linked up with the British 8th Army. The problem was the British 8th Army did not permit animals in their camps. So the Polish Army formally enlisted Wojtek the bear into their ranks. Wojtek was given the rank of a Private. From that point on he was included in all official unit rosters.

The Poles' finest hour of the war came in Italy, in the incredibly bloody battle for Monte Cassino. Wojtek was more than good company during the battle. He actually hand carried boxes of ammunition from supply trucks to artillery gun positions. Some of the boxes weighed over 100 pounds.

After the battle, the official insignia of the 22nd Artillery was changed to a picture of Wojtek carrying a large calibre artillery shell; and he was promoted to Corporal. Once his unit was demobilised in Scotland, the bear was resettled in the Edinburgh zoo. There he was always visited by his old friends from the Polish Army.

Wojciech Narebski, a Polish soldier of Wojtek's unit always remembers him with fondness. He says the bear was like an older brother to him

The bear passed away in 1963 at the age of 22. Edinburgh zoo, it is said, still has a memorial for the brave brown bear.

Pedongi – The Brave Mule

Hardly anyone outside the Army Service Corps knows this. One General Service (GS) mule named Pedongi is the proud recipient of the Vir Chakra! This true story goes something like this.

During the 1971 war, an Animal Transport (AT) convoy in J&K came under ground attack from the Pakistani Army. As per teaching, the AT drivers scattered their mules and sought cover from enemy fire, while the infantry unit accompanying the convoy counter attacked the Pakistanis.

After the attack, during regrouping, it was discovered that three mules had been captured and taken away by the Pakis; Pedongi being one of them. This usually happens whenever they get a chance. Our troops also kidnap Pakistani mules. Since the training of the mules is the same on both sides of the border, as is the harness and saddlery, captured mules are simply put to work without much ado. Sure enough, Pedongi was also made to haul rations, water pakhals, and other loads in Pakistan.

About a fortnight after her capture, Pedongi reported back in her unit in the Indian Army and she was carrying a Pak MMG with two boxes of belted ammunition. Judging from the way Pedongi was exhausted, it was evident that she had somehow escaped her Pakistani handlers and ran back almost 20 kms to

her own unit on the Indian side of the border through a dangerous minefield. For this act of extreme bravery in the face of the enemy, the Divisional Commander asked the CO of the AT Battalion to initiate Pedongi's citation for an award and made sure that she received a Vir Chakra.

Now what does a VrC mean to a mule? Well it meant that she never carried a load thereafter. She just ate and drank and was groomed and looked after all her life. She roamed around freely in the unit till she died of natural causes in 1978.

The above story is open for verification at ASC Centre and College, Bangalore, where her medal and citation is preserved to date along with Pedongi's photograph.

Military Musings

ARMY ASSAULT DOG - ZOOM

As received via Social Media.

Srinagar, 14 Oct: Army today paid rich tributes to Army Canine Warrior Zoom, who was grievously injured on 10 Oct 2022 in Op Tangpawa in District Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir.

In a solemn ceremony at Chinar War Memorial, Badami Baugh Cantt, on behalf of all ranks of Chinar Corps, Lt Gen ADS Aujla, GOC Chinar Corps paid homage to the gallant canine.

As per a statement issued by Defence spokesperson read that on 10 Oct 22, during the operation in Anantnag, Zoom played a key role in not only identifying the precise location of the militants, but also in disabling one of the militants. However, the intrepid canine in the process suffered 02 gunshots.

“Despite being injured, Zoom located the other hiding militant and returned back from the target area and fainted due to severe blood loss. His action galvanised the team to speedily serve justice to the two LeT militants,” reads the statement.

“The canine trooper was subsequently evacuated to Army Veterinary Hospital in Srinagar, where he fought till the very end. He breathed his last at 11:50 AM on 13 Oct 22,” the statement further reads.

“Army Canine Zoom was an invaluable member of the Chinar Warriors. Despite his young age of 2 years, Zoom was a veteran of multiple Counter Insurgency Operations, where he had distinguished himself with his energy and courage. In Zoom, Chinar Corps has lost a valiant team member, who will inspire all ranks to undertake their task with humility, dedication and courage,” it reads.

Military Musings

THE OTHER VIRAT

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Another Virat? True. Not the cricketer, nor the aircraft carrier. The title refers to a horse named Virat.

Television viewers the world over, at the end of this year's Republic Day parade, got to see an unusual sight. The President, Shri Ramnath Kovind, the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi and the Defence Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh in turn petting the neck of a magnificent black horse ridden by Col Anup Tiwari, the Commanding Officer of the President's Body Guard. The horse was Virat and he was very special. He could stand perfectly still for hours and march to the tune of music played by a military band. He would respond to the slightest signal given by his master and the two would always work in perfect sync.

The gesture of 'making much' of the horse by the highest dignitaries in the land was an unmistakable acknowledgement of Virat's military service, especially his role in India's biggest ceremonial event over the years.

Virat was inducted into service of the PBG in 2003 and retired from service on the 73rd Republic Day, after almost two decades of service. Virat is a Hanoverian horse, a German breed known to produce horses for competitive sports. A favourite at R Day parades, Virat has participated in the annual event 13 times during his service. At the end of his glorious career he was awarded the Chief of Army Staff's Commendation Card in recognition of his faithful service. A unique distinction indeed! His award will likely be kept framed in the office of the PBG along with his picture.

So what does the future hold for Virat in his sunset years? He will probably be put to pasture in the depot at the Remount and Veterinary Corps Centre at Shahjahanpur in UP to live out his years in peace. He will be well looked after, as indeed all military animals are.

Horses have a special association with the military. For centuries, horses have been used in war as mounts for soldiers, to pull guns, ambulances and carts loaded with ammunition. One cannot imagine a military parade without a charger. Be it in the Republic day, or a passing-out parade in a military training

academy, or a military tattoo. The dare devil riding display, jumps and tent pegging cause the audience to hold its collective breath in suspense. Polo was a very popular sport in the army of yester years.

The Indian Army had a number of horsed regiments with great military names like The Poona Horse, 3rd Cavalry or the Jodhpur Lancers. But with mechanisation, the cavalry regiments have now been converted into armoured regiments and equipped with massive battle tanks instead of horses. 61st Cavalry, the last of the horsed regiments, is also said to be converting to armour and might soon be holding T-72 tanks.

All military cadets are taught to ride horses and the training academies like NDA and IMA have superb steeds in their stables. Mountain artillery regiments having mules or ASC transport units holding mules are also authorised a few horses.

All military animals are very well groomed, well fed, watered and exercised daily. The shiny coats of military horses, their trimmed manes and tails, their hocks oiled, their saddlery highly polished and elegantly attired, army horses are simply a treat for the eyes to behold. Civilian horses in stark contrast appear small, underfed, skeletal and unkempt in appearance.

Special Veterinary Officers are posted to units having a large number of animals, be they horses, mules, cows or army dogs, to look after their daily medical needs. For serious ailments the animals are evacuated to and treated in Army Veterinary Hospitals just as Military Hospitals cater to the medical needs of the uniformed personnel.

A sight that is forever embedded in my memory is that of an Army Chief's steed at his funeral.

Readers will recall that Gen B C Joshi, PVSM, AVSM, ADC of the Armoured Corps, who was Chief of the Army Staff, died in office in December 1994. I was posted in Delhi then and had the opportunity to attend his funeral. His magnificent charger trailed behind the gun carriage holding the mortal remains of his master. The Chief's riding boots, as per tradition, were placed in the stirrups facing backwards, and the horse covered in black with its head hanging low walked in slow march to the sound of muffled drums playing the funeral dirge. Like dogs, horses also display commendable loyalty to the master/handler. They can be ridden to the limits of their endurance: literally to death.

Military Musings

**A BEAUTIFUL TRADITION
Defence Sunday in St Paul's Church, Pune**

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Just before he retired, my father was posted as the Divisional Engineer Telegraphs at Pune. We had spacious quarters on the first floor above his office, in the compound of the Central Telegraph Office in the Cantonment. I was just 12 years old when we moved into that lovely house. What I loved most about it was its large terrace on which I could ride my new Robin Hood bicycle. My pet dog, Jimmy, a black Daschund with a brown stripe across his chest and brown paws, would chase me around, barking gleefully, whenever I did so.

Exactly opposite and just across the road, stood a beautiful and serene church made of stone, with a tall belfry near the entrance porch; that was St Paul's Church. I used to gaze from the terrace at the cross on the top of the church that was prominently outlined against the skyline. I grew up hearing the sound of church bells on Sunday mornings as its Protestant Christians attended Sunday service. To this day, the bells of St Paul's evoke happy childhood memories in me. I was not to know then, that I, of the Hindu faith, would have a special association with that particular church after my own retirement from the army.

After my first wife Mira passed away, I had moved into a senior citizens home named Punya Dham Ashram as its resident administrator. Some four years later, I met Asha Kolhatkar Andrews who came for a retreat to the Ashram. We got along very well together; so with the okay of our children we came together quietly in a civil marriage. We always felt that our marriage was ordained in heaven. Asha is a Protestant Christian and a member of St Paul's Church. And on special occasions like Easter or Christmas I attend church with her.

One of the special occasions on which we unfailingly attend church together is for the observance of Defence Sunday: on the Sunday preceding 15th August, each year. The tradition was started by the veterans of the three services who

were also members of the church. The tradition has endured for two decades now and is much appreciated by all. Proof of the popularity of the function with the congregation is the fact that the church is always full to overflowing on Defence Sunday and late comers have to find a chair in the porch entrance.

What is so special about it that makes Defence Sunday so uniquely attractive? There are several reasons. Firstly, the military members of the church completely take over the organizing of the function from flowers to decorations to invitations and all the military trappings. The special sequence entwining the military aspects with the church proceedings is meticulously planned out with the Pastor. Special pains are taken to ensure representation of all three services; the army, the navy and the air force. Invariably, a special senior serving officer is invited as the Chief Guest. On Sunday, 11th August 2013, I recollect, it was Lt Gen Raymond J Noronha, AVSM, SM of the Rajput Regiment, then posted as Chief of Staff to HQ Southern Command, Pune.

The function commenced with Col (Retd) Moses Sibloon acting as compere and explaining, very briefly, the duties of the armed forces in war and peace, welcoming the invitees and introducing the chief guest. After laying a wreath at a makeshift memorial, in memory of those servicemen slain in war, Gen Noronha signed the Visitor's Book. He made 'spirit of sacrifice' the theme of his talk that morning. Starting from Christ's sacrifice at the cross, he masterfully blended sacrifices made by the military and by civilians in various walks of life. He was followed by Cdr (Retd) Kantish Jadhav IN, who spoke about the 'right attitude in possession'; his talk was replete with biblical references where applicable.

The military touch was so discernable in the national flag and military flags displayed at the entrance, the buglers playing 'last post' and 'rouse' at the wreath laying ceremony, pipers of the Bombay Sappers playing 'Amazing Grace' and the grand finale – 'Abide With Me' on the Saxophone by no less a person than Col (Retd) Noel Andrew, VSM, who was a superb army musician all his life and has himself composed a number of military marches. The pipes and drums of the Bombay Engineering Group regaled the audience when they gathered for tea and fellowship after the soulful notes of 'Abide With Me' had faded away.

A thoughtfully made print-out of the programme was distributed to all members of the gathering to inform them of the sequence of events. Servicemen and their wives took part in all the church proceedings; flower

arrangements, the readings, offertory, carrying the elements, ushering the pious for Holy Communion and so on. Lt Gen (Retd) Noble Thamburaj, SM, former Southern Army Commander and the senior most retired service officer and active member of the church, read the specially prepared intercession.

Reverend Manoj Kate, the Presbyter-in-charge of St Paul's, conducted the entire religious ceremony personally and said a special prayer for all who had served the country or were still in uniform and thanked the service members of the congregation for their enthusiastic participation.

It was a beautiful, simple, soul stirring ceremony. Little wonder really considering that the church and the army are the two most organized institutions in the world. Religion plays a significant role in the lives of soldiers. One will be hard put to find a military cantonment in India that does not have a church.

Onward Christian Soldiers!

Jai Hind.

Military Musings

ARMY SCHOOL FUNCTION

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

One of the additional duties that I had when I was Commander Karnataka and Goa Sub Area as a Brigadier in the early 1990s, was that of ex-officio Chairman of Army School, Bangalore. I had a few other military schools also under me but the Army School was something special.

The Principal of the Army School was a retired officer of the Rajputana Rifles named Col Hector Grant. He was a thorough gentleman with a sense of humour and compassionate nature. He was popular amongst the teachers and students alike.

One morning, Col Grant called me up to invite me to be the Chief Guest for the annual function. How long would the function last I enquired? "At least a couple of hours" he replied. I groaned audibly. Two hours? Couldn't it be cut short to about 45 minutes or so, I asked. "Sir I'll have a riot on my hands if I cut even a single item. The children are so looking forward to the event and the Chairman's presence. I promise you that Mrs Rao and yourself will enjoy the show thoroughly." I finally accepted the invitation.

I had many official things on my mind when we went for the army school function that evening and I must admit that I was not entirely looking forward to it. I rather treated the affair simply as something that I had to bear with in the course of performance of my duties as Chairman.

But a miraculous transformation took place as soon as the evening started unfolding itself. I was lost in a world of fairies and angels and songs and skits and a beautifully choreographed fashion show put up by the senior girls. I never realised how the time passed. Each event was unique and rehearsed to perfection. The whole evening was efficiently conducted, well compered, and created a good feeling among the audience. The applause by the parents after every event was thunderous.

I conveyed to Col Grant that such excellence should not remain confined to the four walls of the school. I proposed that we have a repeat performance of some selected items in the RSI, our officers' club, on a Saturday evening so that

maximum officers and their families in the station could enjoy and appreciate the superb talent. Col Grant expressed doubts whether the parents would go with the idea of children performing in the club. "Leave that to me" I said.

When I was called to the stage to say a few words, I not only expressed my heartfelt appreciation of the excellence of the performance by the children but also stated my intention of having some selected items re-enacted in RSI some two weeks thence. Furthermore, I added, every child who performed in RSI would be rewarded with a pair of Flying Machine jeans or a denim jacket of the child's choice. I had a friend who was the distributor of Flying Machine products and he very readily agreed to my request. The children's cheering enthusiasm over-rode any objections that the parents might have had.

Needless to add, it was an evening to remember in RSI. The performances excelled even those at the annual function. The show left the parents feeling proud of their wards and the performers feeling euphoric with their gift vouchers. The children only had to go to a nearby stockist and exchange the gift voucher for a Flying Machine denim jacket or jeans of appropriate size, as per their choice.

As a Major General, I was also later Chairman of Army School, Udhampur. And I must admit that I enjoyed the occasional interaction with the children thoroughly. It helped to take the mind off insurgency and IEDs, the constant threat from across the border and the unending operational and logistics problems of Northern Command.

Military Musings

ESM ENTERPRISES

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Providing employment to ex-servicemen (ESM) is a constant concern of the central and state governments, as well as retired personnel themselves. Here are a few of the more unique examples concerning their employment.

The early eighties were a trying and testing time for the fragile ecology of the Shivalik Ranges. The Queen of the Hills, Mussorie, was on the brink of losing its pristine splendour, due to the unscientific and illegal mining of limestone. This unorganised mining activity in the area intensified the rate of deforestation in an unprecedented manner.

Alarmed at the ecological degradation in the Shivaliks, Dr Norman Borlough, from Wheat and Maize Centre, Mexico suggested to the former Prime Minister of India, Late Mrs Indira Gandhi, to involve the Indian Army to restore the ecological balance on a war footing. As the regular Army could not be utilised for the purpose, it was decided that a Territorial Army (TA) Unit be raised for the purpose, enrolling ex-servicemen from the region.

This was with the dual aim of re-settlement of Ex-Servicemen and regeneration of ecology. As an unique experiment, 127 Infantry Battalion (TA) Eco, Garhwal Rifles, was raised on 01 Dec 1982.

Ecological Task Force (ETF) Battalions (TA) have since been raised to execute specific ecology related projects, with military like work culture and commitment, by enrolling Ex-Servicemen. ETF Battalions (TA) use technical expertise of the respective State Forest Department (SFD), for afforestation related activities and to promote environment.

Presently nine such Infantry Battalions (TA) Ecological, comprising 22 operational companies, are carrying out afforestation in difficult and degraded areas in States of Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, J & K, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Assam and Maharashtra. The Ecological Battalion for Maharashtra was raised

in 2017 for drought hit Marathwada region of the state. Also, a Composite Ecological Task Force for National Mission for Clean Ganga has been raised at Allahabad. One company each has been deployed at Kanpur, Varanasi and Allahabad for the said mission.

ETF Battalions are either funded by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change or by the state governments.

Till date ETF Battalions have planted approximately 6.88 crore saplings and covered an area of 72,741 Hectares of land, with 75 to 80 percent of survival rate. They have been bestowed with several awards for their exemplary contribution.

A unique initiative and vision of Indian Army has entailed plantation of high quality Walnut and Chilgoza saplings in Malari region of Uttarakhand to prevent migration of villagers. Malari region is strategically located in Niti Valley, on an axis leading to the China Border and is remotely located and cut off from Joshimath due to heavy snowfall between December-April. The locals migrate to lower regions during this period. There are no avenues of employment & even the cultivable land is inadequate for a sustainable livelihood.

The uniqueness of the initiative is that it involves all resident families in planting saplings of Walnut & Chilgoza, which will belong to them, and they would be sole beneficiaries of the fruits borne by the saplings planted by them. The project was conceived and pursued by our present CDS, Gen Bipin Rawat.

The first phase of this pilot project was inaugurated at Malari on 19 May 2017. A large number of enthusiastic villagers attended the event and 4000 saplings of Walnut & Chilgoza were planted. In Phase II approximate 1,00,000 saplings will be planted over the next three years.

127 Inf Bn (TA) Eco, (Garhwal Rifles) and 130 Inf Bn (TA) Eco, (Kumaon Regiment) have been earmarked for this project. The units have already prepared nurseries and sowed more than one lakh seedlings of Walnut specially procured from Central Institute for Temperate Horticulture, Srinagar, J&K. These saplings thereafter will be transplanted in designated areas of Garhwal and Kumaon region.

Military tourism is yet another area in which ex-servicemen are entering in a big way. Military tourism is already very popular in the West and is slowly

picking up in India. A few companies in the North East cater for tourist visits to the Imphal, Kohima region covering sites of famous battles fought in World War II.

A more recent happening is the setting up of MESCO (Maharashtra Ex-Servicemen's Corporation) which conducts Veer Yatra tours to places of military interest. The Corporation is staffed entirely by ex-servicemen who have knowledge of military history and are familiar with the sites. Maharashtra has a rich military heritage with a large number of forts, monuments, memorials, military cemeteries as also military training establishments located in and around Mumbai, Pune, Nashik, Nagpur and Ahmednagar.

One of our Naval establishments in Mumbai, INS Angre, is named after Shivaji's first naval Commander. And the lofty Sinhagarh fort visible from the Khetrapal Parade Ground in NDA provides a magnificent backdrop for passing out parades.

Many service officers do their bit in their own ways to help ESM get gainful employment. Maj Gen Shashikant Pitre is a retired Bombay Sapper. Since The Corps of Engineers has the exclusive expertise in large scale mine laying and minefield clearing operations, after retirement, he created a private company specifically for minefield clearing purpose and offered its services to the UN. That was the time when anti-personnel mines were being frowned upon and Princess Diana was personally spearheading the anti-mine warfare movement. To cut a long story short, Gen Pitre's boys (all retired and trained Bombay Sappers) successfully removed or neutralised thousands of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

We have here in Pune an ex-servicemen's organisation called Goodwill Ex-servicemen's Corporation of which I was once a member. Soon after I had retired in 1996, I was aware that Vehicle Factory, Jabalpur (MP) was facing difficulty in moving the chassis of newly manufactured vehicles to different locations. I am glad that I could act as a catalyst to help Goodwill get the contract to provide former military drivers to move the newly manufactured Shaktiman and Nissan chassis, numbering 40 to 60 at a time, from Jabalpur to army vehicle depots as far as Avadi (Chennai), Delhi and Panagarh (WB) on a regular basis for a number of years.

The above are but a very few examples of how retired service personnel continue to help the society at large and are contributing to nation building.

There are scores of success stories where individual retired service officers of all three services have set up schools, path labs, waste management systems, management institutions, training academies, dairy farms, logistic and transport organisations, cold storage facilities and several other enterprises of which they might have not even have dreamt when they donned the uniform. Several of them have absorbed ESM to the extent possible.

The Resettlement Directorate of the Ministry of Defence helps hundreds of retired officers/JCOs/NCOs to set up individual agencies to provide, transport, security cover and house-keeping and computer/office services to several public and private sector organisations all over India.

Civil agencies can also approach the Resettlement Directorate to provide skilled or trained ESM.

Military Musings

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

I had just stepped out of my house to buy a few essentials when I ran into Brig DJ Gowadia, another retired officer, at the main entrance gate of our military residential colony, SalunkeVihar, where we both reside.

As old soldiers are wont to do, Brig Gowadia and I got talking about matters military and old acquaintances when he narrated to me a story that warmed the cockles of my heart. Brig Gowadia was commissioned into the Naga regiment, a new raising at that time, and he later commanded the 2nd Battalion of the Naga Regiment (2 NAGA). After an eventful and satisfying career spanning 36 years in uniform, he retired as Commandant of the Kumaon Regimental Training Centre at Ranikhet.

Brig Gowadia told me that he had recently met one of his battalion officers, a Short Service Commissioned officer from Andhra named Capt Nagender Chilkuri, who after leaving the army embarked into the corporate world achieving a great amount of success over the last three decades. He had turned into a very successful businessman and was operating from Singapore. Brig Gowadia had asked the officer what sort of business he, an infantryman with no business background, was involved in? He was surprised at the answer he received.

Capt Chilkuri currently runs his own company with wholly owned offices in 15 countries, specializing in managing travel logistics for the major shipping, off-shore oil and gas companies worldwide on a 24X7, round-the-clock basis. The critical nature of the venture requires the organization to be primed to meet changes at short notice and support the customers with advanced service solutions aligned with evolving business/environmental needs.

Capt Chilkuri confided to Brig Gowadia that one day he got a call from one of his old battalion JCOs named Piju Mao, who at the time when Capt Chilkuri joined the unit, was a sepoy. In true Naga style, without beating about the

bush, Piju Mao demanded his help; much needed by the children of his battalion personnel who were unsuccessfully searching for corporate/government jobs despite having the requisite educational and computer qualifications. He stated that they had no direction or assistance to guide them.

Capt Chilkuri gladly promised to help out and assured Piju Mao that he would visit Nagaland at the earliest and see what he could do. Capt Chilkuri kept his promise and flew out to Imphal, Kohima and met Piju Mao and other battalion personnel and the children.

To cut a long story short, what started off as an innocuous exploratory visit to Dimapur, Kohima, Mao Gate and Senapati in Oct 2018, ended with the creation of a well established training and recruitment institute for the Naga children. Aided by his (doctor) sister in Australia, Capt Chilkuri acquired over three acres of land in a village named Puni Pfosimai and expanded the institute within a short span of time. As a joint effort, with Piju Mao being the foot soldier on the ground, the institute started in March 2019 with 20 young teachers (both men and women) appointed to put the aspiring candidates (boys and girls) through a regimen of physical training / academic subjects / practice interviews needed for getting through in various job openings.

Today, at the time of writing this in Dec 2019, 17 children (including girls) have been absorbed into Capt Chilkuri's own business. They are based in Delhi, Mumbai, Dubai and Singapore. Four of its candidates have already joined the Assam Regiment of the Indian Army. One boy has joined a major merchant shipping company.

The children are all performing so well, that Capt Chilkuri, heartened by the success of his venture, intends to leverage his fellow business colleagues and customers into providing jobs to Naga children passing through his institute

This narration brought to mind another success story, also from North East. My son Ashwin's NDA course-mate and best friend is Col Christopher Rego (Retd), son an Air Force officer who had settled in Bangalore. Chris has conceptualised and created the Sunbird Trust. Started with the help of family and friends, it has benefitted thousands of children in the North East in education and empowerment.

Chris is from the Corps of Engineers and also has a degree in Public Administration. During his service, he served for seven years in three states of the North East. His tenures with the Assam Rifles and in Border Roads, gave him the opportunity to travel extensively in the area and interact with the population. As a result, he gained excellent insight into the socio-political-economic problems of the North East states.

Post retirement in 2016, he took over as full-time MD of the Sunbird Trust, a secular, non-denominational, not-for-profit venture. The Sunbird Trust began its actions with establishing a school cum hostel in Ijeirong, a remote, difficult to access village in Manipur. The Pankriang Friendship Hostel set up from scratch, provides schooling and boarding facilities to 240 children from a dozen villages all round. Children from all tribes, ethnicities and religions attend the school as equals.

Based on the resounding success of the first school, the trust has now set up 7 such hostels, 5 schools, 4 Community Halls and basic nutrition schemes for 600 children. It now sponsors 2600 underprivileged children in four states in partnership with 41 organisations. It also supports the education of 50 undergraduates in Engineering, Law, Agriculture, Humanities and Science.

The initiative is so successful that delegations of tribal elders often arrive from other remote villages asking for similar facilities to be set up in their villages.

Capt Nagendar Chilkuri and Col Christopher Rego are making a difference by being the difference.

God willing, may their well-intentioned enterprising efforts continue to flourish.

Military Musings

PROFESSORIAL RANKING

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Civilians amidst the military would always rank below service personnel and nowhere is it better brought out than in the memoirs of Lord Todd 'A Time to Remember: the Autobiography of a Chemist'.

In 1941, it appears, Lord Todd was engaged in chemical defence work and had occasion to travel to Porton Down to watch a demonstration. Lord Todd had taken a long time getting there from Manchester by train, because of the vicissitudes of wartime travel. Long before his arrival, he had run out of cigarettes, and he was desperate, for he was a heavy smoker and cigarettes were not easy to come by in wartime England. But then after a morning of demonstration on the Salisbury Plain, he was taken to the Officers' Mess for lunch.

In Lord Todd's own words –

"After a wash I proceeded to the bar where - believe it or not – there was a white coated barman who was not only serving drinks but also cigarettes. I hastened forward and rather timidly said 'can I have some cigarettes?'

'What's your rank?' was the slightly unexpected reply

'I'm afraid I haven't got one', I answered.

'Nonsense – everyone who comes here has a rank'

'I'm sorry but I just don't have one'.

'Now that puts me in a spot', said the barman, 'for orders about cigarettes in this camp are clear – twenty for officers, ten for other ranks. Tell me what exactly are you?'

Now I really wanted those cigarettes so I drew myself up and said, 'I am Professor of Chemistry at Manchester University.'

The barman contemplated me for about 30 seconds and then said 'I'll give you five.'

Since that day I have had few illusions about the importance of Professors!"

(Extracted from 'A Literary Companion To Science' – Walter Gratzer (ed), 1990, Norton & Co. London)

My own experience was somewhat contrary. After completing my service with the army, I was selected to be the Shivaji Chair Professor in the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies at Pune University. I once happened to be invited as the Chief Guest to a civilian function at Garware College in Pune. The compere approached me a few minutes before the function demanding a few biographical highlights.

Of course being proud of my background as an army General, I briefly outlined a few major military milestones. Surprisingly that didn't cut much ice with him. 'And what are you doing currently?' He enquired politely. I dismissively stated that I was Shivaji Chair Professor in Pune University. He immediately knelt down and touched my feet in respect.

After that, whenever I was in the university, I was a professor first and General next.

Military Musings

THAT ROYAL TOUCH

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

There is something special about Royalty. Read the following anecdotes to discover what makes them a cut above the common folk.

Nawab Gone Broke

In 1967, we had an emergency Commissioned officer in the Parachute Brigade Headquarters at Gwalior. He was a real wild card: popularly referred to as 'misguided missile' by his juniors, tolerated by his peers and a general pain in the unmentionable to his seniors. He was the grandson of the Nawab of Tonk, a former princely state in Rajasthan, and his lifestyle was that befitting a Nawab.

There was however a problem looming up. We knew that the officer was generally broke and the date of his release from the army was approaching fast. We were wondering how he was going to find the money to clear his large mess outstandings. We need not have worried.

A day prior to his release, the Captain presented himself before the Maharani of Gwalior and introduced himself as the grandson of the Nawab of Tonk and explained his predicament to her. The gracious and wise Maharani helped him out without a moment's hesitation by handing over a cheque covering his dues; taking care however to address the crossed cheque to the Para Brigade Officers' Mess and not to him personally.

Policeman Rescued

Capt J P S Jadeja was the grandson of the former ruler of Morbi in Gujarat. A tall, tough and fearless officer of the Army Ordnance Corps. He was returning to Delhi after a spot of leave and was waiting for a train at a small station (request stop) coming from Baroda, carrying his wife and two small children.

He was strolling around to kill time when he heard a commotion on the platform. He saw three persons armed with knives, set upon a lone policeman. The policeman was stabbed repeatedly. Without pausing to think of the danger

to himself, Capt Jadeja attacked the assailants with his bare fists, in true filmy style. Though he suffered a few minor cuts on his hand, his timely intervention caused the attackers to flee. The thugs were chased and caught by other policemen on duty in the vicinity.

The train thundered in just then and Capt Jadeja, hoping to quietly withdraw from the scene without any fuss, wound a handkerchief around his bleeding hand and made his way through the crowd of onlookers that had by then gathered around the fallen policeman, and got into his compartment. Two minutes later, the train pulled out of the station.

Capt Jadeja's hopes for anonymity were however belied because royalty never goes unnoticed. The locals had recognised him and the policemen learned the identity of their benefactor. A few days later, the DG Gujarat Police wrote a letter to the Chief of Army Staff detailing Capt Jadeja's heroic action which resulted in saving the policeman's life and recommended that the officer's bravery be suitably recognised.

Come 26th January the following year, Capt Jadeja's name featured amongst the list of Gallantry award winners. He was decorated with a Shaurya Chakra by the President of India.

Diplomatic Finesse

Col Bhavani Singh of Jaipur. How does one describe a legend? Formerly India's ambassador to Brunei, Col Bhavani Singh was royalty with a capital R.

Paratroopers loved him. His qualities of head and heart, his cheerful and friendly attitude, his generosity, his gentlemanliness and his soldierliness were all beyond praise. He commanded 10 Para Commando (SF) in the 1971 Indo-Pak war and he kept flitting in and out of my formation, 330 Infantry Brigade of 11 Infantry Division in the Barmer Sector of Rajasthan. We were halfway to Hyderabad city in Sind in Pakistan, when I first met him. Wherever Bhavani Singh set foot in Pakistan, the villagers fell at his feet in droves. He was their beloved prince, bringing succour and hope.

In 1974, I was marking time in Delhi, completing the formalities, en route to Dacca. One day, coming out of South Block, I ran into Col Bhavani Singh. He put his arm over my shoulder, happy to meet again, and insisted that I accompany him to his office for a cup of coffee. After exchanging stories as soldiers are wont to do, he asked me what I was doing in Delhi? I explained that I was then AMA designate in the High Commission of India in Bangladesh and was

completing the formalities awaiting departure. He was genuinely pleased to hear the news and conjured up happy visions of a diplomatic life. Not so! I moaned. Due to change of rules by the Ministry of External Affairs, I was being sent of an official passport; not a diplomatic passport. And even the powers that be in Army headquarters were not able to convince the MEA otherwise.

“What nonsense” exclaimed Col Bhavani Singh. “This needs to be set right”. He picked up the phone and dialled Shri Alirajpur, his cousin and Joint Secretary (Administration) in the MEA at that time. All he said was “Highness! Good Afternoon. Bhavani here. I am sending Major Rao to you. He has a problem. *Zara dekh lena*”.

And my problem was magically resolved.

The Chogyal Responds

One story about late Lt Gen I S Gill which I heard when I was posted in Sikkim, made a deep impression on my mind.

Gen I S Gill is a legend in the Parachute Regiment. Before Sikkim was annexed by India, Gen Inder Gill was once commanding the 17th Mountain Division in Sikkim. At that time, an accident on the firing range caused the death of a Sikkimese local. The matter was being taken up by the Sikkim Government with the Government of India through the Political Office in Gangtok and had the potential of getting blown up into a major diplomatic incident.

Gen Inder Gill was a man of immense moral courage. He checked from his GSO-1 that the army was indeed at fault and pulled up his writing pad.

Legend has it that he personally penned these famous two lines to the Chogyal of Sikkim. “Dear Highness. *Maf karo*. How about joining me for a drink this evening?”

The Chogyal and Gyalmo were guests of the GOC that evening and the gracious Chogyal carried a case of Scotch whisky for the General.

End of incident.

Military Musings

TOUCHING KINDNESS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Camp Torna

The final event in the sixth term in NDA was Camp Torna. It was an inter-squadron competition which involved an overnight forced march. We had to cover about 20 kms cross country, in pitch black darkness with full equipment and rifles, ending up on the banks of the Khadakvasla Lake next morning. The event concluded with an inter-squadron bayonet competition that very morning.

I was resting with my legs up against a tree and head on my Pack 08, waiting for sunset and the start of the competition. I had pulled down my jungle hat low over my eyes. I noticed from under the brim of the hat, that one of the village boys, about four years old, bare bodied except for a pair of scruffy cotton shorts was sitting on his haunches and peering at me. He was obviously mystified to see so many uniformed people near his village. More to get rid of excess weight than any feeling of doing good, I removed the sweet lime that we had been served with our pack dinner and gave it to him. He ran away gleefully. After a few minutes I felt a small hand shaking my shoulder. I thought that the boy had returned to ask for something more. I gruffly asked him what he wanted. Frightened, he simply dropped something and said in Marathi “*Aiyee ni dila hai*” (Mother has given this).

I found four golden yellow mangoes tied in a piece of cloth but before I could thank the boy he had run away. Moments later the whistle blew for us to get up and form up for the competition.

They were the most delicious ‘Apoos’ mangoes that I ever tasted but I could never forgive myself for uncharitably thinking that the boy had come to ask for more. Even today, I feel sorry that I never got an opportunity to thank his mother for her kindness.

It was my first experience of rural hospitality.

Sardarji Taxi Driver

In late 1963, I had come on leave from Ladakh. I was fortunate to get a lift in an American Hercules C-130 which was flying straight from Leh to Delhi. At Delhi I caught the Frontier Mail and after an overnight train journey, arrived at Bombay Central Station, the Western Railway terminus.

I exited the station carrying my coat parka over one arm and my bag in the other. As I headed toward the line of waiting taxis, one Sardarji with a flowing white beard, possibly over 60 years old, detached himself from the waiting drivers, came forward, took my bag and guided me to his yellow and black Fiat. As I got into the taxi I instructed him to drive me to Bombay VT (Victoria Terminus; since renamed as Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus) as I had to catch another train on the Central Railway for Poona, my ultimate destination.

The Sardarji was very curious about my coat parka, an item which is never seen in Bombay's year round hot weather. I explained to him that I had come from Ladakh and would require the coat immediately on my return; hence I had no option but to carry it with me. He thereafter asked me a lot of questions about life in Ladakh, how cold was it? At what height was I posted? Problems of breathing in high altitude? For a lay taxi driver I thought he was better informed than most about conditions in Ladakh.

When we reached Bombay VT, to my surprise and dismay, he just refused to accept the fare. I tried to persuade him forcefully but he was unrelenting. "How are you going to earn your living if you give free lifts like this?" I asked him. His eyes were moist when he told me that his son who was serving in an artillery regiment in Ladakh had been killed in the 1962 Indo China war at Darbuk. He felt happy that today he was able to do something for his son's colleague from Ladakh. So please, I should not force the money on him.

I patted his shoulder with my hand trying to convey everything that I could not adequately express in words; my gratitude for the lift and my sorrow at his loss. I wished him well, told him to take care and left with a lump in my throat.

Stopover at Agra

In September 1965, when the Chinese served an ultimatum to India during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, I was serving with an Independent Parachute Brigade at Gwalior. Till that moment most of us in the brigade were like fish out of water.

The war was passing us by and we were sitting, twiddling our thumbs, in a peace station. It went against the grain and many of us officers applied to the MS for posting on active duty in field formations. Once the Chinese gave the warning, we were moved helter-skelter to the Indo-Nepal-Tibet border; Dharchula was our destination.

Gwalior Cantonment was a study of contrasting moods the evening we received orders for the move. On the one hand, there was great jubilation amongst the troops that at last we were going to war. Anything was preferable to sitting idly at Gwalior. On the other hand, a pall of gloom hung over the families of the paratroopers. No matter how brave a face the wives tried to put up for their husbands, the underlying fear and tension was very evident. When we finally left next morning there was a lot of inconsolable sobbing among the families.

We were moving by road. En route to Bareilly from Gwalior we had a night halt at Agra. We pulled into the convoy ground in the early evening and were immediately swarmed by hundreds of civilians who had heard that we were moving to the front and caught up in patriotic fervour, they surrounded the vehicles carrying food, sweetmeats, blankets and other essentials. There were men, women, young and old, rich and poor, ex-servicemen and civilians. Many of the women tied '*rakhis*' on the paratroopers' hands, garlanded others, applied *tikkas* to the foreheads and generally wished us well and prayed for our safe return from the war. Their faith in our victory was absolute.

We were moved by such faith, kindness and concern. We learnt that many had donated their gold, money and other valuables to the national war effort. Most people were from very ordinary families who themselves had little but gave so generously to the men going into battle.

How could we ever fail in our duty to such people? These ordinary people were the salt of the earth; the very stuff of India. We moved out of Agra with renewed determination to get to grips with the enemy and give him a bloody nose.

The Pathan Suit

In 1992, when insurgency was at its height in the Kashmir valley, I happened to be posted as MGAOC Northern Command at Udhampur. During one of my visits to 2 Field Ordnance Depot, located at Badami Baugh in the heart of

Srinagar Cantonment, I was told that one of the depot's civilian workers sought an interview with me on a personal matter. The worker was a Muslim tailor of the depot. I met the tailor and enquired from him why he wanted to meet me?

It transpired that three days earlier there was a firing incident in Srinagar, and the police had rounded up a large number of people and taken them away to an unknown location. His son, who was in his twenties and an innocent bystander, was also arrested. He sought my help to secure his release from police custody. I told him that I would try but could not promise results.

Knowing the overall insurgency scenario at that time, it was difficult to get anything done from the police at lower levels. Fortunately I knew the DGP J & K Police, Mr K S Bedi who was DIG in Kanpur when I was posted there. As the Station Commander, I had some official interaction with him and we had established a good rapport with each other. Nevertheless it was with some hesitation that I called him up. He was very glad to hear from me after all these years and after some initial catching up, asked how he could help? I gave him the details of the boy and explained the situation. Indeed if the boy was innocent, as claimed by his father, could he kindly be released? He promised to look into the matter.

It was only after my return home to Udhampur, two days later, when my Gorkha orderly was unpacking my suitcase that I noticed a brand new Pathan Suit (Kashmiri style pyjama and kurta). I thought that the dhobi in the depot officers' mess had mistakenly delivered somebody else's clothes.

Gurung explained to me that it was no mistake. Apparently the tailor's son had been released the very evening that I had spoken to the DGP and there was great joy in his family that he had returned home unharmed. To show his gratitude, the tailor had taken the measurements of my pyjama kurta on the quiet, without informing me, and stitched the suit overnight as a gesture of thankfulness.

I was touched by the kindness of this humble individual and felt happy that I had succeeded in restoring the son to the family.

The same Mr K S Bedi when he was DIG Kanpur Range, (and I was Station Commander, Kanpur) once narrated a story about a prank during his days as a student in Benaras Hindu University. The students from Balia (UP) were not known to be very bright and other students were always pulling their leg. One

day Bedi and friends, after everybody in the hostel had gone to sleep, chalked the word 'Baliatic' on the doors of all rooms in which the Balia studentds were staying. Naturally when the students woke up and noticed the writing on their doors they raised a hue and cry and complained to the authorities. Soon the ring leaders were uncovered and Mr Bedi and his accomplices found themselves on the mat. After a good dressing down they were let off – but only after extracting a promise that they would never, ever again, write 'Baliatic' on the doors of Balia students' hostel rooms.

The next morning the students woke up to see 'Non Baliatic' scribbled on all the doors of rooms occupied by non - Balia students.

Military Musings

WELFARE STORIES FROM THE SUB AREA

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

One of my happiest postings was as Commander of Karnataka and Goa Sub Area from December 1989 to January 1992. The happiness stemmed from the fact that we could do an immense amount of collective good for the units and often for individuals as well. A few incidents that are etched in my memory are narrated below.

The Sobbing Switchboard Operator

One morning, whilst my PA had stepped out to meet someone, I needed to make a telephone call. I picked up the hand set and got through to the Sub Area exchange. To my surprise, I heard the switchboard operator sobbing. I asked her what was upsetting her but she was too upset to tell me. So I asked her to put me through to the Exchange Supervisor whom I instructed to have somebody escort the sobbing operator to my office.

My PA was also back by then. I asked her to get a hot cup of tea for Sapna which I learnt was the operator's name. Slowly the story that came out was that her husband was suffering from cancer and had already undergone two operations in a Bangalore civil hospital and was now required to undergo a third one. They had run out of their savings and she was at her wits end about what to do. I asked her what her husband was doing. To my surprise I learnt that he had retired from the Army. Which regiment I asked her? AMC. I assured her then that her problem was not as serious as she thought. I rang up the Commandant of the Command Hospital (AF) in Bangalore and he assured me that they would take good care of him. As far as money was concerned I asked her to have an application made from her husband and we arranged to give him a small sum from the Commander's Welfare Fund to tide over immediate difficulties. We subsequently also tried to get him some money from the AMC Centre on compassionate grounds.

It was touching how Sapna kept in touch with my wife even after we had proceeded to Udhampur on posting. She would call once every two or three months to enquire how Madam was faring? More important, we were reassured to learn that her husband was OK and her family was happy and coping.

Victim of Kannada-Tamil Riots

In the early 1990s, when the Cauvery water issue between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka boiled over, it resulted in rioting and violence in Bangalore, the locals burnt houses built by the Tamilians in one particular locality. That evening my guard at the Flag Staff House informed us that one jawan was at the gate, in great distress and wanting help. I asked that he be brought to me.

The jawan turned out to be a Tamilian Signalman who had come on leave with his family to his father's house. Apparently in the rioting, his father's house had been attacked and burnt. They had lost all their belongings. His father was hit on the head and was unconscious. His mother was also injured; and he could not find his wife and daughter. He didn't know where they were hiding.

The Col GS immediately organized everything. His unconscious father and injured mother were first rescued and admitted to the Command Hospital (AF). Next his wife and daughter with police help were traced at the Cantonment Railway Station. They were all put up in the Station Headquarters for the night. Next morning the Adm Comdt allotted him a quarter, out of turn, within ASC Centre (South). We had him make out an application for financial assistance and arranged to give him Rs 10,000/- from welfare funds so they could buy some clothes, rations, bedding and other essential house hold necessities.

Lastly we informed his unit and Signals Records about his unfortunate circumstances and got him posted to Bangalore on compassionate grounds.

But my greatest happiness was that I was able to get his father the compensation of Rs 60,000/- announced by the Karnataka Government for all those individuals whose homes had been burnt. I rang up and spoke to the then Chief Secretary, Shri T P Issar, who true to his word, arranged to release the money within the week.

The Distraught Officer's Wife

I remember the evening distinctly because it was raining when the guard informed me that there was a lady at the Flag Staff House gate, sobbing, and asking to meet the Commander. She appeared to be an officer's wife and was greatly disturbed. I asked the Guard to escort her in. After my wife and I had her seated and given her a hot mug of tea, we asked the sobbing lady to tell us what was troubling her. I tried to console her up by saying that things were never as bad as they seemed and there was a solution to every problem.

The lady was from Himachal. She had lost her parents and had no family members from her side. She had fallen in love with this Signals officer who hailed from Karnataka. Her husband's parents had been opposed to the marriage from the very beginning. She had one son of her own. And her husband had kept his brother's small boy with them because the brother was not doing so well in life.

They were posted in Pathankot and her husband had been killed in a road accident. Not knowing where to turn she had come to her in-laws' place but within a week she had overstayed her welcome. She had no house and no job and was fast running out of what little money she had. She was at the end of her tether. Also, she added while the Army School at Bangalore had been very nice and confirmed admission for her son they had expressed their inability to take her brother-in-law's child, being a civilian, and due to his not having been legally adopted.

On questioning she informed me that she had surrendered her Pathankot house to the MES. I informed her that since her husband had died in service she was entitled to a house from the Army for one year. In fact I rang up GOC ATNKK&G Area then itself and got his verbal concurrence for allotting her a house out of turn. She was very relieved when I told her that we had two houses in Gun Troop Colony and next morning she could go and select the one she wanted. She could then inform the Adm Comdt of her decision and the house would be allotted to her right away. Next I asked her what job qualifications she had. She was a BA, B.Ed. but had never taught so far.

I called up the Principal of the Army School and told him two things. There was a vacancy for a SUPW teacher in the Army School. I thought she should be able to fit into that job. He promised to do the needful. About the un-adopted boy, I advised him, if he could recommend the matter to me as a special case, as

Chairman of the Army School I would permit the child to be admitted. I also asked her to make an application for funds from AWWA on compassionate grounds to help tide her over till she started receiving her pension.

The lady could not believe that in the space of 15 minutes all her problems had been resolved. She burst into even more tears.

Within a month we had arranged for her pension and dues to be paid into in her Bangalore bank account and before the year was out, a letter from me to MD AWHO got her a small one bedroom AWHO flat, out of turn, on compassionate grounds; and she made a smooth transition into her own house.

She was at the railway station to see us off when we left on posting. The cake that she had specially baked for us, to convey her heartfelt gratitude, said it all.

The Dead Soldier

My Colonel 'A', the custodian of funds in the Sub Area, came to me one day saying that one old man, a civilian, was waiting for him in his office. His son, who was a jawan of a battalion of the Madras Regiment had died in the Command Hospital (AF). The father wanted to take his son's body back to Kerala for cremation. The driver of the vehicle was asking for Rs 5000/- which the old man did not possess. The Colonel A was worried how to recover the Rs 5000/- if a loan was sanctioned.

I told the Colonel A not to worry. I would sanction the amount as a grant from the Commander's Welfare Fund. The jawan was an army man, the father was still in shock and grieving. So just give him Rs 5000/- gratis. The only problem the Colonel A was facing was that we were paying the money to a civilian. So I advised him to get all the jawan's particulars and keep the receipt from the father. Also, to write to the CO of the Madras battalion and inform him of the assistance provided by the Sub Area and give a copy to HQ ATNKK&G Area informing them of the assistance rendered. That resolved the problem.

The warm letter of gratitude that we received from the CO of the jawan's battalion was thanks enough.

The Legless Sweeper

A sweeper of the Sikh Regiment who had lost both his legs in the 1965 war used to draw his rations and canteen requirements from the Sub Area. One day the Colonel A received an application from the ex-serviceman requesting for Rs 2000/- for 'building a house'. The Colonel A was not in favour of recommending the case to me for sanction.

When we discussed the matter, the Colonel A stated that he had asked him to produce the documents showing land ownership and how he was planning to build a house in a mere Rs 2000/-. While I complimented the Colonel A for his diligence, I could not help remarking that sometimes I felt that we were our own worst enemies.

I urged the Colonel A to see the entire matter from a larger perspective. The applicant was definitely a legitimate ex-serviceman. He had lost both his legs in war. He needed financial help for some reason. The sub area had enough welfare funds. Whether he was building his house or merely repairing it, the amount of Rs 2000/- was too small to get so involved in the nitty gritty of the case. In 25 years after being boarded out of the army, this was the first time he had applied for financial assistance. Being a war casualty, I was willing to sanction it without any reservation.

The Colonel A agreed to pay the amount without further ado.

Military Musings

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Army-Air Cooperation

Soon after commissioning as a 2/Lt, I reported to 19 Rajput (Bikaner) for my infantry attachment in the Jammu Sector in July 1961. An army-air cooperation exercise at the divisional level was scheduled to be held in my Brigade Sector and involved a lot of preparation as the battalion was being deployed for the exercise and special duties were allotted to some of us young officers. I was deputed to the Brigade Operations Room as a Liaison Officer.

One morning, when all the officers had gone forward to witness an air strike, I was alone in the Ops Room monitoring communications and maintaining the log book. Needless to say, as a young officer I was feeling very self-important amidst all the maps with the multi coloured marking pins and a host of telephones.

Just then the telephone rang. I picked up the hand set and said "Rao". A string of instructions followed and I hastily interrupted to say that I was 2/Lt Rao, the LO speaking. "Where is the G-1?" asked the authoritative voice. "Sir, he has gone forward to see the air strike" "Tell him to call me as soon as he returns". The GOC put down the phone at the other end and I took out my kerchief to dab the sweat on my forehead. He wanted to speak to Lt Col Krishna Rao, then GSO-1 of 26 Infantry Division (later Chief of the Army Staff).

That brought me back to earth.

Visit to the Army School

Our common surname was to cause confusion yet again in later life when after retirement General Krishna Rao was Governor of J&K and I was serving as a Major General in HQ Northern Command. I was also Chairman of Army Public School at Udhampur. The Chief of Staff had visited an Army School at Kalu Chak, near Jammu, and was very impressed with the way they were running

things there. He asked me to go and have a look at that school in order to bring about some improvements in the Udhampur APS.

A message was sent to the Kalu Chak Principal from the Command Headquarters that General Rao would be visiting the school on the following Monday.

I arrived in the school to a grand welcome. The red carpet had been rolled out; the teachers were lined up for the introduction, a group of girls was waiting to sing 'Swagatam'. The Principal was holding a large bouquet. I was very impressed.. However as I got out of my staff car, I could sense consternation on their faces. Apparently they thought that it was the Governor, General Krishna Rao who was to visit them. They were gracious enough not to roll up the red carpet there and then. They still gave me the bouquet and the girls welcomed me with a song.

General Singh

The nurses in the Officers' Ward of Eastern Command Hospital at Calcutta were, however, not so magnanimous when they discovered that the patient they were waiting for was not Major General Singh but Major Jarnail Singh. Expecting a Major General, the nurses had spent a large part of the morning freshening up the VIP room, swabbing the floor, changing the sheets, puffing up the pillows, checking the oxygen cylinder, giving it a thorough airing and disinfecting the attached toilet; and even putting fresh flowers in the flower vase. The room was finally inspected by the Medical Officer in charge of the ward. The Major's bag which had been brought up earlier was placed with due care in the VIP room.

When the real identity of the patient was discovered, the bag was unceremoniously dumped in the junior officers' ward where Major Jarnail Singh was ultimately admitted after a long wait.

Military Musings

NAAM, NAMAK AUR NISHAN

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

For the military, motivation is an extremely important subject; often talked about, written, discussed and debated. There is the age-old saying in England that the soldier fights for God, King and Country. And despite our close association with the British Army from which we have inherited many of our traditions, that belief does not hold true for us because India is a secular and democratic country. And while we may not fight for a particular God, our troops are certainly very religious and units have their temple, church, mosque or Gurudwara depending on the class composition of their troops. God is certainly worshipped, remembered, thanked, and prayed to daily and particularly before every battle. Many a unit motto and war cry is taken from the scriptures and those who are martyred on the battlefield are cremated or buried according to their faith with full military honours. Religion is a powerful motivator.

So what is it that motivates Indian soldiers to sacrifice their lives for the country? Is it love for the motherland alone? Love for the country doesn't appear to be sufficient motivation for politicians, sportsmen, businessmen and many others who are perpetually jostling for self aggrandisement, personal profit or other non altruistic reasons.

Maj Gen (Dr) V S Karnik, a retired Gorkha officer, a military thinker and management consultant, perceives that the underlying philosophy for combatants in India which is handed down to soldiers, is that—

- Once in a while war between the forces of evil and good is inevitable.
- It is the righteousness of cause, which is important and India always fights for a righteous cause.
- God is always with the righteous.
- The soldier's job is to perform his duty faithfully, to his utmost ability; without concerning himself about its rewards.
- Human soul is immortal; it is only the body, which is perishable.

- The belief that our country, Bharat Mata, is the best and very dear to us; we fight to protect our motherland, our people, our families and our way of life. This is our dharma.

The above listed tenets are passed down by the military leaders to the combat personnel. Also, Indian troops being very religious, all units, according to their class composition have a Religious Teacher. Religious and military motivation is conveyed to these Religious Teachers through the Institute of National Integration in Pune, who in turn propagate it to the combat personnel in the units.

This philosophy is all pervasive and affects the soldier's environment and thinking in all that he does. Love for the country and patriotism are part of the ethos which is ingrained in him right from the beginning and underscores the 'raison d'être' for his being a military soldier.

There are several direct factors also that affect motivation but 'Naam, Namak aur Nishaan' are the three elements that may be summarised as the DNA of the Indian Army.

Naam stands for honour, the good name, reputation or the prestige or the izzat of the paltan and country and self respect. This is the soldier's immediate environment. He lives, fights and dies for the unit. It is called a 'unit' to emphasise that it is one cohesive and complete force; one for all and all for one. The soldier spends his whole life in that unit. Indian army regiments emphasise favour for community based regiments – Marathas, Kumaonis, Sikhs, Rajputs, Jats, Nagas, Dogras etc. So the soldier is always in an environment of community loyalties, community commonalities, community history, traditions, rituals, customs, and values etc in which he was born and nurtured.

The men eat together, pray together, play together; the unit is the family. They celebrate festivals, share each other's happiness and aid each other in sorrow. They train together and fight as one entity. The emotional commonalities and collective psyche make it easier to motivate people for battle. e.g the Gorkhas ingrain into their troops that it is better to die than to live the life of a coward; the Rajputs believe that there is no greater shame than getting a bullet in the back; the Marathas swear that it is a disgrace to desert the battlefield and so on. The men therefore need no coercion. They are constantly reminded of their military heritage and heroes. To be defeated is a dishonourable thing.

For the Izzat and name of his unit, the soldier is ready to give his life. Before joining the actual battle, the leaders at various levels, remind soldiers about this, “You are going to fight for the name and Izzat of the battalion. We never run away from the battlefield. Remember your ancestors who served in this battalion. Do not tarnish their name. Remember the colours and battle honours won earlier by the battalion. Laurels have to be won afresh every time”. These are the actual words used to address the soldiers. Basically, the main motivational factors are the name of the Regiment, loyalty to the unit and the unit colours and indirectly of his community or village.

Namak denotes loyalty to the salt partaken. This tradition of loyalty to the person or unit whose salt the soldiers partake comes from the mid-eastern culture and is strong in North India and the Hindi heartland. When a recruit passes out of the training centre and becomes a soldier he participates in a ‘Kasam Parade’ in which he is administered an oath, and in some regiments, also a pinch of salt. Indian soldiers firmly believe that there is nothing more dishonourable than to be disloyal or betray the person, family or agency that feeds them, In this case the unit, regiment and the army. The men bear the title of their regiment on their shoulders and the insignia on their cap badges and front belt buckles. They owe their fullest loyalty to the regiment, of which their unit is a part and whose salt they have partaken. Consequently, ‘Namak Haram’ is one of the vilest abuses that is hurled at a betrayer.

Politicians, not understanding this concept of motivation, made efforts after independence, to change this practice of having battalions based on community and to reorganize them as mixed battalions. The army resisted this. The concept on caste/community-based battalion works as a major motivating force. Consequently the system of community based ‘pure’ regiments continues though some new units have been raised on mixed basis; but the men are generally from the same area or region. The mix has to be compatible.

Nishan - stands for the national flag /ensign/ standard / regimental colours. In days of yore, units carried the regimental standard or banner to war. The location of the flag marked the position of the Commander and it was considered the ultimate disgrace to allow the unit colours to be captured by the enemy. If the standard bearer fell, it was immediately picked up by another because often loss of the colours also signified defeat and the end of the battle. Hence the term ‘rallying round the flag.’

The colours are considered sacred and when the colours are presented to any unit by the President of India, priests from all four communities, the Panditji, the Padre, the Granthi, and the Maulana, jointly consecrate the flag. The flag is kept encased when not in use, in the unit Quarter Guard, which is its armoury. When the colours are trooped, i.e. brought uncased on parade, everyone in uniform salutes it and civilians stand to attention in respect. The colours are escorted by a Colour Escort or as we say in India, the Nishan Toli. The colours are given a general salute in 'present arms' mode. Such is the reverence for regimental colours.

The period of service that a soldier serves under the flag is called colour service and reservists can be recalled to serve under the colours in war.

Captured enemy flags and colours on display in museums or Military Academies are traditionally displayed inverted, to denote that these are enemy flags and not to be saluted.

When the colours become old and worn out, or new battle honours need to be embroidered, the old colours are ceremoniously 'laid to rest' once the new standard is consecrated.

Good leadership is a battle winning factor. It is the leadership and example set by the officers that matters a great deal. Indian army officers lead from the front resulting in a very high ratio of officers killed vis-a-vis men when compared with other armies. They never ask their men to take risks that they themselves would not willingly face. The officers to men death ratio during 1965, 1971 and Kargil war, was 1:10, which is considered very high, compared to the figures of world wars and other armies of the world.

Leaders at all levels in the army, motivate men. They inspire the soldiers. Senior Generals always say that 'there are no good or bad units in the army; there are only good or bad leaders'. The good leaders are those who can effectively motivate the men under their command. The officers motivate men by leading from front, undergoing the same hardships if not more, and caring for the honour, welfare, comfort, morale and safety of the men under their command, before all else.

Leadership is important in motivating soldiers in battle and in adverse living conditions for a prolonged period of time. A major part of the motivation rests

on leaders who spend lot of time with soldiers. The officers of the Indian army are true and practical Human Resource

Managers, highly experienced in emotional intelligence, expert in inter personal relationship to motivate soldiers and to keep motivational level high.

High morale, comradeship, esprit-de-corps and teamwork, further strengthen the motivational factors. The soldier is motivated when he is aware that he is part of the team, has reliable friends, around him, who can be trusted, and who will lay down their lives to protect him. He knows that the army has provided him the best and most reliable of weapons, ammunition and equipment which will unfailingly function every time irrespective of weather or terrain conditions. Discipline, hard work and good training, standard operating procedures, tough but understanding officers, ways of military life, its core values, are few more contributing factors to motivation. The battalion works and performs, as one “family.” Sense of duty towards the profession is ever prevailing. This is taught to him right from his induction, imparting training in all its aspects, in such a way that it becomes his habit. It's the value system that is imbibed over a period of time that predisposes a soldier to obey and to fight; that becomes a matter of honour.

Other motivational factors are initial success in battle; as the saying goes, nothing succeeds like success in war. Welfare aspects of the soldier like regular leave, pay and allowances, welfare of his wife and children (by his battalion) during his long absence from his home and the assurance he sees around him, that even after the death of a soldier in battle, the soldier's wife, children, parents are being looked after (by his regiment) – all have a bearing on motivation.

In conclusion it is re-emphasised that Naam, Namak aur Nishan are the prime motivating factors for the Indian soldier; good leadership is a battle winning factor. Religion also plays an important role in a soldier's life. Love of the country and patriotism is a continuous inter woven refrain that is part of the military ethic. These along with other motivators prepare the Indian soldier to fight on to the last man and the last round and make the supreme sacrifice willingly.

The Indian soldiers are amongst the world's fiercest and most feared fighters. Quiet, disciplined and God fearing in peacetime, but trained to kill without fear, without remorse and without pity or hesitation in war.

Military Musings

OWNING UP

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

If there is one thing that the army encourages, it is moral courage. Right from the training academies, cadets are subjected to an Honour Code and it is ingrained in them that if one has done something wrong, own up immediately. There would be punishment, but perhaps not as harsh if the crime / mistake were to be discovered later. Conversely, seniors are also very appreciative when a subordinate comes up and straight away confesses to some error or mistake or omission on his part and instinctively they become protective. The three examples below are illustrative of 'owning up' and how the commanders responded to them.

In the early 1960s, Lt Gen Bikram Singh was GOC XV Corps at Udhampur and he was quite a terror. Lower commanders were always taking extra care to ensure that the Corps Commander's orders were strictly followed. Gen Bikram Singh was particularly concerned with traffic accidents in the Corps Zone and had decreed that if any unit has an MT accident, its entire transport fleet would be jacked up for a whole month; that is apart from the CO getting a rap on the knuckles.

At that time, there was an ASC Jeep Company located at Pathankot. It had one Major as OC and a Subaltern as the second in command. One day the Subaltern, a young Lieutenant, decide to take his girl friend out for a joy ride and he took out a jeep from the unit and drove into the foothills towards Dharamsala. After a while they stopped to have a picnic tea and appreciate the view of the Dhauladhar range. To his horror, however, he observed that the jeep started slowly sliding backwards on the steep slope where it was parked and it toppled over the side and fell into the khud about 50 feet below. He was in a sweat. Immediately they packed up the picnic basket and got a lift back to Pathankot where he informed the TCP (Military Traffic Check Post) about the accident and requested them to send an EME recovery vehicle to recover the jeep.

The young officer then contacted the ADC to the GOC at Udhampur, whom he knew, and requested for an immediate interview with the Corps Commander

the next day. That same night he took his best uniform and caught a bus to Udhampur and presented himself at the Corps HQ next morning. The ADC informed the Corps Commander who agreed to see the young officer. The YO, to his credit, confessed to everything without holding anything back. He also said that his CO was unaware that he had taken the jeep out of the unit to show off to his girlfriend and he was solely responsible for the entire misadventure and willing to accept any punishment that the Corps Commander may decide to mete out. Gen Bikram Singh just humphed and told the ADC to give the officer a cup of tea. He then called his MA (Military Assistant) and told him to inform the Sub Area Commander at Pathankot that the officer had met the GOC and to sort out the affair. End of the matter.

The second instance is when I was a Lt Col and commanding 15 FAD in J&K. One day my Adm Officer came to me and said that the Sub Area at Udhampur had forwarded a CMP Report against three of our unit drivers for carrying officers families without indemnity bonds. He suggested that he would reply that the drivers have been warned to be more careful in future and close the matter. I immediately negated the suggestion. I told him that I was commanding troops and if I did not have the moral courage to take responsibility for something which I myself had ordered I did not deserve the honour of commanding my men.

I drew up a printed letter pad and in my own hand wrote a demi-official letter to the Sub Area Commander (my immediate superior) explaining that I had flogged my officers hard for over two months and we being in a remote area, badly felt the need for a change and some recreation. So I had decided that the officers and their families would drive to Udhampur, take in a movie and dine in the officers club and return to the unit. Indemnity bonds were obtained but retained in the unit. While we were watching the movie, my drivers had been checked by the MPs. I took sole blame for it because I was yet unaware of the recent rule that drivers must be in possession of the indemnity bonds at all times. I expressed my sincere regrets and assured the Commander that I had taken note of the requirement and it would be strictly adhered to in the future. End of the matter.

The third example is narrated by Brig PS Gothra.

"Military Police has reported that your unit has sneaked out special army rations as part of the luggage of your officer evacuated to Chandigarh by aircraft. And you abetted this," said the Siachen Brigade Commander in a very stiff tone.

"Yes, sir I have committed the offence and I will be proud to face the punishment," replied the Commanding Officer of the Gorkha unit.

"Proud? What was the item taken?"

"Five Cadbury chocolates, sir."

"That is too small a thing to put your career at stake."

"Sir, you remember last week Pakistanis launched an attack on our Bana Post?"

"Yes, I do, but don't try to divert my attention."

"In that attack one of my officers Lieutenant Sandeep got injured. He got caught in an air burst of the enemy artillery. The flesh from his waist, hand and above left ankle had got blown off. He was bleeding badly but he fought hard."

"Yes, they successfully repelled the attack."

"After the attack my soldiers dragged him into the shelter. He was in pain. We couldn't evacuate him as the firing was still on. Next day we brought him near the helipad. But the helicopter couldn't come as the weather had fully packed up."

"Your nursing assistant on the post must have given him medical aid."

"Yes, he was giving medical aid but a faux pas happened."

"What?"

"Sandeep has grown up in the unit as his father was also in this unit. His buddy couldn't see him in pain. The Gorkha knew that Ibrufen tablets relieve pain so seeing and feeling the magnitude of the pain he gave him seven pills of that medicine. Sandeep's parameters started getting erratic."

"So, you evacuated him on foot."

"No, we were told that at daybreak we will get the helicopter. But in the morning the weather again got nasty. It was already fourth day. So, in the night I decided to evacuate him on foot. But while bringing him down my boys slipped. Fortunately, they could anchor themselves on the edge of a crevasse. Sandeep was dangling in the crevasse. Soldiers had a choice to cut the cord and let him go down. When one of them suggested this option, others said it will be difficult to answer his father. Boys struggled for an hour to get him out. In the bargain the avalanche cord cut into their hands through the gloves. By four in the morning they reached the outskirts of the post, totally exhausted. An officer was there to receive them. Seeing the condition of the evacuation party he picked up Sandeep and carried him to the surgical centre only to collapse at its door."

"You still have not told me about the chocolates?"

"Sir, while Sandeep was being prepared for air evacuation to Chandigarh, I went there to meet him. Before meeting him I asked the senior doctor as to what are the chances of Sandeep's survival. He said about twenty percent. I walked up to Sandeep. He was delirious. I told him that he will be alright and does he want anything? His reply was 'chocolate'. I remembered that when I was a young officer in the unit and he was a child and I used to get chocolates for him. Seeing his condition, I felt it was his last wish. So how could I deny it?"

"How is he now?"

"Critical, as per the report I got in the morning."

"You can go. I can't even say don't do it again," said the Brigade Commander.

After the Commanding Officer moved out the Staff Officer walked in and asked, "Sir, should I sign the convening order for the court of inquiry."

"No," said the Brigade Commander. He picked up the report by the military police and put it in the shredder.

Note:- Lieutenant Sandeep survived and is a serving Brigadier today. Sandeep confided that he was able to hear and understand the conversation among his soldiers when he was dangling in the crevasse.

Military Musings

SHAMED INTO VOLUNTEERING

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The Woman Behind the Man

When I was posted to the Headquarters of a newly raised Parachute Brigade at Gwalior in the mid 1960s, I was having trouble getting an Ordnance clerk posted to me since every paratrooper has to be a volunteer. Finally, Havildar Clerk Harbans Lal volunteered and I heaved a sigh of relief on his arrival.

On his fourth jump unfortunately, there was a 'Roman Candle'; one Jumper whose parachute did not deploy, fell like a stone from 1200 feet and was killed instantly on slamming into the ground of the drop zone. Unfortunately the jumper fell to his death very close to where the spectators were watching the jumps. Amongst the spectators was the wife of Havildar Harbans Lal. Terrified, she coerced her husband to choose between parachuting and herself. He consequently declared himself a non-para volunteer. Since he had not completed all seven jumps to earn his parachute 'wings', his request was granted and he was returned to his parent unit without delay.

I was back to square one, i.e. without an Ordnance clerk. To tide over the situation, the Para Brigade Commander accepted that a non-para volunteer could carry out the duties of the Ordnance clerk till a volunteer was found. Soon Havildar Clerk Mohan Kumar reported for duty. He was over 40 years of age (the upper age limit for jumping) and fearful that he would be forced to parachute from aeroplanes. I assured him that he would not be required to jump.

I was taken aback therefore, about a month later, by his request for an interview with the Commander to waive his age limit, to enable him to do his jumps. On enquiring into this turn-about, I learnt that the wives of other paratroopers in the family quarters were making fun of his wife since her husband was the only non-jumper amongst them. So she had served notice to her husband; "go do the jumps and come back with your 'wings': or else!"

43-year-old Mohan Kumar completed all seven jumps successfully and earned his rightful place amongst the proud Red Berets.

The Provost Unit

When an Inf Div Pro Unit was converted into 51 (Indep) Parachute Brigade Provost Unit (Military Police or MP for short), at Gwalior in 1966, some men were reluctant to volunteer for parachute duties. A few volunteered and the rest were hoping to be replaced by volunteers and get themselves posted out to other units. Brig Sucha Singh, VrC, MC Bar, the Para Bde Commander felt that the men should be made to volunteer by motivating them and shaming them if need be. Consequently word went around that only Military Policemen who were qualified paratroopers could issue MP reports for taking disciplinary action against errant Para Brigade personnel. No cognisance would be taken of any MP reports raised by ordinary (non-para) MPs.

The tactic worked. Take Naik MP Dhani Ram's case for instance. This MP felt increasingly frustrated by one driver of 8 Para in particular; Paratrooper Piara Singh, who kept thumbing his nose at him. If only to teach Piara Singh a lesson, Dhani Ram volunteered for parachute duties and proceeded to Agra to do his jumps.

Three weeks later, the evening of the very day he returned wearing his 'wings', Nk Dhani Ram positioned himself on duty right opposite the 8 Para MT gate, ready to swoop on Piara Singh the moment he drove his vehicle out of the unit lines.

When Piara Singh drove his 3 Tonner out of the unit, the MP flagged him down. Noticing his parachute wings on his right upper arm, Piara Singh smiled and got out of his vehicle. He hugged Dhani Ram and congratulated him effusively and insisted that the 'ustad' join him to celebrate the occasion. Over a tot of rum that evening, Piara Singh confided in Dhani Ram an unwritten law amongst the jumpers. "One Paratrooper never checks another".

By all accounts that was only the first of many occasions they were seen celebrating together. Piara Singh had found himself a friend and well-wisher amongst the MPs.

Military Musings

**THE COMMANDING OFFICER
RESPONSIBILITIES BEYOND THE REALM**

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

There is a vast difference in responsibility resting on the shoulders of a CEO of a commercial organisation and that of an officer commanding a unit in the military. The former, though he may be very well paid, is mainly concerned with the bottom line – the profits accruing to the share holders at the end of the financial year. He has minimal concern for the personnel under him and if profits are falling will ruthlessly issue pink slips to tens of employees.

The Commanding Officer on the other hand is responsible for men. Men who have to be trained to perform in war, accomplish military goals with least casualties, continuously motivate his men to tackle the enemy however, whenever and wherever. He has to administer to their needs in war and in peace, punish errant soldiers but always command with a velvet glove over a steel fist.

In addition, he has to ensure that all the weapons, ammunition, warlike equipment, combat vehicles and operational stores are held as authorised and kept well maintained at all times. Ready for deployment at short notice.

There is a saying in the army that the men belong to the unit but the unit belongs to the CO.

While he does not owe any explanation for his orders to his men, in his heart every good CO knows that in the ultimate analysis, he is morally accountable to them. He has to be fair, firm and honest, perform with the highest degree of integrity without fear or favour and create the best environment for the men to perform in the established military tradition; boldly, faithfully, selflessly and unflinching. No one can let down the unit and the regiment.

The CO is responsible for the physical, moral and spiritual welfare of the men and women under his command. Which is why command of a unit is given to the best officer suited for the job. He is empowered to do whatever is necessary to ensure success in war. He constantly receives feedback from his

officers and the environment, but more particularly, in respect of soldiers, from his Subedar Major and the Religious Teacher and he takes whatever corrective measures that are necessary to improve matters.

Every CO has at some time or the other in his command dealt with issues which cannot quite be defined as purely military responsibility. But welfare issues of his officers and men have a bearing on their individual performance in the unit which if not addressed, adversely affects the cohesiveness and operational preparedness of the unit. He cannot deal ham handedly with situations which require understanding and a sympathetic understanding. Nor can he delegate his responsibility and authority to subordinates.

Here are a few examples to illustrate what I am trying to put across.

When I was commanding 15 Field Ammunition Depot, in J&K, I had an officer named Major M A Ali who was performing the duties of a Sub Dept Commander. One day I found him not at all himself. I enquired what was wrong but he remained silent and downcast. I then asked him to come and see me in my office. In my office he broke down, I gave him time to collect himself, offered him a glass of water and over a cup of tea, assured him that nothing was as bad as it looks; every problem has a solution.

The story that emerged was that his daughter Yasmeen who was studying in Central School in Udhampur was not being allowed to appear for the 12th board exam because she had failed in Maths in the pre-board exam. I soothed Maj Ali, who was feeling ashamed and let down by his daughter, and told him that a problem was only as big as it was made out to be. Children do not do well at times for many reasons. I urged him to go to Udhampur, meet the Principal and resolve the issue. Arrange extra maths tuition for Yasmeen if required and to stay with his family for a few days and then come back. Yasmeen, I told him was a wonderful girl from what I knew of her and she would never let her family down. Well, to cut a long story short, The Principal allowed her to appear in the board exam, she studied very hard and wonder of wonders – she passed with distinction in Maths. But more important to me was that Major Ali was again performing at his best, undisturbed by any personal worries.

Capt Bhide was a recalcitrant character. Surly and rebellious. Unable to pass his promotion exam, he was stuck as a Captain. And he was fond of his drinks. He was generally not trusted by my predecessor and considered a bad hat. A few

days after taking over I interviewed Capt Bhide and heard his woes. I assured him that I would do all that was necessary to help him study for his Part D exam and get his next rank. But I spoke to Capt Bhide informally as a caring elder brother rather than in an officious tone as his Commanding Officer. I told him that I was surprised to see that he loves his family so much, he is a good friend to other officers, an excellent swimmer and a good professional ammunition officer. He paid all his bills in time and lived within his means. There appeared hardly any reason for him to drink so much.

I told him that I had lost my elder brother due to drinking and would not like to see him go the same way. That heart to heart talk bore results. Capt Bhide gave up his drinking (except for a welcome bottle of chilled beer on a hot Saturday afternoon) and concentrated on his work.

I made him Commander of 3 Ammunition Sub Depot which was located at Udhampur, away from the location of the main depot in Jammu District. Capt Bhide flowered in that independent command. But his reputation was known to his men and some were not cooperating with him wholeheartedly. Once when an Other Rank (jawan) blatantly refused to follow a lawful order given him by Capt Bhide, the OR was placed under arrest and marched up to me next morning. I upheld Capt Bhide's action and punished the OR. After that, Capt Bhide had no trouble from his men. But what gladdened me was that he became a trusted and dependable officer. On one occasion when 15 FAD was given the task of arranging a fireworks display collectively for Udhampur military station to celebrate Divali, I entrusted the full responsibility of the job to Capt Bhide. I briefed him on what was expected and told him not to let me down. He put up a grand show and came through with flying colours. The Sub Area was full of praise for the commendable job done by 15 FAD.

From a broken down toper, Capt Bhide transformed into one of the most trusted officers of the depot. Sadly though, instead of trying to clear his promotion exam he opted to quit the army. But I had no complaint against him whilst he served under me. And 3 ASD performed very well under his leadership.

One day I was informed that there was big fight going on in Maj Manjit Singh's basha (the depot was in a field location) His wife was abusing and berating him loudly and the neighbouring unit families were beginning to feel uncomfortable. The reason being that word had been received that day that the officer had been overlooked for promotion. When I received complaints from his neighbouring officers I sent word that I was coming over and after a

little time visited them. I explained that not being approved in the first go was not the end of the road. The sky hadn't fallen on their heads. They needed to take this temporary setback in their stride. God's blessings were to be found in many things. Not promotions and pay rise alone. Unrest in the house would affect their school going children I pointed out, who were already crying, hearing their parents fight. The parents needed to deal with the issue rationally and not emotionally. That pep talk helped them settle down and accept reality. Things gradually returned to normal in the Manjit Singh household and Maj Manjit was able to perform his duties satisfactorily again. He ultimately retired as a Lt Col.

Even jawans problems have to be dealt with understanding and sensitivity. In one instance one jawan lost his mental balance and I was contemplating admitting him to the psychiatrist ward for treatment. Instead, on the advice of my Subedar Major we sent him on two months leave. The jawan returned to the unit fully healed in mind and spirit. Yet another jawan who got bitten by a snake, twice within six months, developed a phobia that the snakes were out to get him. I had him posted to a (non-snake) peace station. Once just before the festival of Holi, I ordered the release of the lone prisoner in the Quarter Guard who had almost completed his sentence of rigorous imprisonment. I told my JCO Adjutant that the rest of his sentence was not being reduced on paper but because of Holi and his good behaviour, I was simply letting him out so he could join in the festivities. That single action had a salutary impact on my men.

Caring for the men also includes the responsibility of caring for the men's families. When I was Station Commander, Kanpur in 1987, an infantry battalion from Kanpur was airlifted overnight to Sri Lanka for Op Pawan. 5 Raj Rif (Napier's) got into the fighting almost immediately on landing on Sri Lankan soil. While the battalion earned a name for itself as the Liberators of Jaffna, they also suffered heavy casualties. The CO started a Jaffna Fund and ensured that within a year, the battalion had rehabilitated every single widow in their respective home stations. They were escorted home by jawans of the battalion and helped to settle down. Bank accounts were opened in their name, and their pensions started getting credited within two months. They were advised on how to manage their money and invest and live prudently. The battalion helped them to get gas agencies or petrol pumps, or employed as school teachers etc. according to their ability or inclination. All school going children were also admitted into nearby schools of their choice. A few eligible boys were admitted to the Taurus Boys Hostel at Delhi Cantt run by the RAJ RIF

centre. An outstanding feat by all accounts Yet such instances are common throughout the army. Knowing that their families will always be looked after even if they are martyred, serves as a great morale booster and motivation for the rest of the men who have to continue to serve and win laurels afresh for the unit, every time.

All problems faced by the CO are not easy to handle and sometimes puts him in a spot. In 1959 some goons molested an army wife. The incident occurred at Amritsar railway station. The matter was reported to the CO who ordered immediate and exemplary action. The army men chased the goons and trapped them in a cinema hall. The power-drunk leader of the gang turned out to be the son of the then Chief Minister of Punjab, Shri Pratap Singh Kairon. The goons were caught, stripped to their underwear, marched to the cantonment and interred for the night. Pratap Singh Kairon was furious when he heard about it and complained to the Prime Minister, Shri Jawahar Lal Nehru. The PM, also upset about the whole issue, asked the then Army Chief, Gen K S Thimayya about it. The General's reply?

"If we cannot defend the honour of our women, how do you expect us to defend the honour of our country?" Nehru was dumbfounded.

However over the years, many incidents of civilians/police misbehaving with army personnel or their wives have incensed unit personnel and they have taken the police to task of their own accord. In most cases, the Commanding Officers have paid the price for standing with and supporting the actions of their men. Commanding Officers and their paltans will always put the izzat of the paltan before all else.

Things go wrong when the dignity of the soldier is offended. It is everybody's responsibility: the police, the bureaucracy, the politicians and indeed the entire nation to uphold and respect their armed forces. The armed forces are the final bastion. When all else fails, the nation seeks the help of the armed forces be it for maintaining law and order, in overcoming natural disasters and most importantly in safeguarding the country from insurgency and terrorists.

The Commanding Officer of the unit who executes the tasks, bears all responsibility for accomplishment of the mission. He is the most important person in the chain of command. He has moral and constructive responsibility beyond the realm of official command. And at times, he is forced by circumstance to stand up to the authorities even at the cost of his career.

Military Musings

VALUE SYSTEM IN THE MILITARY

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

No other service or profession lays as much emphasis on values, character traits and behavioural aspects of its members as do the armed forces. Not even the elite Indian Foreign Service. Values and behaviour expected from a person in uniform are ingrained right from Day One that he joins the defence training institution.

The process starts even earlier. Officer aspirants appearing for the UPSC examination to join any of the three fighting services, after passing a tough entrance examination and making it in the merit list, have to appear before a Services Selection Board. Here the aspirant is tested for his various physical, moral, mental, social and leadership qualities till the board is thoroughly satisfied that he is indeed the right material that the army is looking for.

He undergoes a day and a half of psychological tests. The psychological profiling is very thorough. His integrity, sense of responsibility, determination and behaviour when he is unobserved is noted. His dependability, his command and leadership qualities and team spirit are tested by making him the leader of a group in a 'command task.' His physical prowess is tested on the obstacle course. His ability to speak and inspire is observed in group discussions on given subjects.

On the fourth day, after all that, those few who make the grade, appear before the members of the selection board for a personal interview, where all the board members can see the candidate in person and assess him. At the end of it all, the names of the successful candidates who have been finally selected are announced.

It may be mentioned that rejection is rampant. No concession is made for anybody irrespective of background. There is no special consideration or preference for any category of people. Entire successive batches of SSB candidates are known to have been found unfit and rejected. After all this, one

is put through a thorough medical examination. And a few get ruled out here also. Those who finally make the merit list, join the academy.

It was in the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla that we were meaningfully and deliberately exposed to the norms and values that we were expected to live by. The poem 'If' by Rudyard Kipling was framed in every cadet's cabin over his study table. The Academy taught us everything - how to dress for various occasions, how to conduct ourselves, how to speak, good military bearing and military etiquette, table manners, camaraderie, punctuality, selflessness and self - sacrifice, fighting for a cause, moral and physical courage, honour and being a good citizen amongst others. Even good social behaviour and manners were insisted upon.

Vice Admiral B A Samson, a former Commandant of the NDA when addressing us cadets, once stated "the Academy will teach you to be humble enough to eat with the poor and fit enough to dine with Kings." So true. Service officers are equally at ease whether eating pani-puri from the roadside vendor or dining with diplomats.

Drill is the most important activity in the life of the cadet. It not only puts starch in the cadets but prepares them to become military professionals. Instantaneous and unquestioning obedience of orders is what drill instils in the cadets. A quality on which their very lives may one day depend e.g. when a submarine has to crash dive, a bomber is hit by flak or when an army unit is engaged in covert operations behind enemy lines.

The lasting lesson that we took from the NDA was its motto; to put 'Service Before Self' which everyone of us did; throughout our service. The NDA trained us for all round development. There was a strict 'honour code' for cadets and we were expected to live by it. If a cadet was consistently found lacking 'Officer Like Qualities' he could even be withdrawn from the Academy.

Sports and competitions forced us to put in our very best. Indeed if one did not put in one's best, he was taken to task. Feigning in boxing, shamming in cross country races or hesitating to jump off the 7 metre diving board into the swimming pool; all attracted the attention and ire of the system. Sports taught us to play to win. It also taught us how to take defeat sportingly and to be magnanimous in victory.

The Indian Military Academy further built upon the foundation already laid by the NDA. It taught us to be gentlemen first and officers next and imbibed in us, the credo of the Indian Army –

“The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time.

The Honour, welfare and comfort of the men you command come next.

Your own ease, comfort and safety, come last, always and every time.”

Physical courage and endurance continue to be enhanced even after commissioning through courses that young officers undergo. The Physical Training (PT) course and the Commando course are known for their tough standards. And those who volunteer to become Paratroopers or join the Special Forces need a special brand of fitness and courage.

The insistence on values and what is important to the army does not end with the academy. Institutionalised military upbringing and grooming of young officers is a continuous process. Furthermore, the Commanding Officer of the unit keeps a watchful eye on the young officer’s personal, physical, moral, spiritual and professional upbringing.

And as far as units are concerned, the army frowns on lavish parties and five star culture. Military correctness, courtesy, and good and clean environment are the order of the day. Furthermore, control of wasteful and avoidable expenditure whilst maintaining military standards, is insisted upon.

But with changing times and changing nature of warfare, newer technologies and ever changing social norms, new rules of conduct needed to be enunciated. Gen K Sunderji, late COAS, did just that. He addressed a personal letter by name to every officer of the Indian Army serving at that time, leaving them in no doubt as to what he expected of them.

More recently with Counter Insurgency Operations (CI Ops) becoming the norm rather than the exception and the army facing criticism, Late Gen B C Joshi, when he was Chief of the Army Staff, issued a set of instructions to all units engaged in CI Ops: because the army enjoys considerable latitude while operating under the aegis of AFSPA. Amongst the more important commandments included – no rape or molestation of women, no military disgrace (such as shooting unarmed civilians or burning villages), no torture resulting in death, no interference in

local civil administration, use of minimum force etc. Any infringement would invite immediate and severe disciplinary action under the Army Act.

Value based living has become a way of life for the armed forces. Words like duty, honour, courage, colours and country will always find place in the military ethic. The Indian Army is the epitome of national integration. Its participation in nation building is well acknowledged. When India is ravaged by natural or manmade disasters – it is the armed forces that are inevitably called out to help. The armed forces are the last resort to help solve the nation's problems

The Indian Armed Forces, which are second to none in the world, set the example for others to follow.

Military Musings

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Every January, my mind invariably goes back to the traumatic 26th January of the year 2001 when an earthquake of massive proportions and intense severity struck Gujarat. In one fell swoop, nature rendered lakhs of people homeless, destroyed entire cities, robbed people of their near and dear ones and left them with literally only the clothes on their backs. God alone knows how many thousands actually perished in that natural disaster.

26th January, 2020 fell on a Sunday. We were invited to attend the thread ceremony of Vedant Heblekar, son of Sameer and Vaishali Heblekar at the Karla Math that day. It was a grand ceremony at the Karla Math, with over 500 invitees. At that gathering, Vivek Bijur introduced my wife Asha and me to his sister Jaishree and her husband Utpal Bannerji who had come all the way from Canada. Till that moment, I had only heard their names but never met them in person. I felt moved. And thereby hangs a tale.

Leading a relief mission of Vishwa Jagriti Mission Trust, Pune, to Bhuj after the terrible earthquake at the beginning of the millennium, I realise in retrospect, I had the privilege of seeing something unbelievably grand. The goodness of humanity, caring and brotherhood, help and assistance being extended even by the very people who were themselves rendered homeless and in need of aid; selflessness on a scale unimaginable. There were NGOs, government organisations, the Army, RSS volunteers, Public Sector Units, religious organisations, big business houses and ordinary human beings from Gujarat, Maharashtra and even as far as Punjab and Goa, all over Bhuj District right up to the Rann of Kutch; scouring the villages to seek out the needy and rendering medical, food, spiritual and material help wherever needed.

Temporary kitchens set up by gurudwaras, temples, aid agencies, other NGOs and welfare organisations became the hubs to which humans in distress flocked for sustenance for months after the great quake. These hubs fed lakhs of people, irrespective of their faith. Sterling work, absolutely.

Invariably in a disaster of such magnitude there are hundreds of children who became orphans. What amazed me was that the concern for children was so universal and widespread that every needy child was immediately taken in by relatives, friends, caring folks, children's organisations; whoever. I never saw a wandering child, an unaided child, an abandoned child. At the Air Force Gurudwara in Bhuj, we even met a few childless couples who had come from as far as Rajasthan, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh in search of orphans to adopt.

I could narrate a hundred heart-rending stories about the quake and its aftermath. But one shining example that bears recounting with reference to Hindu - Muslim amity, lingers in my memory.

The magnitude of the earthquake and the extent of devastation it had caused took some time to sink in. Consequently, the logistics of our relief mission took a little longer to get organised and it was almost four days after the quake before our convoy of trucks bearing relief supplies left Pune, by road, for Bhuj.

A day before we left, I received a call from Vivek Bijur, a person with whom at that time, I was only slightly acquainted. He said he had heard that I was proceeding to Bhuj and would I do him a favour? He requested me to carry some things and deliver them to a Muslim gentleman in Bhuj. Vivek sounded concerned and emphasised that it was important that the things must reach their destination without fail. I was intrigued by this request and curiosity got the better of me. Vivek sending things to a Muslim gentleman in Bhuj? What gives? I asked him.

Apparently, Vivek's brother who worked at Kandla Port had his residence in Bhuj. Also having a flat in the same multi-storey building in Bhuj where his brother stayed was this Muslim gentleman named Sharafat Hussein. When the earthquake struck, the brother's daughters, Vinita and Nandita, aged 10 and 7 respectively at that time, were at school attending the R Day celebrations. There was complete chaos as several children died in the school itself. Unknown to the girls then, they no longer had a home and their own parents were at that moment, close to breathing their last.

Mr Sharafat Hussain, whose own home was also destroyed, plunged into the rescue work and extricated Vivek's brother and his wife from the debris and took them to Bhuj hospital but they were both declared 'dead on arrival'. Always selflessly thinking of others, he remembered the girls at school, went

and searched them out and brought them back with him to his own, now shelter-less family, till alternative arrangements could be made. It was Sharafat who called Vivek at Pune and broke the sad news. He advised him against coming to Bhuj, since rail, road and air communications had all been disrupted and everyone was in a state of shock, confusion, grief and despair. Instead, he offered to bring the girls over to Vadodra two days later and hand them over to him at that location. It was also Sharafat who arranged the last rites of the girls' parents.

What Vivek was asking me to carry was a small token of gratitude. Some ordinary daily essentials required by the Hussein family but impossible to procure in Bhuj in the aftermath of the earthquake. Currency notes were just not worth the paper they were printed on. Cooking oil, candles and matches, sugar, baby food, packaged drinking water and the likes were the type of items much sought after but just not available since all shops had been destroyed by the killer quake.

When I heard the story, I assured Vivek that no matter what, his job would be done; though I couldn't say when; but at the soonest, I promised. Indeed I would feel proud to shake Mr. Sharafaat Hussein's hand. I was fortunately able to accomplish the task within three days of reaching Bhuj. And Mr Sharafat was everything his name proclaimed. A decent, well educated, compassionate and soft spoken person with a caring soul.

Vivek collected his nieces from Vadodra and brought them to Pune. The girls stayed with him for a year. Vivek's family and our community were extremely supportive and the children found a new home away from home. The school that Vivek approached immediately admitted them and the girls slowly started adjusting to a life without their parents, but not without a lot of love and caring from their closest relatives. It is to Vivek and his wife's credit that they refused all financial help offered by relatives, well wishers and the community. The girls were then adopted by his elder married sister, Jaishree, who was settled in Canada. Married to a Bengali gentleman, Utpal Bannerji, they had no children of their own. And by all that I gathered, her late brother's daughters brought new meaning and happiness into their own lives.

At Karla Math, Utpal informed me that both girls were now grown up. The elder was working and was married. The younger girl had completed her economics from LSE, UK and had also returned to Canada. Which is why meeting Jaishree and Utpal at Karla that day was a special moment for me.

When I mentioned that it was a very noble thing they did, adopting the girls, with unfeigned humility he declined the compliment. Utpal simply claimed that “it was ordained.”

Our relief mission adopted five villages in the Rann of Kutch area earmarked for us by the army authorities controlling relief operations. We operated in the area for almost a fortnight helping the villagers to pick up the threads of life again. We started by restoring the village temple and organising daily satsangs. Apart from distribution of relief goods and providing cooked food, we provided the leadership, the administrative support, medical help and assisted in restoring water and electricity, clearing up the debris, clearing the main pathways, repairing broken structures; and of course the disposal of the dead; both human and animals .

We later had to get feed for the starving animals too; truckloads of fodder from Mehsana in Gujarat.

Vivek Bijur has made it a habit to call up Mr Sharafat Hussein every 26th January and speak to him; and convey his unending gratitude for the help he rendered in such difficult circumstances.

Mr Sharafat Hussain is truly a shining example of the Good Samaritan personified.

Military Musings

UNSUNG HEROES

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Long Island, Wancowrie, Moose, Hut Bay, Andaman. These are some of the proud little inter-island Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) ships operating under the Andaman and Nicobar Administration; mostly named after the islands of the Andaman and Nicobar group. Ferrying people, vehicles, materials, fuel and everything required for sustenance on the islands on a daily basis.

The Andaman and Nicobar group of islands are spread over approximately 800 Kms in a North - South configuration in the Bay of Bengal with the Southern-most island being a mere 60 Kms from Indonesia. The picturesque islands are amongst the most beautiful in the world and a tourist's paradise.

On 26th December 2004 these beautiful islands were ravaged first by an earthquake of the severest intensity and then by gigantic Tsunami waves. In the space of a few hours life on the islands was drastically affected. Hundreds were killed; thousands later fled to the mainland. The very geography of the islands was altered by this earth-shaking event. Suddenly, the sea, which was the fisherman's friend, was perceived as a treacherous enemy. Many in the refugee camps at Port Blair refused to return to the worst affected islands, which had been their home for generations.

The Tsunami was an extremely traumatic event, which affected the life of every one of the islanders in some way or the other. The civil administration by itself was unable to cope with a disaster of such enormity. The Armed Forces played a vital role in the rescue and relief operations. The efforts of the Armed Forces have been well lauded.

There is one category of people, however, whose efforts have gone unsung and need to be recognized. The Merchant Navy and the brave ships of the Andamans & Nicobar Administration. Here is the story of one such ship, typical of how they performed in those eventful days immediately after the Tsunami. This is the story of MV Katchal.

The morning of 26 December 2004 dawned bright and beautiful without any hint of impending disaster. MV Katchal, MV Bhoruka Prabhu, MV Velankanni and Coast Guard 226 were all moored alongside at Campbell Bay jetty. At 0635 hours, suddenly the ships started feeling the tremors of an earthquake. On board the Katchal, the sailors observed people on the shore running helter-skelter in panic. They saw the jetty shaking and beginning to disintegrate at various places. Poles and cranes on the jetty tumbled down. The water level started rising alarmingly. The ship rose by about 3 to 4 meters whilst the jetty began submerging. They knew that they were caught in the midst of a devastating earthquake. The quake lasted for a full three minutes.

Captain Rakesh Nanda, Master of MV Katchal immediately ordered unmooring of all ropes and to start engines. The Second Officer of Katchal ignoring any danger to his own life, jumped on to the jetty and unmoored as many ropes as he could of all four vessels before clambering aboard his own ship again. Engines were started within two minutes and the vessel cast off from the jetty and proceeded to sea. The crew of MV Katchal learnt on the HF that Port Blair and other ports were also experiencing the same phenomenon. The Tsunami followed soon after.

The vessel remained tossing about in the open sea for 24 hours and on the morning of 27th December, re-entered Campbell Bay and anchored inside the harbour. The crew observed that the jetty had disintegrated and disappeared. The town itself was totally swept away with no shops or houses left in the once busy market place. A lot of debris littered the harbour. The ship's boat was lowered and the Master of MV Katchal proceeded ashore to confer with the Assistant Commissioner, the ranking administrator in that area who was trying to get things under control.

On 28th December, the Assistant Commissioner of Campbell Bay ordered MV Katchal and Coast Guard 226 to proceed to 13 Km point from where the settlement commences and extends up to Km 41. The settlement had got isolated following the washing away of a bridge at Km 13 by the Tsunami. Two other bridges at Km 18 and Km 30 had also collapsed. The ships executed the order and carried out a preliminary survey on how best to rescue the marooned people.

On December 29, Coast Guard 226 was dispatched to Km 13 and MV Katchal to the island of Kondul to rescue survivors. The ship was anchored about two

cables away and a small boat was lowered in which the people were ferried to the ship. 185 people were taken off Kondul by MV Katchal in this fashion. The ship's boat had to make almost 40 trips before all survivors were accounted for. Life jackets were also sent ashore for those who could swim to help them get across to the ship. A few strong swimmers and determined youngsters did that successfully. Then a rope was sent across to the shore and tied connecting ship to shore a little above the water level. Many women and old people came across with the help of that rope. Thus the entire island was evacuated. The operation took about three hours of unrelenting effort. The ship heaved anchor and set course for Campbell Bay. En route, the injured were given medical treatment; everyone was fed, given tea and comforted.

That very night after disembarking the rescued at Campbell Bay, the Katchal proceeded to an island named Nancowri for re-victualling since it had completely exhausted its rations. Early on the morning of 30th December, after taking on provisions, MV Katchal set sail to rescue survivors from the island of Pillow Millow. The vessel collected 84 survivors from Pillow Millow, more than a 100 survivors from the adjacent islands of Macachua, Pillow Patia and Meroe. In all, 226 survivors were transported by the Katchal that day, reaching Campbell Bay at 2130 hours. On the way, food and first aid was given to all. The crew was dismayed to find that the sea was rising again and that it could not disembark its passengers. The rising water forced the ship to put out to sea again and the cooks were put to work afresh to feed the hungry passengers. On the morning of 31st December the vessel re-entered the harbour and was able to discharge its passengers. Later in the day the vessel touched Pillow Baha and Keyong in the Little Nicobar group and rescued another 59 survivors. On the Night of 1st January 2005 whilst the ship was at anchorage in Campbell Bay a country boat with 16 people from Little Nicobar pulled up and demanded shelter. The people were taken aboard for the night. The next morning after serving them breakfast, the 16 people were put ashore.

MV Katchal has the proud record of rescuing 486 people in 4 days. The Chief Officer, the Chief Engineer and all other officers and crew worked as a great team, made sacrifices and worked above and beyond the call of duty. Many ignored danger to themselves in the performance of their duties. Their sympathy for the survivors and the traditions of the sea motivated them to put service before self and do everything in their means to provide help to the marooned islanders. Restoring the smile on their faces was reward enough for the sailors. Small ships of the Andaman and Nicobar Administration they may well be, but they have very large hearts.

Military Musings

THE DREADED ANNUAL MEDICAL EXAM

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The happiest feeling that I experienced on retirement from the army was that I was at last free of the dreaded annual medical examinations. Every year, every officer, JCO, NCO and OR has to undergo the annual medical exam without fail. If for some reason, a person is not able to do so or the medical exam is inordinately delayed, the Commanding Officer of the errant individual has to render an explanation to the designated medical authority, detailing the circumstances under which the person was unable to take the medical exam, for condonation at appropriate level. Deliberately avoiding the annual medical could make one liable for disciplinary action.

It's bad enough to have to undergo the stress of the annual medical but the doctors are hell-bent on putting people through medical exams on any pretext. Apart from the annual medical exam, if one is to be promoted, he has to undergo a promotion medical exam; if one is selected for a foreign assignment, he has to undergo a medical examination. Officers selected for special prestigious long courses in India or abroad, have to undergo the full medical regime. Troops returning from annual leave are subjected to a once over by the unit RMO. When officers cross the age of 40 they have to appear before a special medical board. The medical exam bugs a person throughout his career. Even at the time of retirement one has to undergo a final medical examination to determine whether he is fully fit or a medical category at the time of leaving the service. If one is not 100 per cent fit, it affects commutation of pension, which is a gross injustice to service personnel because there is no such provision for civilians in Government service. Irrespective of their state of health at the time of retirement, they can commute their pension to the maximum permissible limit. I have heard tell the story of a former Defence Secretary who had to swallow about 10 to 12 pills a day to survive yet he retired with full pensionary benefits.

Medical category is determined along five parameters. Psychological represented by the letter S, hearing –H, appendages – A, physical fitness – P

and eyesight – E. In each of these parameters army personnel are graded on a scale of 1 to 5. Thus a person may be S1H2A1P1E1 or S1H1A1P3E1 depending on the affliction. Whenever a person is downgraded temporarily, the period of such down-gradation is specified in weeks. Thus a person who may have fractured his hand may be declared A2 for 8 weeks. At the end of the period he has to again appear for before a medical board for upgrading to A1. A person is considered 100 percent fit when he is S1H1A1P1E1 or in Army parlance, 'SHAPE One'. If a person cannot be cured and has a chronic disease, he may be declared a permanent medical category. Many armoured corps officers and artillery men suffer from partial deafness in one or both year ears due to being constantly exposed to the sound of gunfire. Such persons may be graded as H2 (permanent). A person suffering from diabetes and hypertension may become P2 (permanent) and so on.

Officers need to be SHAPE One to be promoted to every selective rank i.e Lt Col and above. Temporarily down-graded officers are denied promotion till they become fully fit. In the case of permanent category officers, there are rules allowing them to be promoted up to a certain specified rank depending on the nature of disability and type of employment. Battle casualties rightly enjoy special privilege and are promoted irrespective of the nature of injury provided it is not so severe that he has to be boarded out of service on its account. Thus a person who may have lost a leg in battle may be posted out of an active unit to sedentary duties in a peace station, but he gets to continue to serve in the army.

The rationale for holding annual medical examinations cannot be doubted. Every individual in uniform has to be fit at all times and be ready to go to war should the balloon go up suddenly. He should be able to travel by road, air or sea and be fully capable of undergoing the rigors of arduous live combat, as also the physical hardships in different types of terrain and weather conditions; in the heat of the desert, in the snows on the mountains, in the humid weather of the jungles and above all, in high altitudes, where the mean height above mean sea level and harsh weather conditions pose special health hazards.

Downgrading to 5 in any of the parameters means boarding out of service. 4 causes a person to be sent on sick leave on discharge from the hospital for a specified period. 3 demands that the person is allowed to return to the unit but is exempted physical work and is generally employed on sedentary duties. 2 means that a person is recuperating and can undertake all duties but will take that much longer to get recover totally. 1 of course means he is fully fit.

The older and more senior one gets, the tougher the medical exam. There is no relaxation in rigid standards: the simple height weight ratio lands more officers in trouble and is itself the cause of serious stress. And it is the Medical Specialist who is the most dreaded of doctors. Some are positively vicious.

One trigger happy medical specialist who was in charge of the Armed Forces Clinic in Delhi was one of the most heartless that I have ever come across. I was then a Colonel in Army Headquarters. I was found to be a few Kgs above the acceptable limit. He called me obese and gave me two months to get rid of the excess fat. Fortunately I was not downgraded. But he held back the medical for two months till after I had shed the flab. For two miserable months I was on a diet which is not even fed to prisoners. Surviving on soup and cucumber sandwiches, shunning all fried things, ice creams, avoiding my favourite potato chips. running miles in the morning and evening, Not only was I a miserable wreck at the end of two months but I also drove my family up the wall with my irritability. But what struck me dumb was the Brigadier telling me, when I appeared for my re-medical was that I was still a few ounces overweight. I lost my cool and told him that if he considered that such a serious problem, he could happily bung me into the Military Hospital, where I could shed my ounces in comfort instead of earning my keep. That settled it. He pretended that he was doing me a great favour by letting me off. A few months later, when I chanced to meet the DGMS (Army) on a civil flight on which we found ourselves seated next to each other, I mentioned to him the attitude of the Brigadier. The General confided to me that I was not the first person to complain about him. He was generally a pain to deal with.

Another sadist Medical Specialist was posted in MH Wellington in 1980-81 when I was an Instructor in the Defence Services Staff College. He found heart defects amongst at least 15 of us instructors during our annual medical exam and referred us all to the Cardiologist in the Command Hospital (AF) at Bangalore. Of course nothing was found wrong in even a single case. Our feathers were ruffled. When we instructors complained about the Medical Specialist's attitude to the Commandant, Lt Gen Balaram, he tended to believe that the doctor was just being cautious: not vicious. Till he was due for his own medical exam. Now Gen Balaram was as fit as a fiddle. But the Medical Specialist insisted on administering the Glucose Tolerance Test and a few other unnecessary tests for good measure. Gen Balaram was livid. As soon as he returned to his office he called the DGAFMS and narrated the whole sorry episode of the doctor's behavior. He said he didn't want him in Wellington another day and asked for his posting on phone. The doctor was ignominiously

packed off on a posting to a field area in the North East within the week and a very compassionate doctor was specially selected and posted to Wellington in his place. Peace returned to the Nilgiris.

The medical exam has ramifications for service personnel. Should some defect be found and the officer be down-graded by a medical board, his promotion is adversely affected. The annual medical exam causes so much stress that people even have a haircut to knock off a few ounces of weight before their tryst with destiny.

Little wonder therefore, that some officers in the promotion zone tend to spend their own money and get themselves treated in a private hospital rather than reveal their ailment to military doctors. And if the AMC doctors disbelieve that such things happen, they must be leading blinkered lives.

Military Musings

THE HIJACK

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The incident narrated below is a true story. The hijack occurred when I was a Major and serving as Assistant Military Adviser in the High Commission of India in Dacca, Bangladesh. The Assistant Air Adviser and myself were deputed on airport duty by the High Commissioner to take over the Indian hostages as and when released and shift them to a five star hotel till alternate arrangements were finalised for their onward journey.

On 28th Sep 1977, Japan Airlines Flight 472 carrying 142 passengers and a crew of 14 from Paris to Tokyo via Bombay was hijacked by Osamu Maruoka, a faction of the Japanese Red Army (JRA), soon after takeoff from Bombay and taken to Dacca, Bangladesh. The hijackers demanded the release of nine of its members held in captivity by the Japanese Government and US \$ 6 million in exchange for the hostages. The DC-8 remained standing on the tarmac for four days till a special JAL plane from Tokyo landed in Dacca on 2nd Oct 1977 with six of the released prisoners and \$ 2 million in cash.

The Bangladesh Chief of Air Staff, AVM AG Mahmud was personally conducting the negotiations; a certain amount of money and prisoners would be handed over and a pre determined number of hostages would be released in exchange. When 118 passengers had been thus released, there was sudden pandemonium at the airport. The hijackers broke off the negotiations slammed the aircraft doors shut, started the engines and the aircraft started rolling for takeoff.

TV viewers in Bangladesh who were watching the live telecast of the hijack drama were shocked to hear shooting and see people running helter-skelter. They saw an army truck race after the aircraft, and park itself close under the nose wheel just as the aircraft turned into the wind on the runway, effectively obstructing takeoff. The plane finally shut down its engines and stayed put where it was. The airport remained closed for all air traffic.

The plane was allowed to leave the next day and ultimately went to Algeria where the aircraft was impounded by the authorities and the remainder hostages released. Thus five days of high drama in Dacca came to an end.

But what went so terribly wrong at Dacca airport? We later learnt that it was an attempted coup gone wrong. A faction of the Bangladesh Army and disgruntled airmen of the Bangladesh Air Force had earlier planned to simultaneously revolt on that very day but since the hijacked plane landed at Dacca and the attention of the world was focussed on it, the army faction decided to postpone the affair. However the Bangladesh Air Force personnel were impatient and decided to go it alone. They revolted at precisely the moment when the hostage exchange was on. A large number of BAF officers at the airport were killed by the rebels. The BAF Air Chief managed to escape from the airport in disguise. Inevitably, loyal troops of the Bangladesh Army were deployed who surrounded the airport. A large number of Bangladeshi airmen were rounded up by the Bangladesh army, lined up against the hangars and summarily executed wherever they were found; or so we heard. Bangladesh was thereafter without an Air Force for the next six months.

Military Musings

THE INDOMITABLE SUBEDAR MAJOR

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The Indian Army has a unique category of personnel below officer rank known as Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs). In status, they are placed between regular officers and Other Ranks (NCOs and soldiers). The JCOs are the back bone of the unit; men who have risen from the ranks with battle experience and grass-root level leadership qualities.

Their ranks include Naib Subedar, Subedar and Subedar Major. An infantry battalion selects and appoints one Subedar Major as the Senior JCO of the unit. Chosen carefully, apart from ability and performance, the most important thing about the unit Subedar Major is the utmost faith that the Commanding Officer reposes in him. The Subedar Major has access to the CO at all times on all matters affecting the unit.

The SM Saab, as he is referred to in units, ensures that everyone remains on their toes. Very often where discreet corrective action in any situation is required, he does it himself rather than allowing the matter to be officially taken cognisance of.

One infantry officer recalls how when he was a young Duty Officer he went to check the ammunition point of his unit one night, and found the sentry missing from his post. The missing sentry, when he was located, was placed under arrest. Rifleman Chinta Singh was the name of the missing sentry.

Early next morning the SM met the officer and informed him that Chinta Singh had gone to have a leak when the officer arrived to check the guard and then got scared and hid himself. The SM assured the officer that he would sort him out with extra drill and pack parades. The OR was new to the battalion having just joined a few weeks earlier and yet needed to settle in. A red ink entry in his documents at this early stage would be very detrimental to his career and instead of becoming a good soldier, he might turn into a hard case.

The SM advised the officer to reconsider placing him under arrest. The officer agreed to the SM's recommendation. Since he had the officer's consent, the SM said he would speak to the CO about it. Thus the SM in one fell swoop, not only looked after the interest of the unit and Chinta Singh, but also upheld the prestige of the inexperienced young officer by first seeking his approval before speaking to the CO to have the soldier released.

I recollect when as a 2/Lt, I was doing my infantry attachment with 19 Rajput, we had returned from a gruelling 20 mile route march. After getting an all correct report from my Company JCO, I fell out the Company and planned to return to my room in the Officers' Mess to put up my own aching feet. The Battalion SM was close by and asked me to stop the company from disbursing. The SM reminded me that the day's work was not yet done. It would be preferable if I inspected the feet of all my men for blisters cuts and swelling, before tending to my own feet. I have never forgotten that lesson. It starkly brought home to me the credo of the Indian military officer that the welfare and comfort of the men he commands always comes before his own ease and comfort.

Again, in 1961, my battalion was in the Jammu Sector. We only had some temporary barracks but no permanent accommodation. The unit was mostly in bunkers and bashas (mud huts with thatched roofs). We had clandestinely uprooted the railway tracks of the disused and abandoned Jammu – Sialkot railway line and were using the rails to shore up the roofs of our bunkers. It was nearing 1 pm but a little work still remained to be completed. I motivated the men to take a little more time and complete the task before breaking off for lunch. There was some grumbling and mumbling but I prevailed on them; we carried on and finished the job just after 2 pm.

The SM had observed this and I thought he would be pleased that we had completed a difficult job. He was; but he gave me a piece of advice that was to guide me throughout the rest of my military life. The SM told me that most of the men came from villages; from poor homes where they do not get two square meals a day. Food meant a lot to them, and hot food is particularly good for morale of soldiers. In future, he advised me to break them off for food in time and get all the work from them when their bellies are full. They will work better and more willingly. He asked me to take his word for it. I did.

When I was serving in Sikkim, we had 3/9 GR, a battalion of Gorkhas in our brigade. The men mostly belonged to one particular area in Nepal. One of the

soldiers who was on leave in Nepal, found to his horror, that while he had gone visiting some friends in another village, his home had been washed away in a flash flood. He not only lost his home but also his wife and baby daughter and his old parents. He almost went mad with grief. Other villagers took him in and looked after him for a couple of days. After the bodies had been recovered and the funerals were over, the SM who was also on leave at that time, cancelled the leave of another Rifleman of the same company as that of the bereaved soldier, and ordered him to take the soldier back to the battalion in Sikkim instead of his aimlessly roaming around in disbelief, like a zombie.

The year was 1974. There were some young war widows of the battalion from the 1971 war residing in that area. The SM spoke to the parents of a suitable war widow and brought her along with him to Sikkim when his leave expired. The bereaved OR and the war widow were married in the unit mandir, and he was posted to their Regimental Training Centre in Dehra Dun, so that the couple could start a new life together, in a good peace station. Such is the prestige of a Subedar Major. Next to the CO, he is like God to the men.

I recollect one incident which I can never forget when I was commanding my unit, in Jammu District, in 1978-79. We were in a field area and very few jawans were permitted to bring their families. The wife of one jawan, hailing from Haryana, poured kerosene on herself and set herself ablaze to commit suicide. The men, including her husband, had all fallen-in for the evening roll-call. On hearing the screaming and shouting from the family lines, the men all rushed to the area threw a blanket on her and rolled the woman on the ground to douse the fire. The unit RMO administered immediate first aid and she was evacuated to the Command Hospital at Udhampur. The woman died despite our best efforts to save her.

It turned out that the woman was suffering from elephantiasis and the other jawans wives used to tease her and treated her with scorn for being barren; till she could stand it no longer and decided to put an end to it all.

Then a strange thing happened. Another jawan, hailing from Satara in Maharashtra, who saw the woman aflame, went off his head. He became violent and started mumbling incoherently. It took two unit wrestlers to quell him and later the unit RMO sedated him for the night. We hoped that he would recover after a good sleep. But it was not to be. I mentioned to my SM that we would need to shift him to the Command Hospital, probably the Psychiatric Ward. To my surprise, the SM advised against it because he said once he is put in the

Psychiatric Ward, the unit personnel will always refer to him as a ‘pagal’. It will ruin his reputation forever. “So what should we do?” I asked him since we couldn’t keep the jawan sedated or tied up indefinitely.

The wise SM reasoned that the jawan hailed from Maharashtra where bride burning was reported frequently. He was newly married and it was known that his wife and his mother were not getting along. Probably seeing the woman ablaze had affected his psyche. The SM suggested that we grant leave to two of his friends from the same area and send them all on leave with the instructions that they were to escort the jawan home and deliver him there. If his behaviour did not improve, and these relatives were not able to handle him, they were directed to admit him in the Command Hospital at Pune

The wisdom of that counsel was evident when the jawan returned to the unit, on completion of his annual leave, happy and in full control of all his senses.

The few stories above are merely illustrative of the onerous responsibility of the Subedar Major. Stories abound in every fighting unit, the regimental training centres and military training establishments where the Subedar Major is legend.

The esteem for the unit Subedar Major places him on a high pedestal indeed.

Military Musings

WRESTLING WITH WEIGHT

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The Indian nation suffered a heart-break when wrestler Vinesh Phogat was declared overweight by just a hundred grams before the Olympic wrestling finals in Paris in Aug 2024; and disqualified. Despite starving herself the night before, indulging in strenuous exercise to sweat it out, even cutting her hair and blood-letting, she still didn't succeed in bringing her weight down within limits. This is a problem faced by all sportsmen and women indulging in competitive sports where weight matters; be it wrestling, boxing or even horse racing.

When I heard about the incident on TV, my mind went back to an incident when I was a Colonel posted in Army HQ some years back, and I was declared overweight by a few kilos by the Medical Specialist during my annual medical exam..

The trigger happy Medical Specialist who was in charge of the Armed Forces Clinic in Delhi was one of the most heartless that I have ever come across. He claimed I was obese and gave me two months to get rid of the excess fat. Fortunately I was not downgraded. But he held back the medical for two months till after I had shed the flab.

For two miserable months I was on a diet which is not even fed to prisoners. Surviving on soup and mostly cucumber sandwiches for lunch, shunning all fried things, ice creams, avoiding my favourite potato chips. Running miles every morning and evening, Not only was I a miserable wreck at the end of two months but I also drove my family up the wall with my irritability.

But what struck me dumb was the Brigadier telling me, when I appeared for my re-medical was that despite shedding five kilos, I was still a few ounces overweight. I lost my cool and told him that if he considered that such a serious problem, he could happily bung me into the Military Hospital, where I could shed my ounces in comfort instead of earning my keep by slogging like a

mad man, 10 hours a day. That settled it. He pretended that he was doing me a great favour by letting me off and I cleared my medical.

A few months later, when I chanced to meet the DGMS (Army) on a civil flight on which we found ourselves seated next to each other, I mentioned to him the attitude of the Brigadier. The General confided to me that I was not the first person to complain about him. He was generally a pain in the unmentionable.

Another sadist Medical Specialist was posted in MH Wellington in 1980-81 when I was an Instructor in the Defence Services Staff College. He suspected heart defects amongst at least 15 of us instructors during our annual medical exam and referred us all to the Cardiologist in the Command Hospital (AF) at Bangalore. Of course nothing was found wrong in even a single case. Our feathers were ruffled. When we instructors complained about the Medical Specialist's attitude to the Commandant, Lt Gen Balaram, he tended to believe that the doctor was just being cautious: not vicious; till he was due for his own medical exam.

Now Gen Balaram was as fit as a fiddle. But the Medical Specialist insisted on administering the Glucose Tolerance Test and a few other unnecessary tests like the Renal Function Test and Liver Function Test for good measure. Gen Balaram was livid. As soon as he returned to his office he called the DGAFFMS and narrated the whole sorry episode of the doctor's behaviour. He said he didn't want him in Wellington another day and asked for his posting on phone. The doctor was ignominiously packed off on a posting to a field area in the North East within the week and a truly compassionate doctor was specially selected and posted to Wellington in his place. Peace finally descended on the Nilgiris.

The medical exam has ramifications for service personnel. Should some defect be found and the officer be down-graded by a medical board, his promotion is adversely affected. The annual medical exam causes so much stress that some officers in the promotion zone tend to spend their own money and get themselves treated in a private hospital rather than reveal their ailment to military doctors. So the euphoria that I experienced on retirement from the army was largely because I was at last free of the dreaded annual medical examinations. And of course; there was no compulsory early morning parade any longer. One could loll in bed as long as one desired.

Military Musings

AMBUSH IN CHAMBAL

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Yes! It happened in May 1966. I remember the time clearly because the 1965 Indo-Pak war had ended and 51 (Indep) Para Bde had returned from the op area to its permanent location, Gwalior, in Feb 1966. Para jumping which had been suspended due to the war and shortage of parachutes recommenced in April 1966. Though I had joined the Para Bde in mid 1965, I only got to do my jumps in April 1966. I did all my mandatory jumps at the Parachute Training School, Agra, from a Fairchild Packet and earned my parachute wings.

My office runner, Paratrooper (Ptr) Piara Singh was a short but wiry and very fit Khalsa; he was pleased as punch to see me finally wearing the para wings on the right sleeve of my uniform shirt and gave me a smart salute, congratulated me and demanded sweets almost all in one breath.

I gave him some money to get a box of pedas from the brigade baniya for distribution in the headquarters. When I offered the sweets to the Para Brigade Commander, Brig Sucha Singh, VrC, MC Bar, he was pleased and congratulated me but said "Rao, don't think you'll get away with just distributing pedas. We shall be expecting a party from you. It is no small feat to earn your wings and it is a great privilege to now officially become part of the Maroon Berets. I wish you happy landings." "Yes Sir, At the soonest" I promised.

In early May 1966, Major Afsir Karim (later Major General), who was DQ of the Para Bde had to proceed on a few days casual leave and I, as Staff Captain, was officiating in his place. One morning when I was in the office, Ptr Piara Singh informed me that there were some policemen wanting to meet me. The Sub Inspector came in and saluted and informed me that they had nabbed two army deserters and had brought them for handing over to the local military authorities. The two prisoners were dressed in civvies wearing wind cheaters with knitted caps and army boots. Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were roped together to deter any attempt to escape.

My questioning them revealed that they belonged to an artillery regiment in Hyderabad. One was a motor cycle DR, the other an ordinary gunner hailing from Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh respectively. They were both carrying their rifles but with empty magazines.

The story narrated by the Madhya Pradesh Police was that they had received a tip off from an informant that two wanted dacoits were expected to be proceeding to Agra on a motor cycle, on a particular night and would be in the area of the Chambal Ravines between

1 am and 2 am in the night. The police had accordingly laid an ambush at a suitable site to nab them. When the cops saw a motor cycle approaching with two people carrying weapons they were certain that these were the very dacoits they were waiting for and sprung the trap. You can imagine their frustration when they discovered that they had in fact netted two army deserters. With all the lights, shouting and commotion caused, surprise was lost; the cops disgustedly ended their vigil and took the deserters into custody for handing over to the military authorities the following morning.

The real dacoits it appeared had for some reason got delayed and blissfully unaware of the reception that had been planned for them as also their providential escape, crossed that location an hour later and continued on their way, unscathed.

I informed the Para Bde Comdr about the deserters and he directed me to inform all concerned and to direct 7 Para to hold the prisoners in their unit Quarter Guard till they were collected by their unit.

The deserters were accordingly handed over to 7 Para by the policemen for holding in their quarter guard till the military escort from the unit came and collected them. Also handed over to 7 Para for safe custody were their weapons and a black 3.5 HP Royal Enfield Bullet MC displaying an Andhra Pradesh number plate.

Once the prisoners had been taken away, I offered the policemen some tea and biscuits, chatted for a while and thanked them for handing over the two defaulters. The army would take over from here and the two would face a court martial I assured them.

When the whole story was pieced together it turned out that both jawans were bad hats who had just come out of the unit quarter guard after completing 21 days RI. While undergoing their sentence they had decided that

enough was enough and conspired to desert at the earliest opportunity. One day, soon after their release, when they had returned from range firing, without even depositing their weapons, they went straight to the unit MT and took a motorbike on the pretext that the Adjutant had asked them to make an immediate delivery of an important document to the higher headquarters. They mounted and drove out of the unit on their way to freedom.

They hid in Hyderabad for a couple of days in which time they shed their uniforms and changed into civvies and also got the Olive Green army motorcycle fully serviced and repainted black. The military BA number was replaced with a fictional civilian RTO number. Once they had filled up petrol, they set off on their journey to Agra where one of the two culprits had some dealings with some shady characters and was sure that he could get a good price for the weapons as also the motor cycle. They would split the ill gotten gains equally between themselves and part ways thereafter. But fate had other plans.

They ate and slept mostly at small wayside dhabas where they got tasty food cheap as also a cot to sleep. They drove mostly at night and avoided the big cities as much as possible. To their bad luck, they drove into the police net after crossing Gwalior that very night when the police had laid an ambush to trap some dacoits also expected to pass the same way on a motorcycle.

We informed the unit and higher headquarters about the incident and about a week later an armed escort arrived by road from the unit, collected the prisoners, the weapons and the stolen motorcycle from 7 Para and carted them away.

The two soldiers it is understood were summarily court-martialled, sentenced to a year's RI in civil jail and dismissed from service.

Military Musings

ARMY DAY

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The Indian nation celebrates several important national events on specific days each year; like Republic Day on 26th January and Independence Day on 15th August. It also observes other significant days such as Teachers' Day on 5th October, the birth anniversary of our second President Late Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Childrens' Day on 14th November, our late Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's birth anniversary; and a few others.

The Indian Armed Forces celebrate days of military significance. The Indian Navy just celebrated 4th December 2022 as Navy Day because it is on this day in 1971 that the Navy carried out daring attacks right into Karachi harbour on the night of 4th Dec (Op Trident) and again on Night of 8th Dec (Op Python) using Russian Osa - 1 missile boats equipped with Styx missiles. The daring raids inflicted crippling losses on the Pakistan navy and destroyed its oil tanks at Karachi. That action contributed significantly to our victory in the west, helped lower Pakistani morale almost to the point of losing the will to fight, and ensured a resounding Indian victory in the Bangladesh war.

President Droupadi Murmu, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Armed Forces participated in the celebrations at Vishakapatnam (Vizag), the Headquarters of the Eastern Naval Command. She was received by the Naval Chief, Admiral R Hari Kumar, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC.

Air Force Day on the other hand is celebrated on 8th October each year because it was on this day back in 1932, that the Indian Air Force was officially came into being in erstwhile British India. The first air squadron became operational in 1933 with 6 RAF trained officers 19 Havai Sepoys (air soldiers). 2022 marked 90 years of the Indian Air Force which is today a mighty force to reckon with; being the fourth largest in the world after USA, Russia and China.

To mark the occasion, the Indian Air Force organised a massive air show with 83 aircraft participating, at Chandigarh in Western Air Command,. The Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Vivek Ram Chaudhari, PVSM, AVSM, VM, ADC was present of the occasion to view the air display over Sukhna Lake.

Army Day is observed on 15th January each year because it is on this day in 1949 that General (later Field Marshal) K M Cariappa became the first Indian to assume the appointment of Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army. He took over from General Sir Francis Roy Bucher, the last British C-in-C. General Cariappa was selected over two other contenders for the post: General S. M Srinagesh and General Nathu Singh. Gen Cariappa retired after a four-year tenure on 14th January 1953; which day is observed as Veterans' Day by the Indian Army. The day aims to acknowledge and honour the selfless devotion and sacrifice of our veterans in the service of the nation.

Till 2022, Army Day was regularly marked by a major military parade in Delhi Cantt on 15th January. It was also an investiture ceremony because the Chief of Army Staff pinned gallantry awards and other medals on officers and men for their heroic deeds or professional contribution to the Indian Army. From this year onwards, however, the Prime Minister has desired that the event be celebrated in other cities so that our citizens at large get to see the pomp and might of the Indian Army. Consequently, Army Day 2023 is being celebrated at Bengaluru as confirmed by a spokesman of the Ministry of Defence. The parade will be reviewed by General Manoj Pande, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC: Chief of the Army Staff.

On account of the change in venue, the wreath laying ceremony by the three Service Chiefs at the National War Memorial in Delhi will henceforward be scheduled to be held a day earlier.

The Indian armed forces have been tried and tested in wars, proved their mettle in counter insurgency operations, undertaken successful special operations, done sterling work during natural calamities, won acclaim on UN missions, and most importantly have successfully protected the country on land, in the sea and in the air. So they have justifiable pride in observing Army/Navy/Air Force day.

India is proud of its armed forces and we salute our warriors. May they always be victorious!

Jai Hind

Military Musings

CAT'S WHISKERS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Cat's Whiskers as an old informal British way of saying that something or someone is very appealing. It signifies something elite, elegant, beautiful or superlative depending upon the context that it is used. The phrase is catchy and conjures the image of a contended Cheshire cat with shiny white whiskers.

I first became aware of the phrase when serving in the parachute brigade. The caravan of the Para Brigade Commander was named Cat's Whiskers. Legend has it that the caravan was first used by the General Officer Commanding the 44 Indian Airborne Division created in 1944. But post partition, India settled down to having only one Independent Parachute Brigade and the caravan was handed down to the Commander of 50 (I) Para Bde.

The caravan has since been re-fabricated on another chassis with additional comforts/necessities added; but the name Cat's Whiskers had endured. I liked and remembered that classy name.

I got to have a peep at the caravan once when it was deployed on an exercise. It was rear opening with stairs leading to the double doors. Inside, I could see my reflection in a small mirror on the opposite wall with a small revolving fan above it. The van was simply but comfortably furnished for field conditions. It had a folding bed and a folding table apart from a built in cupboard and a toilet. There was a small water tank above the driver's cabin so there was sufficient water available for one's daily needs. It served as the commander's residence as also his small field office during operations.

Camouflage netting was piled up on the roof of the vehicle so that it could be quickly unrolled and the vehicle camouflaged from hostile aircraft wherever it was deployed. There was ample space below the netting and a few folding chairs and camp stools and side tables were placed about to enable the Commander to confer with the parachute battalion commanders and staff officers as necessary. The scrim garnishing not only broke the outline of the

vehicle effectively but also abundantly added to the speckled shade under the netting.

It was when I was elected as Chairman of the Managing Committee of Salunke Vihar, well after my retirement from the army, that I decided to commence a monthly newsletter to all 796 members of the society each month. Since society correspondence was all carried out in English, the periodical would also be in the same language.

I had great plans for the society and through the medium of the newsletter I intended to establish a direct connect with all residents which I felt was necessary to create a more cohesive brotherhood of veterans. The monthly newsletter would keep everybody updated about the progress on various points and projects while at the same time eliminating the grape-vine and arresting spread of unfounded rumours by some vested interests. The informal style of approach would also enable me to add a personal touch while seeking everybody's cooperation on various issues.

The newsletter would also inform the members of approaching events and plans in the offing as also advise them from time to time on important matters like conserving water in summer, security against thefts and more importantly the latest news from the Armed Forces such as issue of new ECHS cards, pension and canteen matters and organisation of special events like a band concert or a special book release and other miscellaneous matters of military interest to all residents.

I was pondering in my mind for a natty name for the monthly; it needed to be elegant and catchy, while at the same time conveying that it was special. After musing over the matter for a few days, I finally settled for either 'Highbrow' or 'Cat's Whiskers'. I was more inclined towards the latter.

As is my habit, I thought I would first run it by my wife who has an uncanny instinct about such matters.

I was a bit taken aback by her negative response to my brilliant idea; but she had good reason to recommend that I select a simpler name that would be understood by all. And I fully agreed with her. Given that Salunke Vihar is a cosmopolitan, multi-cultural society with a fair percentage of the population which only feels comfortable in Hindi or Marathi, she felt that the subtlety of a quaint English

phrase like Cat's Whiskers would be lost on them. Imagine, she said, some old widow exclaiming "*Manjracha misha? Hey kasla nav thevla aahe?*" she said.

We ultimately ended up by simply describing it as (something) "From the Chairman's Desk".

But name notwithstanding, the newsletter proved to be very popular and was much awaited by the residents every month. It served its intended purpose fully and helped foster a feeling of greater togetherness in the society.

And we all purred contentedly.

Military Musings

CELEBRATING VETERANS' DAY

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

In January 2025, the Indian nation celebrated the 77th Army Day and 9th Veterans' Day at Pune. This was in keeping with the practice started a few years ago, on directions of PM Narendra Modi that, for the benefit of the public, the events be celebrated in different military commands and not be centered at Delhi alone; as was the practice till then. The same holds good for the Indian Navy and Indian Air Force also for celebrating Navy Day and Air Force day respectively.

While the Army Day is celebrated on Jan 15 every year, Veterans' Day is celebrated a day earlier on Jan 14. The two dates are associated with the taking over as C-in-C and retirement of Field Marshal K M Cariappa. The Field Marshal took over as the first C-in-C of the Indian army, post-independence, on 15th Jan 1949 from Gen Sir FRR Bucher; he retired on 14th Jan 1953 after a glorious innings in the army. But whereas Army Day was always celebrated by the nation, the custom of observing Veterans' Day was started as late as in 2017, as a pan India event under the purview of the Ministry of Defence.

The aim of observing Veterans' Day is to salute the dedication and sacrifices of veterans of all three services while standing in solidarity with their families. It was also to strengthen the bond between ex-servicemen and serving members of the armed forces and to provide a forum to the ex-servicemen (ESM) to address their grievances relating to pension and welfare matters affecting their next of kin.

Honouring veterans and slain comrades is a long standing practice in various armies. In the US and other Western countries the day is celebrated on 11 November each year; commemorated as Armistice Day or Remembrance Day: marking the anniversary of end of World War 1. Similarly, ANZAC Day is celebrated by Australia and New Zealand on April 25 to

remember all their soldiers who fought and died in all wars and peace keeping operations. The Day is significant because it was on 25 April, 1915 that the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) landed in the peninsula of Turkey for the Gallipoli campaign of World War 1.

Veterans' Day in India is celebrated in major military stations across the length and breadth of the country. The programmes include get-togethers, wreath laying at war memorials, ceremonial parades, honouring veer naris (war widows) and fauji melas to allow interaction between ex-servicemen (ESM) and various agencies like SPARSH (for pension matters) CSD (for canteen needs) AWES (to resolve schooling problems) AWHO (housing issues) ECHS (healthcare benefits), (DGR) for Resettlement issues and Army Welfare Placement Organization (AWPO) for post-retirement employment opportunities. A representative of the state Zilla Sainik Board is also available to tackle local issues.

In Mumbai, a large number of Veterans including gallantry award winners from the three services participate in the Veterans' Day parade which is held on the iconic Marine Drive promenade. The events in Mumbai are organized by the Navy Foundation Mumbai Chapter (NBMC) in association with Headquarters Western Naval Command.

It was Field Marshal Cariappa who created the Resettlement Directorate in the Ministry of Defence (since upgraded to Directorate General of Resettlement). The DG Resettlement enters into MOUs with various state governments, PSUs and corporates to guarantee skilling and mass employment of Agniveers and other ESM. The DGR also provides help in setting up and registering their businesses as also help in getting vacancies with various educational and training institutions for servicemen on the verge of retirement to get degrees or other management/financial qualifications. More recently the Ministry of Defence felt the need to create a Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV) in Army Headquarters, to serve as a single window to resolve the problems of lakhs of military veterans.

On the occasion of Army Day celebrated on 15 Jan 2025 the inclusion of a tableau depicting the role of ESM in nation building caught everybody's attention. It showcased their contribution to society through entrepreneurship, mentorship and social service. On this occasion the army stressed the point that ESM are all trained to be leaders and commanders. Those traits do not vanish when one retires. ESM can, and are, helping immensely in transforming India into Viksit Bharat.

Fittingly, on this occasion, the COAS presented awards to select ex-servicemen for outstanding contribution for social service, preservation of the environment and private entrepreneurship. Also, on this occasion, the COAS released the Tenth Issue (January 2025) of a magazine named 'Samman'. It is exclusively dedicated to articles relating to ESM and their welfare. It lists out various welfare schemes for ESM, war widows, battle casualties and physical casualties (non-battle injuries), redress of grievances and the like. The magazine highlights the latest initiative launched by the present Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi, PVSM, AVSM termed Shaurya Sampravah. It provides a platform for interaction between selected veterans experienced in combat and senior serving policy makers to draw on the wealth of knowledge and core expertise of veterans in their respective fields. Gen Anil Chauhan, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM Chief of Defence Staff underscored the importance of integrating veterans into the army's planning and strategy and that their experience is an invaluable asset; one that can significantly elevate the effectiveness of the Indian Armed Forces in achieving their long term objectives.

The Government has taken special steps in skill training and providing job opportunities to thousands of ESM and widows of military personnel through the PM's Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY). The DIAV and AWWA (Army Wives Welfare Association) are providing adequate funds to soldiers no longer in uniform, for education of their children from KG to PG, providing lump-sum financial assistance to PBOR (personnel below officer rank) for the marriage of their daughters, ex-gratia payment if disabled and boarded out of service on medical

grounds, grant for buying a computer, and providing motorized wheel-chairs to amputees, funeral expenses and the like.

Notable is the Army Group Insurance Fund: soldiers subscribe at different rates according to their rank and they are insured for a substantial sum of money accordingly. It is very popular with troops because on the one hand it provides financial security to the family should he become a casualty and on the other hand, if he is fortunate not to get killed and retires, he gets back the entire sum he has contributed with interest. Besides, AGIF provides extended insurance coverage for a few years after retirement also.

Going through all the welfare measures listed, one is simply amazed at the military's concern for ESM. Guest houses, AWWA hostels for girls, retirement homes, hospital facilities, the army's own colleges and institutions for wards of servicemen as varied as Engineering, Telecom, Medical, Law, Hospitality and Management. Reserved vacancies in government jobs, especially for Agniveers who serve for less than five years is a real morale booster.

Yet another initiative launched by the present COAS and which has received wide acclaim, is Project Naman. The project envisages establishing reception cum facilitation Common Service Centre (CSC) which offer SPARSH enabled services for pensioners, all Government to Citizen (G2C) services as also business to customer (B2C) facilities. 14 such centres have been established thus far and the feedback has been very favourable, So much so that the army is in the process of opening 200 additional centres in locations having sizeable number of ESM. CSCs will render assistance to all ESM, Veer Naris, and their NOK as also provide services to the resident military population in the military station.

It is the proud boast of the Armed Forces that there is no other ministry in the Government or any PSU or Government or Corporate organization or private company which looks after their own like the Armed Forces do. Earlier, there was a saying that a poor soldier is a good soldier and it was a hand-to-mouth

living for ESM. Today after the Seventh Pay Commission and OROP (one rank, one pension) along with a large number of other facilities, ESM find themselves in a comfort zone. Adequate pension and the availability of excellent medical facilities in military or empaneled hospitals (paid for by ECHS) are the two main benefits that ensure their post retirement security and happiness.

The Armed Forces are the extended family of the soldier, sailor and airman. There is organized social support and his family's needs are looked after right from the time he is enrolled and even after he dies. Be it schooling, hospital back up, canteen needs, housing transportation, travel, children's education, care of the family when he is serving in field area, guest houses, pre-retirement skilling/training, post-retirement job emplacement, even his funeral and widow rehabilitation: the lot. The veteran could not have had it any better.

Veterans do not hanker after riches. They simply want to be treated with dignity, shown the respect that they deserve and acknowledgement of the selfless service that they provided to ensure that the nation enjoys peace and prosperity.

Military Musings

DIVINE INTERVENTION

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

A few days ago I received a forward on what's app narrating the experience of Col Nissar Ahmed Ansari, an 80 year old retired officer of the First Battalion of the Garhwal Rifles.

In 1968, when he was still a junior officer, he went from Ladakh to attend the Commando Course at the Infantry School in Mhow. He was carrying his rifle with him. On completion of the course, he reported at the Transit Camp near the IAF airfield in Chandigarh for catching a flight to Leh. That evening, in the Officers' Mess, he had one over the eight and was thoroughly sozzled. Next morning he woke up with a terrible hangover and somehow managed to reach the airfield for the early morning flight. He realised only after boarding the plane that he had forgotten his rifle in his room in the Transit Camp. He had no alternative but to disembark and return to the Transit Camp. He recovered his firearm and determined to catch a flight next day.

Save that the plane that Col Ansari missed did not land anywhere. It crashed with all passengers and crew in the Pangong Tso. God looking after him? Providence? Just good luck? Whatever! As the saying goes - God works in strange ways. That his life was saved was definitely a divine blessing.

The story reminded me of the many times God protected me both in war and peace. During the 1971 Indo-Pak war, there were at least three instances when I should have certainly met my doom. In straffing by Pakistani fighter aircraft, by enemy artillery shelling and once from own anti-aircraft fire. Yet miraculously, as others near me were killed or wounded, I emerged unscathed. I was definitely thankful to God for protecting me yet I couldn't help wondering why was I saved? What was God's plan for me?

But the strangest thing happened when I was attending National Defence College in 1989 at Delhi. On 31st Oct there was to be an aerobatic display at Palam and all officers attending the NDC course were invited to the air show. It was a very frustrating morning for me. After I had donned my uniform I could not locate my identity card, which was normally in my right shirt pocket. I got my Gorkha batman to search all the desk drawers and other places where he

might have put it. We wasted about 20 minutes looking for it till I accidentally discovered it in my left shirt pocket which houses the lanyard.

I was running late and drove as fast as I dared to try and make it to Palam airfield on time. But alas, I was late. The Air Force Police on duty refused me entry saying that I was too late and to move my car because the Air Chief was expected to arrive very shortly. I tried to reason with the Air Force Sergeant and said I shall park unobtrusively nearby, without disturbing the spectators. The Sergeant was very polite but firm in denying admission to latecomers. So I turned the car around and returned home.

Back home, I switched on the TV to see the aerobatic display by the Delta wing Mirage flown by Wg Cdr Ramesh 'Joe' Bakshi. After about five minutes of breath taking manoeuvres the Mirage plunged straight down and failed to pull up in time. It crashed at high speed killing the pilot instantaneously. It crashed quite close to the spectator stand – exactly where I was pleading with the Air Force Sergeant to be allowed to park my car unobtrusively.

Miracle? Divine blessing? Certainly God's grace that he chose to keep me safe. There is no other explanation for it. It was an eerie experience; it left me in a pensive mood wondering about the rationale for certain random events taking place as and when they do. Yet it was comforting to realise that the good Lord was always watching over me.

Military Musings

FIELD FIRING

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Kollegal was a large field firing range in the forests of Karnataka. It was used for live firing by infantry and artillery units of the army. The infantry battalion located in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands also came to the mainland each year for its annual field firing. When I (as Commander, Karnataka and Goa Sub Area, headquartered at Bangalore) checked what arrangements the Sub Area had made for the battalion I discovered that the battalion was largely left to its own devices. If the battalion approached the Sub Area headquarters with any problem, it would be speedily resolved; I was assured by my Colonel GS.

My mind went back to when I was DQ of an Infantry Brigade during the 1971 Indo-Pak war. After holding the entire area captured by 11 Infantry Division for a whole year, 330 Infantry Brigade was pulling back to Kota in Rajasthan for rest and recreation. Enroute, our transport column passed through Jaipur. At Jaipur, the brigade got the shabbiest treatment ever. There were no guides to escort us to the convoy ground, with the result that some vehicles got lost and pulled up well after dark. The Supply Depot had closed down for the day and we had to drag people from their homes for replenishment of FOL and drawing fresh rations; since we had to drive on early next morning. The water point was also shut down for the night. The Brigade Commander felt compelled to officially complain to the GOC-in-C Southern Command and the Sub Area Commander at Jaipur was taken to task.

I insisted therefore, that K&G Sub Area act more proactively. I asked the Col GS to brief the Advance Party Commander of the Maratha battalion when he visited our headquarters, enroute from Chennai to Kollegal about all the arrangements the Sub Area had made for them including guides, arrangements for the night halt at Bangalore, delivery of water, rations and FOL at Kollegal; even attachment of vehicles and communication arrangements required by the battalion. Throughout their month-long stay, their FOL and ration requirements were delivered at the range by the local Supply Depot. I also directed the Col GS to inform the Kollegal police about the live firing taking place in the forest.

Towards the end of their stay I was invited by the CO to visit the battalion and witness the field firing. After the firing I was invited to have lunch with their officers at Kollegal. When the battalion was returning to Chennai, we invited all the Maratha officers for High Tea in the Sub Area.

The battalion was so overwhelmed by the courtesies extended to it, that the CO presented the Sub Area with a silver bust of Shivaji. That memento has the pride of place in the Sub Area's Officers' Mess to this day.

One amusing incident I cannot help but narrate at this stage. It pertains to firing at Kollegal. Permission of the Government of Karnataka has to be renewed annually to continue using Kollegal for range firing. Now Kollegal forest was also the hideout of the elusive sandalwood smuggler, Veerappan. The Government was trying for years without success to nab the dreaded bandit. The Government of Karnataka was feeling so vexed with the issue that in one meeting, the Chief Secretary suggested to me that the army fire artillery guns at random in the forest in the hope of getting Veeappan. I was aghast at this suggestion because it was not made in jest. I explained to the Chief Secretary why this was impossible. He was understanding enough not to belabour the point.

Tail Piece. A newly raised Independent Field Battery had gone to the ranges for their first practice firing camp. The Commander Artillery Brigade (C Arty) was very keen to know about the progress of the firing. He called the Independent Battery Commander on telephone to enquire about it. The Battery Commander's reply took the C Arty by surprise. "Firing Sir? You must be joking!" "No. I am dead serious. What is the problem?" enquired the Artillery Brigade Commander. "Well Sir, It's like this" replied the Battery Commander. "The guns are graduated in mils. The maps are metric. The Grid Sheet is in yards. And my troops are Jats. We are still trying to figure out how to lay the guns".

Military Musings

FLYING HIGH

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Airlift to Thoise

The three years spent in the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla are the best in the life of a service officer. The NDA cements life-long friendships and officers are willing to take risks and make sacrifices for their NDA mates. The NDA spirit is difficult to define; yet the NDA net is an acknowledged fact of life in the Armed Forces. The example below is illustrative of the NDA spirit.

In 1969, I was posted in Ladakh, Being an ammunition specialist I had been assigned a special task to demolish some old ammunition and explosives left over from the 1962 war at Daulat Beg Oldi, a remote area close to the Chinese border. This involved flying to Thoise and a ten-day march thereafter over a glacier, Saser Brangsa, at approx 18,000 feet, to Chung Tash; and finally on to my destination, Daulat Beg Oldi via the Depsang Plain..

In those days, one needed to first fly to Pathankot and then take another IAF flight to Thoise. The flights were irregular and I was dreading the possibility of getting stuck at Pathankot indefinitely. I was having a cup of hot coffee at Leh airport when I felt a tap on my shoulder. Flight Lieutenant Utful Dabir happened to be the younger brother of a naval course-mate of mine, Arvind Dabir; we had all been in the Academy together. After a happy hug, as old friends are wont to greet each other, we picked up the threads about how life had treated us after leaving Khadakvasla.

Inevitably, he asked me what I was doing at Leh airfield and I told him about my need to get to Thoise. To my astonishment he asked me to hop into his aircraft, a C-119 Fairchild Packet; he said he would drop me at Thoise and then return to base. But what about clearance from the ATC and all that? I enquired. He winked in reply implying that his radio was on the blink.

An hour later I was at Thoise. He waved aside my profuse thanks. 'What are friends for anyway?' he asked. Dabir gave me the 'thumbs up' sign, revved his

engines and took off into the wind. In later years, I have often pondered over the enormous risk that Utkal Dabir took, just to give his brother's course-mate a lift. But then, that's what the NDA spirit is all about.

Air Worthiness

I was posted to Ladakh soon after the 1962 Chinese aggression. In early 1963 Ladakh was still underdeveloped. Most of the development came about because of the presence of the Army and the Air Force. Roads brought connectivity and business began to thrive. Today, many Ladakhis earn their livelihood through tourism associated ventures.

But in early 1963, Leh airfield was still what in army parlance is called an - ALG: an advanced landing ground, made of pierced steel planking (PSP). The runway was shorter than most commercial airfields. But what made landing specially difficult, was that as the aircraft aligned themselves to the runway and flew low over the River Indus, they had to maintain their height till they had crossed the Gompha Hill in their glide path and then descend steeply and suddenly, to touch down at the very edge of the landing ground. It was a difficult manoeuvre and took some skill in doing.

At that time the Army was building up its resources in Ladakh. At least 50 to 60 aircraft a day would land and take off. All by about 11 am or 11:30 at the latest. The reason? Leh airfield is located at about 11,000 feet above sea level. The rarefied atmosphere at high altitude when heated, fails to give adequate lift to the aircraft taking off. The problem of lift was so real that many have witnessed planes just about lumbering off the runway but failing to gain height, doing a low circuit and coming in to land again. A couple of Packets crashed into the mountainside across the Indus soon after takeoff. The aircraft were nicknamed 'flying coffins' because of the peculiar coffin like shape of the fuselage between the high twin tail booms. The Indian pilots flying Fairchild Packets earned some indirect compliments when the American pilots said that they wouldn't like to fly Packets even if they were given four times their pay. The Air Force then experimented with fitting a jet booster atop the Packets; it made a strange sight to see a single jet engine fitted on top of the aircraft, between the two propeller engines.

Not only that. The transport aircraft would come on to the apron, turn around and switch off all but one of its engines. One engine was always kept running to ensure that oil did not congeal in the intense cold and give starting trouble.

It also enabled quick turn around of aircraft because the crew wasted as little time as possible in unloading and taking on personnel and loading luggage for the return flight. One propeller spinning on the parked aircraft was a regular sight.

In the winter months, access to Ladakh was only through air and a variety of aircraft would touch down at Leh. From twin engined Dakotas, Fairchild Packets, Fokkers and AN 32s to four engined American Hercules C-130s and Russian AN 12s.

It so happened that one Hercules transport aircraft failed to level up in time after crossing the Gompha Hill while landing and landed heavily on its nose wheel, damaging the under carriage. The American pilots managed to roll the aircraft to the side of the runway under its own power, where it stood for all of 36 hours. The very next day a special service plane arrived in Delhi, all the way from Seattle, USA, we were told. The gear was transferred into a C-130 and transported to Leh.; the aircraft mechanics set about repairing the damaged plane without wasting any time. The nose was hoisted up, and the damaged nose-wheel assembly replaced. The plane was tested for airworthiness before it returned to New Delhi to rejoin its squadron. We marvelled at American logistic efficiency, technology and determination. Those characteristics were further underscored when a similar incident took place a month or so later.

But this time it was an AN-12 flown by IAF pilots that buckled its nose wheel. The pilots were again able to bring the aircraft to the side of the runway and park it. This time the message went all the way to USSR. The Russians wanted a lot of information, which was provided to them. In stark contrast to the earlier accident, the damaged AN-12 stood on the parking apron for almost a month and a half, till the Russian mechanics made an appearance. They strutted about and generally derided the skill of the pilots who had 'pranged' the aircraft. They took almost a week to repair the aircraft but when they took it up for a test flight they discovered that they could not retract the undercarriage.

We later learnt from our Air Force friends that that the Russians flew the aircraft all the way to Russia, with its wheels down, for factory repairs.

Visit to Andaman and Nicobar Islands

A red flare rose into the sky confirming the radio message received by the pilot of the AN-12 aircraft from the Air Force ATC at Car Nicobar that permission for the aircraft to land had been denied.

In mid-1983, the Higher Command course from the College of Combat, Mhow was scheduled to visit Andaman and Nicobar islands to understand the problems of defence of peninsular India and our islands in the Indian Ocean. Since the length of the runway at Port Blair on the main island of Andaman was not long enough for a four engined AN-12 to land, Air HQ decided that the aircraft would land at the Air Force base at Car Nicobar and we would be ferried to Port Blair in Russian MI-17 helicopters. Accordingly, we officers had embarked at Calcutta airport and the flight out to the islands took over two hours.

We were eagerly looking forward to the visit, which had been tied up at least two months earlier and were therefore disappointed and unable to comprehend why permission to land had been refused. We returned to Calcutta and it was decided that except for the Commandant and senior officers who would proceed to Fort William to be put up for the night in the officers' mess, the course members would spend the night at the airport itself. Most of us slept in the aircraft with the mosquitoes adding to our discomfort. Some vanished to enjoy the nightlife in Calcutta.

We learnt from an Air Force officer that the Group Captain commanding Car Nicobar was just a cussed character who was out there on a punishment posting. His claim to fame was that he had once refused landing permission to the AOC-in-C Eastern Air Command himself. He had refused permission to our aircraft because it was a Sunday and he was going fishing. We army officers were aghast that he could behave in such cavalier fashion. He would get away with it, we were informed, because the official reason was that the runway was unserviceable and that could not be questioned. Anyway, the matter had been reported to Air Headquarters and he would be sorted out.

Early next morning, it was still dark when the aircraft was refuelled and as the first rays of the sun peeped over the horizon we were already airborne. This time we were permitted to land without incident and it was a wonderful change to take in the island environment. Ocean breeze, swaying palms, a sparse population and spaced out facilities on flat land just inches above sea

level. (When the Tsunami struck Car Nicobar at the start of the new millennium, the Air Force base was all but wiped out; aircraft, runway and facilities all suffered damage. Of course normalcy was restored on 'operational immediate' priority in the shortest possible time).

The huge Mi 17 helicopters that ferried us to Port Blair were heavy lumbering machines and made an infernal racket once the engines started. The thwack-thwack noise of the rotor always filled our ears and we found it difficult to talk to each other over the noise and vibrations of the helicopter. But the flight from Car Nicobar to Port Blair was most memorable for two reasons, The Indian Ocean seen from the helicopter was a beautiful aquamarine blue, the islands that dotted the ocean looked like perfect circular green discs, the sea was calm and everything seemed picture-postcard perfect. Seeing the vast, deep, sea from above, one could discern what the navy meant by the term 'blue water navy'

The second reason that we remember that flight is because of the vagaries of weather. From a perfect blue sky, we suddenly entered a squall of some intensity. The sky was grey, rain pelted the chopper and visibility, both horizontal and vertical, was reduced to nil. The helicopter juddered and shuddered as we flew through the turbulence. Then, after a few minutes, just as suddenly, we were through it and we once again had the beautiful clear blue sky above us and a placid sea below. The memory of that flight etched itself into my memory forever.

We learnt some months after our return to Mhow that the Group Captain at Car Nicobar who had refused us permission to land because it interfered with his Sunday fishing had been promoted to Air Commodore and posted as Air Attache to Cairo. The Air Force has a nice way of sorting out its errant officers, we Army officers felt.

Flying Over Pyongyang lake

Another memorable flight, one to tell the grandkids about, was a flight out of Ladakh. The NDC team had just concluded its visit to Ladakh and we had got into an AN-12 at Leh for the flight back. We were piloted by Wg.Cdr. S S Gill, reputed to have had over one thousand high altitude landings. On the flight back, we flew low over the Pyongyang Lake which was about 60 kms long and about 5 kms wide at about 14,000 feet above sea level. We flew so low, only about 50 feet above it, it felt as if we could just poke our hand out of the

aircraft window and trail it in the beautiful, pure, cold water rushing by below us. We could see the reflection of the huge aircraft keeping pace with the aircraft. It was an awe inspiring flight.

But it was not all. As we approached the Kashmir Valley, we flew between the twin snow-capped peaks named Lun and Kun. The mighty Himalayan range below us was fully blanketed by clouds with only the twin peaks sticking their snow covered heads out in front of us, lit up by the sun. The sky above was completely clear and blue. It was a breath taking sight. Again we flew low through the pass. Our giant aircraft shuddered and swayed as it was buffeted by the winds in the pass and again we felt as if we could just reach out and scoop up the snow in our hands.

Soon after, we were on long finals descending for Srinagar airport in the Kashmir valley, our next stop on the itinerary.

The Visit to Siachen

I was posted as MG AOC Northern Command in 1992. I once required to visit the Ordnance units in Ladakh, as also the base camp at Siachen. I mentioned this to my friend Tippy: Air Vice Marshal Tipnis who was then AOC J&K (and later rose to become the CAS). Tippy mentioned that he also needed to visit Ladakh and we could make it a combined trip. We decided on a mutually suitable date for the visit.

We flew out from Udhampur to Leh airfield in an AN-32, where we switched over to two separate Alouette helicopters. We each decided to go our own separate way, finish our official visits and meet again at Leh Airbase after lunch for the return flight.

We took off in a Mi-8 helicopter for the return flight but when we reached Zojila Pass, we could not get across because the weather had packed up and the pass was shrouded in cloud; visibility was reduced to zero. We returned to Leh and had a cup of tea with the Air Force crowd while we waited for the AN-32 from Udhampur to come and pick us up again.

After we were airborne we received word that it had started to rain in Udhampur. It was no problem felt Tippy. We could land in the rain. Or, if things were really bad we could land at Jammu and take a chopper back to Udhampur. I groaned at the thought of so much flying. Even though the skies

at Udampur were overcast and it was nearing dusk, once we descended below the clouds, there was enough visibility to land safely at Udampur.

Tippy with a mischievous grin said he could provide a chopper to drop me off at the helipad near the Command HQ, a comparatively short distance away. No thanks I said; glad to be on terra firma again. I had my fill of flying for one day. Besides, my staff car was waiting to pick me up.

NDC Visit to the Eastern Theatre

Nowhere is inter-services cooperation as evident as when one is attending the course in the National Defence College. We were on a visit to the Eastern Theatre and our last stop was at Shillong; Headquarters of the Eastern Air Command. We were to move by road to catch a civilian aircraft from Gauhati to return to Delhi. Due to a flash strike by airline employees, however, the Indian Airlines flight, we were informed, would be terminated at Bagdogra and it would return from there to Delhi directly, without touching Gauhati.

“No problem” claimed the SASO who was formerly DS (Air) in NDC. He whistled up a couple of choppers and we were ferried to Bagdogra, in time to catch the Indian Airlines flight to Delhi.

That’s the Air Force for you.

Military Musings

GUNNER'S EYE

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

When I was commanding 15 FAD, we had a Sub Area Commander who took pride in saying that he had a Gunner's Eye. Meaning if things were not in alignment it would immediately catch his eye. It was the first time I had heard the term and I supposed being an Artillery Officer he had a honed up faculty for judging distance, range, direction and appreciation of how military equipments were arrayed.

On reflection, however, I realised that this quality had been ingrained into all military officers right from our NDA / IMA days. The very first things we learnt were to keep our boots, webbing, uniforms and leather work absolutely, spotlessly clean. 'Cleanliness, neatness and orderliness' was the mantra that was drubbed into us. The frequent 'cabin and cupboard' inspections ensured that the every item was serviceable and folded as per teaching. Every bit of equipment, clothing and equipment had its place as shown in the photograph displayed in the squadron. This meant orderliness. Things were a bit extreme we first termers felt; boots and belts had to be polished to mirror finish, brass items had to be shining spotlessly, the beds were to be done in a specified manner, the khaki uniforms starched to stiffness; even twisted laces would attract punishment.

The importance of always having things perfectly lined up was brought home to us in the second term itself, during Camp Greenhorn. Lt Cdr P S Bahar, IN, Squadron Commander of George Squadron who had a reputation of being more of a stickler than the strictest army officer in the academy, was inspecting, to our misfortune, the bivouacs of Easy Squadron. The Packs 08, all beautifully blanched olive green and brass buckles shining, were perfectly aligned on ground sheets in front of the bivouacs and we were seriously hoping to be adjudged the best squadron, considering the terrific effort we had put in to win the competition. Cdr Bahar came and eyed the layout and snorted. Then to our utter surprise he went to the end of the row of bivouacs and lay down flat on his stomach on the ground and eyed the alignment of the packs. One pack out of the ten was perhaps sticking out for a millimetre. We were given marks on the basis of "one pack in line. Nine out of alignment"

1/10. None of us in the 18th Course Easy Squadron has ever forgiven him for that.

But the incident taught us an important lesson all right. Thereafter whether we were marking a volleyball court, or checking alignment of flower pots displayed in front of the squadron, we always used a taut string to check length and alignment. We used inch tapes for measuring exact sizes. We found it laughable when we were issued little, wooden 'hose-top measuring sticks' to check the width of the fold of our stockings. Exactly three inches at the top. And the maroon garter flashes showing below the fold, protruding for exactly one inch. And woe betide the cadet who was careless. He was asking for extra drills.

Military units are subjected to strict annual inspection by the higher formation commander every year. A very good thing because it ensures that all warlike equipment is held, is in working order and well maintained; morale of the men is high; and the turn out of the vehicles reflects the pride of the paltan. Men wear new uniforms on the day of the actual inspection and the unit lines and offices are all done up to highest military standards. Meaning everything receives a new lick of paint and is in proper state of repair. All brass and silver items are highly polished. Firing records and BPET results and inspection reports are kept ready for the information of the inspecting officers. The 'court-martial box' is opened and checked that it contains everything prescribed; that the MIML (Manual of Indian Military Law), copies of the Bible, Gita and Quran are in place.

All books, ledgers and documentation are brought up-to-date; new file covers replace the year old grubby ones. The event invariably starts with the book inspection by designated staff officers. Audit / inspection reports and regimental accounts are placed before the inspecting officers. Everything is brought up to date and a special effort is made to put the best foot forward.

And it is at such times that cleanliness, neatness and orderliness are most visible. The Quarter Guard, the pride of the unit, is specially done up. The barracks are all painted and repaired; even the trees and bricks lining the road receive a new coat of 'chuna-geru'. The blades of the fans in the barrack are all parallel. In the unit MT lines the vehicles are perfectly lined up and in front of each vehicle is a large ground sheet having the outlines of all authorised tools and accessories drawn on it; so every tool has its proper place. Thus the

inspecting office can see at a glance if all authorised tools are held or which tools are missing. The army truly has a great way of going about these things.

Brig Gurjit Singh Randhawa, of the Sikh Regiment was my Brigade Commander during the 1971 war. Although an Infantry officer, he too had a well developed Gunner's Eye. I was the DQ of the brigade. After two years in the desert of the Barmer sector the formation was pulled back to Kota for a few months for rest and recreation. The Commander gave the units a month to relax, enjoy some leave, make up the war losses and ammunition deficiencies and get ship-shape again. Then he asked me to accompany him on a visit to an infantry battalion. During the visit to the unit mandir, (in a tent EPIP) the Commander observed that the mandir flagpole was not perfectly erect; it was slightly inclined to one side. He stopped, and the look he gave the CO, said it all. No words needed to be spoken.

After I became conscious of the term Gunner's Eye, I myself developed the ability to notice things which were not in order till it became a habit. I used to feel immensely glad when things were as one expected to find it and irked, if I found when inspecting units, that adequate effort was lacking. As Additional DG OS in Army Headquarters, I once had occasion to visit a Central Ordnance Depot. When I was taken around, I found things so shabby and the depot looking so unkempt, that I felt compelled to order a re-inspection. I did not require a gunner's eye to notice the slovenliness. I gave the depot one month to get things ship shape. Needless to say, everything was tickety-boo the next time round.

My ability to see things from the inspecting officer's point of view always helped in service. Once the DGOS (Head of Service) was to visit 42 Vehicle Company when I was MGAOC Northern Command. I called up the OC and told him that I would like to visit his unit before the visit of the DGOS. It is a good thing I did. Because I made the OC and Senior JCO follow me with a notebook and pencil and keep jotting down all the points I noticed. There were 46 observations in all and the unit had four days before the DGOS' visit to put things right. To the credit of the OC he went at it hammer and tongs. The visit of the DGOS was a smashing success.

Earlier, as a Brigadier, when I was Commandant COD Kanpur and also the Station Commander, I was informed that the Army Commander was visiting Kanpur in three days time. I held a conference immediately and gave explicit orders to all unit commanders about what I expected from them. Because I

had heard that the Army Commander had just returned after a visit to Pachmari and, to put it mildly, was disappointed with things in that military station. He was quite annoyed with the Pachmari Station Commander.

I took the GE and the Adm Comdt with me in my staff car and we went over the entire route the Army Commander would take and where all he would go. I saw Kanpur station from the Army Commander's point of view. Everything must look military and in a high state of care and maintenance. I gave on the spot orders for grass cutting, getting stray animals impounded, doing up the sign painting, filling up pot holes on the road, where to locate the MPs, tightening of sagging fences and the like. The detailed reeve cum rehearsal paid rich dividends. The Army Commander's visit was a huge success and Kanpur came in for repeated praise in Central Command.

To end on a lighter note. A Jat soldier was reportedly very happy in the army. His villagers were very curious to know what special thing was keeping him so happy. What was his secret? Simple he said. "Salute everyone who moves and paint everything that doesn't."

Military Musings

MINISTERIAL MEETINGS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

One does not meet many politicians when in military service but when one does, the occasions tend to be memorable.

My Meeting with Babuji

Towards the end of 1973, I was selected for posting to Dacca as the Assistant Military Adviser (AMA) in our High Commission in Bangladesh. The last step in the formalities of the selection process for the diplomatic assignment involved an interview with the then Defence Minister, Shri Jagjivan Ram, commonly referred to as Babuji. Initially I was told to meet the Honourable Minister at 10 am, in his South Block office in New Delhi, which was quite convenient for me. On the previous evening before the interview, however, the time and venue of the meeting was changed to 8 am, at his residence, 6, Krishna Menon Marg.

It was a bitterly cold winter morning in January 1974 when I set out to meet the Defence Minister. The early morning hour and the cold wave combined to put me in an uncharitable mood. An official interview in his house? In this cold? At the unearthly hour of eight in the morning? Ministers were never known for punctuality. Yet I couldn't take a chance and had to be five minutes ahead of time as per military custom. I was anticipating a long wait before I got to see him.

I tried to gather my thoughts as I approached my destination. What did I really know about Babuji? Precious little and mostly negative in nature; that he was obese, ugly to look at and worst of all, he claimed to have 'forgotten' to pay his income-tax for well-nigh ten years. That was truly unforgivable from my point of view. The only positive things that I could come up with was that he was a politician of standing for many years and though belonging to a scheduled caste, he was a minister of stature who had served the Congress party well.

When I arrived at his residence, my worst fears were confirmed. Despite the early hour and the biting cold, there were at least 200 people on the dew soaked lawns waiting to meet him; a group of about 60 Lamas from Bodh Gaya, members of his constituency from Sasaram in Bihar, people seeking succour and

people with complaints. I noticed a silent loudspeaker rigged to one of the pillars of the veranda. I looked at my watch. Two minutes to eight. Shivering in the cold, I made my way to a corner of the lawn to await my turn; feeling very out of place in my smart service dress.

Exactly at 8 o'clock, the loud speaker hummed into life and a voice asked "Is Major B N Rao here? Will you please come forward Sir? The Defence Minister is waiting for you". You could have knocked me over with a feather; I was that surprised.

The Personal Assistant ushered me into the visitor's room. Babuji was already seated; occupying the better part of a three-seater sofa. I was asked to occupy a single seater sofa on one side. I saluted the Defence Minister and sat down. And waited, and waited, and waited for the Defence Minister to speak. I couldn't discern the reason for the prolonged silence; perhaps he was marshalling his thoughts? Or was he just trying to test my mettle? I was determined not to be put off by such antics and continued to wait patiently. After a full five minutes of silence, he asked me a question; in Hindi. "*Accha to aap Bangladesh ja rahen hain?*" I replied appropriately in Hindi. After two or three more questions in Hindi, Shri Jagjivan Ram switched over to English.

Thereafter, Shri Jagjivan Ram did me a very great honour indeed. Over the next twenty minutes or so, he briefed me about Indo-Bangladesh relations as if I was the High Commissioner designate and not a mere AMA. His inputs were excellent and he had a tremendous grasp of the subject. He was totally frank about what India expected of the Government in Dacca and the course that our relationship was likely to follow. In retrospect, it was as if Babuji had a secret crystal ball to gaze into. He also had a subtle sense of humour, I discovered.

Nobody has ever made such a profound impression on me as Babu Jagjivan Ram did in the space of those twenty minutes at the interview. I came away marvelling at him. As I left 6 Krishna Menon Marg, I distinctly remember thinking that if all our Ministers were indeed as capable as Babuji, they jolly well deserved to be exempted from paying income-tax. India was indeed in safe hands.

The average Indian army officer does not have much time for either politics or for politicians; thanks to the Army's apolitical professionalism. I was surprised when after reaching Dacca, I discovered that the Bangladeshis envied India for the quality of its politicians. Having met Babuji, I could understand their envy.

Railways to the Rescue

In 1990-91, I was the Commander of Karnataka and Goa Sub Area, with my Headquarters in Bangalore. Just after dark one rainy evening, I received a call from the PA of the then Railway Minister, Shri Jaffar Sharief who was visiting the city, stating that the Honourable Minister desired that I should meet him urgently; that very evening. I informed my GOC in Chennai of the Minister's request and left to meet the Minister.

The problem was the extensive flooding caused by the Cauveri River in Mysore District, which was the Minister's constituency. He sought the Army's help. I explained that I could only order troops in aid of civil authorities either through a written requisition from the Chief Secretary of the state, or if I was so directed by Army Headquarters. I could sense the Central Minister's hesitation in approaching the Chief Minister, a rival Congress leader. "How do we go about requesting Army Headquarters?" he asked me. I replied that he would need to speak to his counter-part, the Defence Minister. He called his PA on the intercom and asked him to get him the Defence Minister on line. He was connected to Shri Sharad Pawar within 15 seconds. I recall being amazed at such connectivity.

The Railway Minister spoke to his colleague for a few minutes and then, to my surprise, and dismay, handed over the handset to me saying "Here, speak to your Defence Minister." I repeated to Mr. Sharad Pawar what I had told Mr. Jaffar Sharief. Our conversation ended with the Defence Minister stating that he would ask the Defence Secretary to speak to the Director General of Military Operations. At midnight we received orders from Army Headquarters to provide flood relief assistance in Karnataka.

But, that was not the end of the matter. Early next morning, I heard my telephone ringing as I entered my office. I wondered who the early morning caller might be. It was the Chief of the Army Staff from New Delhi.

"Rao, I believe you've been rubbing shoulders with the high and mighty in the land." boomed General S F Rodrigues in his typical flamboyant fashion, causing me to chuckle at his choice of words. I explained to the COAS all that had transpired the previous evening. He asked me my views about what troops to allot for the flood relief operations. I suggested that we had a Railway Engineers (Territorial Army) unit at Bangalore which though officered by the Army, was staffed and paid for by the Railways; if that could be placed at the Railway Minister's disposal, we would not need to disturb any regular Army units.

That very day, orders for embodiment of the Railway Engineers (TA) were received and the unit was placed at the disposal of the Railways for flood relief operations, for as long as needed.

It was a win-win situation for all.

Mix-up at Delhi Airport

Once when I was a Colonel and posted in Army Headquarters, New Delhi, I had cause to fly to Pune on duty. I had already checked in and was undergoing security check in the domestic departure area at Delhi airport; I had just put my briefcase on to the conveyer belt for the X-Ray check. Just then Shri N D Tiwari, then Chief Minister of UP, accompanied by an armed escort, arrived in a hurry and out of courtesy I allowed him to precede me for frisking. He went ahead picked up my briefcase from the other end of the conveyer belt by mistake (both were very similar in appearance) and proceeded to his aircraft.

When I couldn't locate my briefcase, I noticed the similar looking briefcase lying unclaimed on the conveyer belt. It had Mr. N D Tiwari's name tag. I immediately contacted the nearest security official and told him about the mix-up. He grasped the situation immediately and took decisive action. He asked me to follow him. He was already talking into his walkie-talkie as we exited through one of the exit gates and got into an empty airport bus. He directed the driver to drive us to the Lucknow flight and wait for us. We mounted the steps of the aircraft, which was ready for departure and already had its engines warming up.

Mr. N D Tiwari was occupying a front row VIP seat; the security official explained what had happened. Mr. Tiwari checked that his own briefcase was being returned to him and returned my briefcase with a half apologetic smile.

The airport bus dropped me to my own aircraft and I thanked the security official profusely for helping me out.

Though I did wonder later whether the airport official would have acted with equal alacrity had the mix-up not involved an important politician?

Bon Homie at Bangalore

Newspapers in July 2013 carried the news of the passing away of Shri Khursheed Alam Khan, father of our then foreign minister Shri Salman Khursheed.

The elder khan was Governor of Karnataka and Goa when I was the Sub Area Commander of Karnataka and Goa in the early 1990s. As per custom, soon after assuming my appointment in Bangalore, I called on the Governor to pay my respects. I found him a very learned, charming, unassuming and amiable person. He was very polished and cultured, as found in some old Muslim families. It was very easy for me to establish a cordial relationship with him.

The Governor and I met in the VIP room at Bangalore airport whenever the Prime Minister or some high dignitary was visiting or stopping over at Bangalore and we both had to be present at the airport. On one occasion, he enquired from me if all was well with the troops in Karnataka. I replied in the affirmative but for a small problem we were having in Belgaum, I informed him. Belgaum has a large number of ex-servicemen and whenever someone suffered a heart attack, the local military hospital had to send the individual to a civil hospital because they did not have a DC Febrillator. Khursheed Alam Khan was genuinely concerned to hear this. 'How much would it cost?' he asked me. Just under Rs One Lakh, I told him, as estimated by Commandant, MH Belgaum.

He surprised me by telling me to send someone to his secretary the next day. Apparently there was enough collection in the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund and it would give him pleasure to do something useful for our gallant veterans.

On another occasion when I informed him that I would be away to Goa for a few days, he invited me to come and stay with him in the Raj Bhavan at Goa. I thanked him immensely for the courtesy but of course I declined, being on an official visit. My arrangements had already been made in the MES IB.

But such was the measure of the man.

Military Musings

SAI BABA'S BLESSINGS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Gen B C Joshi, late Chief of Army Staff, when he was a Lt. Gen, soon after taking over the appointment of GOC-in-C Southern Command, decided to visit Bangalore. I was then, in the early 1990s, the Commander of Karnataka and Goa Sub Area. Gen Joshi was keen to visit Satya Sai Baba in Prashanti Nilayam which though located in Andhra Pradesh was more easily accessible by road from Bangalore.

We were fortunate to have the Commandant of the Pioneer Corps Training Centre in Bangalore, a Sikh Colonel, who was known to be an ardent follower of Satya Sai Baba.

He acted as the Sub Area emissary to Sai Baba who assured him that the Army Commander was "most welcome". However, the visit had to be called off at the last minute since the Defence Minister was suddenly visiting Jaipur and the Army Commander's presence was required there. The Army Commander's visit to Bangalore was postponed for later.

As the time for Gen. Joshi's next visit approached, I was rung up by his Military Assistant (MA) from Pune, emphasizing the importance of the visit to Prashanti Nilayam and more so it was imperative that the Army Commander gets a personal audience with Satya Sai Baba. A previous Army Commander had not succeeded in getting an audience with His Holiness, he reminded me.

I apprised the MA of the procedure for interviews that was followed at Prashanti Nilayam. Sai Baba selected devotees for interview at random from the hundreds that sought his personal blessings. One had to have faith and if one was not selected it was to be believed that all was well with him and someone in greater distress needed Sai Baba's direct attention.

It fell upon me to advise the Army Commander that he and his wife should proceed to Prashanti Nilayam a day earlier and stay overnight. The Army Commander was reluctant to do so but finally agreed when I spelled out the advantages of following such a course mainly that their feedback system in the

Ashram would inform Sai Baba of his presence and that heightened his chances of meeting His Holiness in person.

The next problem for me was to persuade Gen Joshi to make the trip in his official staff car. The Army Commander would have preferred to make a quiet visit without any fuss.

I assured the General that many ministers and high ranking officers frequently visited the place. There were proper arrangements for the guard and his staff to stay. The Army Commander was travelling within his own command, the place had been 'sanitized', his guard had been positioned and secure communications installed. Besides, the police of both states, Karnataka and Andhra had been alerted of his impending visit and they would be escorting the Army Commander's fleet of cars. Gen Joshi finally agreed to my recommendation and left with Mrs. Joshi for Prashanti Nilayam the previous afternoon. I said a silent prayer beseeching God to ensure that all went well on this visit.

In the evening, I got a call from the MA saying that the Army Commander had asked him to convey to me that he was very happy with excellent arrangements made by the Sub Area at Prashanti Nilayam. God had evidently heard my prayers because the next morning, not only did the General and his wife have a private half-hour audience with Satya Sai Baba, but Baba materialized a diamond ring which he presented to the General. The Army Commander returned to Bangalore that same evening, euphoric after his triumphant visit.

The next morning the GOC-in-C was to play golf and have breakfast with the AOC-in-C Training Command, at the Air Force Golf Club. Soon after the foursome had teed off, I spotted a worried looking ADC hurrying towards me in the club house. Apparently General Joshi had taken off the ring given by Sai Baba to play golf and put it in his pocket but could not find it. He felt that he must have dropped it somewhere near the No.1 tee. The General desired that we look for it 'discreetly'. This was, as we say in the army, 'much of a muchness'. I was still deciding how to go about organising the job discreetly when a runner came up to inform me that the ring had been found. The General had wrapped it in his handkerchief and put it in his pocket. We all heaved a great sigh of relief.

The saga of the Sai Baba visit did not end there. A month later when Gen Joshi was in Delhi for a conference in Army headquarters, he was invited for dinner

by Lt Gen R P Agarwal, Director General of Ordnance Services (DG OS), and my technical head, since I belong to the Army Ordnance Corps. Gen Agarwal's son was a young Captain in the Armoured Corps and happened to be General Joshi's ADC. After dinner Gen Joshi mentioned to the DG OS about his visit to Satya Sai Baba and his materializing the ring for him. Gen Agarwal who was also a Sai Baba devotee, said he had something special that he wanted Gen Joshi to hear. He played a cassette of high quality digital sound recording the bhajans sung by Sai Baba himself. Inevitably, Gen Joshi asked him from where he had obtained it. Gen Agarwal explained that after a visit to HAL and other PSUs in Bangalore, he had some time to spare and he made a quick visit to Sai Baba's ashram in Prashanti Nilayam; and mentioned that I had accompanied him. The cassette was a gift from my elder brother, Suresh, also a retired Ordnance officer who had served with him, and was after retirement staying permanently in Putta Parthi.

The next morning I got a call from the Army Commander from Delhi. He informed me that he had dinner with the DG OS the previous evening and he had heard the cassette that my brother had given him. He wanted a copy of the cassette. He insisted that he would pay for it. He sounded piqued that I had accompanied the DG OS to Prashanti Nilayam but had not accompanied him. I explained that Gen Agarwal's visit had been fixed up by the Ordnance Directorate and HAL had directly fixed up everything. The Sub Area had hardly any responsibility. His visit to Prashanti Nilayam was also a spur of the moment thing. And since I was not busy with anything specifically, I accompanied him at his request. Whereas the Army Commander's visit was an important official inspection for the Sub Area, covering several days. I had to per force remain in Bangalore so that I was available to my staff to coordinate and monitor the programme and give decisions to ensure that the GOC-in-C's visit to Bangalore went off flawlessly.

That satisfied the General's ego.

Military Humour

FAUJ HAI MAUJ HAI

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The language spoken in the Army is a healthy mix of English and Hindi and often a smattering of words from other languages as well. For example, the South Indian soldier is commonly referred to as 'Thambi' by their officers. Punjabi is also widely spoken. And every now and then the result is hilarious as the following anecdotes reveal.

Bar to VSM

When I was awarded a 'Bar to VSM' a civilian clerk of the NBC Cell in the MT Directorate where I was posted at that time was curious to know what a 'Bar to VSM' meant. A colleague of his clarified it succinctly as follows – "*Jab bar bar VSM milta hai to usey Bar to VSM kahtey hain*".

One Below the Belt

One of the undying stories that are handed down from course to course in the Indian Military Academy at Dehra Dun, and one of my favourites, is that of the Subedar Major shouting at a Gentleman Cadet "*Woh GC, Number 3 in the front rank, parade ground par theek se march karega. No slouching !*" The GC who was weak in Hindi replied "*Saab, mere peth mey 'ache' hai*" to which the Subedar Major's immediate response was "*Peth mey ek ke bajey do kyon na ho, phir bhi theek se march karega*"

Verbal Orders in Hindi

Hindi verbal orders had just made their advent into the Army in the early sixties and not everyone was familiar with the equivalent Hindi terminology for tactical phrases in those early years.

As a young Captain in 1964, I was the Company Commander for a night attack while attending the Junior Commander's course at the Infantry School in Mhow. The order that I would have normally given to my 'O' Group, in English,

would have been “Intention - Alpha Company and attached troops will capture Area Sausage by 1 O’clock”. The equivalent Hindi phrase was “*Irada - Alpha Company aur ‘imdadi dasten’ ilaka Sausage ko ek bajey tak kabza karega*”. I was unfamiliar with the urdu derivative ‘*imdadi dasten*’ for ‘attached troops’ and what I actually blurted out was “Alpha Company *aur ‘hamam dasta’ ilaka Sausage ko ek bajey tak kabza karega*”. The DS who was standing behind us to hear me give the orders, couldn’t suppress a snigger and tapped me on my shoulder with his stick “Its *imdadi dasten* you dope”

Kamla Ki Ungli

As fifth termers in the NDA, we were attending a weapons training period. After drill and physical exertion in the morning, we were all feeling a bit drowsy in the mid-day heat. Sitting cross-legged on the ground sheets in FSMO with our rifles resting on our left shoulders, under a tree, was relaxing.

The subject of the lecture was ‘Trigger Operation No. 5’. TO-5 is an exercise designed to bring about coordination of the mind, the eye and the index (trigger) finger. The *Ustad* stated it in Hindi “TO-5 *ka maksad hai, dimag, ankh aur ‘kalme wali ungli’ ka mel-milap karma*”. Just then, a gentle snore jolted us awake from our drowsy state. The *Ustad*, quick to note the culprit, pointed to him and said “Cadet Verghese *bataienge ki TO-5 ka maksad kya hai?*” Caught napping, Cadet Verghese blurted out “TO-5 *ka maksad hai, dimag, ankh aur Kamla ki ungli ka mel milap karna*”

The squad burst out laughing but the *Ustad* did not find it funny. “*Acha, to tum Kamla ke khwab dekh rahen ho?*” The entire squad was made to lift our rifles above our heads and run twice around the field to shake us out of our stupor.

We never quite forgave Cadet Mohan Verghese for our getting punished on his account.

Ready for Anything

In 1962, Major Alfred Upot was the officiating Deputy Commandant of Central Ordnance Depot, Jabalpur and it was a final dress rehearsal of a ceremonial parade that was to be put up for the Sub Area Commander’s annual inspection. He marched up smartly to the then Commandant, Col. A S Ahluwalia, reported the parade strength and said “Parade *kuch bhi ke liye tayar hai*” instead of ‘Parade *kooch ke liye tayar hai*’. A ripple of laughter went through the rank and

file while Col Ahluwalia, the Commandant, suffered a bout of apoplexy on hearing Maj Upot's Hindi.

Uneducated Jat

Ordnance officers are required to do an infantry attachment immediately on commissioning. In June 1961, I was attached to 19 Rajput (Bikaner) and reported to the battalion location at Damana near Jammu.

The officer on attachment is attached to a Rifle Company, the Support Company and other sub organizations in turn so as to get an all round feel of the '*paltan's*' functioning. I was acting as under-study to the Adjutant when a new draft of soldiers reported to the battalion. The soldiers were to be interviewed by the CO.

Now 19 Rajput was composed of three companies of Rajputs and one company of Jats.

The new draft had 10 jawans; nine Rajputs and the last, a Jat. They were lined up in a single rank, in that order, in front of the CO's office, dressed in their best uniforms. The CO, Lt Col Bhagat Singh was a tall Sikh officer, a thorough soldier and a man of few words; more at ease with Punjabi than Hindi or English. He had the same three questions to ask of every new jawan as he moved down the assembled line of recruits. "*Tumhara naam kya hai, tum kis Kaum ke ho and kahan tak padhe ho?*" Discerning the pattern of questioning, as the CO came to the last recruit, who blurted out even before the old man asked him anything – "*Saabji, mera naam Dalpat Singh hai aur main bilkul anpadh Jat hoon*".

Driving in the Desert

After the 1971 Indo- Pak war, my infantry brigade in the Barmer Sector was tasked to hold on to the entire area captured from Pakistan till the delineation talks were over. The rest of the infantry division was pulled back for rest and recuperation.

My own Brigade Commander took some well deserved leave at that time and the Commander Artillery (C Arty) came in to officiate as Sector Commander in his place for the duration of his absence. The Brigade Headquarters was at Gadra Road and we had a field regiment at Chachro, in the occupied territory.

It was but natural that the C Arty would want to visit his regiment, which incidentally was composed entirely of Sikh troops.

I was the DAA&QMG (DQ for short) of the Brigade. The Officiating Commander desired that I accompany him on his visit to the field regiment. As we drove to Chachro, it became evident that the Commander's driver was unwell and was beginning to feel feverish. The Commander decided therefore to leave the driver in the regiment to recover and borrow a driver from them for the return journey.

Now, driving in the desert requires a certain skill or one can spend hours stuck in the sand trying to extricate the vehicle. Besides, being Sikhs, and flush with victory at that, the Commander suspected that they were not above providing a dud driver and laughing their heads off at the thought of their Commander spending a night shivering in the open. So he felt it prudent to interview the driver before undertaking the return journey to the Brigade Headquarters. A burly and unkempt looking gunner was presented to the Commander outside the Officer's Mess. The interview went some thing like this: -

" Tumhara naam kya hai?"

" Saabji, Tarsem Singh"

" Tum driver ho?"

" Saabji."

"Jonga chalutey ho?"

" Saabji."

"Desaert mein driving kiya hai?"

" Saabji."

Whatever he was asked , Tarsem would simply reply *" Saabji"* which combined with his disheveled looks did not really inspire much confidence in him. Finally, the Commander asked him –

" Tumne desert mein takriban ek hazar kilometers Jonga chalaya hai ?"

One could then see the spark light up in Tarsem Singh's eyes as he replied in Punjabi

"Saabji, enna to mainne sirf reverse hi kitta haiga"

We couldn't help but chuckle at the reply. The CO chipped in at this stage and assured the Commander that Tarsem was indeed an excellent driver. Not only that, if the Commander's vehicle broke down, he would carry him to the Brigade Headquarters. Such was the high morale and indomitable spirit of the regiment.

Mulish Attitude

Overheard in the MGO's Branch at Army Headquarters -

"Why does the infantry prefer mules to three tonners?"

"Because the mule is not dependent on the Ordnance for spares, nor on the EME for repairs. Besides, its marching speed matches that of the infantry".

Bogey Aur Boga

My colleague in Ordnance Depot, Talegaon Dhabade, Major Malkiat Singh Toor, was basically from a farming family in Punjab. "So what do you grow?" I asked him one day. "Potatoes" was the answer. "And where do you market them?" I enquired.

He replied that they marketed the potatoes all over India but mostly to West Bengal and points East. And how did they send them? If it was less than 20 tons in a bogey. But if it was over 20 tons then they sent it in a boga.

I could imagine a bogey, but never having heard that word 'boga' I asked Malkiat what it meant. He replied that in Punjab a bogey was a normal four-wheeled covered railway wagon and a boga was the larger eight-wheeled version of the covered railway wagon,

Trousers with Brakes

When I was posted to AOC Centre in 1970, nylon and terylene were popular materials for making shirts and trousers. The Centre tailor, a Sardarji, was after me to get a terylene trouser stitched from him. I disliked the synthetic material and told him that I found it irksome because the terylene trousers would slip on the nylon shirts which did not make for comfortable wear.

The tailor was however insistent and told me that I need not worry about it. He promised (in Punjabi) to make me a “*brake-an-wali pant*”. Never having heard of brakes on a trouser I asked him what he meant? Apparently he stitched a waist band of rougher material in the inside of the trouser which increased the friction between the trouser and the shirt that prevented it from slipping. Hence the sobriquet ‘*brake-an-wali pant*’

Tailoring Woes

Many Army officers prefer to have their tailoring done at Mhow. Not only is the tailoring reputed to be of high quality but the tailors take kindly towards young officers and allow them to pay in instalments.

When I was attending the Higher Command Course at the College of Combat I once decided to get a good pair of trousers for myself. I had taken my Gorkha orderly along also.

I was a bit stumped when the tailor taking my measurements asked me what sort of trousers I wanted. “Why? Normal ones”, I said , “like the one I am wearing”. The tailor got the idea.

I then told Gurung to also order a pair for himself. When the tailor asked him his preference, to my stupefaction, Gurung reeled off a string of instructions. 18 inch open bottoms, two hip pockets without flaps, one secret pocket, two side pockets with slanted openings, five loops for the belt, zip opening in front (not buttons), adjusting buckles on the side, a cotton waist band inside to avoid terecot shirts from slipping and parallel bottoms (not bell bottoms).

It lends credence to the belief that Gorkha soldiers are always well dressed, be it in uniform or in civil dress.

Military Musings

MILITARY CRACKERS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Romantic Burial

As a Captain in 1960-61, Lt Gen P N Hoon was posted as the Weapons Training Officer (WTO) at the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun. One of the items in the newspapers one morning was that Lady Mountbatten, wife of Admiral Mountbatten had passed away, and in deference to her husband's long association with the Royal Navy, she had desired in her will that she be given a burial at sea.

Mrs Hoon thought it very romantic and wondered aloud what she should write in her will. Without batting an eyelid, Capt Hoon told her that being the WTO's wife she should ask to be buried in the firing butt.

The Quack

In the Armed Forces Clinic in New Delhi the doctor proudly displays a sign stating 'Physician to the Chief of Army Staff' So when Lt Col Sharma a doctor qualified in the treatment of nuclear, biological and chemical casualties, was posted to the NBC Cell in the Directorate General of Military Training, he proudly put up his own sign in his office informing all that he was 'Physician to the DGMT'.

One morning, Lt Gen S F Rodrigues, the DGMT, brought some foreign visitors to the NBC Cell. They were surprised that we were so far up with NBC training and enquired if he had enough qualified staff. Gen Rodrigues replied in his usual style "Yeah, I've a motely lot of characters trained in NBC protection, including a quack"

Next day, Col Sharma removed the sign from his office.

Casual Drunkard

When 51 (I) Para Brigade was in Gwalior in 1965-66, its Commander was Brig Bhumi Chand Chauhan. One evening young Captain Shinde, the BSTO, decided to call on the Commander at his house. The Commander and his lady wife received him graciously. As they settled down for a chat Brig Chauhan offered Capt Shinde a drink. Capt Shinde politely refused the drink saying he preferred something soft instead. The Commander insisted he have a drink to which Capt Shinde responded by saying that he didn't drink. "Come on Shinde, Don't give me that. I've seen you having a drink at the Gwalior Club last Saturday".

Capt Shinde defended himself claiming that he was only a 'casual drunkard'.

Desolate at Chung Tash

When I was OC MARS in Ladakh in 1969, I was tasked to go to Daulat-Beg-Oldi near the Chinese border and destroy some ammunition left over from the 1962 war which was causing casualties to ITBP personnel posted there; generally while hunting for souvenirs.

It was a 10-day high altitude march from Thoise, over the Saser Brangza glacier along the old silk route. On the eighth day, we reached an outpost at Chung Tash. It was a godforsaken place. Not a blade of grass; nor a fly or crow, neither rodent nor reptile to be seen. The supplies and mail were air dropped once a month to the Ladakh Scouts platoon located there. So if there was no letter from home one had to wait for the next air drop. There was no writing paper. The only thing in abundance was parachute cloth. Parachutes recovered from the air drops lined the igloo huts, were used as stuffing for pillows and other purposes, including writing letters home on pieces of parachute cloth.

At the time when I reached the outpost, the platoon had just lost one of its jawans who had not been able to urinate for three days, but due to inclement weather, the helicopter to evacuate him arrived only after it was too late. Till then I had not really realized the depth of the meaning of the word despair.

The young 2nd Lt. commanding the Ladakh Scouts platoon was angry that whilst he had been commissioned into the 8th Gurkhas five months previously, his first posting was to Ladakh Scouts; he had not even seen his battalion. He was stuck in the back of beyond at Chung Tash.

He was aware, however that General Sam Manekshaw, then COAS, was Colonel Commandant of the 8th Gurkhas. In a fit of pique, he picked up a piece of parachute cloth and penned a letter addressed to “Dear Sam” detailing him his woes and sent it off with a patrol to Thoise for onward transmission to Delhi through the Field Post Office there. Having sent it, he sweated blood. He was sure that the Chief would take exception to his ‘letter’ and have him sorted out. But he need not have worried.

A fortnight later a helicopter touched down at Chung Tash bringing his posting order as well as his replacement. The same helicopter carried the young officer to Leh en route to the 8th Gurkha Regimental Training Centre at Dehra Dun.

General to Sergeant

When my elder son was a small boy we used to revel in reading Sad Sack comics together. Sad Sack comics perpetuate the persecution of the GI at the hands of his sergeant. I was then a Captain and had come home on leave to Pune from Ladakh.

One evening when it was time for him to do his school homework, he tried his best to get out of it. One ploy that he tried was by asking me whether he may call me General. “No” I said. “Then I’ll call you Colonel” he said. I was stern with him. “You will do nothing of that sort; open your book and get down to work”. His response? “O.K. Sarge”

Patriotic Trio

After my diplomatic stint as AMA Bangladesh, as a Major, I was posted as Deputy COO to Ordnance Depot, Talegaon Dabhade, near Pune. Pending allotment of married accommodation we stayed in temporary accommodation in the Officers Mess for a few months. The Officers Mess was located very close to a small wayside railway station named Begdewadi, on the main Bombay – Poona line. Only local trains stopped there. But, it was convenient for officers and their families going to Pune to catch the local at Begdewadi.

One overcast Independence Day my wife and children decided to go to Pune for the day. I chose to stay back since I had to catch up with some work. I, however, drove them down to Begdewadi to put them on the morning local. The station was deserted. The only two people seen were the station master in his *pyjama kurta* and one helper in his *dhoti*. But what caught our attention

was that between the two of them they had rigged up the national flag for unfurling. There was a coconut and garland placed at the foot of the flagstaff. The children were amused that just between the two of them, these humble people showed such patriotic fervour.

The local came in, the family boarded the train and the train departed. As I ambled down the empty platform towards the exit, I was approached by the station master and requested to be the chief guest at the flag hoisting ceremony. I could hardly refuse him and we unfurled the flag and broke the coconut in a smattering of rain. I was also duly garlanded and thanked for acceding to their request.

The children had a really good laugh when I told them on their return that evening “Not just that! The three of us also sang the national anthem “Jana Gana Mana” together”

Piquets Renamed

In 1965, during the Indo-Pak war when the Chinese served an ultimatum to India, 51(I) Para Brigade, in which I was serving at that time as a staff officer, was moved to the UP-Nepal-Tibet border.

Lt Col D H J Gear of the Parachute Regiment was then a battalion commander, commanding 8 Para. One morning Col Gear visited the brigade headquarters and limped into my office. He was carrying an inflated scooter tube, which he carefully placed on a wooden chair and gingerly sat upon it. I wondered what that was all about? “Don’t ask”. He said. “I’m suffering from piles and its the most embarrassing bloody disease.”

Col Gear, it turned out, had visited one of his piquets, which was named Magarmach I. Since another piquet called Magarmach II was located on the same ridgeline and appeared very close (distances and heights are very deceptive in the mountains) Col Gear decided to finish his visit to that location also. By the time he reached that picket six hours later, he was in considerable pain and had to come down the next day riding a mule. He was declared sick in quarters by the unit RMO for a couple of days till he was able to walk normally again.

Col Gear confided to me that he had decided to rename these two picquets. Henceforward he said, Magarmach I would simply be Magarmach. And Magarmach II will be known as Bugger-much.

Boarding School Fare

When I was a DS at the Staff College in Wellington, my wife and I were local guardians to two little children of another army officer, Col R B Babulkar, who were in the boarding school at Lovedale in Ooty. Whenever they come to spend a day with us, my wife would prepare the type of things that the children would enjoy eating.

Some years later, I mentioned to an aunt of mine how uncaring children are about the efforts that the lady of the house puts in to prepare their favourite dishes. "You're telling me!" She said. Apparently, once my Uncle and Aunt had also been local guardians to two small boys. The first time that they visited them, my aunt went to great trouble to prepare a sumptuous lunch with their favourite items. The boys were wolfing away the food and my aunt couldn't resist the temptation of asking them how was the food in their school?

"Don't ask, Akka! Replied the younger of the two. Its much worse than this".

"Served me right for fishing for compliments" she admitted.

Self Help

The army doesn't label it stealing; its called 'self help' basis. Swiping things for the common benefit of the unit was not an uncommon practice in the old days. I was attached to an Infantry battalion, 19 Rajput (Bikaner) located at Damana near Jammu, and I remember we were always lifting various things.

We had scanty accommodation in 1961 and most units were making do either with tented accommodation or '*bashas*' and bunkers constructed on 'self help' basis. I recollect that we went on route marches at night and stealthily ripped up the old Jammu-Sialkot railway lines for the roofing of our bunkers. And we invariably picked up bricks from the local brick kilns along the Akhnoor Canal, whenever we passed through them on night route marches.

During the 1971 Indo-Pak war, I was commanding the brigaded B echelons when we received some 'meat-on-hoof' in our rations. A great treat in the

desert in the middle of the war. Our dreams for a much-needed fine meal next day evaporated when we discovered that most of the goats had been swiped by some troops of the Sikh LI battalion of a neighbouring brigade. We gnashed our teeth in impotent fury while they feasted on our meat. But it was all considered as part of the game.

When I took over command of 15 FAD a lot of major works were under progress inside the depot. New ammunition storage sheds were under construction and cement could be found lying in abundance all over the depot. Invariably, the troops helped themselves whenever required for improving the Quarter Guard, repairing the unit *langars* or patching some plinth protection. All legitimate unit requirements; but the cement was nonetheless acquired illegally.

It was inevitable therefore when I took over that one of the first complaints I received was from the Garrison Engineer about the theft of cement bags. I assured him that the practice would cease and issued strict orders that there was to be no more pilfering of cement.

I had hardly issued the stern orders, when a few days later, The MGAOC from HQ Northern Command called me up. Apparently some unit temple in Udhampur was being repaired and he had promised them that he would get them some cement. Not much; just two bags. Could I arrange it? Without committing myself I said I'd see what I could do.

I immediately sent for my JA who controlled the issue of such precious items and apprised him of the request 'from above'. How much cement did we have? I asked him.

I remember his answer to this day because I laughed aloud at the reply he gave me.

He said that if the requirement was only one bag it was immediately available. Two bags would require time till evening. But if the Command HQ wanted more I would have to give permission for a night route march in the depot.

Back to Earth

Late Rear Admiral Heble often regaled the officers at the bar in RSI, Pune, with naval anecdotes. One that has stuck in my mind over the years is that of a

naval squadron returning from a month long goodwill cruise to the Far East. As the ships were entering Bombay harbour, the C-in-C Western Naval Command sent them a signal-

“Welcome back. All good things must come to an end. Auditors and wives are waiting!”

Soldier Proof Equipment

When I was a Director of Equipment in the NBC Cell in Army Headquarters, I had occasion to visit one of our defence laboratories in connection with development of indigenous NBC equipment.

After some serious discussions, I stressed on the Director of the Laboratory and other scientists that whatever equipment they developed must be ‘soldier proof’ I explained that soldiers were very innovative and used stores and equipment for purposes that they were never designed for. By way of example I explained that a rain cape may double for a ground sheet, a mosquito net may be used for catching fish, an empty small arms ammunition container for heating water. One infantry battalion that I knew even experimented with adding a little petrol in their 2” mortar barrels to get some additional range for the mortar bombs in the mortar firing competition. If ‘*chuna*’ is not available to mark a basketball ground, troops will merrily use ‘*atta*’. The army is famous (read infamous) for improvisation.

They had a good laugh and the Director said “Colonel Saab. We can only make the equipment fool proof; but there is no way we can ensure that it is damn-fool proof”.

Relief in Line

Here is a good one that I heard soon after the 1971 Indo-Pak war came to an end.

A battalion of the Madras Regiment had relieved a battalion of the Gorkhas on the front line. Although there was a cease-fire in operation, Indian and Pakistani patrols ran into each other and sporadic incidents continued to occur for a few days. The Madrasis were warned to be careful whilst patrolling. They should try and gather information whilst themselves being careful to give nothing away.

As anticipated, a very few days after the Madrasis came into the sector, one of their patrols came across a Paki patrol. The Pakistanis asked them “*Kaunsa Paltan?*” The security conscious Thambi replied “*um Gorka*” in his typical Tamilian accent. It was now the turn of the security conscious Indians to ask “*Tumhara kaunsa paltan?*”

“*Hum Thambi*” was the prompt Pakistani reply.

Officer Pattern Salt

A charming attraction of Gorkha troops is their very simplicity. My course mate, Brig R Devasar from the Gorkhas narrated this gem to me when we were both serving as staff officers in a divisional headquarters. When he was a Company Commander, his battalion had once returned from a long and weary route march. As was then the practice, everybody had to drink a glass of water with a spoonful of salt mixed in it to compensate for salt loss in the body. For some reason his Gorkha orderly was taking longer than usual to fetch the salt. He sensed that something was amiss. When the Johnny turned up Devasar asked him what took him so long. The Johnny replied that he was searching for the ‘officer pattern salt’.

Never having heard of such a thing as ‘officer pattern salt’ Devasar asked the Johnny to show him the salt. The Gorkha batman produced a bottle of Eno’s Fruit Salt.

Umedwar Cadre

My colleague (late) Lt Gen Ashok Chaki of the 8th Gorkhas and I were on the Higher Command course together. He was explaining the simplicity of the Gorkha soldiers in his *paltan*. Once some Gorkhs soldiers were appearing for an ‘Umedwar’ cadre for promotion from Sepoy to Lance Naik. They were given a simple paper to answer. The first question asked them the motto of the battalion. One Johnny misunderstood the word ‘motto’ which in Gorkhali meant the fattest person. He wrote the answer - Major Dhan Bahadur Sahab.

At the end of the cyclostyled question paper the Head Clerk had drawn a line interrupted with a few Xs to indicate the end of the paper. One Johnny mistaking that line also to be a question drew an arrow pointing at the line and wrote ‘*eta barbet wire*’ (this is barbed wire).

Sandstorm at Gadra Road

After the war 1971 Indo-Pak war, 330 Infantry Brigade, that I was serving in, set up its headquarters at Gadra Road in the Barmer Sector. The rest of the division had pulled back to peacetime locations, leaving the brigade with necessary attached troops to hold and patrol the entire divisional sector while the border delineation talks with Pakistan were in progress.

For the first time after over a year, except for the units deployed on the front line, the troops were feeling relaxed and had time to concentrate on normal unit administration.

Morale was high; flush with the victory in war. 11 Infantry Division had particular reason to be satisfied with its performance since it was well inside Pakistan when the war ended and thus holding a vast area of captured territory.

The Brigade Commander, Brig Gurjit Singh Randhawa of the Sikh Regiment decided it would be a good idea to invite all officers of the brigade elements who were at Gadra Road to beer and brunch one Sunday morning. Now it was his practice to wash his beard and hair every Sunday and nothing annoyed him more than interference with this ritual.

Major R D Law, commanding 3 (I) Armd Sqn attached to our brigade was also invited. He decided to come a bit early and came riding atop his T-55 tank. We had misgivings as soon as we spotted the column of sand approaching the Inspection Bungalow, which acted as the Brigade Officers' Mess. The tank came at high speed spewing a high cloud of sand in its wake and came to a dramatic stop directly in front of the IB. As R D Law climbed down from his tank with a broad grin, sand enveloped and settled down on the entire IB. Brig Randhawa's efforts to preen himself came to nought. His hair was full of sand. The Commander had to wash it out and dry it all over again.

R D Law was chastised for his prank but forgiven. Even the Commander had a good laugh after he had cooled off.

We had won the war after all.

Coded Messages

The IB at Gadra Road had thin walls. The Commander, the BM and I occupied the three available rooms. Now the BM had a habit of calling his wife in Delhi usually after eleven at night and he would invariably end his conversation with “India, Lima, Yankee”.

After three days of this, the Commander could not stand it anymore. The next morning at the breakfast table, he told him, “Surinder. If you must tell your wife that you love her, for God’s sake say so in clear, instead of forcing us to decode messages late in the night.”

Practical Joker

The 1965 Indo-Pak war was over and 51 (I) Para brigade deployed on the UP-Nepal- Tibet border was awaiting orders to return to its peace location. Major (later Major General) Afsir Karim who was the DQ of the brigade was known for playing pranks. He just couldn’t help it. It was just his way.

One Sunday morning as I was coming out of the Brigade mess, he was just coming in. “Rao, why was the Commander looking for you?” “Looking for me Sir? I didn’t know” I hastily snatched up my notepad and ball point pen and presented myself in front of the Commander, Brigadier Sucha Singh, a thrice decorated Sikh officer. He was sitting in the lawn of his residence, drying his hair, trying to read the morning papers.

“You wanted to see me Sir?” I asked. The Commander exploded. “You are the fourth bloody fool to have come to me without my calling you. Who the hell gave you the message?” “The DQ Sir” I spluttered. “Send him to me”

Needless to add, Major Afsir Karim had made himself scarce for the rest of the morning.

Military Musings

DIPLOMATIC DAZE

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The Beetle

When I was posted to Dacca, Bangladesh on a diplomatic assignment, the family was abuzz with excitement and happy anticipation of the diplomatic life to come. My elder son who was then 12 years old and very enamoured with cars, as boys of that age are wont to be, was insistent that we should buy a Volkswagen Beetle. In fact he was so excited on visiting his first foreign country that he just couldn't contain himself. His greatest joy was that he counted over 30 different makes of imported cars within minutes of our exiting Kurmitola Airport. A far cry from the Ambassadors and Fiats that populated Indian roads in the seventies.

But as it happened, our enthusiasm for the Beetle waned rapidly in the weeks that followed. This was because we discovered that we diplomats were always followed by Bangladesh Intelligence bods wherever we went – in a white Volkswagen Beetle. Not only was the car always the same, even the people assigned to keep an eye on us were also the same. And even though they wore civvies, their army boots were a dead give away. Also, one of the 'followers' was well over six feet tall; easy to spot in a crowd.

My two sons spotted them within two weeks of our arrival and always used to keep looking out of the car window to check if they were following or whether they had lost track of us. It became a sort of game for them.

Once we stopped at a shop to buy some '*Mishti Doi*' a favoured Bengali sweetmeat. The Beetle also came to a halt, a little distance behind us. After making our purchase, we drove away from the shop; we had to make a U turn a little distance away and come back along the road. The children reported that the Beetle was not following us. As we passed the sweetmeat shop we saw the sleuths pushing the Volkswagen Beetle which apparently had starting trouble. The boys gleefully waved out to our followers.

They were sporting enough to wave back but with sheepish grins on their faces.

Thus evaporated all our plans to go in for a Volkswagen Beetle.

The MA's Tape Deck

Brig Ashok Vora, the Military Adviser, once asked me to accompany him to Baitul Mukkaram, a central shopping area in Dacca. He had to deliver his Akai tape deck for some repairs.

The shop owner was extremely polite and attentive and requested the MA to collect it after two days. When we went to collect it after two days, he presented the MA with a bill for 150 Taka. Now Brig Vora was a true blue blood Gujarati who never paid a bill, however small, without bargaining; diplomat or not. The shop owner agreed to reduce the bill for him as a special case from 150 taka to 130 taka, since Bangladesh owed India so much, and diplomats, he claimed, were their valued customers. "But one thing, Sir" he added "I haven't had time to do the oiling and cleaning. Could you kindly collect it tomorrow?" Brig Vora left the shop feeling triumphant, as if he had won a major victory.

When Brig Vora took out his purse to pay the bill, the next day, he glanced at it and was horrified to read "Repairs- 130 Taka, Oiling and Cleaning – 50 Taka. Total 180 Taka." Brig Vora again got into an argument with the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper was as gracious as before and said "But of course Sir! You are our valued customer. So I'll give you a discount of 30 Taka and charge you only 150 Taka" – which was the original amount of the bill. Brig Vora had met his match; he paid the money with poor grace.

It was only when we sat in the car that he took a deep breath and then burst out laughing, seeing the funny side of it. He admitted that he'd been had. "--- and I bet he did no oiling / cleaning either" he added. The shopkeeper obviously followed a procedure.

As we drove towards Dhanmandi, he said that it reminded him of the story about the man who got a job as an optician's assistant. On his first day at work the optician had to step out for an hour or so. He instructed his new assistant to hand over Mr. Smith's prescription if he called for it. "How much do I charge him?" the new assistant asked. The optician, with a twinkle in his eye, told him that he had a system. "When Mr Smith asks how much, you say "Sir, that will

be 20 Pounds!” and if he doesn’t object, you say –“for the frame”. Then you say “and another 10 pounds for the lens;” again if Mr Smith doesn’t flinch, you add – “each”. And if there is still no protest, you add “another 10 Pounds as making charges” and “bill him for an even 50 Pounds”.

Takas for Toilet Paper

In 1974, after the oil price hike, severe floods and shortages, the markets in the nascent country of Bangladesh had yet to stabilize. John Laws, a friend from New Zealand working in the Asian Development Bank narrated to us the wide difference in the cost of toilet paper between two adjacent shops. One shopkeeper quoted 160 Bangladeshi Taka for a roll of toilet paper which in those days was equal to 160 Indian Rupees. The New Zealander was shocked to hear such an atrocious price being quoted for an ordinary daily use item. He refused to pay that amount. “Keep the toilet paper” he told the shopkeeper in a huff. “I’ll use the Takas instead. That will work out cheaper”

The Burmese Boy

Cdr Maung Maung, the Burmese Defence Attache in Bangladesh, and his wife once came calling on us. They had a special request. Their five year old grandson was spending a few days with them in Dacca. Cdr and Mrs. Maung had to go out of Dacca on a day’s official visit; could they leave him at our place for the day to play with our younger son who was approximately the same age?

My wife assured them that we’d be delighted to look after him. But we wondered how the two boys would communicate with each other since Cdr Maung Maung’s grandson knew no English or Hindi and our son knew no Burmese.

We need not have worried at all. The whole day the boys had a whale of a time playing with cars, planes, toys and tricycle; and the house was full of their laughter and shouting. They conversed in a smattering of Bangali and used words like crash, bang, boom, ouch, etc which provided an adequate vocabulary for them to understand each other. It was a happy day for both boys and they parted reluctantly that evening, when the Maung Maungs sent their car and driver to pick up their little grandson.

Jasmine Tea

A few months after the new Chinese Military Attache to Bangladesh had settled down, I was asked by our MA to pay him a courtesy visit.

The Chinese MA was most courteous except that since he spoke no English, we had to converse through an interpreter. I was offered special Jasmine tea, straight from Beijing.

Frankly I found that it was strongly scented and too sweet; I had difficulty swallowing it. But I sipped the tea since I had no choice. The Chinese MA inevitably asked me how I was enjoying it. "Excellent" I replied like a true diplomat. At which the MA personally poured out a second cup for me.

I do believe that I was at my diplomatic best when I succeeded in finishing the second cup with apparent relish.

Brig Vora's Chocolates

Brig Ashok Vora, our Military Adviser in the Indian High Commission in Bangladesh in the mid-1970s, was a parsimonious Gujrati bachelor. Some astrologer had once told him that he would find it difficult to hang on to money so he should always prefer to convert it into property or articles of use or food items. Thus Brig Vora had a large storeroom in his house. Even though living alone, he bought things by the dozen; be they tooth brushes or bed sheets, in the belief that purchases were always cheaper by the dozen.

Once when our Air Adviser, Air Cmde D G King-Lee was proceeding to Calcutta on leave, Brig Vora asked him to get him a dozen large bars of Cadbury's chocolate. When Air Cmde King-Lee returned to Dacca he apologized that he couldn't get the chocolates because it was extremely hot and driving over two days, the chocolate bars would have melted and got ruined.

At this, Brig Vora suddenly scratched his head "Gone bad? I wonder what happened to the chocolates I bought last year!" Needless to add, over the next two weeks, the MA and I polished off the chocolates he had held back in reserve for so long.

Prince of Fish

When we were in Bangladesh, we had to send our 12 year old elder son back to India for his studies since we found that country too unstable for a child at that impressionable age.

Once when we had a friend visiting us he enquired how the Prince of Wales was doing back home? This was overheard by the younger five year old playing nearby and he was obviously perplexed on hearing mention of the Prince of Wales.

Having pondered over it at night, next morning at the breakfast table, he announced to his mother “If Anna is the Prince of Whales; I’m the Prince of Fish”.

Intellectual Perceptions

When in a political reorganisation of the country in the early 1970s, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave up being President and became the Prime Minister instead, one Mr Mahmadullah was made President of Bangladesh. Mr Mahmadullah though a staunch Awami League member, he was not reputed to be intellectually the brightest of people to hold that esteemed post. His appointment was deliberate, people believed, because it suited Mujibaur Rahman to have no opposition to himself from any quarter; least of all from the President.

Soon after liberation, Bangladeshi citizens were overly sensitive about their intellectuals because the Pakistanis were believed to have eliminated many of them.

Late Mr J N Dixit, who retired as our Foreign Secretary, was then our Deputy High Commissioner in the Dacca mission. He narrated to me the story that was then doing the rounds in diplomatic circles.

The Ambassador of one of the Western nations had just presented his credentials to the President. When he was surrounded by reporters after the presentation ceremony and asked what he thought of the country of his accreditation, he replied “Before coming to Bangladesh, I was told that the Pakistanis have slaughtered all the intellectuals. I have just come after meeting with the President and I believe the statement to be true.”

Student Intellectual

The MA had once obtained for Gen Zia-ur Rahman, then COAS of Bangladesh Army, a set of aiguilletes from India, at his request, since Gen Zia was due to visit Moscow and urgently required that particular item of uniform. When the aiguilletes were received through the diplomatic bag, I called his ADC and informed him that the aiguilletes were ready for collection. Gen Zia's ADC said he was very busy preparing for going abroad and could he send his brother to collect it on his behalf. "No problem" I said and confirmed a suitable time when I would expect him in the Military Wing of the High Commission.

When I asked his brother, over a cup of tea and small eats offered to him, what he was doing, he replied that he was an intellectual. "An intellectual?" I queried unable to hide the surprise in my voice. "Yes" he reiterated. He was a student of Rajshahi University and was given to serious thinking. He hoped to study philosophy.

"That's good" I told him and added "but we in India, when we think of intellectuals, names of eminent people like Rabindranath Tagore, C Rajgopalachari or Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan come to mind".

Nevertheless, I wished him well in his endeavours.

Military Musings

UNIFORMLY FUNNY – UNIT TALES

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

J & K Posting

Major Md. Asif Ali had wrangled a posting to J & K but was very disappointed that he neither got Jammu nor Srinagar. Instead he was posted to 15 FAD which was in a God forsaken field area, in the middle of nowhere. The pits, as far as J & K postings went.

When he rang up his friend in Army Headquarters a few days later, his well wisher enquired “Ali! I hope you are happy you got your posting to J & K” to which Ali replied “*Kya Sir! Aap ne to na ‘J’ diya na ‘K’ diya. Mujhe to aapne “and” mey latka diya*”

India is in Indira

The ammunition depot had a vast acreage and in the middle was a small hill with the Goddess Kali’s temple. It was a beautiful vantage point but one had to climb it on foot which made it difficult for us to take VIPs there. I entrusted the task of making a motorable road to the temple to Major M A Ali. He did a terrific job of it and we could now comfortably drive visitors to the top for a bird’s eye view of the depot.

At the location where the winding road started climbing, the workers had built a small gate which I was amused to notice, was named ‘*Ali Dwar*’. A few months later Major Ali came to see me in my office over some ammunition matter. But he lingered after our discussion was over.

“Something on your mind Ali?” I asked. Hesitatingly he stated that the gate at the start of the road had been repainted but ‘*Ali Dwar*’ had become ‘*Kali Dwar*.’

I told Ali that I had this misgiving right from the start. It is but appropriate that the entrance to Kali’s temple should be called ‘*Kali Dwar*’. But he should feel

happy I told him, that his name had been immortalized because spelling-wise, Ali will always remain in Kali just as India is in Indira. (Indira Gandhi was then India's Prime Minister). That corny logic helped assuage his hurt feelings somewhat.

High and Low

Soon after my taking over as COO 15 FAD, we were expecting our first VIP. At the end of his visit I drove him up to our vantage point and pointed out the extent of my depot on the ground. The only question I was asked by the infantry officer was "How high is this hill?" Not knowing its exact height I gave some vague reply about it being approximately a 1000 feet above the valley floor. That very evening I called for a map and checked the spot height of the hill; determined that I should not be caught on the wrong foot again.

My next VIP was a Brigadier from the Artillery. As I finished off the visit at the temple by giving him the spot height of the hill we were on, the Brigadier pointed to the River Tawi which flowed alongside our boundary and asked "and how deep is the river here?"

This was a 'much of a muchness' I felt. I got all my officers together in the officer's mess that evening and had a brain storming session. They were free to ask any question relating to the depot, no matter how stupid or irrelevant. What is the flying time from Udhampur to the depot? How many Hindus and how many Muslims were staying in Kanhiyala Village next to the depot? The distances, driving times and 'going' to various locations near the depot, speed of the water in the Tawi in flood, and so on. We listed about 60 questions and found their answers. Determined, never to be caught on the wrong foot ever again.

And none of us ever were.

Plumbing the Depths

This time I did not call for the map. Instead I asked Capt Victor Pitchai who was to appear for his Part C exam shortly to find out the depth of the river and let me know.

When I got into bed that night something kept worrying me. Capt Pitchai had not got back to me with the information that I had asked of him. I cursed

because he was quite capable of physically going into the river to check how deep it was. I called him on the phone there and then and asked whether he had found out the depth of the Tawi?

My worst fears were realized as he replied that he had detailed four boys, all swimmers. They planned to tie themselves with a strong rope and enter the river the next day. He had a stout 10 foot staff notched at one foot intervals. They had reconnoitred the place from where they would wade through the water. I blew my top before he got any further. "You dope" I shouted at him. "Have you heard of thing called a map?" I directed him to get me the map immediately after breakfast next morning. And of course I forbid him from entering the Tawi. Only then did I fall asleep.

The Abandoned 3 Tonner

Capt Victor Pitchai, the unit MTO, had a knack for getting into trouble. One morning as I returned from an overnight trip to Udhampur I passed Capt Pitchai and Capt Rajgopal heading for the Officers' Mess for breakfast. As my Jonga came to a halt in front of the mess gate, I noticed a 3 ton vehicle which was covered with dew and had been apparently standing there all night.

As the two officers reached the gate I asked Capt Pitchai what the load carrier was doing outside the mess gate. He slapped his forehead with the palm of his hand. "Sorry Sir" he said "I'll have it removed immediately" I gave him a ticking off and left. I learned later that he had driven it there himself and after a few drinks and a good dinner he had simply forgotten about it and proceeded to his quarters along with other officers.

But I laughed aloud when Capt Rajgopal confided to me that when my Jonga had passed them on my way in, Capt Pitchai said "Why did I have to see the CO's face early in the morning? Now something is sure to go wrong" And after I had conveyed my displeasure and left them at the mess gate Capt Pitchai had turned to Capt Rajgopal and whispered "See. Didn't I tell you so?"

The New RMO

Our new RMO had just been posted in when a NCO of the DSC reported to the unit along with his wife despite our being in a field area and without prior permission. He however had a valid reason. He was posted in Bombay earlier and had helped net in a gang of railway thieves who were looting wagons; the

gang had sworn vengeance against him and his family. So he could not leave her behind all alone. Besides she was expecting. The last statement appeared to be questionable because from all accounts, she did not appear to be pregnant.

The new RMO, Capt Sunil Jatana of the Army Medical Corps, was asked to examine her and give me his opinion. The RMO saw her cursorily and stated that she may be expecting but not for another four to five months. The jawan's wife delivered a baby girl a fortnight later.

We never let the RMO live it down and he came in for a ribbing on this account throughout his tenure in the unit, and after.

(Capt Jatana retired as a Brigadier and was a very successful Child Specialist, very much in demand and much sought after wherever he was posted.)

Makhan Baazi

The unit was located very close to the village of Kanhiyala which was famous for its cheese (*paneer*). So whenever there was a party in the Command or in the Sub Area at Udampur, we were requested to send across some good *paneer*. This our DR or some vehicle going that way would deliver. Observing this phenomenon the depot jawans prepared a skit for a *barakhana* in connection with Corps Day celebrations.

The scene was that of a jawan preparing to return to the unit at the end of his leave period. His wife asks him when he would be coming home again. After five months or so he informs her. "Five months" she wails "Can't you do something?" she asks. "CO *Sahab ko thoda makhan lagao na'*. The jawan replies " *Kya karoon Gori? Aaj kal depot mein makhan baji bhi nahi chalti hai. Wahan to sirf panner baji chal rahi hai.*"

Sexy Colour

The Ordnance regimental colours have red, navy blue and 'saxe' blue in them. Just before the Sub Area Commander's administrative inspection we had to get the old flags in the unit replaced with new ones. Before the local purchase party set off for Jammu I asked my JCO Adjutant whether they had got the colours right. "*Ji, Shriman*". He replied. "Red, Navy Blue *aur* Sexy Blue"

Bhide's Boys

One morning as I sat down for breakfast in the mess, two little boys came in and plonked themselves in the chairs on either side of me. Since I was sitting at the head of the table, they were opposite each other across the table. The Mess Havildar got concerned and was preparing to usher them away but I indicated to him to leave them be. It was a pleasant change for me to have a couple of boys for company at breakfast in a field area.

"So what are your names?" I enquired of them. One was Vikram and the other was Vikrant. Their father was Capt. Bhide. They had just come from Poona. "Which school?" "S.S.P,M,S" they replied in unison. "*Accha to tum dono S.S.P.M.S ke goonde ho*" I commented. Though uttered in jest, the remark hurt their feelings.

After a few minutes Vikram asked his brother for toast. The brother picked up a slice of toast and flung it across the table which he caught in mid air. Observing their deplorable table manners, I asked them "*tumhe S.S.P.M.S.mein aisey toast dena sikhate hain kya?*" The elder replied instantly. "*Haan. S.S.P.M.S. ke gunde aisach karte hain*"

Military Musings

FAUJI JUGAD

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

A good example of fauji jugad is what I saw in NDA in my very first term in 1957. The Academy was still settling in at Khadakvasla at that time and there was a dearth of trees and decorative plants. The passing out parade was just three days away and the academy was being spruced up for the Reviewing Officer – a VIP on the occasion, in every sense of the term.

Overnight we saw plants and flowers in full bloom all along the main route and especially around the Ashoka Pillar in the centre of the Academy. We learnt later that holes had been dug and plants and flowering shrubs, many in their original pots, were simply put into the prepared holes and covered up with earth and smoothed over; they appeared quite natural. On the morning of the passing out parade, these had been watered so onlookers were none the wiser about the whole clandestine operation.

I remember in Tangdhar, an operational area in J&K, in 1965, the snows had melted and spring was in the air. The Brigade Commander desired to have a volley ball match between the officers and men in the Brigade Headquarters location. The task of preparing and marking the ground, getting a new net fixed, ensuring proper air filled in the volley ball etc was the responsibility of the Camp JCO. Even though the camp had no *chuna* for marking the lines, when the Commander arrived for the match he saw beautiful white lines on the ground demarcating the court.

I later enquired from the Camp JCO who was from the Gorkhas, how he had managed to procure the *chuna*? He confided to me that since *chuna* was not available they had used *atta* instead. A little *atta* is always surplus in units and the Gorkhas used their initiative and earned a *shabash*.

When I had just joined my first unit in 1961, I was told that after independence, the army was short of everything, including paper pins. So how were the typed pages attached? Some troops were sent out into the jungle every month, to search out *Kikar* trees and break the thorns and bring them to

the office in the unit headquarters. The thorns substituted for paper pins. So office work progressed uninterrupted.

This innovative trait is seen throughout the army, in every regiment and service. Naturally, stories abound.

Brig Sandeep Pathare who served with Sikh troops has written a delightful article titled 'Fauji Jugad. Any problem? No problem Sir!' He writes and I quote -

During my service period, what impressed me the most was the ability of a Sikh soldier to get any job done; either by hook or by crook. The old saying, "The possible we do in a jiffy; the impossible takes a little longer" holds true for my regiment. "Ho jauga, saab" (will be done, Sir) is the most common response to any task.

It was the early 1990s and we were at Kota, Rajasthan. Summers were unbearably hot, made just a little better by uninterrupted power supply (the state generated surplus electricity). Amid this, our formation was conducting the Command Environment Week. The event was going on well till the Army Commander decided to visit Kota for a day. Hectic preparations commenced and our battalion unfortunately got the worst responsibility — making arrangements for his stay.

The Army Commander was to be lodged in an MES Inspection Bungalow (IB). Everything was tidied up and the Brigade Commander visited the IB for a final look, a day earlier. It was perfect till he visited the bathroom where while washing hands he observed that the tap water was very hot. "Can we do something about this", he enquired. The CO nodded towards me, and said, "Fix it." This was easier said than done as the water storage tank was on the top of the building under direct sunlight. I was furiously thinking how to address it till my JCO asked, "Saab, any problem?" I told him the situation. He thought for a moment and said, "Ho jauga, saab."

The Army Commander's visit went off without any hitch. "How did you manage room temperature in the tap water in this heat?" my CO asked me after the visit. He had a hearty laugh when I narrated just how we managed it. The JCO had deployed two NCOs on the top of the building next to the tank, with a temperature-measuring instrument, a scoop and a slab of ice conveniently broken into 1-kg pieces. Every hour upon the hour, some water

would be scooped out of the tank, its temperature measured and an appropriate amount of ice was dropped into the tank...till the next round.

From Kota, we moved to Dera Baba Nanak. In the first visit of the Brigade Commander, there was embarrassment. At the officers' mess, the Commander asked for beer from a "black bottle". As per him, beer in plain glass bottles lost all taste which was only retained if the bottle was coloured. To our horror, we realised there were no coloured beer bottles in the mess. "I'll have a nimbu pani instead," the Commander said. It was considered as an insult to the regiment. The CO was furious and gave the Mess Secretary a glare. After the commander left, the CO told me, "This shouldn't happen again. Ensure adequate beer is always available."

A mad exercise started thereafter — the hunt for coloured beer bottles. Stocks were checked, indents sent to CSD depots, sister battalions approached. But somehow none was available and my parties returned empty handed. As I was wondering what to do next, my Mess Havildar told me, "Relax saab, ho jauga." "How," I enquired.

In the next visit, the commander again asked for beer. Promptly, chilled beer in a black bottle, duly wrapped in a white damask napkin, was served. "This is bliss, chilled beer on a hot afternoon," the Commander remarked. The CO, too, appeared pleased as punch. Delayed lunch followed a long beer-drinking session, in which beer did not fall short. "Good show," the CO gave me a thumbs-up at the end. The second-in-command (2 IC) had a quizzical look after the CO left. He said, "How did you manage? You told me black bottles were just not available?"

"True Sir. Since beer in black bottles was not available, we fished out some old empty black bottles from the store, washed them thoroughly and stored them on ice. On the party day, beer was slowly transferred from a plain glass beer bottle into these pre-cooled black bottles and served."

I am withholding the names of the commanders because the first one went on to become the Chief of Army Staff and the second became an Army Commander.

Military Musings

JUMPING JITTERS

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

All paratroopers who jump from an aircraft the first time experience fear. But that fear is controlled and overcome by excellent training, rational thinking and superb high quality equipment. We had been well trained on how to exit the aircraft, the drill when suspended in the air after the chute deploys and how to roll on landing. We had the best proven American airdropping parachutes in the world packed by expert packers and checked by supervisors before being cleared for use by the jumpers. Thousands of military personnel jump from the aircraft safely the world over, so the odds are mightily in favour of all going well. So we were prepared to take our chances.

In India, parachute jumps are conducted at an IAF establishment, the Parachute Training School (PTS) at Agra (UP). During World War II most paratroopers were commonly dropped from Dakotas. But by the time I did my jumps in 1966, we were jumping from American twin engined, C-119 Fairchild Packets with high twin tail booms nicknamed Flying Boxcars. Later the Army started using twin engined Russian AN-32 and four engined AN-12 planes also, using rear ramp exit.

Gentlemen Cadets of the Indian Military Academy are trained in parachuting by jumping from Russian MI-8 helicopters at 22 Establishment, Chakrata.

At the PTS, one has to successfully do seven consecutive jumps to qualify to get the coveted paratroopers' 'wings'. The first jump is a 'stick' of slow five from the port (left) exit; meaning that the plane will drop five parachutists only in a single run over the dropping zone (DZ). The next jump is a stick of slow five from the starboard (right side) exit. The jumps get progressively more difficult with sticks of 10 from either door, simultaneous exit using both doors, night jumps, jumps with full battle order including helmet, rifle and kit bag, and finally an operational jump with the whole lot in battle order exiting the aircraft simultaneously from both doors in a single run over the DZ and from a slightly lower altitude; simulating battle conditions..

The night before the first parachute jump was a restless one. The jump was finally upon us who, for the past fortnight had been undergoing rigorous training at the Parachute Training School at Agra.

The jump was scheduled for early morning, and on the day of the jump all of us were nervous. The person who drew the parachute having number 13, being superstitious, insisted upon changing it. He was taking no chances.

One never expects the Air Force to be on time, yet there was the C-119 Fairchild Packet waiting all ready to take off, with its twin engines warming up. We cursed the Air Force for its punctuality that day and got into the aircraft like sheep going for slaughter. We occupied our bucket seats on both sides of the aisle and waited for the event we had all volunteered for. Yet at this moment each man was wondering whether he was the bravest fellow or the biggest fool on earth to volunteer to leap out of an aircraft into nothingness.

All conversation had ceased. Some were praying. My neighbour was unable to restrain the involuntary shaking of his leg. It was a grim picture inside the aircraft as it lumbered on for take-off. Soon after we were airborne came the announcement "Red on. Stand the Door" The door opened and we could see the earth 1200 feet below us. We stood up, hooked up our parachutes and checked out the man in front, according to the drill. We were as ready as we would ever be. As soon as the light over the door turned green, the Air Force 'drifter' was first out of the door. We saw him being whipped away in the wind. A few seconds later we saw his parachute develop and inexplicably the light turned red and the door closed. We were asked to unhook and resume our seats. The wind speed was too high; over 7 knots. So the jump had been cancelled; or so we were informed.

We all heaved a sigh of relief. Another day to live. Everyone started talking at once. People who were praying stopped praying and my neighbour's leg stopped shaking. It was a study in psychology.

We enjoyed the view of Gwalior Fort and the Bharatpur bird sanctuary and were trying to glimpse the Taj as we returned to Agra when to our horror, the door opened and it was 'Red on. Stand the Door' again. No false alarm this time; it was 'Green on. Go'. Although we were required to move towards the door with each step, most of us were stamping our feet in the same spot. The two Air Force Sergeants at the door helped each one to the door and booted him out. Being senior most, I was the first to tumble out in a stick of slow five from the port exit. Three seconds later, I felt the tug on the back of my neck which meant that

the line had parted and the parachute had deployed. I opened my eyes and looked up. Such a comforting sight to see the huge canopy billowing overhead. I saw that the four others from my stick, suspended from their chutes at different heights were all safely coming down as the aircraft receded in the distance.

I now concentrated on the landing. The earth seemed to rush up faster as we approached the ground. Feet and knees together and toes pointing upwards, I held the straps tightly, careful not to hold my tongue between my teeth, hit the ground and rolled and stood up in a tangle of parachute cords. Yippee! I was safely on the ground. I had done it. I said a silent prayer of thanks.

We are taught to roll in six different ways, forward right, forward left, side right, side left, backward right and backward left so that we may roll in whichever direction the wind is carrying us. But as is the common belief, we all end up doing a seventh type of roll automatically as a reflex action without thinking. That's how good the hard training makes us.

We later learnt that the wind speed had been conducive for jumping all along. So we never forgave Wing Commander Mankotia, the OC of the PTS, who was piloting our aircraft that morning, for playing that dirty trick on us.

One important precaution all jumpers need to take is to remove all loose attachments before jumping including, spectacles, hearing aids and dentures. Being my first jump I was very keen to look before I leap. So an exception was made in my case but I was made to fasten the spectacles with a string tying both arms of the glasses to the back of my head and fixing the frame securely to the sides of my head using broad strips of surgical sticking plaster. Yet when I opened my eyes everything was a bit of a blur. I wondered why and the first thing I did was to feel for the glasses. Yes it was still in place. The mystery was solved when I landed and got up and discovered a drop of blood on my nose. The lens had been whipped away in the wind leaving the securely affixed frame in place.

To, our surprise, it was the second jump which was the scariest of all. The reality of what we had gone through hit us that night. And the next morning we had to really will ourselves forward at every step and to willingly exit the aircraft. But after that we started enjoying the jumps. Even though the time in the air was just about 10 seconds or less, we could spot the Jamuna and the Taj Mahal and started to identify other landmarks around the DZ.

Seven jumps in all. Slow sticks, fast sticks, port side exit and starboard side jumps, day jumps and night jumps; jumps with full kit and with rifles. We did them all and earned our parachute 'wings' and our maroon berets; the proudest insignia of our uniform which identified us as part of that elite force.

If I couldn't sleep the night before my first jump for fear of the unknown, I could not sleep the night after I got my wings for the triumph and euphoria of success.

"Chattri Mata Ki Jai."

Military Musings

LAFFS FROM LADAKH

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VAM & Bar (Retd)

Discerning Rats

When I was a Captain in 1968, I was posted as OC of a Mobile Ammunition Repair Section (MARS) in Ladakh. One morning my office clerk put up a letter to me for my signature; a letter which I vaguely felt, I had already signed the previous day. However, being only an acknowledgement, I did not give it a second thought and signed it. But when the same thing happened again a few days later, I was sure it was no high-altitude effect that I was experiencing. I summoned the office clerk and sought an explanation for putting up the same letters repeatedly for signature.

Sheepishly he explained that rats were eating the outgoing mail at night. I paused to wonder at this phenomenon of rats who could discern between incoming and outgoing mail. On investigating the matter, I discovered that due to non availability of gum, the dispatcher was using tinned milk or jam to stick the envelopes. He would then stack the mail neatly in a corner of his desk to send off the letters to the Field Post Office next morning. And at night the rats would come and nibble the tasty envelopes.

The matter was remedied by placing all outgoing mail in a sturdy steel ammunition box and locking it, which no rat of any kind could penetrate.

Pest Control

My friend Major Madhukar Surkund was 2 IC of an Engineer Regiment in Ladakh when I was OC MARS. Once when I was due to inspect his regiment's ammunition point, he was required to fill up some details in a draft report, which was in the form of a questionnaire, and submit it to me for my approval

In reply to one question "Is the explosive storehouse so constructed as to prevent the entry of rats, pests, reptiles and insects?" Major Surkund had neatly penciled in "Yes; all except OC MARS"

Bathing Beauty

In the late sixties, the Army Ordnance Corps had a unit named Mobile Laundry and Bath Unit. The unit would move from one formation to another in high altitude or intense cold areas to provide hot water showers for troops to bathe and change.

One enterprising NCO who struck up a friendship with some local Ladakhi females started secretly allowing them to have hot water showers; soap and towels provided, in exchange for favours returned. However, his ingenious scheme was soon rumbled and the NCO was put on the mat. He was charged under Army Act 63 for an act prejudicial to good order and military discipline.

The Army would not tolerate such 'miss-use' of military facilities.

Breakfast in the Brigade Mess

As OC MARS, I was on an inspection visit to a brigade located in Karu. One Sunday morning, the officers all gathered for breakfast in the Brigade Officers Mess. When the usual fare of fried eggs and toast was served by the waiter, the Brigade Commander, Brig Sushil Kumar, enquired of the BSTO why we couldn't have had kidneys when the brigade had just had a supply drop the previous day, which included meat on hoof.

Capt Shinde, the BSTO unthinkingly replied "Sir, we received only female goats yesterday".

The Commander choked on his toast. "For God's sake Shinde: I asked about *kidneys!*"

High Altitude Entertainment

After the Chinese invasion of 1962, the wave of patriotism in India ran high. The build-up of troops in Ladakh was underway in the summer of 1963. The air effort was intense; whenever weather conditions permitted flying to and from Leh, a large number of Air Force transport aircraft would land at Leh airfield daily.

News was received one day that Waheeda Rehman and Sadhna were coming with an entertainment troupe to entertain troops of Leh garrison. Being the most sought after actresses of those years, the morale of the troops was high. As the great day approached, the Division spent its time in happy anticipation of seeing the two beauties of the Indian screen in person.

On the day of their arrival, the troops thronged the airfield right from first light. One aircraft after another landed, unloaded its cargo, took on return loads of personnel proceeding on leave and departed. But no sign of Waheeda or Sadhna. Time went on. From 9 O' Clock to 10, to 11. The troops were getting downright impatient when word was received from the ATC that the troupe was in the very last aircraft, which would arrive soon after 12 pm. The last aircraft of the day, a huge four engined AN-12 finally touched down after mid-day, taxied to its apron, turned around, and switched off three of its four engines. The cargo doors yawned open and the ramps were unfolded.

The garrison let out a loud collective groan when out tumbled one short round sardarji, two middle-aged females with a whole lot of other sardarjis in tow. It was Asa Singh Mastana and his group of entertainers.

The disappointment of not seeing Waheeda or Sadhna was however forgotten that evening as Asa Singh Mastana and his troupe had the garrison in splits of laughter, in what turned out to be one of the most entertaining evenings that we had ever experienced.

The GOCs Budgerigars

Us Captains staying in Charlie Mess in Leh had our ears close to the ground for 'gup-shup' and laughs. We had a great laugh the day we heard what happened to the GOC's budgerigars.

It was cloudy day when the GOC, Maj Gen P Chowdhry, 5GR, as he was leaving for office, remarked to his ADC that the birds were looking a bit dull.

The keen young Captain said "Yes Sir!" and when the GOC was out of earshot, the ADC instructed the GOC's Gurkha batman to spruce up the birds. The Gorkha Johnny did what he could in the only way he knew to clean up anything. He dunked the birds in cold water and cleaned them. When the GOC returned at lunchtime, he found the birds lying belly- up in their cage, with their feet in the air, frozen dead.

The GOC who was a true bird lover was so furious he fired his Gurkha ADC and got rid of his Gurkha batman. Legend has it that he was so mad that he even swore to get rid of the entire Gurkha Defence and Employment Company attached to the Divisional Headquarters.

Performance Trials

In the early years in Ladakh, troops serving in high altitude and intense cold climate had an irrational fear that they were getting impotent because of reduced libido. The doctors serving with the units were instructed to explain to troops that what they were experiencing was a temporary phenomenon, which would right itself when they went on leave or returned to peace areas at lower altitudes on posting.

It was also a time when the Army was coming down with a heavy hand on troops contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STD). Instructions were issued to troops to beware of severe action if they were careless and contracted STD through prostitutes.

One JCO, who on return from leave was detected with STD, was marched up to the GOC. The GOC admonished the Subedar that being a senior *sardar* of the *paltan*, he could be so stupid as to contract the disease. The GOC demanded an explanation.

The JCO explained that he was serving in Darbuk and had not been home for six months. When he reached Pathankot, he felt that before he got home, he needed to test the system; that the plumbing was still in working order.

The GOC suffered a fit and ordered him to get lost.

A Letter a Day

One newly married young officer posted in Ladakh used to write to his wife with unwavering frequency: a letter a day. Now in Ladakh the mail always came and went by IAF aircraft. Once, owing to inclement weather, there was a break in the air service for a period of 20 days. So, no mail was received or dispatched. Ladakh was literally cut off from the rest of India.

When the postal system resumed, the officer's wife in Poona received 12 letters together in the morning post. She came in for a lot of ribbing from the family as to how Army officers in Ladakh had nothing better to do than write to their wives the whole time. You can imagine her plight when the afternoon post brought another eight. Needless to say it took her all of two days to read them; after first opening all of them and arranging them in chronological order.

Sound Horn Please

For many servicemen posted in Ladakh in the early sixties, it was also their first flying experience. They were full of curiosity about the aircraft and Air Force procedures and at times, a more experienced flier would pull the leg of the first-timer.

Just as the AN-12 commences its final descent for landing a hooting noise is sounded in the main body of the aircraft to warn the passengers of the impending landing. One jawan asked the person sitting next to him what the sounding of the horn meant? The neighbour, obviously the more experienced of the two, asked the jawan to look out of the window. He pointed out another aircraft flying parallel to theirs and a little behind them.

“That pilot wants to overtake and is asking for a pass” was the explanation given.

Indicating Distance: The Gurkha Way

Lt Gen F T Dias when he was a major in 5/11 GR narrated one about how Gorkha troops indicate distance. If an object is in the near distance, it is indicated by a short 'oo'. If in the middle distance then the 'oooo' gets stretched. The length of the 'oooo' being proportionate to the distance.

Once when he was driving up to a picket in Ladakh, he found one of his unit vehicles precariously perched on the verge of the road, dangerously tilted towards the valley below, and the driver standing on the road trying to figure out what to do. If the vehicle went over the side, it was a drop of over 1000 feet to the river below. It could never be recovered. He instructed the driver not to touch the vehicle; he would send help.

On his return journey, an hour later, he found the driver still standing there but no vehicle was in sight. When asked about the vehicle the driver pointed to the river below and said 'oooooooo ---'.

Major Dias got the idea and drove away.

The Mis(s)understanding

One Sunday morning in 1968, as I came off duty as the Div Duty officer, I was relieved by a Bengali Major who was posted in the Div HQ as DADH. I happened to ask him "Sir you are a qualified doctor doing Div Duty officer. Whatever made you join the army?"

"Kya karen Rao", he explained. "Blame it to my poor Hindi and Bengali accent." Apparently after he qualified as a young doctor he decided to open his own small clinic in Allahabad. His first patient happened to be a pretty teen aged girl who came with her mother. She was having some problem with her arm. But being a keen young doctor, he was determined to do a thorough job. So picking up his stethoscope, he asked the girl "Joban kholo" meaning show me your tongue (jaban). The girl and mother were both shocked, thinking that he was asking her to remove her blouse (joban). The doctor was perplexed that they did not understand him. "Accha. Samjha nahin? Tang phelao" (put out your tongue), which they understood his words as saying "spread your legs". He continued, "Jo ma beti wahan se bhage, I had no choice but dukan band kar ke fauj me bharti hona."

I laughed all the way back to my quarters in Charlie Mess.

Military Musings

FAUJI LINGO

By

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Everyone is familiar with the English lexicon. One has even heard of Hinglish. But military lingo combines not only Hindi and English but also words from other languages. Sometimes words are simply shortened like “Side disquali ho gaya” meaning that the team has been disqualified. Welcome to the world of ‘Fauji’ Lingo.

English words are mispronounced by choice or adapted to suit the convenience and pronunciation of troops; and one must not forget that our troops hail from various parts of India. But apart from the regimental language i.e. the language spoken in the ‘paltan’ e.g Marathi in Maratha battalions, or Punjabi in units of the Punjab and Sikh regiments or Tamil in the Madras regiment etc, the common language adopted by the entire army is Hindi. All courses of instruction for soldiers are imparted in Hindi. Officers largely speak English and also converse fluently in Hindi and also their own regimental language.

I recollect many years ago, as a Subaltern, the very first time I was interviewing an Other Rank (Jawan) when I was doing my infantry tenure with a battalion of the Rajput Regiment. The jawan had applied for leave and I asked him why he needed the *chutti*? He replied “*Sahab, family ko baccha hone wala hai. Shayad scissor hoga*”. I was taken aback by the use of the word ‘family’ for wife but in the minds of the jawans ‘family’ is synonymous with ‘wife’. Not surprising really considering that if he is killed, his wife will receive a family pension. If he is posted on active service his wife is allotted separated family quarters, Wives attend the family welfare centre. If she has to travel by rail he is given a family warrant. The OR married quarters are referred to as family lines.etc. But the word ‘scissor’ conveyed that the baby was likely to be delivered through caesarean section.

Gorkha troops are very simple and they have difficulty remembering long and unfamiliar names. So they have their own system of mnemonics. Once when Admiral Mountbatten as Supreme Commander of the South East Asia

Command visited a Gorkha artillery unit in Burma he asked a Gorkha Gunner if he knew his name. The Gorkha Johnny replied. "Han Sahab. General Mountain Battery Sahab." Similarly Field Marshal SHFJ (Sam) Maneckshaw, who was himself from the Gorkhas, was endearingly and simply titled Sam Bahadur by his Gorkha troops.

In the National Defence Academy, cadets are categorised as non-vegetarian, egg-vegetarian and vegetarian to make the catering officer's provisioning task easier. But many cadets become 'mauka-terians' because when they feel like having a glass of milk they become vegetarians, or if a vegetarian fancies having an omelette he becomes an egg-vegetarian and of course if the chicken appears mouth watering, many a vegetarian has a go at it. Real opportunists: these hungry cadets!

The jawan is commonly referred to as 'Thambi' in South Indian units, or as 'Banda' in Punjabi speaking units, 'Kancha' in Gorkha units and 'Pandu' in Marathas, Bhulla (younger brother) by the Kumaonis and so on. In some Gorkha units having too many troops of the same name like Limbu or Gurung or Chhetri, the soldiers are identified by the last two figures of their personal number. So if the officer orders "Chattis ko bhejna" the soldier whose personal number ends with 36 is promptly sent for.

It is not very surprising to hear an officer tell his wife that the bulb in the bathroom or the battery of his car has gone 'dix' (dysfunctional). It means that it is of no use any longer and needs replacement. This dix is not to be confused with diks - meaning small round metallic discs used in the unit armoury when a person is issued his weapon. Riks lena is not catching an autorickshaw but taking risk.

Blood 'tasting' means blood testing and food 'testing' stands for food tasting which the Duty Officer is supposed to do in the unit langars. In the same vein 'murky' bulb is a mercury bulb and 'sexy' blue refers to the colour saxe blue found in the regimental flag. 'Borning' date refers to the date of birth. And 'ragda' does not refer to ragda served at chaat parties but to some gruelling physical punishment. 'Bekar-di' rum means Bicardi rum which does not give sufficient kick.

And if a Gorkha soldier tells you that he is from 'thud-ate' what he means is that he is from the Third Battalion of the Eighth Gorkha Rifles.

Troops in high altitude areas are supplied with accelerated dehydrated frozen foods, commonly referred to by troops as 'dy-harted.' And 'climattling' means the acclimatisation process in high alti (tudes) that newly inducted troops are subjected to.

'Relaxation' Range is not a place to take it easy; quite the contrary. It stands for Reflex Action Range. 'Hotjar' is a howitzer and 'missile screw' does not imply a rogue missile but to the missile crew. The problem of 'mass-karela' was solved after the cook produced a tin of Mackerels and Maska Drill is to be interpreted as 'musketry' to which the suffering recruits are subjected.

'Haftewala' is not the cop collecting illegal fines but the jawan who comes to you daily to pass on the battalion orders; and "daily' is the parade state tally which is put up to you once a week. A 'discipline case' is actually an indisciplined soldier. '1 Ton' and '3 Ton' are not measuring weights. They refer to military load carrying vehicles.

A military unit posted near the coast line spread the word that they were becoming MBBS. A hasty clarification had to be issued to the Regimental Medical Officer that his therapeutic domain was not under threat of an infantry take over; it was simply that the unit was preparing for 'amphibious' operations.

When I was in AOC Centre, Secunderabad, as a junior Major, the Centre tailor, a Sardarji, insisted that I get a pair of Terelene trousers made from him. When I declined because I found Terelene trousers very slippery he said he would make me a "brake-an-wali' pant; meaning a trouser with brakes. What he actually meant was that he would put in a strip of felt around the inside of the waistband to increase friction between the trouser and the shirt so that it wouldn't slip.

And Ordnance storekeepers tasked with supervising the loading and unloading of railway wagons differentiate between a four-wheeled covered wagon and the larger eight- wheeled covered wagon by referring to them as 'bogie' and 'boga' respectively.

Army personnel have their own earthy way of expressing things. Unending are the examples and it is impossible to record all of them in this article. Army life is full of humour and laughter. There is never a dull moment. But what matters in the end is that the military lingo makes for effective communication.

Part 2

Gems from the Treasure Trove

NISHAN - THE COLOURS

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

National Defence Academy (NDA), Khadakvasla, is located near Pune and is the primary training institute for a majority of the officers in the Indian Armed Forces. The primary aim of the NDA is to inculcate the correct value system in its alumni. To achieve this, the Armed Forces ensure that the very best instructors and most illustrious personnel are posted to the academy.

As an acknowledgement of the sterling service that the NDA has rendered to the nation, the academy has been conferred the Presidential Colours or as we in the military call it, the Nishan. The Nishan is a customized flag and is a symbol of valour and heroic deeds of the alumni. Like in all units of the military, it is a source of intense pride and inspiration for the unit. When the colours are trooped, i.e. the Nishan is brought on the parade ground, it is conferred a National Salute and all those present in uniform salute the colours. If one is not in uniform, he/she is expected to stand.

One of the most important appointments in the Academy is that of the Chief Drill Instructor or Subedar Major, Drill. He is a person below officer rank but has full authority and responsibility for the discipline and drill of all the officer cadets of the academy.

Subedar Major Darbara Singh of the Sikh Regiment once occupied this appointment. The man was tall, with an erect military bearing and always perfectly turned out. He was a physically very impressive personality.

The high point of training in the academy is the end of term passing out parade. This is the time when spirits are high amongst the cadets and makes controlling these 1500 young men a tough task. Rehearsals commence about 15 days ahead of the actual day.

The cadets initially gather for the parade inside the Quarter Master Fort (QM Fort). On one particular day, the cadets gathered inside the QM Fort were in a garrulous mood, there was no stopping the noise or the general confusion. One after another various drill instructors tried to bring about silence and order but to no avail. The noise did not die down even when the colours were brought into the fort and this was a serious matter indeed. This insult to the Nishan did not go down well with SM Darbara Singh. With his measured steps, he approached the podium and got on to it and with a voice heavy with anger

and gruff with emotion he asked the cadets to lend him their ears. A hush fell over the assembly.

He said “Cadets, I am 52 years old and have served in the Indian Army for 36 years. I have seen the 1962 operations, the 1965 and 1971 wars as a combatant. The Nishan that you have not acknowledged today stands for me and countless others who have taken up the profession of arms and given their youth and lives for the honour of being given an opportunity to salute the Nishan, as the symbol of supreme sacrifice made by our martyrs. I will tell you a story that might indicate to you the feelings that we soldiers have for the Nishan”

The SM drew a deep breath and continued in a sombre tone “in this very academy we have a Hut of Remembrance where the names of all former alumni who have fallen in action are inscribed on the walls. I have been in this academy for three years but been able to enter the hut only once. Because written on the wall is a name “Lt Palta of the 9th Battalion of the Sikh Regiment. During the 1962 China war, my ‘paltan’ was posted in the Tawang Sector. I was deployed right on the border and my Section Commander was the same Lt Palta whose name is inscribed in the Hut of Remembrance. On the night of 16th October 1962, the Chinese attacked our post and we were told to fight back to the last man and the last round. Lt Palta was personally leading the fight back. It was a harrowing time. We were out-numbered, out-gunned and desperately short of ammunition. Yet we soldiered on because Lt Palta did not know any other way.

Sometime during the night, Lt Palta was hit in the face by a mortar bomb. The explosion severed his head from his body and the lifeless body was thrown upon me. The enemy overran our post as soon as the officer was killed and I, 17 years old with 11 months of service fighting a bloody skirmish with the enemy and out of ammunition was lying under the body of my dead Section Commander. The blood from Lt Palta’s body soaked my beard and chest and the enemy thinking that I was dead, did not even bother to take me as a POW. Through the night I lay there in the battered remains of our post, freezing in the Himalayan cold. All my comrades dead and the dead body of that heroic officer shielding me. It took me three days to wash off the blood from my face but in my mind, the blood of Lt Palta is still there, warm and caking slowly. I will carry this image to my funeral pyre”. The SM’s voice became gruffer with verbalised emotion, “ when I entered the Hut for the first time, I saw Lt Palta’s name and picture on the wall, in an instant I was transported back in time to

1962, and again felt his cold stiff body on top of mine and his blood congealing on my face. Till date, I haven't been able to enter the Hut again.

“Cadets, it's for officers like these that the Academy has been given the Nishan. It has been won by the blood of ex-NDA officers and it stands for all that is good and pure in these 'Kaliyugi' times. I will not allow you to insult the Nishan and Lt Palta as long as I have breath.”

So saying the SM stepped off the dais and strode out of the QM Fort. The fragile, pin-drop silence inside the fort was shattered only by the word of command ordering the commencement of the parade.

The Nishan is nothing but a flag for those who see it as such but for Subedar Major Darbara Singh of the 9th Battalion, the Sikh Regiment of the Indian Army, and countless others like him, it stood for Lt Palta, and a cold winter night when a young Lieutenant died trying to lead his men into battle and to supreme honour. It stood for a quintessential Indian Army officer who even when dead continued to shield a young frightened soldier who was out of ammunition and out of his wits. A breed of officers who gave these grizzled old men the self esteem and sense of izzat, of belonging to a family, of mattering, of esprit-de-corps, and in the very end, a way of life.

NDA's FIRST DAUGHTERS

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

On 30th May 2025, 17 out of 19 girl cadets who were the first to join the National Defence Academy (two were relegated and would pass out six months later) stepped on to the *antim pag* of the Quarter Deck to pass out of the NDA after successfully completing three years of gruelling training in the Academy. These 17 girls made history again when they passed out of their respective Academies (Army/Navy/Air Force) in end May 2026 as commissioned officers in the regular armed forces. These girls had scripted their names in the annals of history making their parents, Indian womankind and all of India proud of their splendid achievement.

There was a lot of buzz when the Government first decided to grant regular commission to women officers by inducting them through the NDA, thus far a male-only domain. It required a lot of preparation, revising rules and regulations, redesigning and modifying cadet accommodation for females, rewriting orders for discipline and honour code, dress regulations for the Lady Cadets and many other aspects that would affect their daily lives.

Who better than Maj Gen Sanjeev Dogra who happened to be the Deputy Commandant of NDA when the 19 girls first reported to the Academy to write about those early days.

In his view –

“They arrived not with fanfare, but with grit stitched quietly into their hearts. It was July 2022. The monsoon had just begun to sweep through Pune, soaking its ancient streets and distant hills. On a platform at Pune railway station, nineteen girls in civilian attire assembled after stepping off long-distance trains—duffle bags in hand, nerves tight, and eyes wide with the anticipation of history and life in the military.

A tall drill Ustad with a chest full of ribbons and a moustache trained by generations stood waiting. His voice, when it came, was sharp yet proud. “From this moment, you are not civilians. You represent the Indian Armed Forces. The country is watching. Walk like one, carry yourself like one.” Startled into attention, they fell in. That line would stay with them long after their boots had left Platform No. 1.

The convoy moved through a city rich in martial legacy—Shaniwar Wada and Sinhagarh ever reminding everybody of its historical past. The vehicles proceeded through the rolling expanse of Pune Camp, past Savitribai Phule Pune University, via the DRDO Necklace towards the placid waters of Khadakvasla Lake. The Tri-Shakti Gate of NDA loomed ahead. They passed through it slowly, uncertain but proud. The magnificent view of the Academy came into view, Sudan Block stood regal and eternal, as if waiting to record this new chapter in its storied walls. The mast of the Quarter Deck on the Khetarpal Parade Ground stood tall and proud, a symbol of drill and discipline, stark white against the backdrop of the magnificent Sinhagarh Fort in the distance.

They were led to R (Romeo) Squadron, part of which had been refurbished with care and attention to detail. Enhanced lighting, secure fencing, designated lady duty officers, and minor layout changes weren't signs of separation—they were signs of a thoughtful institution preparing its daughters for battle, not merely hosting them. Behind the scenes, months of preparation had taken place: security protocols were redefined, a new code of conduct evolved, and traditions, long steeped in a male-only legacy were revisited and modernised: without losing their essence. From day one, the message was clear: the Academy was not making exceptions. It was making history.

As they looked around, the scale of their leap became evident. Nineteen girls. Over 2200 male cadets. The odds were overwhelming. But so was the pride. What played in their minds? Perhaps uncertainty. Perhaps resolve. But definitely this: that nineteen of them would be course-mates for life, joined by the most powerful bond the Academy forges—camaraderie born out of tough training, shared fire, struggle, and purpose. They were course - mates, and that meant everything.

The first term hit like a monsoon storm; early mornings, drill square corrections, endless PT, obstacle courses, academic classes, and military routines so tightly packed that even blinking seemed a luxury. The Drill Instructors, or *Ustads*, roared louder than the skies. But beneath their thunder, they watched over the cadets like elder brothers—strict, disciplined, but fiercely protective. They were quick to punish, but quicker to acknowledge effort.

The Physical Training Instructors (PTIs) were quieter, more methodical. Their task: transform girls into soldiers—agile, strong, and enduring. The obstacle

course, log races, fireman lifts, and punishing endurance runs built more than muscle. They built belief and self-confidence.

And then came the academic classes—held in the imposing Sudan and Manoj Pandey Blocks. Cadets rushed in after morning drills, breathless, still catching their last sips of tea. Subjects ranged from international relations to military history, physics to geopolitics, and foundation-level knowledge of all three services. Some cadets found themselves so exhausted that the line between blinking and dozing was often just one nod—a scene familiar to every cadet ever trained at NDA.

But the girls held their own. In classrooms, on quiz fields, in lectures by decorated officers—they asked questions, gave answers, and soaked in knowledge that would serve them far beyond the classroom.

If the classrooms sharpened their minds, it was the outdoor camps that tested their soul. Living under canvas, rationing biscuits, learning cross-country navigation, reading maps in rain-soaked darkness, leading squads through unfamiliar terrain, surviving on cold meals and camaraderie—this was where officers were made. The girls didn't just survive. They led. They developed a natural camaraderie with their male course-mates, forged through shared mud, grime, bruises, and laughs. Bonds formed in the field had no gender—only trust, sweat, and the silent nod of mutual respect.

“The Divisional Officers, who oversee the training, grooming, and overall development of cadets, played a pivotal role in this journey. Beyond their instructional responsibilities, they became mentors, moral anchors, and guiding forces. By the time a cadet completes sixth term, the Divisional Officer has already shaped their mind-sets, value systems, and leadership character with subtle precision and enduring influence.

By third term, jokes flew in the ante-rooms. By fourth term, they were picking each other up after falls, literally and figuratively. By sixth term, they no longer looked like "the first batch of girl cadets." They looked and behaved like leaders.

Life at NDA has a rhythm. You don't control it; it shapes you. The soul of NDA lives in the scent of wet parade boots, ironed uniforms, and monsoon-washed earth. It lingers in the echo of commands at dawn and laughter at dusk. It's in the quiet pride, the shared fatigue, and the invisible thread of honor that binds every cadet, forever and always.

The Adjutant of NDA, ever vigilant and impeccably turned out, represents the pinnacle of drill and discipline. Mounted on his white charger during ceremonial parades, he occupies a revered place in every cadet's memory. His sharp gaze and crisp orders symbolize the exacting standards the Academy upholds and instils.

The cadets marched on the Khetarpal Parade Ground, and gathered in the ante-rooms for daily orders. They ran cross-country, acted in plays, won debates, and sang in cultural evenings. They excelled in obstacle races, led squads in drill, and became appointments in squadrons. They took the ethos of NDA—**service before self, integrity beyond reproach, leadership through action**—and made it their second skin. Today, they're fully integrated into squadrons, routines, punishments, privileges, and pride. They are part of the traditions now: not just recipients of it, but custodians.

When parents visited on midterms or designated days, they saw a transformation few could have imagined. The girl who left home was gone. In her place stood a cadet—taller, steadier, sharper in salute, firmer in values. For the parents, what began in apprehension ended in admiration. Even the sceptics among veterans now salute the transformation. The system had worked. The girls had adapted. And most importantly—NDA had grown stronger.

“Now, they prepare to leave for the next phase: IMA, INA, AFA. But this time, they won't be nineteen among thousands. They'll be officer cadets expected to lead, to excel, and to carry the NDA standard forward. They'll face tough competition—not only from female peers but also male counterparts across academies. They'll be tested in leadership, operations, technology, and ethics. And they'll have to lead in an environment shaped by Operation Sindoor, where the lines of warfare are blurred and expectations from every officer are sharper than ever.

In the future, they may command platoons, manage logistics in contested zones, pilot aircraft, direct satellite operations, or manage battlefield communication grids.

But wherever they go, the true compass will remain values—those etched into them at NDA. They will need to be courageous in thought and deed; ethical in command and conduct; humble in success, and resilient in setback.

Technologically aware, tactically sound, and emotionally grounded. And always, deeply rooted in service before self.

“On 30 May 2025, they will step onto Khetarpal Parade Ground for one final time. The Chief Guest, flanked by NDA’s top brass, will salute as the cadets march past. There will be no special mention, no gender distinction. Just a uniform stride, a common rhythm, a shared legacy.

And as they pass the Tri-Shakti Gate one last time, NDA will not be saying goodbye. It will be saying: Go lead. You are ready.

They came as nineteen girls. They leave as trailblazers. And in doing so, they didn’t just become part of NDA history. They made it.”

It is believed that one may leave the NDA but the NDA never leaves him. Being ex-NDA myself, I can vouch for it. The three years spent in the Academy were the best years of our lives. All of my course-mates still remember RSM Ayling of the Grenadier Guards yelling at us on our arrival at the Academy to forget our fathers and mothers. He promised to convert us from milkshake drinking school boys into whisky guzzling soldiers.

And the Commandant, Rear Admiral B A Samson said, the Academy would train us to be humble enough to eat with the poor and fit enough to dine with kings. To be magnanimous in victory and resilient in defeat.

I dare say they both succeeded in their promises beyond expectations. The ethos of NDA—service before self, integrity beyond reproach, leadership through action becomes the way of life for all ex-NDA officers.

TOM FOOLERY IN THE ACADEMY

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Reproduced below is an article received by me through social media. The author is anonymous but I have no reason to doubt the veracity of the events narrated.

“One Sunday morning in 1968, in our fourth term in NDA, we reported to the swimming pool in PT rig with a swimming costume and towel, to jump off the 7 mtr high diving board and swim a length to pass the minimum swimming ability test; failing of which usually led to relegation.

Jumping off the 7 mtr board was dreaded by many of my course mates. At least the ones like me who had not volunteered to join the Navy.

The swimming tests were scheduled between 0600 hours and 0800 hours, after which the pool was reserved for use by the officers and their families. The tests were conducted by the venerable, formidable Physical Training Officer (PTO), Major Darshan Singh (alias Dushman, aka Dush). On that particular day, Dush had a plaster cast on his right leg, But a dislocated ankle was not something that deterred the highly conscientious PTO from his work; The tests commenced on time, one squadron at a time in alphabetical order; Alpha Squadron leading.

Dush would blow a whistle and the cadets would troop up the ladder to the 7 mtr board. On his next whistle they would jump off the board one by one, like paratroopers without their parachute, after shouting their name and number on the top of their voice. That was the plan. But like all battle plans there were glitches. Some cadets would not jump and it took a lot of persuasion and threats to make them take the plunge. Often Dush would laboriously climb up the ladder and using his plastered foot, shove the cadets down from the 7 mtr diving board. It went on like this and it was almost 8 am by the time Echo Squadron's turn came.

Very soon the families began to gather. There was also Sunita Bakshi, the buxom daughter of a former Commandant. She was a very good looking girl, very dynamic and good natured, more or less our age.

In due course, cadets from Echo Squadron also jumped i.e. all except cadet AK who simply refused to jump.

When Dush climbed the stairs, AK would find a shortcut to come down usually by sliding down the vertical supporting structure. When Dush came down, AK would climb back to the 7 mtr board like a monkey.

“Cadet. I will punish you” Dush roared, blowing his whistle, long bursts for emphasis.

“Sir. Sir, please Sir, give me a chance I will jump I will jump on my own. The drama would be repeated all over again. It was really very hilarious to see Dush and AK doing monkey tricks on the diving ladder. After a while, Dush managed to corner AK on the 7 mtr board.

“Sir, I will jump. I promise I will jump. Can you come up-to the edge with me just to give me confidence?” AK shouted. And poor Dush took him at his word. When they reached the edge AK pretended to stumble and gave Dush a push.

Dush fell into the swimming pool from the 7 mtr board like a sack of potatoes and some of the PT ‘ustads’ had to jump in and fish him out. The Commandant had arrived by then and was quietly watching the ‘tamasha’ from a corner.

“Let me try and make him jump” said Sunita Bakshi. “Can I come up there?” she asked AK with a sweet smile. “Yes Ma’am. But don’t push me. OK?” AK called down to her. “No, No. I just want to talk to you” she said loudly, as she climbed up the stairs. For the next ten minutes Sunita cooed and hushed, put her arms around and cajoled AK, right there on the 7 mtr board, right there in public view. We cadets of Fox squadron died with jealousy.

Finally, inch by inch, Sunita managed to bring AK to the edge of the diving board. But when they reached there AK put his hands on her back side and gave her a push. Sunita too fell into the pool from the 7 mtr board. Many of us cadets wanted to jump in and save her, but the young bachelor officers beat us to it.

“Come down here” The Commandant commanded. AK came down. Hesitating at each step and stood at ramrod attention in front of the Commandant, unmoving, gaze on the horizon. The Commandant gave him a long ‘bhashan’. At the end of it “Yesssss Sssssir” AK answered in a loud parade ground voice.

He made a big show of going up to the diving board, came down half way and went up all over again. He stood for a while contemplating on the 7 mtr board. "Sir. Can I jump from the 10 mtr board instead?" He asked the Commandant.

"Well done AK! Go ahead." answered the Commandant.

AK slowly climbed up to the 10 mtr diving board. Sunita huddled on the side of the pool like a wet Otter, looking at AK with doleful eyes. We sat there in a hushed silence. All eyes were turned upwards at AK on the 10 mtr board.

Slowly AK took three steps and went to the very edge of the board. He took a few deep breaths, shook his shoulders to relax. Very slowly, in perfect slow motion, he did a hand stand at the edge of the 10 mtr board. He stood on his hands for another minute, perfectly still, head craned backwards; his toes pointing to the sky.

All of a sudden he pushed with his hands, upward and forward like an ejecting Polaris missile from a submarine, For a second or two, he stretched his hands out in an inverted crucifix position, body stiff and toes still pointing at the sky. As gravity took hold, he rolled himself into a ball, clasping his knees with both hands, somersaulting backwards once ... twice ... three times. As he approached the water, his body uncoiled, hands above his head, ram rod straight and entered the water in a perfect dive, like an Olympian diver.

Everyone held their breath waiting for AK to surface. Suddenly there was a splash at the other end of the pool; AK ejected himself out of the water like a Dolphin. There were shouts. "Cadet, come here!" Everyone was laughing and cheering. Sunita Bakshi loudest. But AK ran for his life.

AK was marched to the Commandant next morning. I believe the Commandant got up from his chair to shake AK's hand, But AK was also awarded 14 days restrictions for 'shirking'.

Afterwards AK was the runaway diving champ of NDA and there was none to beat him. He had been a diving champ even before he had joined NDA but had not told anyone about it. AK served in the Sikh Regiment with distinction. Many years later, he grew old, like the rest of us and retired. He is still fond of playing pranks; especially when his wife (Sunita?) isn't looking.

A DIFFERENT TYPE OF BROTHERHOOD

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

In response to my article titled “A Brotherhood Beyond Compare”, Air Marshal Subhash Bhojwani, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) responded by sending his article titled “A Different Type of Brotherhood”: and this is what he wrote.

I am from 26th NDA/J Sqn (Juliette was newly formed in July 61, the year I joined NDA). I understand you are looking for 'brotherhood' stories from NDA.

The story I have attached takes a somewhat different definition of brotherhood - ie the bond between a soldier and his weapon. I hope you enjoy reading it, even if you choose not to add it to your booklet. But do read the backstory first.

The prequel to the story is what happened during my final term at NDA. In 1964 in our 6th Term, as AF cadets, we were looking forward to a week at an AF Station while our army course mates sweated it out in Camp Torna. However, the powers that be decided that AF and Navy cadets would also have to attend Camp Torna. We girded our loins for a week of hard camping and exercises. The Camp was tough but we coped and all went well till the last day.

The concluding exercise of the camp was a night cross-country route march back to NDA, doing our own map reading navigation. The rig for 'Exercise *Bhaag Daur*' was full Chindit Order with rifles. As the sun set on the horizon, the squadrons were flagged off from the camp site towards NDA. It will be recalled that the terrain in that area is undulating mountains and we often had to decide whether to go climb the hills for the shorter route or go around the base. Some times when we decided to summit a ridge, we often found vertical rock walls that we could not climb and we had to descend back to take a circuitous route. So there was a fair bit of zigzag and back and forth in the actual path followed.

It wasn't a route march, it was between a trot and a gallop, as time taken to destination was to be a major consideration in the the final squadron position. We ran like the devil was on our tails, pushing and pulling those who were slowing us down - I'm sure as an infantry man you can can imagine the situation. It was a relief when by dawn we crossed the Long Range Hill and we got a glimpse of NDA. As we arrived at the designated termination point near the Bombay Stadium, to much back thumping and applause by the Academy

staff, along with gallons of water and cold coffee, we all fell to the ground due to exhaustion. But the prime feeling was one of satisfaction at having completed the tortuous exercise with all hands accounted for.

BUT the feeling didn't last long when we realised that the .303 rifle of one of the cadets had its firing bolt missing!! We had been warned of the proclivity of the bolt to get loose and fall out, so we had followed the advice of our '*saab*' to tie down each rifle bolt with a length of '*chindi*', the flannel used for rifle cleaning; but in this case clearly this method had not worked. To put it mildly, the missing bolt caused quite a stir amongst the NDA staff and officers. The loss of a bolt was seen as seriously as a loss of a weapon.

Even as the other squadrons were cleared to deposit their rifles and return to their rooms for a well earned rest, J Sqn was told to wait the orders were issued : J Sqn was to proceed to the Cadets Mess for a hurried breakfast followed by a back-track on the route taken in order to locate and bring back the missing bolt - the final words were : If you can't find the bolt, don't come back!! Certainly not what we had looked forward to during the gruelling route march. But orders are orders and we unhappily set off on Exercise Bolt Search, the only concession was that we didn't have to go in Chindit order, but bare dungarees.

We wondered how we were ever going to find a 8-inch long piece of dark metal in the 15 odd km we had transversed the previous night. To cut a long story short, after only about 2 hours of trying to retrace our exact route, we did find the bolt. What attracted our attention to it was the long piece of white '*chindi*' which was still attached to the bolt. We happily and triumphantly returned to NDA with our prized possession, even though we knew that for 'Ex Bhag Daur' Juliette would be placed at the bottom of the list.

The big lesson learnt was that a fighting man is to never lose his weapon. This thought injected itself into my very core, more deeply into my sub-conscious than I could have imagined.

With this NDA lesson on 'brotherhood with my weapon' background, please read the story attached and try to locate a common thread.

21 SECONDS - FLAME OUT AT LOW LEVEL

THUD...Bang...Bang....BANG, it sounded like the much dreaded ENGINE SURGE we had been told about during training and countless discussions in the

squadron. The phenomenon was rare, but happened under certain circumstances. Along with the loud noises, the engine appeared to oscillate very rapidly from full thrust to zero thrust and back again; I was alternately thrown forward against the straps and then pushed against the seat in quick succession. Then, as suddenly as the banging had started, things seemed to quieten down – but the winding down note was unmistakable as the engine flamed out and the aircraft started decelerating. Along with the sickening change in the engine note there was a corresponding counter-clockwise motion of all engine gauges and the warning panels in the cockpit started lighting up like it was Christmas. In next to no time, the cockpit became silent; it was quite unlike anything I had experienced in my short flying career. We had been taught what to do in the event of an engine failure, but it was always at a safe height. But in this case I was at low level, barely 100 meters above the plains of Punjab. Nevertheless, basic training made the next few responses automatic. I instinctively pulled the nose upwards, but not too steeply, to get away from mother earth and noted that the air speed, which was about 850kmph at the time of the flame out, was already bleeding off below 700. I reached out and tried flicking ON the relight switch to attempt a ‘hot relight’ and gave a terse call, “Leopard-1, I’ve had a flame out!”.

“Bhoji, with you.” The calm deep voice belonged to the squadron CO, Wg Cdr Upkar Singh. The radio call reassured me, but at no stage was I under any illusion : It remained entirely my responsibility to try to control the situation and to bring the stricken single-seat MiG21 back in one piece.

But since the relight switch had not yet been thrown into the ON position the engine remained quite dead. From low level the aircraft had gone up to about 500m above ground, with the speed having washed off to about 500kmph. I was mentally aware that Adampur was about 1 o’clock just a few km away, though it wasn’t visible due to the dust haze; I willed myself to push the control column forward and shove the nose down to prevent the speed decaying below the recommended glide speed of 450 kmph.

Time seemed to slow down, the entire day and parts of my recent life flashed on a virtual HUD like a time-lapse video. It was a typical summer day on 7th Jul 71, and had started quite unexceptionally. Our HQ had been expecting war to break out any minute and there had been the usual ‘blackout’ the previous night, but thank God there had been none of the frequent ‘general recalls’ that forced one to leave a comfortable bed, throw on a pair of flying overalls and report to the squadron in quick order. In the months leading up to Dec 71

these had become quite commonplace in Adampur, also known as Randhir's Air Force' (so named after the no-nonsense AOC). In the morning there had been the usual Met, ATC and Signals Briefing, followed by an aircraft recognition and 'emergency' session, nothing out of the ordinary there either. But for me it was a special day; I was going up for the final 4-aircraft Lead Check. The CO had decided to assess me personally and was the sub-section leader, the No 2 & 4 were Vijay Sethi and Steve Lall respectively. The mission was a Low Level Nav followed by a right-hand pull up mock attack over Adampur, with a high speed low level getaway, and finally re-muster as a formation before rejoining circuit. Obtaining a 4-aircraft lead 'ticket' was to be the culmination of almost 3 years of work up on MiG21s and it was the final step in being near the top of the squadron operational ladder.

Start up, taxi, take off from Runway 31 and navigation had been near copybook, the amount of low flying we had done in the area around Adampur ensured that we knew practically every bend in every roads and canals that crisscrossed Punjab. The first 25 minutes of the sortie were the navigation part and had gone off without hitch; the turning points had been reached on time, we spotted the 'bouncer' and took initial tactical action twice, yet I had managed to hold the formation together and made the last navigation point Nawashahar, the selected Initial Point, within the required tolerance of ± 10 Seconds.

As we left the IP, headed for the all-important pull up point, I gave a call "Leopard, switches", which indicated to the rest of the formation to set their weapon switches to 'live' and adopt the attack formation. I simultaneously opened throttle to 98% as briefed prior to take off and in unison the formation accelerated to 850 kmph. I now concentrated on the most crucial and final part of the mission. This involved picking up the 'target' airfield through the haze layer, ensuring the necessary offset for a right hand Pull Up Attack, looking out for 'enemy' CAP aircraft and continuing to make adjustment to ensure TOT remained within the same 10 second tolerance. With my entire focus on these myriad tasks I missed seeing my feathered nemesis dead ahead.

Judging by the damage it caused to MiG21, as seen after landing, it was a monster of a vulture. The air intake lip, normally perfectly circular, had been flattened and folded rearwards in the lower half below the nose cone, and parts of the huge bird's wings spread out in front of the first stage of the engine compressor starving it of air.

My CO's voice brought me back to the present. "Bhoji, did you get a relight?". "The relight switch isn't coming on", I said as calmly as possible. I realized that the wire used for locking the toggle switch was too strong to be broken with ordinary force! "Keep trying." Said the Boss. Two, maybe three more efforts to break the locking wire – success!! "Relight switch on but no relight", I transmitted.

Even as I looked helplessly at the RPM hovering at about 18% and JPT gauge readings to the extreme left, in my peripheral vision I saw No 2 overtaking me on my right. An irrelevant thought came to my mind : I must remember to debrief No 2 on poor position keeping!

Mentally back again in the cockpit I realized that soon I may have to eject. I put away the map on the instrument coaming and gave one more quick glance around the cockpit, much like a hotel guest might give a once-over to his comfortable room to check if anything has been inadvertently left behind. The look-around couldn't have taken more than a fraction of a second, but it was enough to trigger the thought that the throttle was still way forward, at about 95% position. I figured that since the RPM had decayed to wind-milling, it was no longer a 'hot' relight and I ought to bring the throttle to idle.

The effect of bringing the throttle rearwards was magical, to say the least. As the throttle came to the idle the RPM and JPT needles started moving in the right direction and I could hear the engine note rising. I started breathing again.

"I HAVE A RELIGHT!" I almost shouted on RT. "Start easing up, Bhoji", my CO advised.

I waited till the RPM had stabilized for a second before gingerly moving the throttle forward. I remembered DS Brar's case 3 years earlier, where during a high altitude sortie he suffered a flame-out and managed to obtain a relight, only to flame out again because he tried to open throttle before the engine had attained idling RPM for that altitude and speed. He finally gave up and did a perfect dead stick landing, thanks to the regular force landings we practiced in those days. Incidentally, I understand that that was the world's first ever recorded successful forced landing carried out by a Mach 2 fighter.

With this at the back of my mind I held my patience and advanced the throttle ever so carefully. While under training at Hakimpet we were taught to be extremely careful with the Goblin engine of the Vampire which was prone to rich cut if mishandled. That day I treated the MiG21's R-11 turbojet with equal care. In my peripheral vision I could see the runway looming up 1 O'clock, just 1-2 km away, and the ground getting uncomfortably close. I nursed the nose

up a bit but fought the urge to slam open throttle, and once again straightened my spine in case I had to eject. It hadn't dawned on me that by now the aircraft was well below the ejection minima for the Type-77, which was 110m above ground in level flight. But I was aware that the situation was not totally hopeless as the engine was responding positively and gradually I was able to bring the nose to achieve near level flight. I was obviously VERY low as the ground was rushing by at a hectic pace!

An angel was definitely watching over my shoulder that day. Soon, the engine had revved up to 93% and the descent had bottomed out, almost scraping the tall sugarcane growth below. The CO later told me I had gone down to less than 10m above ground!

The engine was making strange sounds and vibrating terribly; the whole airframe appeared to be shaking to pieces. The stench of burning flesh in the cockpit was almost unbearable. But the engine was giving what I needed the most at that moment : Life saving THRUST. I left the relight switch on just in case.

The aircraft slowly gained height, initially 100m, then another. I reached circuit altitude of 500m but kept climbing in case the damaged engine quit on me again. By now I was south of the runway, ideally positioned for right hand circuit for the downwind runway. My good friend Kailasam was the DATCO, a truly professional controller. He had silently monitored all the RT transmissions and made visual contact with my aircraft. Anticipating my next move he had already switched the arrester barrier positions so Runway 13 was available to me and alerted the crash rescue facilities.

He came up on RT, "Leopard 1, Runway 13 on your right, cleared for priority landing." Turning towards the runway I reduced engine RPM gently to about 75% and carried out a descending circuit, lowering the landing gear and flaps only as I rolled out on finals, keeping about 20kmph higher speeds all the way down as a safety margin. Not knowing what else had been damaged by the bird hit and the subsequent severe vibrations, I decided to use the chute after touch down.

Things worked out fine and the landing was uneventful. Surprisingly, the hydraulics, pneumatics and all other systems operated quite normally. With the kind of beating the aircraft had taken in the previous few minutes, I somehow expected more problems. I paid a silent tribute to Mr Mikoyan and Mr Gurevich for the sturdy design of the MiG-21, a truly remarkable fighter plane.

On the assumption that the damage could have ruptured fuel pipelines and more thus rendering the fighter a time bomb, I chose not to taxi back but to park the aircraft at the end of the runway. As I switched off and waited for the Fire Trucks to arrive and rescue Jeep to place the ladder in position, my legs started trembling. Apparently the adrenalin induced tension of the previous 3 minutes had started to release. The duty doctor insisted I accompany him for immediate medical attention, but by the time we reached the MI Room I had calmed down and was back to normal.

From the ATC tape recording the Court of Inquiry found that the time elapsed from the first call of “Flame out” to “Relight” was just 21 seconds. I couldn’t believe it – to me it had taken an eternity for the engine to respond. How could so many things happen in just 21 seconds? That’s when I learnt about the phenomenon of ‘Temporal Disorientation’ in which time seems to slow down. Incidentally, the locking wire used on the relight switch was found to be a gauge too coarse and the investigators expressed surprise that I had managed to break it – an adrenalin rush obviously gives extra wallop to the muscles!

Oh yes, I almost forgot to mention : The CO not only cleared me for 4-ship lead but also recommended the award of a Vayu Sena Medal for recovering the crippled aircraft from a very difficult situation. The latter did not fructify, but I was happy to not to have to prepare for another 4-ship lead check!!

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*POST SCRIPT : On the rare occasion that I relate this tale (most recently to cadets of 4th to 6th Term at the NDA) I’m asked why I stuck on to the stricken jet even though it adversely affected my chances of survival. I have never been able to give a satisfactory response. It was, indeed, a touch and go situation. **Perhaps my experience of Camp Torna helped me choose to trust my steed and do all I could to save my well-bonded weapon; save it for a war that was round the corner.***

DARBARA SINGH SAAB

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Lt Col Noel Ellis writes about Subedar Major (Honorary Captain) Darbara Singh who served as Subedar Major (Drill) in NDA. Subedar Major (Drill) is a legendary figure and this is Darbara Singh's story.

As I scrolled WhatsApp today, the first picture was of Subedar Major Darbara Singh of the SIKH Regiment. I address him so because we saw him as Sub Maj in NDA. He later rose to be an Honorary Captain, which he well deserved. We fondly called him, 'Darbara.'

If anyone could dwarf a drill instructor, it was this man. I am not sure how many inches above six feet he was but one thing was sure that no other Drill Ustad could match that personality. He would stand at the 'Quarter Deck' and keep an eye on every squad practicing across the length and breadth of the drill square.

Instead of calling a Cadet 'Dheela,' it would be the instructor who feared to be called 'dheela man.' If Darbara was near any squad, drill instructors got into a tizzy. Rather grilling and drilling cadets, instructors used to shout at twice the decibel levels and stamp their feet fifty times harder than they normally used to do. That was what Darbara.

Adjutants came and went but Darbara stood there forever. Imagine a close to seven-foot Drill Ustad from Sikh Regiment giving the parade report to five foot something Gorkha Rifles Adjt.

One day we were practicing 'Shastra Kawaid.' (Drill with rifles). There was one favourite cadet of 'Subedar Ranganathan.' Let us call him Cadet GP. Madrasi and a Malyali combination was worse than a Sikh and a Madrasi.

We were practicing the 'slow march' where the weapon is carried millimetres above the ground. GP somehow balanced the rifle in the gravel and left the weapon as we marched in 'Dheere Chaal' towards the Quarter deck. Ranga did not notice it but Darbar saw the SNAFU and shouted at top of his voice, 'Rangaaaanaaaaathaaaaan.' Ranga did not know what hit him. His life was made

hell by Darbara thereafter. Ranga used to request us to do that much, so that SM Saab does not notice.

As usual, yours truly was caught by drill Ustads for something or the other. At 1.30pm after classes we would fall in near Darbara Saabs office in Sudan block. I had been shifted to the third battalion and was pedalling up the steep slope towards the hut of remembrance. You could not ride a bike unless you were in a squad but what the heck. My bad luck, as my favourite Drill Ustad took my I-Slip and told me 1.30. I would miss my veg pulao for lunch today, I thought to myself.

As a veteran of 'punishments' I knew where to report. I was all alone somehow. Darbara appeared from somewhere and saw that Drill Ustad and me. Having been marched up to Deputy Commandant and Commandant, in his presence, he recognised me and smiled. Ye Cadet, kee keeta hun? With 'dopish eyes' I remained mum. Without even asking my fault he told me to 'FO' and tore that slip. It was my lucky day. The Ustad who caught me, did not have the guts to utter a word. Off I went, all alone, riding my bi-cycle and ate all the leftover veg-pulao.

Just before the final POP (passing out parade) of any term, Darbara would address close to 1500 cadets bundled together inside the Quarter Master's Fort. 300 waiting to cross the 'antim pag' and the rest did not care as DLTGH and catching the NDA special train would now be one or two.

With adrenal running at double the speed in every artery and vein and every nerve sending twice the signals that final POP is the time to dig up the drill square, Darbara would walk in and stand on the steps. 'Oye saalo discipline main raho, Darbara a gaya hai,' we would chatter. He would raise his cane once. That is what was called 'pin drop silence squared.'

In the softest of tones, he would deliver his josh talk. We would strain our ears to hear each word and mind you we could hear them so clearly. 'Ye cadet, aaj meri izzat ka sawal hai. Meri izzat rakhoge, he used to say? The QMs fort walls could fall when we all shouted in unison 'Bilkul saab.' Even girls at Deccan Gymkhana could feel the reverberations.

He would then quietly walk out and we would just look at him in awe. That was the reverence we had for him. We never got a chance but each cadet who learnt drill under his stewardship would touch his feet and swear by him.

We had the Queen of England visit us and he was responsible for the Parade we presented to her. People fainted and fell flat on their faces but not a cadet moved. The synchronisation was so perfect that the Queen complimented and remarked about the synergy displayed by the cadets during the parade at the Queen's lunch. SM Darbara received a 'Vashist Seva Medal' for that event.

This is how I remember Hony Capt Darbar, VSM. The impression he has left on me will ever remain etched deep inside me. Drill Ustad to bahut dekhe par darbara jaisa koi na dekha.

Rest in Peace sir, May Waheguru bless your soul always. My head has grown heavy and my sight grows dim as tears are swelling up remembering you so fondly. A Salute to you for making boys into men.

JAI HIND DARBARA SAAB.

Can such legends ever be replaced? I wonder!!

ROYALTY REDUX IN NDA

Maj Gen Raj Mehta (Retd)
(Now Lt. Gen. Retd)

A cavalry veteran, I respect change but get distraught when, at times, our armed forces violate their understated fail-safe ‘hastening slowly’ rule in invoking radical change. The need to break free from our colonial past is incontestable but how much is irrelevant needs a sense-and-sensibility-driven approach. ‘Hastening slowly’ can be re-positioned from being a smart oxymoron to a status wherein our haste to dump the past doesn’t return to haunt us.

These conflicting thoughts were temporarily overwritten in my mind by the superbly choreographed spectacle of Queen Elizabeth’s earthly journey ending as her coffin was carried to St George’s Chapel for burial by her scarlet-uniformed Grenadier Guards, escorted by her resplendent, mounted Household Cavalry.

Draped in her Royal Standard, her coffin shorn of its symbols of royalty and power — her bejewelled orb, sceptre and Koh-i-noor-embellished crown — a poignant, haunting, traditional lament, ‘Sleep, dearie, sleep’ was played out by Paul Burns, her Scottish Royal Bagpiper. As the lament faded away, the lone piper symbolically walked out of the chapel... Elizabeth’s story had ended.

My mind did a royalty redux as I recalled the shock and awe when I, a Short Service Commission (SSC) officer, was posted to the National Defence Academy (NDA). It had received orders to accept SSC officers but rigorous ‘performance appraisal’ of those posted was imperative; an unprecedented change inviting mutual apprehension. In the hard work that followed, I saw the first of three chances to clear the prestigious, tough-as-nails Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) examination disappear: I was on ‘probation’, I was told. When the second chance came, it was announced that Queen Elizabeth II was visiting the NDA for the 65th Course Passing Out Parade.

The Commandant, Rear Admiral Ravi Sawhney from NDA’s first batch — a handsome, florid man in knife-edged ceremonials, sword, aiguillette and medals — made it clear in the Queen’s English that the parade would be memorable not just for the visiting royalty but also in making a statement with

a performance of 'NDA', not 'Sandhurst', standards by proud cadets of a resurgent India. I didn't bellyache. Officers don't.

That pleasant winter day of November 21, 1983, the Queen's gracious words of praise and endearment for the meticulously-choreographed parade and linked ceremonial/social events made us walk tall. 'They've set world standards'; so the Queen implied, as did proud Air Chief Dilbagh Singh who'd reviewed the parade. The bursting-with-pride cadets marched out on Scot poet Robert Burns' poesy/music of Auld Lang Syne....

I followed their lead, clearing the DSSC exam on the last chance.

The Queen has departed. Auld Lang Syne has departed, as has 'Abide with me'. Our colonial past, however, needs time before deciding what's worth trashing or retaining. Hasten slowly.

OPERATION MAHADEV

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

This exciting article chronicles the neutralization of the three Pulwama terrorists. Reproduced as originally received from Lt Gen Gautam Moorthy, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd).

14 Days, 1 Mission, Mahadev Peak: How the Pahalgam Mastermind Was Hunted Down

DAY 1 – Shadows over Mahadev

The silent forests beneath Mahadev Peak, towering over the scenic Dachigam valley, hid a dark secret. After the blood-soaked tragedy in Pahalgam, India's elite counter-terrorism units vowed retaliation — not in haste but with precision. Deep in the wild, at 12,000 feet above sea level, surveillance teams intercepted encrypted Chinese military-grade communication signals — cold, coded, and deadly. The chatter was unmistakable: “WY-SMS”, the infamous communication protocol once used by Lashkar-e-Taiba in 2016, was back. Its origin? Somewhere in the icy wilderness of Mulnar, Harwan, at the base of Mahadev. The hunt had just begun.

DAY 3 – Phantom in the Trees

The intelligence was staggering — the mastermind of the Pahalgam attack was hiding here: Suleiman Shah, alias Hashim Musa, a ghost with a blood-soaked legacy. A former commando of Pakistan Army's Special Services Group (SSG), Shah had vanished into Lashkar's shadowy world years ago. Hardened in jungle warfare, survival, and insurgency tactics, he had become a myth until now. Using satellite imagery, ground reconnaissance, and direction-finding radars, the Indian Army and intelligence agencies triangulated the source of the encrypted signals. The needle pointed toward a camouflaged cluster of hideouts deep in the Mulnar jungles — possibly an operational base.

DAY 5 – The Steel Web Tightens

The Army's elite 4 Para (Special Forces) were inserted into the periphery — silent, unseen, and in pairs. Meanwhile, technical intelligence confirmed multiple foreign fighters were in the area. The jungle was rigged — escape tunnels, booby traps, motion sensors. The teams would need patience and planning. The snow-fed streams nearby ran cold and fast — masking every footfall. The op was codenamed: Operation Mahadev — not only after the sacred peak, but also the divine destroyer in Indian mythology. Destruction of evil was imminent.

DAY 9 – A Clue in the Static

At 0400 hours, the SIGINT team intercepted a short-range encrypted message: "Move before full moon." The implication was chilling: the terrorists were preparing for a high-profile attack, possibly on a civilian target in Srinagar during the Amarnath Yatra. The operation could no longer wait. The next 48 hours would be a race against time.

DAY 11 – Final Lock-On

Using drone surveillance with infrared vision, a brief movement was detected near an abandoned shepherd hut — a brief glint of metal in the undergrowth. It was confirmed: Shah, Afghan and Gibran all Category A++ targets, armed with carbines, AK-47s, and grenade launchers. The Army sealed off the escape routes. Infiltration teams were silently positioned along the ridges. The entire forest was now a pressure cooker, and the lid was about to blow.

DAY 13 – The Reckoning Begins

The One-Minute War That Lasted a Hundred Hours. It began not with a gunshot, but a whisper in the wind. Somewhere high in the undulating terrain between the Mahadev and Zabarvan ridges, deep behind the shadows of Dachigam National Park, came intel—scant, raw, but credible. A trio of heavily armed terrorists had slipped through the LoC and were believed to be regrouping in the thick alpine forests. Their mission was unknown. Their

movements, erratic. But one thing was clear: they couldn't be allowed to vanish into the mist.

Enter the 4 PARA (SF).

Twelve men. One Major. No air support. No second chances.

For over four days, these elite commandos became shadows in the forest—sleepless, silent, and calculating. The terrain was merciless. Temperatures dropped below zero at night, and the sun offered no kindness during the day. But not once did they complain or retreat. Their quarry? Three battle-hardened, Pakistan-trained infiltrators believed to be linked with Lashkar-e-Taiba. Heavily armed. Ruthless. Trained to kill and disappear. The search was a tactical ballet—slow, deliberate, and dangerously close to exposure. But the team held its nerve. Every rustle was noted. Every disturbed twig was logged. Still, the enemy eluded them. Until Day Four.

The Revelation: Micro Drones, Macro Impact

Just before dawn on the 100th hour, a nano drone the size of a palm lifted off silently from behind a boulder. Guided via thermal imaging and AI-assisted threat recognition, it skimmed past thick pine canopies and hovered near a makeshift camouflaged camp.

There they were. Sleeping. Clumped together like deadweight. Three terrorists. AK-47s next to them. One grenade belt. Two radio handsets. All weapons accounted for. None on alert. That one aerial snapshot changed the game. The drone sent encrypted live feed back to the command tablet in the hands of the Major leading the mission—a 29-year-old veteran of three earlier cross-border operations. His eyes scanned the visuals, and he whispered just two words into his throat mic:

"Initiate contact."

The 4 Para team moved in like wraiths. Distance to target: 40 meters. Elevation: downhill gradient—perfect for a ballistic advantage. Night vision on. Safeties off.

At 03:46 AM, a single suppressed round cracked the silence. First terrorist down. Two startled shapes stirred. Another double-tap. Second down. Before the third could even reach for his weapon, the Major himself squeezed the trigger. The shot struck centre-mass. Third down.

Total time: 58 seconds. Rounds fired: Six. Enemy retaliation: Zero.

Not a single soldier was injured. Not a single noise that could give away their position to any potential backup squads. It wasn't a firefight. It was a clinical termination.

Aftermath

Weapons, radios, and recovered mobile phones revealed chats with handlers in Muzaffarabad and GPS coordinates linked to infiltration routes. The entire operation, though bloodless on the Indian side, thwarted a planned attack likely targeting Amarnath Yatra pilgrims. As dawn broke, the soldiers melted away into the forest, leaving behind no trace—except the still bodies of those who thought they could outwit India's elite. Operation Mahadev wasn't just a manhunt. It was a testament to India's growing technological and tactical edge in high-altitude counter-insurgency. A story of patience, precision, and deadly silence.

The post-op sweep recovered:

3 AK-47s, 17 rifle grenades, Chinese-origin encrypted radios, Night vision scopes, High-calorie Pakistani combat rations, Map with planned routes into civilian zones, It was no ordinary cell — this was a mobile command unit, a snake's head severed. Every item recovered had screamed “ I am from Pakistan “

Back in Pahalgam, tears turned into a quiet prayer. Justice had been delivered. Not with fanfare, but with the cold precision of a nation's resolve. Operation Mahadev was more than just a tactical success. It was a message — that no matter how well-trained, how deep they hide, India's enemies will be found, cornered, and neutralised. From the cruel silence of Pahalgam to the roaring mountains of Mahadev, this was a reckoning long in the making. And it had just begun.

The mountains and the Mahadev peak, for once, echoed not with gunfire but with the quiet pride of victory.

THE SWORD OF THE SAMURAI

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

In an article titled 'A Hill Called Melrose', Dr. Yeshwant Thorat, son of Late Lt Gen SPP Thorat, KC, DSO, recounts a fantastic meeting that defied all statistical odds. Dr Thorat was travelling by train in the autumn of 1980 from Berne to Geneva to give a talk at the University, when he met a Japanese UN official travelling with him in his compartment. After some small talk they discovered that both their fathers had participated in the same battle, the battle of Melrose Hill in the Arakan Hills of Burma during World War II.

At that time in 1943, Lt Col SPP Thorat was commanding a battalion of the Punjab Regiment. Lt Col Thorat's Battalion was a part of the All India Brigade having two other battalions. The Baluchis commanded by Lt Col L P Sen and The Hyderabadis commanded by Lt Col K S Thimayya.

After a conference at the Headquarters of the All India Brigade, Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Commander of the South East Asia Command, said to the Brigade Commander, Brigadier Hutton "All right Reggie, let your All-Indian Brigade do it. But, by God, it is going to be tough." Then turning to the three of them he summarised, "Gentlemen, The Japanese are pulling out of Upper Burma. You have been selected to intercept their withdrawal. You will concentrate at Akyab, proceed to Myebon by sea, capture Kangaw, penetrate Japanese-held territory and convert the Japanese retreat into a rout."

The withdrawal route of the Japanese was dominated by Hill Feature 170 – Melrose. It was firmly held by the Japanese and gave them the enormous advantage of having the commanding heights. Worse, intelligence reported that they had two brigades. The Indians had one. Brigadier Hutton realised that if the withdrawal had to be cut, the hills would have to be captured irrespective of the numerical disadvantage. He took the call.

The first attack by the Hyderabadis under Thimayya mauled the enemy severely but did not achieve the objective. The second by the Baluchis under Sen also failed to dislodge the enemy from Melrose. It was then that Brigadier Hutton asked the Punjabis to make the final effort. Artillery and air support was coordinated. The zero hour for the attack was set at 0700 hours on 29 January 1944. At dawn as the leading companies moved forward, the Japanese opened

up machine gun fire. The artillery provided cover and laid on a smoke screen. The Punjabis began to climb the hill. Safe from amongst well dug bunkers the Japanese opened fire on them. The Indian casualties mounted as the men began to drop. The air cover failed to materialise – bad weather and bad luck. Taking a calculated risk, the Punjabis pushed on. They were hardly a hundred yards from the top when the Japanese threw everything they had at them. In the face of such unrestrained fierceness, the advance faltered hovering uncertainly on the edge of stopping. For the commander it was a moment of truth – to fight or flee? As he saw his men being mowed down a rage erupted within him. Throwing caution to the winds Lt Col Thorat charged forward inspiring the men to follow him. The scales tipped. The troops rallied and charged into the Japanese with obscenities, primeval war cries and fixed bayonets. A fierce hand to hand combat ensued. The Japanese counter attacked repeatedly but the Indians held firm. Then the last bullet was fired and there was silence.

Many years later Mountbatten would describe what took place as “The bloodiest battle of the Arakan” and correctly so. The price of the battle was two thousand Japanese and eight hundred Indians dead in the course of a single encounter. Fifty officers and men would win awards for gallantry. Lt Col Thorat would be decorated with a DSO for unflinching devotion to duty and personal bravery. But all that was in the future.

At that particular moment on the field of battle, Lt Col Thorat was looking at the Japanese soldiers who had been taken prisoners of war. On seeing the Indian Colonel, the Japanese commander called his men to attention, stepped forward, unbuckled his sword, held it in both hands and bowed. The Indian was surprised to see that his face was streaked with tears. He understood the pain of defeat but why the tears? After all, this was war. One or the other side had to lose. How could the Japanese explain to the Indian that the tears were not of grief but of shame? How could he make him understand what it meant to be a Samurai? Given a choice he himself would have preferred the nobler course of Hara Kiri than surrender. But fate had willed otherwise. The ancestral sword in his hands had been carried with pride by his forefathers. Now he was shaming them by handing it over.

All this was unknown to the Indian commander. He came from a different culture and had no knowledge of what was going on in the mind of his adversary. Yet there was something in the manner and bearing of the officer in front of him that touched him deeply. He found himself moved. Without being

told he somehow intuited that the moment on hand was not merely solemn but personal and deeply sacred. He accepted the sword and then inexplicably, impelled by an emotion which perhaps only a soldier can feel for a worthy opponent, bent forward and said clearly and loudly in the hearing of all "Colonel, I accept the surrender but I receive your sword not as a token of defeat but as a gift from one soldier to another". The Japanese least expecting this response looked up startled. Coming as it did from the heart, it had touched his men and redeemed their – and his honour. The Punjabis applauded in appreciation.

Far away in the jungles below, Brigadier Reggie Hutton looked up at the success signal, three red Very lights in the sky, and smiled. His faith in his commanders had been vindicated.

When the Japanese gentleman on the train learned that the commander of the Punjab battalion on Melrose Hill was Dr. Yeshwant's father, he broke down. After a while he looked up with eyes full of tears and holding both of Dr. Thorat's hands said in a voice choked with emotion "It was my father who gave battle to yours at Melrose. It was he who surrendered. Had your father not understood the depth of his feelings, he would have come back and died of shame. But in accepting our ancestral sword in the manner in which he did, he restored the honour of my family to my father and me. That makes us brothers you and I."

The train pulled into Geneva station. They got down. The Japanese gentleman bowed. "Goodbye" said Dr. Thorat. "Keep in touch. Incidentally would you like me to restore your sword back to your family?" The Japanese smiled, looked at him and said "Certainly not. The sword already rests in the house of a Samurai."

HOOFBEATS AT HAIFA

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

During the regime of Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, Maharajah of Mysore in the early twentieth century, Mysore had managed to retain a fairly large Special Cavalry Force in its army. There were 29 cavalry officers, 444 soldiers and 526 fine breed of Arab horses. With the advent of canons and machine guns, most of the rulers in Indian provinces had disbanded the cavalry except for the Nizam of Hyderabad and a few Rajput kings in Rajasthan.

By 1914 dark clouds of First World War were spreading all over Europe and African regions. The Britishers were gathering all available war resources in India and transporting them to potential war zones.

The cavalry then was fading into being just a ceremonial force. The Britishers wanted to station some loyal forces in the African War Theatre, particularly Egypt, for safeguarding the Suez Canal. The canal was a major strategic sea link for the Allied Forces. They thought the cavalry would be admirable for the task. The mobility it would provide along the length and breadth of the canal was considered vital.

A strategy was thus formed. Along with the Special Cavalry of Mysore, they also added the cavalry of Hyderabad and of Jodhpur to form the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade. Major Dalpat Singh Shekhawat was nominated the Commander of the Cavalry Brigade. All the horses and men were shipped to Egypt by 33 ships in 1915. For almost three years these cavalry forces did a commendable job defending the important Suez Canal.

Haifa port in West Asia was a strategically important port not only for sea trade; it was also a major entry point to Asia from the West. The Ottoman rulers realised the importance of this port and had captured it and held it under their control for about 400 years. They completely blocked the trade route to India, which was a major trade centre.

The Turks, Germans and Austro-Hungarian Forces controlled the fortification at Haifa. As the First World War broke out, everyone wanted access to this port. Especially the British. But the Turks and the Germans had amassed their forces on all the vantage points. Canons and machine guns were positioned to cover

all possible entry points to the port. It was impossible to sneak in individually, let alone a troop of cavalry trying to move in unnoticed.

Major Shekhawat and his cavalry were now moved to a place near Haifa to develop a strategy to somehow dislodge the Germans and the Turks. Major Shekhawat studied the terrain around, discussed the matter with his fellow Lancers and collectively they decided on a plan. When British Generals were briefed about the plan, they said it's ridiculous! Horse mounted soldiers against machine guns? Will it ever work? Everyone expressed doubts except the Lancers. They were supremely confident.

Mount Carmel is a hillock which is sparsely guarded. It was considered strategically not important, for it was neither overlooking the port nor was it guarding any approach roads to the city. For the Lancers it proved to be a suitable launch pad. The previous night, the horses were moved to the base of the hillock. Each soldier was issued either a sword or a lance. Next day with their backs to the rising sun the horses in two columns slowly started climbing up the hillock. It was a blind climb. Anyone could detect their movement. Major Dalpat was the first to reach the hilltop. The morning dawn barely provided enough light to locate the gun positions and the soldiers. Guessing their positions by the trodden paths, he decided to use these trail markings. Quietly he ordered the cavalry to follow him. Very slowly, the horses started to walk; the walk became a trot; the trot became a canter and finally the canter became a gallop. By now everything was clearly visible. The cavalry struck the sleepy Germans and Turks at lightning speed, taking them completely by surprise.

"Har .. Har .. Mahadev" The war cry rent the morning air in Haifa. Several of the thunderstruck enemy soldiers left their gun posts and fled. In the hand to hand fighting that ensued, 44 Indian soldiers including Major Dalpat Singh Shekhawat lost their lives.

The British Generals had watched the whole cavalry charge in disbelief. But Haifa was won and a crucial route was opened for the Allies.

Haifa is now a major port city of Israel. As a mark of their deep gratitude to the martyred soldiers including Major Shekhawat, the daring attack by the Indian Lancers is taught to the children of Israel in their schools.

On the last day of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel in July 2017, he visited the Haifa Indian Cemetery. He also unveiled a commemorative plaque in honour of Major Dalpat Singh Shekhawat, MC, Hero of Haifa.

A memorial on Teen Murti Marg in New Delhi perpetuates the memory of the gallant cavalry action at Haifa. It consists of three life-sized bronze statues of three lancers – one each of the Mysore, Jodhpur and Hyderabad Lancers placed around a central three-sided pillar.

When Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu visited Delhi in January 2018, he along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tribute to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives at Haifa and the Teen Murti Chowk was renamed as the Teen Murti Haifa Chowk.

23 September 2018 marked the centenary celebration of the victory at Haifa.

A COMMAND DECISION

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

All over the world, be it the Army, Navy or Air Force, officers in command at times have to face situations where they have to take a hard decision; a decision which may prove detrimental to his career; a decision where he was damned if he did and damned if he didn't. It takes great moral courage to take that decision because what may seem right to the officer in command at that moment may not appear so to higher authorities who review the facts after the crisis.

This is one such story worth sharing. I received it from Cmde Chaitanya Shiroor, IN (Retd) though the original author is unknown. The story is reproduced as received.

On the morning of April 29th, 1975, Major Buang-Ly knew his country only had hours to live. The South Vietnamese Air Force officer was stationed on Con Son Island, a small outpost, fifty miles off the Southern coast. The island served primarily as a prison camp, but it also had a small airfield – and on that airfield sat a two-seater Cessna 0-1 Bird Dog, a light observation plane built for reconnaissance: not escape.

Buang-Ly looked at his wife. He looked at his five children, the youngest fourteen months old, the oldest just six. North Vietnamese forces were closing in. The prison guards were abandoning their posts. If they stayed there would be no mercy for a military officer and his family. He made his decision.

The Bird Dog was designed to carry a pilot and one observer. Buang-Ly helped his wife and all five children squeeze into the back seat and the small storage Area behind it. He hot-wired the engine. As the tiny plane lifted off and banked towards the open sea, enemy ground fire zipped past them. He had no radio and he had no destination. He had only the hope that somewhere out there, the American fleet was still operating.

For thirty minutes, Buang-Ly flew East over the South China Sea. Then he spotted them; dozens of helicopters, all flying in the same direction. He followed. The helicopters led him to the USS Midway.

The aircraft carrier was in the middle of Operation Frequent Wind, the largest helicopter evacuation in American history. More than 7000 Americans and at-risk South Vietnamese were being airlifted from Saigon to the ships of Task

Force 76. The Midway's flight deck was chaos. Helicopters landing, refugees pouring out, aircraft being pushed aside to make room for more.

At one point, the ship's air boss counted 26 Huey helicopters circling the carrier; not one of them with working radio contact.

And then the spotters noticed something different. A fixed wing aircraft. A tiny Cessna with South Vietnamese markings circling overhead with its landing lights on.

Capt. Lawrence Chambers had been in command of the Midway barely five weeks. He was the first African American to command a US Navy aircraft carrier. A graduate of the US Naval Academy who had risen through the ranks at a time when such advancement was far from guaranteed. Now he faced a decision that could end his career.

The Admiral on board the Midway told Chambers to order the Cessna to ditch in the ocean. Rescue boats could pick up the survivors. Chamber understood immediately why that wouldn't work. The Bird Gog had fixed landing gear. The moment it hit the water it would flip. With a plane packed full of small children, ditching meant drowning. The ship was a hundred nautical miles from the coast – too far for the Cessna to return even if it had anywhere safe to land.

As the small plane continued circling Baung-Ly tried to communicate the only way he could. He wrote a message on a scrap of paper and dropped it during allow ass on the deck. The wind blew it into the sea. He tried again and again. Three notes disappeared into the water. On the fourth attempt dropped a leather pistol holster with the message tucked inside. This time a crewman grabbed it. The note was scribbled on a navigational chart. The spelling was imperfect. The writing was hurried but he meaning was unmistakable." Can you move your helicopters on the other side so I can land on your runway? I can fly for one hour more. WE have enough time to move. Please rescue me. Major Buang, wife and 5 child." The message was rushed to the bridge. Chambers read it. He picked up the phone to call his Air Boss, Commander Vern Jumper. "Vern" he said "give me a ready deck." Jumper's response, Chambers later recalled, contained words he couldn't want to print. It didn't matter. Chambers called for volunteers –every available sailor, irrespective of rank or duty to the flight deck immediately. What followed was controlled pandemonium. Arresting wires were tripped from the deck- at the Bird Dog's

slow landing speed, they would trip the plane and send it cartwheeling. Helicopters that could be moved were shoved aside. And the helicopters that couldn't be moved? Chambers ordered them to be pushed over the side.

The sailors of Midway pushed four UH-1 Huey helicopters and one CH-47 Chinook into the South China Sea. 10 million dollars' worth of military hardware tumbling into the waves. Chamber didn't watch. He already knew the Admiral was threatening to put him in jail. "I was scared to death" he admitted years later. But he also knew what would happen if he followed the order to let the plane ditch. "When a man has the courage to put his family a plane and make a daring escape like that, you have to have the heart to let him in" Meanwhile the ship's engineer reported a problem. Half the Midway's boilers had been taken off line for maintenance. They didn't have enough steam to make twenty-five knots Chambers needed to generate proper headwind for the landing. Chambers told him to shift the Hotel electrical load to the emergency diesel generators and make it happen.

The old carrier groaned as she picked up speed turning into the wind. The ceiling was 500 feet. Visibility dropped to five miles. A light rain began to fall. Warnings about a dangerous downdraft behind a steaming carrier were broadcast blind in both Vietnamese and English, hoping the pilot would somehow hear them even though he had no radio.

Buang-Ly lined up for his approach. He had never landed on an aircraft carrier before. The runway was 1001 feet long. Enormous for a carrier, impossibly small for what he was attempting. The down draft behind the ship could slam his overloaded plane into the deck or flip it into the sea. He only had one chance. He looked at his family. "When I looked at my family" he said later, my gut told me that I could do it." He pushed the throttle forward and commenced his descent. The Bird Dog crossed the ramp, bounced once on the deck, touched down on the exact spot where the arresting wires would normally have been and rolled forward.

The flight deck crew sprinted towards the plane, ready to grab it before IT went over the angled deck. They didn't need to. Buang-Ly brought the Cessna to a stop, with room to spare. The crew erupted in cheers.

And then something unexpected happened. Major Buang-Ly and his wife jumped out of the cockpit, pulled the backseat forward and out tumbled child

after child. The deck crew had expected two passengers. They watched in amazement as five small children came out of a plane built for one.

Capt Chambers came down from the bridge. He walked up to the exhausted pilot, this man who had risked everything on an impossible gamble and did something that no regulation authorized but every sailor understood. He pulled the gold wings from his own uniform and pinned it on Buang-Ly's chest. "I promoted him to Naval Aviator right on the spot" Chamber said. The crew of the Midway adopted the family. They collected thousands of dollars to help the family start their new life in America. The Buang family became seven of the 130,000 Vietnamese refugees who eventually settled in the United States. All seven are now naturalized American citizens.

Capt. Lawrence Chambers was never court-martialed. He was promoted to Rear Admiral and retired in 1984 as the first African American Naval Academy Graduate to reach flag rank. Today, ninety six years old, he still speaks about that day with the same conviction. "You have to have the courage to do the thing which you think is right regardless of the outcome" he said at a recent commemoration. "That's the only thing you can live with." Major Buang-Ly now ninety-five lives in Florida. The Bird Dog he flew that day hangs from the ceiling of the National Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, still bearing its South Vietnamese markings. Beside it, in a display case, is the crumpled note he dropped onto the deck of the Midway.

Fifty years later, both men, the pilot who refused to let his family die and the Captain who refused to let them drown – are still there to tell the story. Some moments become symbols larger than themselves. This was one of them. Not just an escape but a testament to what becomes possible when desperate courage meets uncommon decency. A father who would not give up. A Captain who would not look away. And a flight deck cleared for landing.

WHY 'CHUCK' YEAGAR HATED INDIA'S GUTS

Contributed by

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of victory of the Indian Armed Forces over Pakistan in Dec 1971 – a snippet of history

This is really the story of Admiral Arun Prakash, PVSM, AVSM, VrC, VSM (Retd), former Chief of Naval Staff who, as a young naval pilot seconded to the Indian Air Force in the 1971 Indo-Pak war, blasted two planes at Chaklala airbase in Pakistan. One aircraft, A Hercules C-130 belonged to the UN and the other, a small Beechcraft, was used by Brigadier General Charles E. 'Chuck' Yeagar, USAF, who had been posted to Islamabad to train Pakistanis in the use of American military equipment.

Due to constraints of space, this story has been divided into two parts. First to introduce Brig Chuck Yeagar and bring out the significance of that bit of action to the readers; and in the next issue, KS subscribers will get to read the first hand, undiluted and exciting account of Arun Prakash's bold fighter raid on Pakistan's airbase at Chaklala.

But first – about Chuck Yeagar. He had a fantastic flying record and was an outstanding pilot of the US Air Force. For his exceptional performance in war, he is much admired by air warriors the world over. He is the first pilot ever to have broken the sound barrier and flown at supersonic speed.

Chuck enlisted as a Private in the US Army Air Corps in 1941 and entered pilot training to graduate two years later as a flight officer. During World War II, he flew 56 combat missions, in which he shot down 12 German aircraft (including five Me-109s during a single mission). Returning to the USA in 1945, his remarkable flying skills caught the eye of his superiors and he was assigned to the USAF Test Pilot School then at Wright Field.

On graduation, Yeager was selected as project pilot for one of the most important flight test programmes in history; to fly the rocket powered Bell X-1. On 14 Oct 1947, after launch from the belly of a B-29 bomber, he accelerated to Mach 1.06 at 42,000 feet and became the first pilot to shatter the once

dreaded "sound barrier". During his career he flew over 10,000 hours on 330 different types of aircraft.

He commanded the USAF Test Pilot School and a fighter wing in Philippines; flying 127 operational missions over Vietnam. In 1969 he was promoted to Brigadier General and in January 1971, in his penultimate assignment, he was sent as the US Defence Representative to Pakistan in Islamabad. And that is where fate decided that Chuck Yeager's and Arun Prakash's paths would cross.

Fast forward to a post war article titled 'Right Stuff in the Wrong Place' by Edward Ingraham reproduced in the which was reproduced in the 'Aerospace and Defence Review' Ingraham was

Political Counsellor to Ambassador Farland in Islamabad when Chuck Yeager was head of Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG).

The destruction of Yeager's Beechcraft had greater ramifications than one could

"In 1971" says Ingraham, "Yeager arrived in Islamabad to head the MAAG. Yeager's new command was a modest one: about four officers and a dozen enlisted men charged with the equally modest task of seeing that the residual trickle of American military aid was properly distributed to the Pakistanis. All the chief of the advisory group had to do was to teach Pakistanis how to use American military equipment without killing themselves in the process."

He goes on, "One of the perks of Yeager's position was a twin-engined Beechcraft, a small airplane supplied by the Pentagon to help keep track of the occasional pieces of American military equipment that sporadically showed up in the country."

"Speaking of the worsening situation in East Pakistan" Ingraham says, "we at the Embassy were increasingly preoccupied with the deepening crisis. Meetings became more frequent and more tense. We were troubled by the complex questions that the conflict raised. No such doubts seemed to cross the mind of Chuck Yeager. I remember one occasion on which Ambassador Farland asked Yeager for his assessment of how long the Pakistani forces in the East could withstand an all-out attack by India. "We could hold them off for maybe a month" he replied, "but beyond that we wouldn't have a chance without help from outside?". It took the rest of us a moment to fathom what he was saying, not realizing at first that "we" was West Pakistan, not the United States."

He continues, "The dictator of Pakistan at the time, the one who ordered the crackdown in the East, was a general named Yahya Khan. Way over his head in events he couldn't begin to understand, Yahya took increasingly to brooding and drinking. In December of 1971, with Indian supplied guerrillas applying more pressure on his beleaguered forces, Yahya decided on a last, hopeless gesture of defiance. He ordered what was left of his armed forces to attack India directly from the West. His air force roared across the border on the afternoon of December 3 to bomb Indian air bases, while his army crashed into India's defences on the Western frontier."

"It was the morning after the initial Pakistani strike that Yeager began to take the war with India personally. On the eve of their attack, the Pakistanis had been prudent enough to evacuate their planes from airfields close to the Indian border and move them back into the hinterlands. But no one thought to warn General Yeager. Thus when an Indian fighter pilot swept low over Islamabad airport in India's first retaliatory strike, he could see only two small planes on the ground. Dodging antiaircraft fire, he blasted both to smithereens with 20-millimeter (sic) canon fire. One was Yeager's Beechcraft. The other was a plane used by United Nations forces to supply the patrols that monitored the ceasefire in Kashmir."

"I never found out how the UN reacted to the destruction of its plane, but Yeager's response was anything but dispassionate. He raged to his cowering colleagues at a staff meeting. His voice resounding through the embassy, he proclaimed that the Indian pilot not only knew exactly what he was doing but had been specifically instructed by Indira Gandhi to blast Yeager's plane. In his book he later said that it was the Indian way of giving Uncle Sam "the finger" ". Ingraham's suggestion that "To an Indian pilot skimming the ground at 500 mph under antiaircraft fire, precise identification of targets on an enemy airfield might take lower priority than simply hitting whatever was there and then getting the hell out" was met by withering scorn from Yeager.

"Our response to this Indian atrocity, as I recall," adds Ingraham (tongue firmly in cheek), "was a top priority cable to Washington that described the incident as a deliberate affront to the American nation and recommended immediate countermeasures. I don't think we ever got an answer."

Ingraham says that Yeager's movements and activities during the subsequent conflict remained uncertain, but "A Pakistani businessman, son of a general, told me excitedly that Yeager had moved into the big air force base at

Peshawar and was personally directing PAF operations against the Indians. Another swore that he had seen Yeager emerge from a just landed jet fighter at the Peshawar base."

The facts narrated in Ingraham's article leaves one wondering whether the destruction of the Beechcraft and consequently the US Embassy's request to Washington for immediate countermeasures influenced President Nixon's decision to deploy the Enterprise Task Force in the Indian Ocean.

ATTACK ON CHAKLALA

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

This piece is a "first person" account of an episode of the 1971 Indo-Pak war written by Admiral Arun Prakash, PVSM, AVSM, VrC, VSM (Retd) former Chief of Naval Staff. As a young Naval fighter pilot, he was on deputation to No. 20 Squadron, then commanded by Wing Commander Cecil Parker, MVC, VM. This IAF unit is credited with having won the highest number of gallantry awards in the conflict.

The following is extracted with the permission of the author.

Tribe Twenty

“As a young naval Lieutenant, in the late 1960s, having recently carrier-qualified on the Armstrong-Whitworth Sea Hawk, from the deck of the Indian Navy's sole flat-top Vikrant (R-11) I was just settling down to polish up my embarked flying skills when I received orders for an exchange posting with the Indian Air Force (IAF). So I packed my bags and with great reluctance, left the sunny beaches of Goa (where our Naval Air Station was located) and headed for north India.

Having converted to the British Hawker Hunter ground attack fighter (a second-generation trans-sonic descendant of the Sea Hawk) I was posted to No.20 Squadron "The Lightnings" based close to New Delhi in end-1970. It did not take me long to find my feet on terra firma; the air force did everything more or less like the navy, except that they were very serious and professional. But we (Indian Navy) thought that we performed with greater style and panache, and wore orange "mae wests' while doing it!”

After a spot of leave, “I returned to New Delhi to find that my IAF squadron had been moved further north and went looking for it. Our new base was located within 2 minutes flying time (at 420 knots) from the India-Pakistan border and would certainly be an interesting place to be in when the "Balloon" went up.

My squadron "boss" was an unusual combination; a great flyer, and also a martinet. He made it clear that if we ever went to war, he wanted to be sure of two things: (a) that he had prepared us for it in the best possible manner, and (b) that he went in ahead of everyone else. So for the next four months we were put through a most rigorous training programme, focusing on target recognition, low-level navigation, weapon delivery at dawn/dusk and air combat.

The only long-range combat aircraft in the sub-continent in that era were the Canberra light bomber in the IAF inventory, and its US derivative, the Martin B-57 that equipped our rival, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). The Hunter Mark 56-A that my squadron flew carried four large under-wing fuel tanks, which gave it (for those days) an extraordinary radius of action at low level. Therefore, as far as reach was concerned, apart from the Canberra, my outfit had the longest legs in the IAF.

As a single-seat fighter, the Hunter's operating milieu was, however, restricted to daylight hours, whereas night bombing missions were the forte' of the Canberra. It was therefore an unstated sine qua non that wars on the Indian sub-continent would commence only on a full moon night so that the Canberras and B-57s could be fully exploited.

During summer of 1971, as we watched the sequence of tragic events unfolding in East Pakistan, most of us were convinced about the inevitability of conflict. At the end of the monsoons, to avoid becoming "Sitting ducks" for a PAF pre-emptive strike; every full moon phase saw my squadron retiring to a rear base (a few hundred miles away from the international border).

Sure enough, on the evening of Friday 3rd December the radio announced that at 5.40 pm, PAF fighters had carried out a coordinated strike on nine Indian air bases all along the western border. Later that night we clustered around the radio to hear Prime Minister Indira Gandhi tell the nation that we were at war with Pakistan."

Lightning Strike

"Since the die had now been cast, our first task was to get back to base and commence the retaliatory air war ASAP. Having been briefed for a 5.30 am take-off, we grabbed a couple of hours of fitful sleep, and tumbled out of bed at 4 on a bitterly cold morning to find the base completely fog bound! Starting

up and taxiing in blackout conditions would have been bad enough, but the fog made things even more interesting. Some people took a wrong turn on the taxiway and got lost, but my wing man and I were glad to find ourselves lined up for a timely take-off.

It was eerie to be airborne in the pre-dawn dark, flying at 500 feet with a hint of moonlight in the sky and a sheet of fog below. We knew no enemy fighter could be around, but that did not prevent the hair on your neck prickling now and then. We had a safe transit of about 45 minutes to base, save two minor incidents.

As we neared home, one could see in the distance, a very pretty but intense fireworks display. It was the "Friendly" tracer, which our local air-defence gunners seemed to be putting up to welcome us back! Some frightfully bad language on RT from the Flight Commander soon put a stop to it.

Shortly after I had touched down on the darkened runway, I saw from the corner of my eye, a green light whizzing rapidly past my port wingtip. It was my wing man who, in his excitement, had landed a few knots "hot" and after overtaking my aircraft came back on the centre line ahead of me, luckily missing the runway lights! I heard a muttered apology on the radio, but we had more important things on our minds.

It was still dark as we taxied into our blast pens, and there was just time for a quick wash and bite before briefing by the Boss; while the aircraft were fuelled and armed. I had drawn a two-aircraft mission against PAF base Chaklala, located a few miles SE of the new capital city of Islamabad. The briefing was to carry out a single pass attack on briefed targets and to look out sharply for enemy

The direct distance to Chaklala was not great, but we were going to do some tactical routing over mountainous terrain and approach from the northwest, so that the radars would not see us till very late. A few minutes into the mission, the butterflies settled down in the stomach as one concentrated on the map, compass, airspeed and stop-watch (which were all the navigational aids one had 35 years ago!). As we approached the target, it became apparent that the fog, which had bedevilled us over north India a few hours ago, was going to spoil our fun again; the sun was still low, and the slant visibility poor, but one could see tall objects and features right below.

We pulled up from low level to about 2000 feet by the stopwatch, and were gratified to see the murky outlines of the cross-runways of Chaklala airfield, but little else. Then a huge tower appeared out of the haze and I thought that the air traffic control would be a worthwhile target for want of anything better. A short burst from my four canon saw the tower collapsing, and as I flew over it, a huge column of water rose to greet me from the debris. Oops! A water tower! I consoled myself with the thought that the PAF would at least go thirsty tonight.

Pulling out of the dive, I desperately scanned the airfield for something more lucrative on the surprisingly bare tarmacs. Suddenly, from the corner of my eye, I spied protruding from a large mango grove, the unmistakable shape of a tall aircraft fin, and a sharply swept-rear ramp section. A Hercules C-130 under camouflage. With a bootful of rudder and the stick hard over, I swung my fighter around in a shallow dive, hosed the ground with 30mm shells. A thin wisp of black smoke gave cause for optimism and I thought another pass would be necessary. My wingman, keeping a vigilant eye for enemy combat air patrols felt that we were stretching our luck in hostile territory and made his views known.

Pulling out of the second dive, through a gap in the fog, I caught a glimpse of a row of small transport aircraft lined up on the secondary runway. The sight was too tempting. Putting all thought of the Hercules out of my mind and ignoring the multiple arcs of tracer fire, I swung around in a tight high-G turn and emptied my guns on whatever was visible of the light aircraft. By now my wingman had lost his patience and was yelling on the RT. We departed Chaklala at full throttle hugging the deck amidst intense anti-aircraft fire, which seemed to grow by the minute.

Fate was kind, and empty guns notwithstanding; we had an uneventful return passage. We landed back safely at base, feeling elated that we had opened our account and given the enemy a dose of his own medicine. In the de-brief, I concentrated on the hidden Hercules, and other target details, with a passing mention of the light aircraft and skipped the water tower episode altogether.

That evening I heard that Radio Pakistan had complained bitterly about an IAF attack on UN aircraft but decided to ignore it as enemy propaganda. The Boss, sharp as ever, would however not let go, and for many months after the war, I had my leg pulled mercilessly about the Navy attacking "unarmed neutrals".

ALBERT EKKA: STORY OF A PVC

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM,VSM & Bar (Retd)

This is as reported by Wg Cdr Unni Kartha Rtd.

Part-1: L Nk Albert Ekka

28 yrs old L Nk Albert Ekka of 14 Guards (of 73 Mtn Bde under Cdr Tulli) was KIA on 3 Dec 71 during the battle of Gangasagar (adjacent to Agartala) when 57 Div (of IV Corps) punched through the heavily held E.Pak node at Akhura. He demonstrated extraordinary valour and therefore, on the recommendation of his CO Lt Col Vijay Channa, was most deservedly awarded a posthumous PVC. The citation below elaborates his valour. He was laid to rest in the thick of battle, by the unit's Adm echelon, along with ten of his mates, in Sripalli village of Dukli (in B'desh), 15 km south west of Agartala.

Citation:

L Nk Naik Albert Ekka was in the left forward company of the battalion (14 Grds) during their attack on the enemy defences at Gangasagar. This was a well-fortified position held in a strength by the enemy. The assaulting troops were subjected to intense shelling and heavy small-arms fire, but they charged onto the objective and were locked in bitter hand-to-hand combat. Lance Naik Albert Ekka noticed an enemy light machine-gun (LMG) inflicting heavy casualties on his company. With complete disregard for his personal safety, he charged the enemy bunker, bayoneted two enemy soldiers and silenced the LMG. Though seriously wounded in this encounter, he continued to fight alongside his comrades through the mile deep objective, clearing bunker after bunker with undaunted courage. Towards the northern end of the objective one enemy medium machine-gun (MMG) opened up from the second storey of a well-fortified building inflicting heavy casualties and holding up the attack. Once again this gallant soldier, without a thought for his personal safety, despite his serious injury and the heavy volume of enemy fire, crawled forward till he reached the building and lobbed a grenade into the bunker killing one enemy soldier and injuring the other. The MMG however continued to fire. With outstanding courage and determination Lance Naik Albert Ekka scaled a side wall and entering the bunker, bayoneted the enemy soldier who was still firing and thus silenced the machine-gun, saving further casualties to his

company and ensuring the success of the attack. In this process however, he received serious injuries and succumbed to them after the capture of the objective. In this action, Lance Naik Albert Ekka displayed the most conspicuous valour and determination and made the supreme sacrifice in the best traditions of the Army.

This heart wrenching story is not really about Albert. His story has been immortalised in the annals of Indian military history. It is about his uneducated tribal wife 'Balamdine' from 'Gumla/Jari' village in Bihar (now Jharkhand) and her son Vincent (born few months after the war).

Part-2: Indomitable late Mrs Balamdine Ekka & son Vincent.

After the war, and award of PVC, everyone went home to return to their normal life. The young widow Balamdine and her tiny tot Vincent, shunned by tribal family and friends as 'bad omen', were shunted out to eke a living in the wilderness.

Post President's Rule in Bihar in '72, and successive political turmoil of INC, successive CMs (Kedar Pandey (1972) to Jagannath Mishra (1990), and chaos by Lalu Prasad Yadav and his wife Rabri Devi (CMs 1990- 2005), insurgency in the 'red corridor', attempts made by Guards Regimental Centre (Kamti) to locate Balamdine proved unsuccessful.

Twenty year old ex Bengali Pak Para Arty Captain, absconder from western sector turned 'EPR' freedom fighter in 71 war, promoted subsequently to Col, retired from B'desh army around 1995. He settled down in Dacca devoting his time to do exemplary research and document the history of their unsung liberation "freedom fighters – Mukti Bahini" who fought Pakis in every nook and corner of E.Pak. He personally helped recover their mortal remains (even from Tripura), and inter them in their Dist WMs. With 52 books under his belt, Lt Col Qazi Sajjad Ali Zahir is today the foremost authority on military history of their freedom struggle, and graphically told stories of the valour of ordinary Bengalis in their 'liberation war'. As part of EBR attached with 73 Mtn Bde, he was an eye witness to Albert's valour and death, as in the citation above. Albert had perhaps saved his life too.

Around 2010, Sajjad on his own set out to track down Balamdine and her son Vincent in the 'red corridor' and after determined perseverance, an incredible adventure, found them in the jungle in abject poverty.

The story he published in B'desh (above) was picked up by our embassy, and when sent to India, shook our 'politicals' in Centre and State, who then made it into a tribal vote bank election 'Jumla'. Cash rewards, offer of land & buildings, lumpsum grant etc were promised and quickly forgotten after elections. But not 14 Guards and GRC, who offered Balamdine sustenance from regimental funds.

In 2017, Balamdine and Vincent were invited as a VVIP to Dacca by the current PM of B'desh, for honouring them, and also on her request a visit by helicopter to Albert's meticulously maintained grave in Sripalli village. Not only was Albert Ekka posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra, Bangladesh also conferred on him the highest award "Friends of Liberation War" title, to honour his outstanding sacrifice for their liberation.

Balamdine passed away in her village in Apr 2021, just barely above poverty line. Vincent Ekka, now aged 52, is a clerk in the small municipal office in Gumla. I believe it is a job he achieved through his own merit and bottom up hard work, and not through any political dispensation or gratitude of Central or State Govt. Or the nation.

Col Sajjad Rtd is Bir Protik (equivalent to VrC), 'Swadhinata Padak' (highest civilian award) and now our 'Padma Shri' too. He lives in Dacca, continuing to help foster Indo-Bangladesh relations as well as write untold war stories of their freedom fighters.

“BAD ANGEL”

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Received through Social Media.

We were in Hanger #4 of the Pima Air and Space Museum to view the beautifully restored B-29, when I happened to take notice of a P-51 Mustang near the big bomber. Its name, "Bad Angel." I was admiring its aerodynamic lines and recalled enough history to know that until the P51 Mustangs came into service, the skies over the Pacific Ocean were dominated by Japanese Zeros.

Then something very strange caught my eye. Proudly displayed on the fuselage of “Bad Angel” were the markings of the pilot's kills: seven Germans; one Italian; one Japanese AND ONE AMERICAN. Huh, "Bad Angel" shot down an American airplane?

Was it a terrible mistake? Couldn't be. If it had been an unfortunate misjudgement, certainly the pilot would not have displayed the American flag. I knew there had to be a good story here. Fortunately for us, one of the Museum's many fine docents was on hand to tell it.

In 1942, the United States needed pilots for its war planes, lots of war planes, lots of pilots. Lt Louis Curdes was one. When he was 22 years old, he graduated flight training school and was shipped off to the Mediterranean to fight Nazis in the air over Southern Europe.

He arrived at his 82nd Fighter Group, 95th Fighter Squadron in April 1943 and was assigned a P-38 Lightning. Ten days later he shot down three German Messerschmitt Bf-109 fighters. A few weeks later, he downed two more German Bf -109's. In less than a month of combat, Louis was an Ace. During the next three months, Louis shot down an Italian Mc.202 fighter and two more Messerschmitt's before his luck ran out.

A German fighter shot down his plane on August 27, 1943 over Salerno, Italy. Captured by the Italians, he was sent to a POW camp near Rome. No doubt this is where he thought he would spend the remaining years of the war. It wasn't to be. A few days later, the Italians surrendered. Louis and a few other pilots escaped before the Nazis could take control of the camp.

One might think that such harrowing experiences would have taken the fight out of Louis, yet he volunteered for another combat tour. This time, Uncle Sam sent him to the Philippines where he flew P-51 Mustangs. Soon after arriving in the Pacific Theatre, Louis downed a Mitsubishi reconnaissance plane near Formosa. Now he was one of only three Americans to have kills against all three Axis Powers: Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Up until this point, young Lt. Curdes combat career had been stellar. His story was about to take a twist so bizarre that it seems like the fictional creation of a Hollywood screenwriter. While attacking the Japanese-held island of Bataan, one of Louis' wingmen was shot down. The pilot ditched in the ocean. Circling overhead, Louis could see that his wingman had survived, so he stayed in the area to guide a rescue plane and protect the downed pilot.

It wasn't long before he noticed another, larger airplane, wheels down, preparing to land at the Japanese-held airfield on Bataan. He moved in to investigate. Much to his surprise the approaching plane was a Douglas C-47 transport with American markings. He tried to make radio contact, but without success. He maneuvered his Mustang in front of the big transport several times trying to wave it off. The C-47 kept ahead to its landing target. Apparently the C-47 crew didn't realize they were about to land on a Japanese held island, and soon would be captives. Lt Curdes read the daily newspaper accounts of the war, including the viciousness of the Japanese soldiers toward their captives. He knew that whoever was in that American C-47 would be, upon landing, either dead or wish they were, but what could he do?

Audaciously, he lined up his P-51 directly behind the transport, carefully sighted one of his 50 caliber machine guns and knocked out one of its two engines. Still the C-47 continued on toward the Bataan airfield. Curdes shifted his aim slightly and knocked out the remaining engine, leaving the baffled pilot no choice but to ditch in the ocean.

The big plane came down in one piece about 50 yards from his bobbing wingman. At this point, nightfall and low fuel forced Louis to return to base. The next morning, Louis flew cover for a rescuing PBY that picked up the downed Mustang pilot and 12 passengers and crew, including two female nurses, from the C-47. All survived. Later, Lt. Curdes would end up marrying one of these nurses!

For shooting down an unarmed American transport plane, Lt. Louis Curdes was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Thereafter, on the fuselage of his P-51 "Bad Angel," he proudly displayed the symbols of his kills: seven Germans, one Italian, one Japanese and one American.

IF LIFE CAN BE A BITCH, THIS IS IT!

Life journey of Late Col AGJ Swittens (37 NDA), of the Indian Army by his course mate & close friend, Gp Capt Unni Kartha (Veteran):

There is a Prisoner of War (POW) story of my course mate. Joe, I would like to tell. He passed away last year in Pune of brain haemorrhage.

The story is based on my conversation with Joe.

I first met AGJ Swittens (Joe) when I was returning home during term break after my first term in NDA in Jun/Jul 1967. While haunching and front rolling in the corridor of first-class special compartment, simply to entertain a few bored seniors, I discovered that Joe and I came from the same place in Kerala. He from the coastal town of Alleppey and I from a village called Ambalapuzha, about 13 km further south. During the front rolling and haunching in confined space, around three feet of the compartment's corridor, we bumped into each other many times and as a result we fused into a lifelong friendship that surpassed the ordinary feeling of brotherhood.

Because neither of us had any meaningful friends at home, during the holidays in that term break, as well as all the other term breaks that followed, Joe and I travelled the 13 km coastal strip to and fro to meet practically on daily basis. We did many interesting things together including joining a typing school because a large number of pretty Mallu girls were found going to the typing school. As a result of this very innovative idea, we not only learnt to type but also the use of 'Brail' for man-woman communications after the sun set on Alleppey beach. Sometimes we managed to get hold of a 'Pauwa' Rum (smaller bottle with just 6 pegs) and learnt to drink it neat because the sea water did not taste good with Rum. It was difficult to climb a Coconut tree for coconut water and Coke was too expensive on our meagre pocket money. Hence, it was cheaper and more stimulating to sip neat rum, passing the bottle from one to the other, swearing everlasting friendship between each sip. Licking lime pickle in between helped tone down the euphoria. The packet of lime pickle came free with the Pauwa.

Joe and I were just 16-19 yrs old when we were in NDA. Joe was the eldest son of the keeper of the lighthouse at Alleppy beach and had more than a dozen siblings of all shapes and sizes, mostly girls who giggled loudly from behind

closed doors when I visited their house. His younger brother Johnny (now an AF officer) was just a tiny toddler then. It was only natural that both our parents soon began to treat us like twins because of the NDA induced behavioural pattern that made us indistinguishable one from the other. While my father thought of me as someone incapable of earning a livelihood, Joe's father was counting the days when Joe would get a commission and add something to the family pot.

In our 4th term, 'Rangila' the terrible, in the equitation lines kicked Joe in the face and he lost four of his front teeth and had to get dentures when he was 17 yrs old, a compulsive reason he had to use Brail to communicate with our GFs from the typing class. I think it was a blessing in disguise, probably the only time God was kind to Joe and I. His troubles were just beginning. We passed out of NDA in Dec 1969, he from J Sqn and I from F Sqn. The war clouds were beginning to rise in East Pak (now Bangladesh) border, but we had no idea of such things then and were single-mindedly interested only in the tactical manoeuvres of typing and Brail at Alleppey without misfiring our guns in the cockpits, a condom was unheard of those days. The tactical manoeuvre we had to master ourselves at our young age was 'Coitus Interruptus', a failsafe military tactic, not taught in NDA, but which we believed was perfected by the Roman army of Julius Caesar on their visit to Alexandria (Cleopatra).

While I went to the flying school in Bidar, Joe went to the Military Academy in Dehra Dun. He was commissioned into the Gorkha Rifles on 20 Dec 1970. After a short break he joined his Battalion (I think 1/4 GR). His unit at that time (I think) was deployed right on the Indo Pak border in Chamb sector somewhere near Mole and Phagla ahead of the Munawar Tawi river with Sikhs (5 Sikh ?) on their northern flank and Assam Rifles (5 AR ?) on their southern flank facing Koel and Bakan Paur, a few km ahead of them, probably held by the 111 Brigade of the Paki army.

Joe went through the usual initiation ceremonies in his battalion and by end of Nov 1971, he was already a hardened soldier and had endeared himself to his company commander. His company was deployed some 2 km away from the Unit HQ - rear administrative location with his CO and the 2 i/c. For tactical advantages Joe's Company Commander had established an observation post (OP) about 400 mtrs ahead of the company deployment area ahead or almost on the Cease Fire Line (CFL) of 65 war which was at that time the border. The OP was around 50 feet higher than the surroundings and hence had a

commanding view. The company itself was deployed in well prepared bunkers and trenches. The OP was simply a fox hole behind a low bush about four feet by three and around three feet deep, very pains-takingly and surreptitiously dug over a period of time, at night, using helmets and Khukris so that it's existence would not be noticed by the enemy. Every night the Company Commander would send someone or the other crawling forward towards the OP and they would replace the OP crew who had been there for the previous 24 hrs.

The OP crew generally consisted of a junior officer (or an NCO) with two Jawans simply for company and for time pass, usually playing cards while staying hidden, surreptitiously observing enemy movements and deployments across the LOC. The enemy was deployed in depth and hence there was not much that one could see from the OP foxhole. So the OP duty was considered a boring and unproductive job, though it gave 2nd Lt AGJ Swittens some respite and relaxation from the daily rigours of infantry life.

On the evening of 3rd Dec 1971, a Friday, it was Joe's turn to do the OP duty. So, after sunset, after an early dinner, he collected his two Shakarpara packets (next day's breakfast and lunch), filled his water bottle, and along with a Naik and two soldiers crawled to the OP to replace those who had spent the previous night and day there. Everything looked peaceful, there was no noise or activity or any lights from across the border and so Joe called up the Company Cdr and reported, 'All quiet on the western front.' He could not have been more mistaken, it was the lull before the storm. To his horror, Joe also discovered that the battery discharged and soon afterwards the ANPRC radio set went completely dead. But Joe was not too concerned, his entire Company was deployed just 400 mtrs behind him and that gave him a tremendous sense of security, adequate to fall asleep in the fox hole, a habit inculcated in NDA, to sleep instantly, anytime, anywhere, in any position.

Unknown to Joe, around 1800 hrs while he was on his way to the fox hole, the Paki AF crossed the border and launched a massive pre-emptive strike on various Indian airfields in the western sector. But all was quiet around the fox hole and Joe slept and dreamt, the kind of dreams that a healthy happy 20 yr old would have, I presume the Brail kind.

At around 2020 hrs Joe was rudely woken by incredible explosions of heavy calibre artillery shells. There was nothing that fell on him, but when he looked back he could see that his Company position was being obliterated systematically, inch by inch by a creeping barrage. He could not see from where the guns were firing, they were located beyond comprehensible distance in the west.: However, he could see the entire sky filled with artillery shells streaking like meteors, each going overhead with shrieking banshee wail. Some were aimed at his Company position, but most of them were going deeper eastwards towards the other deployments of Indian infantry and armour. There were more than 150 enemy guns, probably 105 mm variety firing at them with deadly accuracy. Soon a similar number of Indian guns, probably of bigger calibre, began to return the fire. Heavy calibre artillery shells were firing to and fro, hundreds of them every minute over Joe's head, but none fell on him. Joe and the three soldiers with him lay flat in the foxhole, one on top of the other for lack of space, cringing and shivering, covering their ears from the unbearable and most frightening sounds.

After about 30 minutes, they felt the ground begin to tremble like a mild earthquake. They heard clanking and grinding noises. When Joe peeped out of the fox hole he saw a Paki Sherman tank about fifty meters ahead, heading straight for him. Joe ducked back into the fox hole and the tank rolled right over them almost crushing the fox hole and burying them into the ground. Soon there were other tanks going over them or around them and after a while he lost track which way they were coming or going, there were shouts and battle cry, soon he could hear soldiers running about, but he had no idea whether they were friends or foe. This went on all night.

In the twilight hours that arrived after an eternity (4th Dec 71), Joe poked his head out. He found himself surrounded by Paki soldiers and two Sherman tanks. When he looked backwards, he could not find any trace of his company. Unknown to Joe, when the shelling started, the Company along with the entire Indian Brigade had been ordered to withdraw, leaving poor Joe and his companions in the foxhole.

In the Foxhole the Naik took out his Khukri. 'Shhaab', he advised Joe, 'Kafar Hunu Bhandu Marnu Ramro (Better to die than live like a coward)'. The three soldiers took out their Khukri and Joe took out his revolver. 'Ayo Gorkhali', they screamed at the top of their voice, jumped out of the fox hole and charged out. They caught the Pakis completely by surprise, they were brewing

or sipping tea with their weapons at ease. One of the tank crew jumped up, climbed his tank and let fly a burst of MMG fire at them. Joe tripped and fell down. The burst of bullets miraculously went by Joe but cut up the other three Jawans into pieces. By then the Paki soldiers had grabbed their 303 rifles and formed a ring around Joe, twenty to one. Joe kept pointing his revolver from one to another, he turned round, fired one round and because his hands were shaking, the round went over the enemy's head. The circle of enemy soldiers got closer and closer. Finally, Joe gave up. He unhooked the revolver from his lanyard and put it on the ground. He raised his hands in surrender. A Paki JCO gestured to him to kneel. They ripped out the lanyard and bound his hands behind his back. For next half an hour they played 'Russian Roulette' with his own revolver. They would insert one round, twirl the drum and empty the gun on Joe's head. Each time the gun clicked but did not fire, the Paki soldiers would laugh aloud, pass lurid comments and poke him with a bayonet several times. This went on and on and Joe died a thousand deaths.

After about half an hour, a Paki officer, probably a Colonel came by in a jeep. First, he was unmoved by the fun that the Paki soldiers were having. Then better sense seemed to have prevailed. 'Stop it,' he ordered. 'Put him behind my jeep.' Joe was then taken to what he perceived as 111 Brigade HQ, large number of tents under camouflage netting, for interrogation. He was also given field dressing by a Paki MO who stitched up 64 bayonet wounds without the use of any morphine. Joe realised the futility of resistance, he was far too gone, he was just 20 yrs old, and he probably was the first helpless Indian POW of 1971 war.

About an hour later, there was a flurry of activity, and the Pakis began dismantling the tent. Their HQ was being moved elsewhere. He was handed over to two villagers who put him into a bullock cart and took him westwards, he had no idea where they were taking him. His hands were put around his legs and tied tightly with his lanyard so that he was in a very uncomfortable yoga posture, completely immobile. En-route, along the villages where they stopped, children pelted him with mud and stones, while their parents watched with disdain. He was not given any water or food. After a long ride, he was taken to a police station and locked up, probably at Kakian Wala.

The Military Police visited twice. They stripped him naked, hung him on a hook and beat him with a thin Malacca cane. All the bayonet wounds which had been stitched up, tore open once again and he started to bleed profusely. Joe

gave them his life history, that he was just twenty years old, that his father was a light house keeper, about how Rangila kicked him and how he lost his teeth, how much he yearned his typing class in Alleppey and probably about a stupid friend called Unni in the AF, but he stuck to his story that he had joined his unit just two days earlier and that he did not even know the name of his company commander leave alone deployment, locations or strength of the Indian army in Chamb. They beat him some more, just for the heck of it, but they fed him tea and rusk twice a day and two chapatis with dal at night. A local civilian compounder was called, and he applied raw Iodine on his wounds, just as bad and painful as the beating. After a day he was put into a local bus handcuffed to a policeman and taken by road to Rawalpindi jail. He was incarcerated there along with common criminals. He was issued prison clothing. However Joe did not throw away his OG jersey, a memento of his Indian army uniform.

Around the 7th or 8th Dec 1971, because Joe's name was not announced on Paki radio as a POW, or the names of the three soldiers in the OP with him, his unit presumed that he was 'missing believed killed'. Soon afterwards, the Army HQ sent a terse telegram to his father. 'Your son/ward missing/ believed killed in action'. For several nights, though the lighthouse continued to go round and round beaming high power lights to the ships at sea, there was gloom and darkness in the household below the lighthouse. The war had extinguished their aspirations and livelihood.

Seven months later, on 2 Jul 72 the Shimla accord was signed by Madam I Gandhi and Mr Bhutto. The two armies, both Indian and Pakis, went back to business as usual with their guns pointed at each other. A new Line of Control (LOC) was defined, doing away with the earlier CFL of 65. All captured territories by both sides were returned, except that in Chamb where Bhutto managed to convince I Gandhi that it was to be gifted to them. Sacrifices, blood sweat and tears, in Chamb and at Hajipir Pass were soon forgotten and in the diplomatic circle at Chanakyapuri both the Indian and Paki envoys began to once again have Mushairas and Mujras, excuses to hug and kiss each other as well as each other's wives. Everyone went home happy and there was large acclaim internationally about how well India had handled the handing back of 98,000 Paki POWs. No one asked how many Indian POWs were still in Paki jails. Who cared, everyone was celebrating, writing their own citations and congratulating each other in Delhi.

Joe managed to make friends with his 'Ward Supervisor' in Rawalpindi jail, a convict with a life sentence for murder. He was very tall and well built sympathetic Pathan who was 'desperately seeking Susan'. In Joe he found his Susan, a life's companion. As Joe told me later with a sad smile, 'What did it matter, what difference did it make, I was just 21. What choice was there, it was either being public property or exclusive private property. God probably decided that it was payback time for what we did to the typing girls on Alleppey beach'.

Despite his going around wearing his OG Jersey with two pips on either shoulders with 4 GR written on the epaulets, no one asked who he was, what crime he had committed and whether he had ever been tried for any crime in any court of law. He had no access to any newspapers, magazines or a radio. In the Pathan's cell, which Joe shared, he had a Paki calendar in Urdu on which he kept ticking the days and months as they flew by. Several times he wrote to the jail authorities, advising them that he was a POW, an Indian being kept in a civil jail with convicts without any trial and that he should be moved with other Indian POWs if there were any in Pak. But because the application had to be routed through the Pathan ward supervisor, who knew no English and who did not want to lose his Susan, none of his appeals were ever given to any one in authority. Two years went by. Everyone including me forgot about Joe Swittens. Joe had no idea that the war was over, that there was a Shimla accord and that 98,000 Paki POWs had been returned to Pak and in reciprocity all known or publicly acknowledged Indian POWs had been sent back to India.

Then one day, in Feb 1973, the Pathan told Joe that there was a team from 'Amnesty International' who was to visit Rawalpindi jail, to check for human rights violations. He wanted Joe to act as the interpreter. Joe really had no choice, he had to do whatever the warder told him to do. So, he went and had a haircut, shaved, got his prison clothes pressed, rubbed toothpaste on his 2nd Lt's cloth pips on his OG jersey so that it looked bright, rubbed shoe polish on 4GR to get it to lose the faded look, polished his torn and tattered shoes and was ready for the Amnesty team when they arrived. 'Ladies and gentlemen, follow me, I shall take you on a conducted tour of the prison', he announced like Dev Anand in the movie Guide, smartly saluting the ladies and shaking hands with the gentleman. The Pathan had briefed him that he was to make all efforts to show off and to make belief that there was no human rights violation in Rawal Pindi jail. 'Of course not, everyone is treated well here' Joe kept saying with a sad smile whenever someone questioned him.

There was an elderly Swiss woman from the Red Cross in the team who was more curious and inquisitive.

She took Joe aside. 'Mon Ami', she asked, 'Who are you and why are you wearing an army jersey with a pip on each shoulder, were you in the Paki army?' 'No Mam', replied Joe vehemently. 'I am a POW. I am 2nd Lt AGJ Swittens of the Indian Army.' 'Arme de terre l'Indienne ? Incredible', the lady exclaimed. 'Don't you know that the war finished two years ago and that all POWs went back home last year?'

The Pathan did not like Joe having a private conversation in a language which he did not understand, he sensed that something was going wrong. He quickly herded the lady away. But before they left the jail, the lady asked the Pathan, 'May I take your photo and one of this young man for my personal album?' The Pathan had no choice because there were Paki jailors present at that time who desperately wanted to please the foreigners.

The lady took several photographs of the Pathan and one of Joe too. 'Please send one photo to my father, he is at Alleppey light house in India,' Joe whispered to the Swiss lady from Red Cross.

So it was that one fine morning in Jun or Jul 1973, a Photo card came by ordinary post, addressed simply to 'Mr Swittens, Light House Alleppey, India', on which there was an address and tel number of the person who sent it from Switzerland. And the photo at the back was a black and white close up of a smiling Joe Swittens with no teeth, in a torn OG jersey, but with shining pips and 4GR on his shoulder. Below the photo was inscribed 'Rawalpindi Prison'. There was much consternation as well as incredulity at the light house. Mr Swittens, Joe's father immediately sent a telegram to Army HQ and MoD describing the event. It took MoD almost four weeks to send a reply by normal post. 'Your son/ward missing/ believed killed in action' the Under Secretary simply said. They had not even bothered to type it – it was a cyclostyled unsigned letter and left it to the recipient to cross out what was not applicable.

Mr Swittens went to see the local MLA in Alleppey who then had an agenda of his own. He raised the issue in Kerala assembly and soon there were questions asked by MPs in Delhi. It became a starred question in the question hour. The defence minister Jagjivan Ram sought time to reply. The R&AW were told to go and investigate in Rawalpindi Jail. They embarrassed the Pak Govt, the system in Pak did not want to accept that they had made a mistake by sending POWs

to ordinary jails. They did not wish to proclaim that that POW camps were set up only after 15 Dec 71 and that there could be others who had suffered the same fate as Joe.

‘There is no 2nd Lt AGJ Swittens in Rawalpindi Jail’ was their reply. ‘There is no 2nd Lt AGJ Swittens in Rawalpindi Jail’, Jagjivan Ram announced in parliament with a sense of finality. Mr Swittens, Joe’s father, did not give up. He mobilised a few sympathetic Mallus and they in turn mobilised some more Mallus.

There was a demonstration outside the Pak embassy in Chanakyapuri. The press picked up the news. Someone, (I think the ‘Hindu’ paper) managed to get a sworn statement from the Swiss lady that she had indeed met a person in Rawalpindi jail who claimed that he was Joe and corroborated it with several photographs that she had taken. MEA asked the US Ambassador to intervene. Finally, Pakis bowed to international pressure. They admitted that they did indeed have a person in Rawalpindi jail named ‘Wasim Khan Akram’ or such a name arrested for murder in general area of Kakian Wala and if the Indians think he is one of their army officers, Indians were welcome to have him.

2nd Lt AGJ Swittens walked through the Wagha border into the waiting arms of Indian military police(MP) sometime Sep Oct 1973. He was the last POW to be exchanged after 71 war. Promptly, as soon as he set foot in India, he was arrested and incarcerated in Red Fort in Delhi. He was accused of being a spy, that he voluntarily stayed back in Pak and that he was brain washed. Joe told me afterwards, ‘I did not mind what they did to me in Pak, after all they were the enemy. But what the MPs did to me afterwards in Red Fort was completely unjust’. He said all that with a smile. A man who had been to hell and back had much resilience and tenacity.

There were more protests by Mallus in front of the Red Fort and after a month of ill-treatment by our own MPs, Joe was asked to go and join his unit in Arunachal, at a post called Gelling which took about 22 days to backpack (walk) from the Unit rear. I think that is where I met him in 1973 or 74, and where he told me his POW story. Gelling was another POW camp of sorts, at least for a 23 yr old.

The last time I met Joe was in his flat in Hinjewadi in Pune, around two years ago (2010). He only smiled and said very happy things about our life and times while we passed the same Pauwa back and forth. After 1973 Joe Swittens lived to fight again and again, with tenacity and resilience, and with the same chant

‘Ayo Gorkhali’, the last time in Kargil war in Jul 99 after which he retired and settled in Pune. Col Swittens spoke perfect Gorkhali besides several other languages. The last time I spoke to Joe was around three days before he died.

Joe died of a brain haemorrhage last year in the middle of the night with just his Alsatian dog for company. He died a lonely man. I can say this with certainty that his last words may have been the same, ‘Kafar Hunu Bhandu Marnu Ramro’.

I went to the lighthouse in Alleppey,

With half bottle of rum looking for the youth that I miss.

They looked at me with suspicion, ‘Are you a terrorist?’, they asked.

I went out into the setting sun and to the beach where we learnt to Brail,

The Typing Girls are all grand moms in Dubai,

The sea water tasted just the same.

So I passed the bottle from left hand to right hand

And took sips from each hand, one for Joe and one for me.

Joe my friend I am glad you are gone, A prisoner of life, no more.

PS- Amazing fortitude.🙏

We shouldn’t expect much from politicians and bureaucrats.

But it’s unfortunate that the Indian Armed Forces did not play a proactive role firstly in seeking his whereabouts from the Pakistani Army, then in not ensuring that all “missing in action” were accounted for (56 remain unaccounted for till this day) and finally in not moving heaven and earth to get him out from Pakistan PK.

It’s a sad commentary and it should serve as a warning for all ESM to stick together post-retirement too.

COME AND FIGHT A GORKHA

An article by Colonel AK Ahlawat (Veteran)

Lacchiman Gurung was one of the thirteen Gorkha soldiers who won the Victoria Cross in the Second World War. The tale of this diminutive warrior is perhaps unique. He was probably one of the shortest soldier who fought in the war. His deeds stand out very tall even in the exalted list of the Victoria Cross winners, among the pillars of valour where one topples the other.

It is the winter of 1940 in a far flung hill village in Nepal. A father told his son, "Son go and get me some cigarettes."

The young man ambled off to the village shop. He met a friend who was carrying a bag slung on his back.

"Going somewhere?" asked the boy.

"I am off to bharti (enlist in the army)."

The two young men set off from the hills of Nepal. Generations of hill boys go to India to join the army in their salad days. They walked over the hills and torrents and through the forest on slippery goat tracks. Then they hit the plains after three days. A train carried them to the town where the enrolment for Indian Army was being done.

The "Bharti" (enlistment) line was long. A few hours wait and the boy's turn came. He felt deja vu. He was twenty two. The Gora sahib looked at him critically with arched eye brows and nodded his head.

"Too short. Next."

The young man stood on his toes and strained upwards to make up for his diminutive height. The recruiting officer smiled ruefully,

"Still too short Johnny. Move on now."

The young man cursed his luck. They would never enlist him; why did he come again. If only they knew what fires burnt his heart. Had he travelled all the way

to get rejected yet again? His head was hot and blood to boiled in his eye lids. He walked slowly, grimacing and cursing .The crowd of onlookers sniggered at his dejection.

"Bonaa, Dekho Chaar footiya aaya bharti honay - Look at the four foot dwarf; he has come to get enrolled" they jeered and pointed at him with index fingers.

The small Gorkha kicked a stone hard that lay in his path, aimed at no one in particular. The stone flew and hit a tall burly Pathan who was also standing in the recruitment line. The Pathan yowled in pain and spat out brimstone and fire at the tiny Gorkha.

"Oye khabees ka bacha (no good offspring), I will teach you a lesson," screamed the frontiersman. He went to the tiny Gorkha and yanked him by the scruff of his neck violently. The Pathan looked all around to show everyone how the tiny Hillman was kicking his legs in the air. He threw the Gorkha who crashed on the ground and lay in a heap. The crowd jeered and the Pathan felt his pride restored and enlarged.

The small man got up slowly. His heart was a red coal.He charged and rammed the huge Pathan in the belly with his head with a bomb like force. The big man fell down and the Gorkha leapt upon him and started raining blows. He was heard shouting,

"So you want to fight a small Gorkha, fight me now, fight me."

"Separate them." yelled the recruiting officer sahib. A few sepoys ran forward and disentangled the duellers.

"Get him here. Get that tiny Gorkha here" shouted the sahib who had watched the event unfold in front of his eyes.

"What is your name?" asked the sahib.

"Hajoor; Lacchiman Gurung."

"Write his name in the roll." nodded the officer to his clerk.

"But Sir, he is too short. He is not even five feet tall" said the argumentative and officious Bengali clerk.

"Bannerji babu, he is tall enough as far as I am concerned. Now do as you are told" snapped the officer with finality.

By July 1944, the Japanese army investing Kohima and Imphal had been stopped. The Japs lost more than 60% of their strength. Field Marshal Slim's 14th Army won hard fought victories at Imphal and Kohima and ended the threat to India. But throwing the Japs out of Burma would take many more months for Slim's 14th Army.

At the end of April 1945, 89 Brigade of the 7th Indian Division was ordered to cross the Irrawady river to destroy a Japanese force which was withdrawing towards Taungdaw valley.

4/8 Gorkha Rifles was positioned near Taungdaw village to block the route of the retreating Japanese army.

The battalion detached two companies to lie in and block the retreating Japanese force. But it was the Gorkhas who got encircled and cut off. On the night of 12/13 May 1945, Lacchiman was in the forward most trench of his section about 100 metres ahead of rest of his platoon.

At about one twenty ack emma (AM) in the night, the Japanese assaulted them with suicidal fury. Waves of Japanese soldiers attacked, firing and throwing hand grenades in the trenches. A grenade came and landed on Lacchiman's tin helmet. He snatched the ticking grenade and lobbed it back at the attackers before it detonated. He lobbed back a second grenade that landed in his trench in the semi darkness of a moon lit night. Again a grenade came and landed on the parapet of his trench. Lacchiman leaped to get hold of the grenade and try a third "Return to Sender." But this time he was not so lucky, the deadly grenade went off, shattering his arm and taking off his fingers. Shrapnel cut into in his right eye and in his legs. The other two men in the trench also got very seriously wounded making them Hors De Combat.

Lacchiman was wet. Blood poured out of him like a sieve from a body riddled with grenade fragments. His right eye was gone. His face was a blood mask. His right hand was mangled and gone, no fingers left. He was left one working

hand and he was probably going to die very soon he thought. He shrugged. "Well death comes to us all; what's so special if it comes to me too?"

And then Lacchiman did what only a Gorkha can do. He pulled out his Khukhri with his good hand and stabbed it on the parapet of his trench and shouted at the Japanese attackers,

"NONE OF YOU WILL MAKE IT PAST MY KHUKHRI ALIVE."

He picked up his bolt action Lee Enfield Mark 3 rifle, which is designed to be used by a right handed firer and shouted and invited the enemy to "COME AND FIGHT A GORKHA."

With his friends dead or dying, Lacchiman fought for hours with his one working hand, killing anyone who came near his trench. He would wait till the Japs were on top of his position. He would kill the closest Jap at point blank range, chamber in a new round with his left hand and then kill the Japanese soldier's battle partner. At times he would be required to impale a Jap with his Khukri. This he did with divine relish.

Lacchiman killed Japanese attackers throughout the night of 12/13 May 1945 till the next morning when his company reinforcements reached his lone trench. The reinforcements heard him shouting in the haze of early morning, a solitary mad voice shouting, "Come and fight me. Come again. I will kill you. I will kill all."

The Company held on to the critical position. Lacchiman refused to be evacuated. They counted eighty seven dead Japanese soldiers, out of these thirty one had been personally killed by the tiny, badly wounded Rifleman Lacchiman Gurung.

For this stellar act of insuperable courage Lacchiman was awarded the Victoria Cross.

He returned to his village after five years of absence without an eye and a hand. His father Pratiman, asked him,

"Son, I had sent you to bring me cigarettes .What took you so long."

He said," Father I have got us something better than cigarettes. I have brought you the Victoria Cross."

EDDIE AND BUTCH

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The following true stories are among my favourites; taken from the internet. If you have occasion to visit O'Hare International Airport at Chicago, give some thought to visiting Butch's memorial displaying his statue and his Congressional Medal of Honor. It's located between Terminals 1 and 2.

Easy Eddie

Many years ago, Al Capone virtually owned Chicago. Capone wasn't famous for anything heroic. He was notorious for enmeshing the Windy City in everything from bootlegged booze and prostitution to murder.

Capone had a lawyer named Easy Eddie. He was Capone's lawyer for a good reason. Eddie was very good. In fact Eddie's skill at legal maneuvering kept Big Al out of jail for a long time.

To show his appreciation, Capone paid him very well. Not only was the money big, but Eddie got special dividends, as well. For instance, he and his family occupied a fenced-in mansion with live-in help and all the conveniences of the day. The estate was so large that it filled an entire Chicago City block.

Eddie lived the high life of the Chicago mob and gave little consideration to the atrocity that went on around him. Eddie did have one soft spot, however. He had a son he loved dearly. Eddie saw to it that his son had clothes, cars and a good education. Nothing was withheld. Price was no object.

And despite his association with organized crime, Eddie tried to teach his son, right from wrong. Eddie wanted his son to be a better man than he was. Yet, with all his wealth and influence, there were two things he couldn't give his son; he couldn't pass on a good name or a good example.

One day, Easy Eddie reached a difficult decision. Easy Eddie decided to rectify the wrongs he had done. He decided he would get to the authorities and tell the truth about Al "Scarface" Capone, clean up his tarnished name, and offer his son a semblance of integrity. To do this he would have to testify against the mob, and he knew that the cost would be great. Yet, he testified.

Within the year, Easy Eddie's life ended in a blaze of gunfire on a lonely Chicago street. But in his eyes, he had given his son the greatest gift he had to offer, at the greatest price he could ever pay. Police removed from his pockets a rosary, a crucifix, a religious medallion, and a poem clipped from a magazine.

The poem read –

The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power to tell just when the hands will stop, at late or early hour. Now is the only time you own. Live, love, toil with a will. Place no faith in time. For the clock may soon be still.

Butch O'Hare

World War II produced many heroes. One such man was Lieutenant Commander Butch O'Hare. He was a fighter pilot assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Lexington in the South Pacific.

One day his entire squadron was sent on a mission. After he was airborne, he looked at his fuel gauge and realized that someone had forgotten to top off his fuel tank. He would not have enough fuel to complete the mission and get back to the ship.

His flight leader ordered him to return to the carrier. Reluctantly, he dropped out of formation and headed back to the fleet. As he was returning to the mother ship, he saw something that turned his blood cold. A squadron of Japanese aircraft was speeding its way towards the American fleet.

The American fighters were gone on a sortie, and the fleet was all but defenseless. He couldn't reach his squadron and bring them back in time to save the fleet. Nor could he warn the fleet of the approaching danger. There was only one thing to do. He must somehow divert them from the fleet.

Laying aside all thoughts of personal safety, he dove into the formation of enemy planes. Wing mounted 50 caliber canons blazed as he charged in, attacking one surprised enemy plane and then another. Butch wove in and out of the now broken Japanese formation and fired at as many planes as possible till he ran out of all ammunition.

Undaunted, he continued his assault. He dove at the planes trying to clip a wing or a tail in hopes of damaging as many enemy aircraft as possible,

rendering them unfit to fly. Finally the exasperated Japanese squadron took off in another direction.

Deeply relieved, Butch O'Hare and his battered fighter limped back to the carrier. Upon arrival he reported in and related the event surrounding his return. The films from the gun camera mounted on his plane told the tale. It showed the extent of Butch's single handed daring attempt to save the fleet. He had in fact destroyed five enemy aircraft. This took place on February 20, 1942. And for that action Butch became the US Navy's first Ace of World war II and the first Naval Aviator to win the Congressional Medal of Honor.

A year later Butch was killed in aerial combat the age of 29. His home town would not allow the memory of this W.W.II hero to fade; and today, O'Hare airport in Chicago is named in tribute to this great man.

So what do these two stories have to do with each other?

Butch O'Hare was Easy Eddie's son.

ETHNIC AFFINITY

Contributed By Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

AK Ahlawat in an article originally titled 'An Id Ul Fitr Story' narrates a true story which illustrates the sort of geographical and cultural ties that Indian and Pakistani men in uniform share.

It was 20th of December 1971 and the War had ended a few days ago. Ajay was a pre-medical student in DAV college Chandigarh.

Ajay reached the Chandigarh bus stand to catch the first bus to Jammu. The morning was cool and winter's haze hung on the roof of the lined up buses. A few minutes before seven, the Sikh driver in khaki climbed behind the wheel.

By evening Ajay was with his father, an army colonel posted at Udhampur where the army's 15 Corps was headquartered.

The family was grieving. On 6th Dec they had lost Flight Lieutenant Vijay Kumar Wahi in an aerial battle over Chambb in the Akhnoor Sector. He was flying a Sukhoi 7 aircraft with the IAF's 101 Fighter Squadron. The mood of the family was sombre and quiet. Vijay Wahi was the fighter pilot brother whom Ajay hero-worshipped.

Then one day his father said "Ajay I have to visit the Prisoner Of War camp here in Udhampur. Would you like to come along?."

So they drove in an army Jonga, turned left from the nullah before the Base Hospital and reached the barbed wire cage of the POW camp. The elderly time scale Sikh colonel who was the camp commandant took them to his hut and offered them tea and biscuits.

"Anyone from Khooshab Sargodha area in the camp?" asked Colonel Wahi.

"I think there might be a few?" The Camp Commandant replied: pressing the office bell. An orderly appeared.

"Go call the Pakistani senior JCO."

A man in Khaki came in, saluted and gave his name, no, rank, unit and name.

"How did you get caught as Prisoner Of War? JCO's are at gun positions in the rear." asked Colonel Wahi.

"Janab there is a lot of difference in our armies. In Indian Army officers do Artillery Observation Post duty. In our army, officers remain behind at Gun positions and JCO's are at Forward Observation Posts to direct artillery fire. My observation post got over run by Indian infantry and I was taken prisoner."

Colonel Wahi was silent for a few moments trying to recollect something,

"Isn't there a Pakistani athlete of your name who had competed with Milka Singh in races."

The Pakistani came to stiff attention and said,

"*Janab* I am the same man."

They exchanged notes about their old native province for some time and then the JCO asked,

"*Gustakhi maaf howey to janab ek arz karan* - Sir if you permit I have a request."

"*Bilkul dasso kee* - sure go ahead. Tell me"

"*Janab ek munda hai, ohh nu bayonet lagya hai. Doctor saab rozz aande ne, oh nuu dekhdey ney, parr ohh thik nahi ho rayaa* - Sir there is a soldier of ours who has a bayonet wound, the doctor comes every day to attend to him but his condition is not improving."

"*Badaa tezz bukhaar hai mundey nuu aur saadey paasey daa he hai* - The lad has high fever and he is from our province itself."

"*Janab* if a surgeon *sahab* can have a look at him, *badi meherbani howeey gi sahab*. He is slipping away fast Sir. If he can be transferred to the Military Hospital, may be his life can be saved."

The Senior Advisor Surgery in Base Hospital was a white bearded Sikh who also came from Khooshab. He was Colonel Wahi's tennis partner. They give him a

call from the POW camp and related the case. The surgeon Colonel Baldev Singh asked for the POW to be sent to the Base Hospital and sent an ambulance.

In the evening the surgeon met Colonel Wahi at the tennis court. The young school boy had also accompanied his father.

"Thank God you sent him just in time. The bayonet has gone deep inside and he has peritonitis. Very serious infection has developed inside him and he will have to be operated. We need some blood for him. I have told the staff that I will operate him after I play tennis and in the meantime they are to look for some blood donor of the same blood group."

The medical student, Ajay Wahi who was overhearing the conversation asked,

"Sir what blood group is he?"

"He is B positive."

"I am also B positive."

The surgeon looked at Ajay.

"You will donate blood for this Pakistani soldier?"

,"
"Yes I will."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, I will."

"Come son then let's go to the hospital."

They reached the hospital and the senior surgeon said "here is the voluntary donor, I will just change and operate."

Then the father and son came back. The father said,

"Son I thought that you were still a kid, but I have realized today that my son is no longer a boy, he is a man."

Postscript.

Colonel Ajay Wahi, a pathologist of the Army Medical Corps, made 130 blood donations till the time he reached the age of 65 years.

Subedar Abdul Khaliq, the Pakistani JCO of 8 Medium Regiment of Artillery was an ace sprinter of Pakistan whom Pandit Nehru had named 'The Flying Bird of Asia'.

THE BATTLE OF KOHIMA AND IMPHAL FEBRUARY TO JULY 1944

By

Ashwin Panemangalore

(My resource for this is the British National Army website who graciously allowed sharing)

Preface

Our British trained Indian Army is known as one of the best fighting forces in the world. Their exploits in World War I and their participation in the great Battles of El Alamein and Dunkirk of WW II have been written about. More recently, the Indo Pak Wars of 1965 and 1971 were brought back from memory. In 1971, the crossing of over a hundred water bodies in East Pakistan, pushing the Pak army into defeat and rounding up of 95000 POWs is a major feat in world war history. But amidst all this, the bravery of our soldiers who won the Battles of Kohima and Imphal have not been in the Indian eye. In fact on the canvas of war history this Battle finds scarce space. A telling comment on its 75th Anniversary in 2019 in the Washington Post is quoted below “In recent years, the battles of Kohima and Imphal were voted Britain’s greatest battle by the National War Museum, beating out Waterloo and the Normandy landings. However, despite specialists recognizing the critical nature of these conflicts, Kohima does not loom large in histories of World War II.” In India, it has been omitted from much of public writings and from schools history.

This lack of recognition mirrors the international perceptions of the region in which it occurred. The British colonial army that fought there, officially the 14th Army, was nicknamed the “Forgotten Army,” and the China-Burma-India Theater is often called a “forgotten war”.

18th July 1944 marks the end of the bloody Battle of Kohima and Imphal which raged on our borders between the Japanese and the British and Indian armies and Air Force. It is a red letter day in the history of our country. Had the British and Indian armies lost the Japanese were all set to maraud their way into India and make real, Japanese General Mutagachi’s boast that he would ride in

victory on Kingsway (Rajpath) in Delhi. So confident was he of his strength and superiority that he had dropped instructions to the soldiers in English on the modalities of surrender.

A vast majority of Indians know little or nothing about this Battle and the bravery of our several divisions who fought hard to defeat the Japanese who were clearly stronger in numbers. Our war generation however were aware of an impending Japanese onslaught in the east making Calcutta highly vulnerable. I recall as a child being told by my dad that this fear had spread to Bombay and most of the buildings where we lived in Matunga emptied as the residents fled to their native towns in the hinterland. Matunga was a deserted neighbourhood all the way from Dadar TT to Kings Circle that year.

This account has been simplified for ease of understanding a more detailed writeup is available on warfare history network online by Robert Barr Smith.

Japanese offensive

In March 1944, the Japanese 15th Army began an advance against India's north-east frontier to forestall a planned British invasion of Burma. They intended to capture the British supply bases on the Imphal Plain and cut the road linking Dimapur and Imphal at Kohima. (Nagaland and Manipur) With Imphal in their hands, the Japanese would be able to interrupt air supplies to China. It would also give them a base from which to conduct air attacks against India.

The plan to attack Imphal originated with Lieutenant-General Renya Mutaguchi (1888-1966), a veteran of campaigns in China, Malaya and Singapore. He led three Japanese divisions and the INA.

The Battle

Imphal, the capital of Manipur state, lay in a plain surrounded by hills and was the main British base in the area. It was held by Scoones' 4th Corps.

Mutaguchi's plan relied on his men quickly annihilating 4th Corps and seizing its supplies before his own communications and logistics broke down.

The Japanese 33rd Division would cut off the 17th Indian Division south of Imphal. Shortly afterwards, the 15th Division would attack from the north-east, severing the road to Kohima, some 80 miles (120km) away in Nagaland. Sato's

31st Division would simultaneously surround Kohima to prevent any relief from Dimapur, which was a further 40 miles (64km) to the north.

Kohima Surrounded

The Japanese offensive started well. On 29 March, they cut the Imphal-Kohima road and almost surrounded the 17th Division. Next, they quickly isolated the hilltop town of Kohima, capturing all but the central ridge by mid-April. Colonel Hugh Richards had hastily organised a scratch force from his 2,500-strong garrison, many of whom were non-combatants. It was built around 4th Battalion, and the Assam Regiment. Elements of 161st Indian Brigade, stationed at Jotsoma two miles to the west, also reinforced the Kohima defenders.

At Close Quarter

Faced by 15,000 Japanese, the British-Indian troops held a tight defensive perimeter centred on Garrison Hill. Between 5 and 18 April, Kohima saw some of the bitterest hand to hand fighting of the war.

Relief

Mutaguchi had underestimated his enemy's especially the Indian regiment's defensive skills. Likewise, he misjudged the Allies' ability to bring up reinforcements.

Admiral Mountbatten Commander of the South East Asian Forces had immediately despatched the 2nd Division from India by road and rail to Dimapur which took several days across the slow circuitous route. There, it joined the British Corps for the bitterly contested march to relieve Kohima. On 14 April, the British broke the Japanese roadblock at Zubza and reached Kohima four days later.

The reinforcement Indian divisions reached late. The battle continued to rage around Kohima until mid-May, when the Japanese General Sato's division began to withdraw. The British Division, then cleared the road to Imphal. On 22 June, they linked up with 4th Corps, which had been under siege since 5 April. The Japanese made several attacks against Imphal's defensive perimeter. But the 5th, 17th, 20th and 23rd Indian Divisions held firm.

The fighting all around its circumference was continuous, fierce, and often confused as each side manoeuvred to outwit and kill. There was always a Japanese thrust somewhere that had to be met and destroyed. Yet, the fighting did follow a pattern. The main encounters were on the spokes of the wheel, because it was only along these that guns, tanks, and vehicles could move.

The Allied Army was led by General Slim. During a reunion at Kohma in 1956 he recounted that the Allies' logistical and communications superiority were key. They had not only allowed the quick deployment of reinforcements from Dimapur, but also the airlifting of 5th Indian Division and its equipment from the Arakan to Imphal in only two days.

During the battle, the Royal Indian Air Force flew in nearly 19,000 tons of supplies and over 12,000 men, and evacuated around 13,000 casualties. Continually supplied by air, the garrisons threw back the Japanese attacks in bitter close-quarter fighting until the relief forces reached them.

Casualties

The Japanese could have withdrawn fairly easily had Mutaguchi not persevered long after it was clear the offensive had failed.

His plan had relied on using captured supplies. When these were not forthcoming, his men starved in the worst of the monsoon conditions.

The Japanese 15th Army, 85,000-strong, eventually lost 53,000 dead and missing. The British sustained 12,500 casualties at Imphal, while the fighting at Kohima cost them another 4,000 casualties.

Imphal-Kohima was one of the biggest defeats the Japanese Army ever suffered. Mutaguchi was relieved of command, recalled to Tokyo, and finally forced into retirement in December 1944. That same month, Slim and the other Generals were knighted by the viceroy of India, Lord Wavell, in a ceremony at Imphal.

After their defensive victory, the British planned a new offensive aimed at clearing the last Japanese forces from northern Burma and driving them south towards Mandalay and Meiktila.

Fighting through the monsoon and supplied by air, troops of the Fourteenth Army now crossed the River Chindwin. The 15th Corps took Akyab in the Arakan, while 4th and 32nd Corps won bridgeheads across the River Irrawaddy. After fierce fighting, Meiktila and Mandalay were captured in March 1945. The route south to Rangoon now lay open. 4th Corps was only 30 miles (48km) from the city when it fell to a combined air and seaborne operation in early May.

The legacy

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Imphal contains 1,600 graves. The one at Kohima holds 1,420. There are also several monuments to British and Indian units that fought at Kohima, as well as the Kohima Cremation Memorial commemorating the 917 Hindus and Sikhs killed there.

Kohima War Cemetery lies on the slopes of Garrison Hill and also contains the British 2nd Division's memorial. The inscription on the latter has become famous as the 'Kohima Epitaph'.

'When You Go Home, Tell Them of Us and Say, For Your Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today.'

'Kohima Epitaph', John Maxwell Edmonds, 1944

Indian Army participation

50th Indian Parachute Brigade, 5th, 7th, 23rd, 114th, 161st, 268th, Indian Infantry Brigades

17th Indian Army Division, XXXIII Indian Corps

5th Indian Infantry Division, 23rd Indian Infantry Division

1st Assam Regiment and Assam Rifles

1st 7th, 14th Punjab Regiment, 4th, 7th Rajput Regiment, 1st Burma regiment, 1st, 4th Gurkha Rifles,

8th, 13th Frontier Force Rifles, 1st Bihar Regiment, 2nd, 4th, 5th Bombay Grenadiers, 1st Chamar Regiment, Bengal Sappers, 2 Mahratta platoons.

Post War

A Kohima War Museum has been built at York in the UK. A reconciliation reunion of the Japanese, British and Indian veterans of the war was held on the 75th Anniversary of the Battle at Kohima in 2019 by the Nagaland Government.

A BRIDGE AND SERENDIPITY

By

Maj Gen (Dr) S G Vombatkere, VSM

The importance of a bridge is usually according to its dimensions or its carrying capacity. This account concerns the events that led to the construction of a military (Bailey) bridge insignificant in its dimensions or load capacity, its construction under exceptional circumstances, and how it became important.

Prelude

April 1982. I joined 16 BRTF in Ladakh to take over command from Lt Col (later Brigadier) S.M.R.Nair, who briefed me about the work, achievements and challenges in its area of responsibility. 16 BRTF of those days had an extensive road sector with many “choke points”, one of which was an ice body, the so-called glacier, situated on Road Leh-Chalunka just north of Khardungla (altitude 5,603-m) which is 39-km from Leh. The entire road was unsurfaced and in most places, just wide enough for one-way movement of the army’s 3-ton lorries. The road over Khardungla between South Pulu and North Pulu was kept open between May and October every year only to army vehicles – civilian vehicles did not operate because of the tortuous and risky passage. It took a light vehicle like a Nissan Jonga about seven jolting, dusty hours to cover the distance of 124-km between Leh and Hunder in the Shyok valley.

The road stretch passing over this ‘glacier’ at 5,580-m altitude, was 80-m long, but due to loss of about 40% of rated engine power due to altitude and wheels slipping on the ice, vehicles could not cross it without the help of a bulldozer or recovery vehicle winch at both ends of the glacier. Each crossing was time-consuming, and only 5 to 6 army 3-ton lorries could manage to pass per day each way. Further, the roadway width appeared to be gradually reducing, making vehicle passage risky. With the passage of even this minimal traffic over the years, and boulders and rubble being dumped on the ice to provide better wheel traction, the ice body had developed a depression or dip in the road surface, making it difficult and risky even to winch vehicles into and out of the dip.

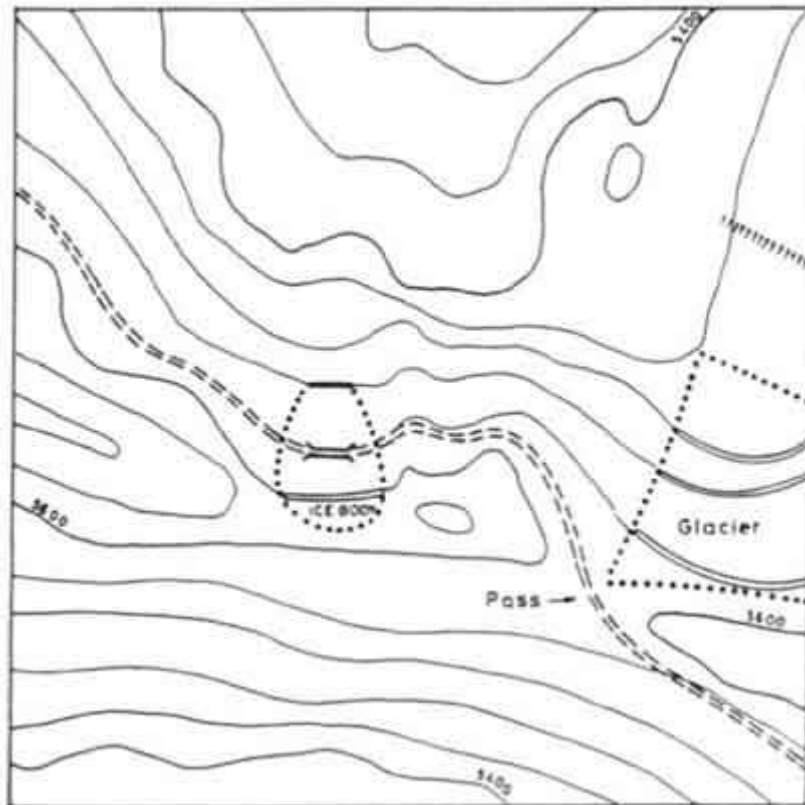


FIG . 1.-Plan of Bridge

With the road virtually unusable, the army's growing operational commitments required increased operational and logistic loads to be airlifted at enormous expense.

In the summer of 1980, glaciologists from the Geological Survey of India (GSI) had been called to study the glacier and render expert advice regarding its stability. They made a brief site visit and reported that the "ice body" was *"in a state of flow"*, and the only solution was to realign a portion of the road to bye-pass it. The time for completion of the bye-pass was estimated at five years due to low machine output on account of high altitude, and snow and ice making formation cutting work possible for barely 3-4 months in a year. On the basis of the experts' report, a work estimate for construction of a new road to bye-pass the glacier at cost of Rs.45 lakhs, had been prepared.

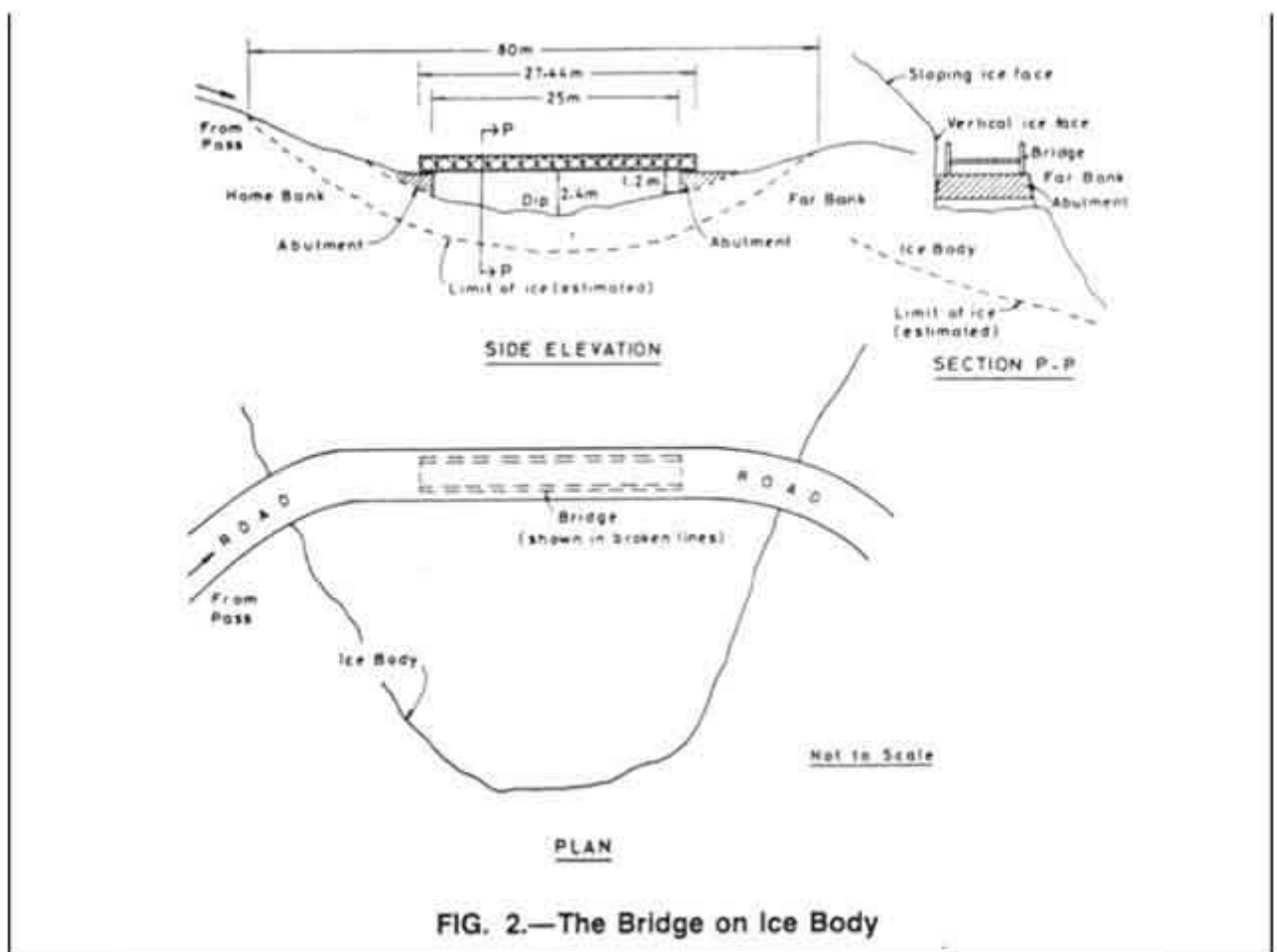
A suggestion re-considered

Even as the sanction for the work was awaited, the trafficability over Khardungla had further deteriorated, and with increased operational commitment, the load transportation requirement had increased. This rapidly worsening situation placed immense pressure on 16 BRTF to find an immediate solution to the problem of trafficability. It was clearly necessary to take a fresh

look at the problem, and informal discussions to find a temporary solution were reckoned to be a good start point.

During one such 'chatting session', it came to light that, following the glaciologists' visit, when the matter was being tossed about in the Officers' Mess one evening, an officer's wife had suggested constructing a bridge over the glacier. Considering the experts' view, this was apparently considered flippant, and she had been pooh-poohed as impractical. But in the hot-seat in May 1982, and pressed with the urgency of the situation, launching a Bailey bridge across the glacier appeared to be a solution worth re-considering.

The opinion from the ground



Reconnaissance of the road slopes and horizontal curve geometrics on both sides of the North-facing glacier revealed that launching a Bailey bridge to span across it was definitely not possible. And resting the bridge on the ice body itself to only span across the depression in the ice surface was also considered impossible by experienced hands, because glaciologists had declared the glacier to be *"in a state of flow"*. This opinion was strengthened by reports

from GREF Pioneers working on the ground that the glacier was moving, because the road width was observed to be gradually reducing. This was being overcome by manually hacking the ice face with pickaxes to widen the road (since the bulldozer blade could not make even a dent in the hard ice) so that the vehicle body would not accidentally strike it. They also pointed to the wreckage of vehicles which had fallen into the valley when moving across the glacier, because the body of the vehicle had struck the ice face, and the jerk had caused the vehicle to slip on the ice, slide off the road, and plunge down the slope.

Experts are not always right

Periodic observations over about 10 weeks, of three pegs in a straight line, two driven on hard ground and one on the ice, remaining in line, and the simple check that the centre lines of the road on ground and on the ice showed no lateral displacement, conclusively showed that the ice body was not moving. Also, careful observation showed that reducing roadway width was not due to movement of the ice body, but because water from melting ice on the upper sloping ice face was re-freezing on the vertical ice face of the road cut, which received no sunlight. I was convinced that the opinion of GSI glaciology experts regarding the glacier being in a *“state of flow”*, based on their brief site visit and the reports that the roadway width was reducing, was in error. Belief in this reality contrary to expert opinion, was central to the design and construction of the bridge. However, even if constructing a bridge was possible since the ice body was not moving, there were other problems to be addressed.

Practical solution

The proposal of constructing a Bailey bridge resting on ice and spanning across the depression in the road surface, was questioned by the team-on-the-ground, quoting the experts’ *“state of flow”* opinion. This called for explaining how simple engineering observations demonstrated that the “glacier” was really an unmoving ice body, and also explaining how the gradually reducing roadway width did not mean that the ice body was moving.

Questions of whether the ice would bear the weight of the bridge and vehicles moving across it without melting under pressure and/or cracking, were answered on the strength of Military Engineering Vol.III (Bridging), which records the Russians’ construction of a bridge on the ice of frozen Lake Ladoga every November and dismantling it before the spring thaw, for three successive winters of the German army’s siege of Leningrad during World War

2. Simple calculations established the minimum bearing capacity of ice as being far in excess of any possible loading including a generous factor of safety. Thus, the practicality of a bridge resting on ice was established. It was late July 1982.

Burden of responsibility

The thinking in 16 BRTF was oriented to constructing a bridge resting on ice, and it was time to obtain the permission of the Chief Engineer at Srinagar. However, it was not possible to convince the Chief Engineer or his staff, who were influenced by the “*state of flow*” opinion of GSI glaciologists, regarding the stability of the ice body and a bridge on it. They retained the view that constructing a bridge was risky, if not foolhardy. Thus, armed with a personal belief in the stability of the ice body and the viability of a bridge founded on it, the hard decision of going contrary to expert opinion for an emergency work of an unconventional and risky bridge launch, was taken to solve the trafficability problem over Khardungla. It was early August 1982.

Plans are useless without team competence

The road sector came under 54 RCC / 168 FC PI ably commanded by Maj S.Ramaswamy (Ramu, to his friends) and AEE(M) H.S.(Harry)Rakhraj respectively. Ramu conducted detailed bridge reconnaissance to show that a 90-ft single-single (SS) Bailey bridge would serve the purpose. He also proposed bridge abutments built from stones wrapped in wire crating, resting on ice. In place of cement which would not set at low temperatures, with sapper innovativeness he proposed pouring water which would freeze and bind the stones together to make monolithic abutments.

Ramu, an accomplished leader and team-builder, combined efficiency and toughness with genuine understanding and the personal touch. Harry was another go-getter, extremely tough, solid and dependable. Ramu and Harry along with an enthusiastic Sapper JCO, Nb Sub P.Angamuthu, and GREF Pioneers (all aged around 45 years and with no experience of handling Bailey equipment) drawn from 1594 and 1601 GREF Pnr Coys, comprised the bridging team.

Since at that time all Bailey equipment in 16 BRTF sector was committed on ground with none held in stock, Ramu had to rustle up Bailey components by dismantling small bridges from within his road sector, and moving them up to Khardungla.

The reader may well wonder why so much is being made of constructing a mere 90-ft SS Bailey Bridge which could, in ordinary circumstances, be entrusted to a Sapper NCO. The reason is that this bridge was constructed under multiple constraints, all of which were overcome by the ingenuity and careful work by Ramu and his team.

Restrictions and constraints

The site restrictions were multiple. Bridging components had to be placed strung out on the road side as the road was narrow, requiring manual carry of heavy components over 50-metres at high altitude by inexperienced men who were already in their forties. There was severely restricted back space (only 30-ft) available for construction, making conventional construction and launching of a Bailey bridge impossible.

Therefore intermediate temporary piers were constructed on the ice surface, using steel bridging cribs, Bailey transoms and wooden sleepers, with plain rollers mounted on top. The two piers, located 30-ft from the launching rollers on the home bank, were braced together, and their bases restrained from sliding on the ice by pickets driven into the ice. To make matters worse, it was a downward-slope launch and launching links to construct the “nose bay” were not available. This called for great care in setting out and launching, so that the leading bridge girders landed very gently on the pier rollers.

Construction

28 August 1982. The difficult nitty-gritty of logistics – planning and positioning stores and organizing work, making changes to standard procedures and bridge construction drills for untrained, inexperienced troops – and preparatory work was taken up enthusiastically, yet carefully and systematically, by Harry and Angamuthu under Ramu’s leadership and directions. Wire-crated dry stone masonry abutments (1.2-m high, 4.8-m wide, 1.8-m deep) were constructed, and the vertical ice face was dressed to achieve full road width and more importantly, permit launching of the bridge without transoms fouling with the ice face. This had taken three days of unremitting work in the most trying circumstances.

With only 30-ft of backspace available, it was not possible to follow normal procedures of providing adequate counterweight until the bridge tipped onto the intermediate pier rollers. Ramu, as innovative as ever, had additional transoms placed in the bays behind the launching rollers and had them shifted rearwards as the bridge was boomed out.

The temporary piers were a constant source of anxiety during launching because they were merely resting on ice, and the smallest jerk while launching the bridge could dislodge them, with disastrous consequences to men and equipment. It was imperative to eliminate all jerks when the bridge was approaching the temporary pier, and later when the bridge was running on the pier rollers, due to its rather precarious foundation on ice. Thus, booming-out the bridge was done very, very slowly, often as little as 6-inches at a time, to check that transoms did not foul with the ice face, sway braces did not foul with the rollers, and adequate counterweight was ensured. [Indeed, when the lead girder touched down on the intermediate pier and the pier rocked ever so slightly, everybody present gasped!

All activities were slow because the GREF Pioneers were unfamiliar with Bailey equipment and construction, had to carry heavy components a distance of about 50-m, and worked with reduced oxygen due to high altitude, and sub-zero temperature due to the wind chill effect.

Starting work at 0700 hrs, the bridge touched the far bank rollers at around 1600 hrs. The bridge was jacked down, the temporary piers dismantled, and rough earth ramps built, so it was only around 1930 hrs, that a light vehicle was crossed over the bridge to mark completion of the task. The whole operation had lasted four days, and this was possible only because of Ramu and his marvellous team who had worked efficiently under exceptionally arduous conditions.

The features that made this bridge a reality to solve the problem of trafficability over Khardungla, were the concept that overcame adverse expert opinion, the command and technical risk involved in the decision to implement the concept, and the successful execution of the concept under exceptionally difficult circumstances and site conditions by Ramu and his team.

Serendipity



Completed 90-ft single-single Bailey Bridge

When we were back in camp and the team met for debriefing after the task was completed, someone remarked that this was perhaps the highest altitude motorable bridge. And so it was that serendipitously, a mere 90-ft SS Bailey bridge constructed to solve a problem, “accidentally” and fortuitously became the highest altitude bridge [Note 1]. Later it was discovered (more serendipity!) that besides being the highest altitude motorable bridge, this bridge also had the engineering distinction that it was a semi-permanent bridge across an ice body, with its foundations on ice.

Sequel

AEE (M) H.S.Rakhraj and Nb Sub P.Angamuthu were awarded the BRDB Commendation Card and the COAS Commendation Card respectively, for their roles in the construction of the bridge. Maj S.Ramaswamy was awarded the Visishta Seva Medal for distinguished service concerning this bridge and other works in his very difficult high altitude road sector, which improved communications.



Army convoy towards Leh

Army convoy traffic over Khardungla increased manifold, saving most of the enormous recurring cost of airlifting military stores and even personnel. The bridge enabled winter observation of the ice body and, starting with the winter of 1983-84, the road across Khardungla was kept open during winter also, with its huge military and civil benefit. The J&K government civil supplies department was able to provide food and fuel to the people, and projects for telecommunications, power and other infrastructure were initiated, with trade and commerce in the hitherto cut-off area receiving huge impetus.

The work estimate for realignment of the road died a natural death, and in appreciation of the work, the Chief Engineer's office designed Project Beacon's greeting card for New Year 1983 with a photograph of the bridge on it.

Technical papers were published in premier international journals – The Journal of Glaciology in 1985 [Ref.1], and American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Journal of Construction Engineering in 1986 [Ref.2]. The bridge-on-ice was also reported in an international seminar in 1991 [Ref.3].

In 1985, the bridge was delatched and re-constructed as a 110-ft DS BB anchored with SWR to the mountain-side against shifting due to sloughing snow from the ice body above it. Notwithstanding this safety measure, two bridges were lost when hit by snow avalanches, but each time a new bridge was constructed.

In keeping with the recession of glaciers all over the Himalayas, this ice body also gradually ablated over the years, and in January 1995 it became possible to replace the bridge, lost in an avalanche, with a stone causeway. Today, the causeway serves quite well, and the highest altitude motorable bridge which was in service for about 13 years, from August 1982 to January 1995, is only a memory refreshed by pictures, or its scale model in 16 BRTF.

The construction of this highest bridge in the world has been acknowledged and certified by the Guinness Book of World Records.

1971 - THE NAVAL WAR: ATTACKS ON KARACHI

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The 1971 fourteen-day Indo-Pak war concluded on 16 Dec 1971, and in Dec 2021, India celebrated the golden Jubilee of its victory over Pakistan – Swarnim Vijay Varsh. India's success on the land, in the air and at sea was swift and absolute. That historical victory resulted in the dismemberment of Pakistan and East Bengal became Bangladesh, a new independent country on the world map. Over 97,000 Pakistani armed forces personnel were taken POW. The most resounding victory after WW II and a military feat never equalled by any other country since.

On 22 Dec 1971, after the unilateral declaration of cease-fire, Smt Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, wrote to Admiral S M Nanda, Chief of Naval Staff -

“The Navy’s exploits in these 14 days of fighting will long be remembered. The achievements of our Naval Forces have thrilled the nation. Your leadership and the daring and the skill of our Fleet have made singular contribution to the success of the war on both fronts. I should like to express the gratitude of the Government and the people of India to you and your officers and men.

None of this would have been possible without the most exacting leadership and dedication at all levels. In this, your role has been crucial. No words can be a better recompense for your labours than the people’s admiration and India’s success.”

‘Success of the war on both fronts’ – these words are worth noting. In the 1965 Indo-Pak war the Indian Navy was left to sit out the war; the war was fought by the Army and the Air Force against West Pakistan. But as the storm clouds were gathering in 1971, the Navy bided its turn to go into action. As it became evident to Admiral S M Nanda, that another war with Pakistan was becoming inevitable, he was determined that unlike 1965, the Navy would not be excluded this time around and famously promised his officers “If war comes again, I assure you that we shall carry it right into the enemy’s biggest ports like Karachi”.

Significantly, all three fighting services, the army, the navy and the air force were all actively involved in the fighting in both theatres of war in 1971.

The plan of the Navy was twofold: -

- (a) In the East, surround the East Pakistan coast and block all ports for enemy activity; which meant denying trapped Pakistanis soldiers opportunities to flee.
- (b) In the West, attack Karachi. All external trade and transfer, including that of arms and ammunition, took place at Karachi port. It was also the Headquarters of the Pakistani Navy as well as its principal oil storage facility.

This is the story on the Naval war in the West; more particularly the attacks on Karachi harbour.

The Indian Navy's daring attack on Karachi harbour on the night of 4th Dec by the deadly 'Killers' - Russian Osa-1 missile boats, is well chronicled in the annals of history for its sheer chutzpah, out-of-the-box thinking and flawless execution. The Pakistan Navy was surely taken by surprise because it was only the previous evening that Pak aircraft had launched pre-emptive air strikes on Indian airfields. The retaliation by India was too swift for them to comprehend because an attack of such magnitude by Indian missile boats inside their major port could not have been carried out without meticulous planning and preparation.

Osa in Russian translates to 'Wasp' and it certainly carries a lethal sting; the deadly ship-to-ship Styx missiles that could blow the biggest enemy cruisers out of the water, and homing radars that could out-range any naval radar of that era. Thus these fast-moving Vidyut class missile boats could look and strike deep in enemy waters. The limitations were the operational range and the short range of the missile itself since the boats were designed for coastal defence; not as long range attack boats.

In the latter half of the 1960s, India had procured from USSR, eight of these Osa-1 missile boats. The logistics involved in transporting the 80 ton boats from the Soviet Union to Calcutta, special arrangements for unloading them in a time bound manner and then towing them along the coastline to Bombay and then again to Okha is a different story altogether.

On 23 Nov 1971, after Pakistan declared a national emergency, three of these missile boats, christened INS Nirghat, INS Nipat and INS Veer were towed from

Bombay and located off the coast of Okha; they formed the Karachi Strike Group.

On 4 Dec, as planned, towed and escorted by two anti-submarine Corvettes of the fleet, INS Kiltan and INS Katchal, the Karachi Strike Force was positioned 250 nautical miles (nm) South of the coast of Karachi. As Pakistani aircraft did not possess night bombing capability, the attack was planned for the hours of darkness, between dusk and dawn.

INS Nirghat moved in a North Westerly direction and fired the first of its four Styx missile at PNS Khaibar. Khaibar was mortally wounded and a second Styx missile from Nirghat sank it at 10;45 pm Pakistan time, killing all 222 Pakistani sailors aboard.

INS Nipat verified two targets at 11 pm and fired two Styx missiles. The first was aimed at a cargo vessel MV Venus Challenger carrying ammunition for the Pakistani forces and the second at PNS Shah Jahan, a Pakistani destroyer. Venus Challenger exploded and sank immediately while Shah Jahan was so badly damaged, it was no longer sea worthy and was rendered non-operational.

INS Veer targeted a Pakistani Minesweeper PNS Muhafiz and sank it instantly with all 33 sailors.

Thereafter, INS Nipat continued towards Karachi and targeted the Kemari oil storage tanks; its Styx missiles destroying the tanks and setting the oil on fire. Karachi harbour was left ablaze.

The two anti submarine corvettes also played their own roles very effectively. They towed the three missile boats safely and successfully to the mouth of Karachi harbour and protected them during the attack and return to base. It is a matter of great pride to the Saraswat community that (Late) Commodore Kasargod Pattanshetti Gopal Rao who commanded the Corvette group (INS Katchal and INS Kiltan) was awarded a Maha Vir Chakra.

Op Trident was one of the most successful offensive actions undertaken by the Indian Navy. All five ships returned to harbour at Okha without any loss of lives or damage to the ships.

The Pakistanis attacked Okha harbour by air in retaliation but the attack was anticipated and due precautions were taken to safeguard the missile boats. Not content at the success of Operation Trident, as the first attack on Karachi

harbour was codenamed, a second attack named Operation Python was launched just four days later by the Indian Navy again attacking Karachi and sinking three more Pakistani ships and setting their remaining oil stores on fire. Such was the resounding success of these audacious attacks on Karachi that the world sat up and took notice of the Indian Navy.

With the Air Force also relentlessly bombing Karachi and our ground forces being well on the way to Hyderabad (Sindh) it was later learnt that there was utter panic in Karachi. In their mistaken belief that the Indians were trying to divide West Pakistan into two; there was an exodus of Pakistani civilians Northward for safety.

The Indian Navy certainly had cause to pat itself on the back, for nothing succeeds like success in war. Due to the outstanding success of Op Trident, 4 Dec is celebrated as Navy Day ever since.

(Extracted from articles published in Quarterdeck -2021, Swarnim Vijay Varsh issue. Courtesy Navy Foundation, Pune Chapter)

1971 - THE NAVAL WAR: IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

50 years ago, in Dec 1971, the USA threatened India to stop the 1971 war. An alarmed India sent a SOS to the Soviet Union. A story that has been nearly erased from Indian history books.

When Pakistan's defeat in the 1971 war seemed imminent, Kissinger spurred Nixon to send the US 7th Fleet's Task Force, led by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, to the Bay of Bengal. The USS Enterprise, at 75,000 ton, was the world's largest nuclear-powered aircraft carrier in the 1970s with more than 70 fighter aircraft. A monster. The Indian Navy's fleet was led by the 20,000-ton aircraft carrier, Vikrant, with 20 light fighter aircraft.

The USS Enterprise was being dispatched to secure American citizens in Bangladesh was the official American statement. Unofficially it was to threaten the Indian forces and prevent the liberation of East Pakistan. India soon got another bad news.

Soviet intelligence reported to India that a powerful British naval group led by the aircraft carrier HMS Eagle with commando carrier HMS Albion, several destroyers and other ships were approaching India's territorial waters from the west, towards the Arabian Sea. The British and the Americans planned a coordinated pincer attack to intimidate India: the British ships in the Arabian Sea will target India's western coast, while the Americans would make a dash to Chittagong. Caught between the British & the American ships was the Indian Navy.

It was December 1971, and the world's two leading democracies were now threatening the world's largest democracy. An SOS from Delhi was sent to Moscow. The Red Navy soon dispatched 16 Soviet naval units and six nuclear submarines from Vladivostok to block USS Enterprise.

Admiral N. Krishnan, the chief of the Eastern Command of the Indian Navy, wrote in his book, 'No Way But Surrender' that he was afraid that the Americans will reach Chittagong. He mentions how they even thought of attacking Enterprise, in a do or die move, to slow it down.

On December 2nd week 1971, the US 7th Fleet's Task Force, led by the monstrous USS Enterprise arrived in the Bay of Bengal. The British fleet was arriving in the Arabian Sea. The world held its breath.

But, unknown to the Americans, the submerged Soviet submarines had overtaken them.

As USS Enterprise moved towards East Pakistan, the Soviet submarines surfaced without any warning. The Soviet subs were now standing between India and the US naval force.

The Americans were shocked.

Similarly the Soviet ships positioned themselves between the British ships and the West coast of India.

Admiral Gordon told the 7th American Fleet Commander: "Sir, we are too late. The Soviets are here!"

Both the American and British fleets backed off. Today, most Indians have forgotten about this colossal naval chess battle between the two superpowers in the Bay of Bengal.

GETTING MARRIED

This is an epic story of the Indian Navy Sea Hawks; received by me from multiple friends in the Indian Navy.

Once an Indian Navy Sea Hawk took off from INS Vikrant. It's mission??? Pilot Getting Married!!

"Sometime in May 1965 the war clouds with our western neighbour were building up and Vikrant steamed out into the Arabian Sea to provide some gunboat diplomacy of the 'beware we are on alert' sort to Islamabad. Such sudden deployments cause disruption in the lives of the crew but that is what the Navy is about. One such disrupted young Lieutenant who was a bindaas (to use a Bombay term) Sea Hawk pilot who was scheduled to proceed on leave to get married the day the ship sailed and suddenly found himself far from the railway station that would take him to Bangalore.

Possibly after a lot of requesting and discussions with his superior his Captain ordered him to take off at dawn on the big day in his Sea Hawk and set course for Bangalore and get back on deck by 0600 hours the next morning. Off went our young bridegroom. The Navy may be strict, but it likes to take care of its seamen and the Fleet Commander Rear Admiral BA Samson blessed this adventure. But how was he to carry his clothes and toothpaste.

A bright technician suggested they empty out the cannon ammunition bay and that made just enough space for his clothes to be stuffed into. Onto the steam catapult and off to the old HAL airport at Bangalore. The bride of this arranged marriage lived close to the airport and between the nervous ma-in-law to be and pensive pa-in-law and clueless bridegroom's parents they didn't know what to do. Here was the auspicious day and the hero nowhere in sight. Because the ship was on a full alert patrol there was no radio communication at all and let alone the relatives.

Even HAL airport control tower did not know that our man was zeroing in till he asked for permission to land!. Then suddenly the piercing roar of the Rolls Royce turbo jet filled their ears and thumped their hearts. Our man deftly landed, parked his flying machine and was whisked away for the muhurtam with literally minutes to spare.

Next morning 0400 hours he took off again and in little over 90 minutes got back to the carriers deck in the middle of the sea.

This young pilot was SK Gupta who later commanded INAS 300 White Tigers in the 1971 war and was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra. Later in life he rose to flag rank. On his return there were no flowers on the ship to celebrate his new status but his fellow pilots not to be put off garlanded him with a mala made of vegetables." His colleagues wrote "Just Married" on his Sea Hawk with a pair of boots tied on to the nose of the aircraft.

MY FIRST JOB AFTER LEAVING THE NAVY

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The following article forwarded to me by a colleague, is authored by Captain (Retd) Anil Gonsalves of Fox Squadron, 54th Course, NDA. It is too humorous not to be shared with others. Though written in lighter vein, it brings out the stark realities of civil life at sea.

“In the Navy I never ever negotiated for my salary or wondered when and where my next salary would come from. It was automatically deposited into my bank account at the end of the month. It’s a different matter that more than half of it went towards my children’s education fees, a part of it went towards club bills and maybe a movie and the little that was left over went to running my car, clothes for wife (joking) and household expenditures. By the 15th of the month my liquid assets would be on par with that of a homeless person. Savings were pretty meagre. But things changed after I left the Navy.

Three months after I left the Navy I got a call from a shipping agent called Alibaba requesting me to tow a barge from Mumbai to Daman. Alibaba offered to pay me twice the last monthly salary I was drawing in the Navy, for a job that would take about five days. I checked my fictitious calendar, which didn’t have anything planned on it for the next fifteen years and readily agreed in less than two minutes to take the job.

The next day when I arrived at Dadar railway station, he was waiting in a chauffeur driven car with a pair of clean overalls, safety shoes and industrial helmet. “These are for you” he said. “Can I offer you lunch at any restaurant of your choice in Mumbai?” “No” I said very foolishly, take me to the Tug and we’ll get on with our business without any delay. “Excellent” he said “I like your attitude Captain saab”.

I looked around feeling very pleased with myself and thought that the only thing missing was a Jhanda on the bonnet and red light on the roof top, which all Flag Officers used when moving around in cars. Enroute he briefed me that the Towing survey was completed without any deficiencies, all port and anchorage dues were paid and the Port Clearance Certificate was available on board. All I had to do was call Port Control on VHF, ask for permission to leave harbour and tow the barge to Daman, where he would be waiting to receive

me. “No need for Harbour Pilot, since you have a Foreign Going Master’s ticket.” He crooned.

“What about provisions for food and drinking water? When was the last annual survey conducted by IRS? What is the bollard pull of the tug? How big is the barge? Are we following safe manning plan on board? Is the machinery and navigational equipment in order and when was the last weather update received? I asked a series of questions in automatic gunfire mode. He crunched his face and looked at me wearily as if I wanted him to give me Cocaine. “You will find everything in order, sir” he said cheerily, advertising for detergent powder. Then he got me to sign the Letter of Contract for my wages and the Articles of Agreement appointing me as Master of the Tug Boat. “Get my Tug and

Barge safely to Daman sir”, he pleaded and shook hands. I quite liked Alibaba’s ‘Take-No-Prisoners-of-War’ approach to life.

At Bhaucha Dhakka he put me in a little boat and sent me off to embark the Tug at anchorage, while waving out “Have a very happy Bon Voyage, sir.” There was nobody to receive me on the Tug. A huge muscular pot-bellied chap with a potato head was chewing paan on the deck. I introduced myself to him in friendly overture “Kem Chhe?” I tweeted. “Tamharu naam su chhe? Awoo vahan nu navo Master chau” I said in my best faltering Gujarati. “Natthi chhe” he snorted and spat paan syrup next to my feet.

I gave a closed mouthed smile to let him know I was totally cool with him spitting on me. Potato-Head was obviously a loose cannon on board. When he turned his back to me it looked like a stuffed suitcase. I figured this was the type of chap whose help you would require if you happened to fall over the ship’s side and had to fight a crocodile or shark. I took leave from my new best friend and made my way to the wheelhouse.

The Wheelhouse was littered with debris, as if a pipe bomb had just exploded in it. Now I know why cabin-cupboard inspections are taken so seriously in the Armed Forces. The Serang was sitting on the only plastic chair and demolishing a plate of rice and daal with a big grin on his face. I approached him from his back and shouted in a military voice “I’m the new Master. Get ready to weigh the anchor. I’m calling up Port Control to take permission to leave harbor.” He reacted like there was gunfire in the wheelhouse. He dropped his plate of rice and tried to get up from his seat. It took him three false starts to get up from the chair, which seemed to be stapled to his buttocks. Finally I extended my

hand and pulled him up while he disengaged himself from the chair. I liked to think that if he was a turtle and had fallen on his back, he would have been flailing his hands and legs in the air unable to upright himself. I told him to muster the crew in the wheelhouse so that I could get to know them.

The Serang seemed entirely too top-heavy to make a clean sweep from the Wheelhouse to below decks without knocking something down, so he just yelled out at the top of his voice for the seamen to come to him. A bunch of three very thin guys appeared on the Bridge and when I asked them for their names, they all said “Tandel” in unison. I thought they had been spawned by the same set of parents, but they confirmed that they were fishing community people. One was Mukesh, one was Kamlesh and one was Rajesh.

Next, I called the Engine Room and ordered the Main Engine to be started. It took a number of starts before it started. Then I called up Port Control, went through the lengthy exchange of information and got permission to leave harbour. In the meantime the boys weighed anchor and we were finally underway to our destination at Daman with the Barge in tow.

It took me about four hours to cross Fairway buoy. A little later the Engineer Officer came to the wheelhouse and began chatting. “Sir, I was wondering whether to tell you that our windlass broke down after we weighed anchor. Also for your information, the air bottles for starting the Main Engine are empty and our air-compressor is non-operational .” “What?” I replied in utter shock. “That means if our engine shuts down we won’t be able to restart it” he said. “I’m turning the vessel around and taking her back to harbour” was my immediate reply. “Hold on sir. Please hold on” he pleaded. “The Company hasn’t paid our wages for over one year. If we complete this job they will get the money to clear our wages. So please don’t turn the tug around, I’m begging you.” After a while he said “Are you okay sir?” seeing me fall off the Monkey bars in the playground.

I sat back in the plastic chair and stared at the ceiling as if a Mi-8 helicopter had landed on the deck above. I was intuitive enough to know that things were not going well on board. “Is there anything else that I should know?” I queried. “Do we have provisions and water?” He folded his hands and said “Please sir, please. We have one gunny sack of rice, half gunny sack of daal and one gunny sack of bhindi. That’s all.” I couldn’t believe this. So that is why Alibaba wanted me to eat my Last Supper before sailing out! “Also we have three tons of water” he said with a pleased look on his face.

“Do you have enough fuel for an eight day voyage?” I asked. He replied “Yes sir.” It was quickly becoming apparent to me that the situation was more serious than I had ever imagined. I crossed my arms and aimlessly moved my head in a circular motion, like a seagull. For the rest of the evening I sat staring out the tug making plans to castrate Alibaba.

Fortunately, the weather seemed okay. The sky was lit up with stars and the sea conditions were calm as we chugged our way to Daman. I had planned our voyage about 15 miles from the coast to remain in touch on cell phone. The next morning I called up Alibaba and gave him a piece of my mind. He said “Don’t worry sir, I’ll compensate for your trouble with Takleef money. Please bring my Tug and Barge safely to Daman.” For the next four days we sailed smoothly, freshening the nip on the tow rope to prevent chaffing . And of course we ate rice, daal and bhindi, three times a day, every single day of the voyage. One more day of this and my stomach would be officially concave, I thought to myself.

I was beginning to feel more confident as we approached Daman. Then disaster struck.

We were about 15 miles from Daman when the weather picked up late in the evening. I got all the water-tight doors closed and the Booby hatches buttoned down with canvas covers before nightfall as we braced down to face the weather. Wind speeds reached 40 knots and the sea began mercilessly lashing the tug and barge. I tried altering course down-sea to reduce the stress on the tow rope. Eventually the tow rope parted and the barge began drifting away. Then I began counting the seconds each time the bow of my tug went below water, One-two-three-four-five, and up she would come to take a huge gulp of air. I thought the drifting barge had sunk, but we spotted it early the next morning about a mile away from us.

The next morning the weather miraculously calmed down. I steered the tug towards the barge. All three Tandel chaps jumped in the water and swam across to the barge and reconnected the tow after a series of manoeuvres. Next, I called up Coast Guard Station in Daman on VHF, only to discover that the ExO of the ship that I had commanded in the Coast Guard way back in 1991 was the Station Commander in the rank of DIG. I had a long chat with him on my cell phone and asked him to do me a favour.

Soon Alibaba called me on my cell phone and pleaded “Sir, I understand that you almost got shipwrecked last night in the storm. Please do something to bring my Tug and Barge back safely. Please do not request Coast Guard for towing and salvage assistance since their charges will be over Thirty Lakh rupees. Please!” He pleaded. “My Company will go bankrupt if you use their services.”

It didn’t bother me even if his Company generated the same income as a giraffe. What bothered me was whether I would get paid for the dirty work that I was doing. “Sure, you son-of-a- bitch” I said, as words rolled off freely from my tongue. “First deposit my wages in my bank account and don’t forget to add ten percent as ‘Takleef allowance.’ Also deposit wages of all the crew into their personal accounts. Then talk to me.”

My wages were deposited by 6 pm in my account and my wife confirmed it. The crew also confirmed their wages. I steamed into Daman port with the air of an Admiral commanding a grand Fleet of one Barge and anchored the tug and the barge safely in the anchorage area of the outer port limits.

Next I handed over the vessel in safe condition to the Sarang by making a log entry and packed my haversack to leave. The Coast Guard sent me a high speed boat to disembark and I left the tug. All the crew came to the ship side to wave goodbye “Sir, next sailing me jaroor aana!”

“Dimaag kharab hai kya?” was my reply. And we all laughed.”

NAVAL SLANGUAGE

By

Hugh Ganter

The navy has a language of its own. This is only natural, since the sailor's way of life is different, his mind is deliberately biased in a certain way. It follows then, that his mode of expression will be different. And it is. Naval slang is varied and colourful; it is a distinct and unique dialect.

Much slanguage arises from terms commonly used in the navy by means of deliberate extension of meaning. 'Adrift' for instance, refers to the state of an un-propelled object floating at the mercy of the winds and the tides. In slang however, 'adrift' means overdue, lost or misplaced. Or, one 'belay' a rope around a cleat to secure it or arrest its movement; and so to belay an order means to stop an order or cancel it.

But all slang is not merely a corruption of normal naval terms. Much of it arises from the brittle, cynical humour of men amongst men, living hard lives in a society without women, where social hypocrisy is unnecessary, unwanted, intolerable – a society where the brown, suede, crepe-soled shoes of the extra snappy dresser are ironically termed 'brothel keepers'; the smooth talker a sea lawyer, soft conciliatory words 'flannel' and indecisiveness, 'waffle'. There is no room for such things in this world, because the 'poodle faker' (the payer of polite calls) is apt to be the 'wettest' (stupidest), 'wooliest' (vaguest) clot (inefficient person), who as likely as not 'goes into a flap' (indecisive excitement) whenever he 'puts up a black' (makes a bad mistake) and moans (grumbles).

All this does not mean that the navy is a collection of smug, self centred individuals. To the contrary, an occasional 'drip' (complaint) is considered a sign of health. In fact so universal is a mild clean dissatisfaction, that all three services have common terms for it. Everyone at one time or another has been 'brassed off' or 'cheesed off' or 'browned off'. "Brassed off" arose from the navy's constant, unrelenting war on rust and tarnish. All unpainted metal objects on every ship are polished, and polished till they shine brightly every single day. It is an unenviable task, though a necessary one. But from the point of view of the sailors whose job it is, it certainly is an irksome, tiresome chore.

Like the heavy, dispirited taste of food that is overcooked (browned off) or over flavoured (cheesed off), the men felt tired or jaded through, in their opinion being overworked. No one should be allowed to become so 'brassed off' and 'chokkered' that he would become 'bloody minded'.

Then there are phrases in the slang which defy classification. Carried over from civilian life, they reflect a more irresponsible, a freer, an almost undergraduate way of life. To 'have a bash at it' is one, meaning, to make an attempt. So also are 'chop, chop' meaning quickly and 'fair enough', the elegant, casual agreement to what has been said. 'Old your horses' conjure pictures of a more courtly age when if you wished to go slow, you had to rein in your horses. It still means to go slow, normally offered as advice to an impetuous friend. 'Laugh like a drain' is self-descriptive as is the bohemian 'let one's hair down' or to talk confidentially. I particularly like the expression 'get any joy?' for get any satisfaction? And 'not on' for not possible or not done. I feel there is something very carefree, very confident about them. They are youthful expressions and, therefore, particularly suited to the services, which are, after all, almost a monopoly of the youth.

And then there are the four letter Anglo-Saxon expressions. It really is amazing, after all one hears to the contrary in civilian life, how seldom these words are used. Except for a sprinkling of particularly expressive individuals, words with an 'unmentionable' significance are comparatively rarely used. And when they are, it is usually in moments of great tension.

SNAFU, for instance may once have meant 'situation normal and fully understood' but it is generally considered to mean 'situation normal all fouled up'. Similarly TARFU stands for 'things are really fouled up' and FUMTU for 'fouled up more than usual'. Alas, the word is not always 'fouled'.

And finally we come to the pet expression of so many of us. 'Sweet Fanny Adams'. Now before you raise your eyebrows and look over your shoulders to see if the children are asleep, let me hasten to assure you that there was a real Fanny Adams. She was murdered, poor girl, in 1800. Her boyfriend chopped her up and flung her pieces into a river. She was later, in a flash of grisly humour, adopted by sailors for 'tinned meat'. And still later, her initials of her name were made to stand for a rude term meaning 'no-thing'. A touching saga, and one that we should all keep in mind, when passing any remarks about 'sweet FA'.

(The army equivalent of 'sweet FA' is 'sweet bugger all')

GURU PURNIMA

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Guru Purnima is being celebrated on 29th July this year. It is befitting therefore to learn from the experiences of a service officer on this occasion. The article is dedicated to Gurus i.e. teachers & instructors based on the unknown author's personal experience. The article, received by me from Cmde Chaitanya Shiroor, IN (Retd) is reproduced as received.

Always Believe in Your Teacher / Instructor.

First Event

1. Our's, the 133rd Pilot's Course was the first Course to have commenced the ab initio flying training directly on Jets, HJT 16, the Kirans, at Air Force Academy (AFA) Dundigal (Hyderabad). Previous to that (upto 132nd PC) the ab initio training used to be on HPT 32 at Air Force Station Bidar (Karnataka).
2. At AFA, the flying would be in two details, morning and afternoon. The morning flying would commence at 6AM onwards and the morning briefing used to be at 5AM. The morning briefing time used would be a real Emergency time for flight cadets. The instructor would come to the podium and ask an Emergency situation to the course. After that there would be a pin drop silence and each one of would be trying to hide behind the silhouette of others. We did not know who would be called at the podium to answer. Even if he could answer, then the response would lead to another question until sure enough he would commit a mistake. This Emergency session used to be more scary and difficult to handle than the actual Emergency.
3. It was 22 October 1983. I was planned for my third solo in the early morning. I took off on that day of my third solo sortie in perfect weather condition. During the take-off roll, the throttle was on 100%, aircraft had attained round off speed (100 kts / 185 kmph), the nose wheel was already up and the aircraft was like a stallion on rear two hoofs. On the runway the aircraft was running on main wheels the nose wheel up like the tranced horse at NDA equestrian line during the lane jumping. Out of the blue, the Audio Warning came on which indicated that the Cockpit Canopy was not in the closed position and it may fly off any time. In case the canopy flew off, it would pose a very complex situation as the entire dynamics of aircraft handling gets

changed which could be beyond the capability of a Flight Cadet to handle who has just done only 12 hours of flying and two solo sorties.

4. I was in a state of total Scylla and Charybdis (confusion) what to do? I had only a couple of seconds to take a decision and execute! This was a nonstandard Emergency not mentioned in our SOP (Standard Operating Procedure). The general understanding of the Flight Cadets regarding Emergencies after aircraft attaining Round Off speed and take off was to “point the aircraft in a safe direction and eject”. I actually would have done so and had split of a second to take a decision.

5. Similar to flash of a lightning, I remembered the Emergency session covered a couple of days before by Flight Lieutenant SS Saikia and it played in my mind like a movie at a game speed of 100. He had asked this Emergency to Flight Cadet KhAK Singh (Khoshian Amar Kumar Singh)

Flight Lt SS Saikia: You are on a take off roll and the Cockpit Canopy Open audio warning comes ON. What are your actions?

KhAK Singh (in his Manipuri accent, an accent very soothing to hear): Sir, I will continue with the take-off roll, climb to Circuit Height which is the safe height, point the aircraft in a safe direction and eject

Flight Lt SS Saikia (in a typical Assamese accent): - No, you should not eject at all. It is not an emergency of Engine Fire or Engine failure at all. It is a very simple emergency of your canopy being in partially open position. Climb to 800 feet, 200 hundred feet lesser than circuit altitude, so that you are clear of other aircraft on circuit, report to ATC, do a normal lower circuit come back and land

(Khoshian Amar Kumar Singh used to be very good at remembering Emergency Handling and actually handling them efficiently in flight, which he did once for supposedly engine flame out. Unfortunately, he left for heavenly abode in the year 2020 after battling a prolonged cancer illness, we miss him, May his soul rest in peace)

6. Because of coincidental remembrance of this, I blindly complied with what Flt Lt Saikia had covered during session a couple of days before. I continued with take-off roll, levelled out at 800 feet (instead of at 1000'), did a normal circuit (despite the continuous audio warning which prevented me to receive ATC communication / instruction) and landed back safely.

7. If this undocumented Emergency in SOP was not covered on that day and if I had not blindfolded complied with it the way it was covered by Flt Lt Saikia, I surely would have ejected and might not have returned back to dispersal. Certainly, IAF and AFA would have lost a valuable aircraft.

8. I owe my life and saving of the aircraft to two aspects:-

(a) To Flt Lt Saikia for covering this unconventional emergency not mentioned in SOP.

(b) Total belief and faith in instructor and blindfold compliance to instructor's instructions – to do blindfold what he tells you to do.

Second Event

1. In July 1998, I was a Lieutenant Commander and was appointed as Commanding Officer INS Ghorpad (a LST- Landing Ship Tank) at Visakhapatnam. The Ship had just come out of a short refit and the command of the ship was handed over to me by Lt Cdr Tony Chacko, a very good friend of mine since NDA days. He had done the hard work of getting the ship's refit done and making it as good as new ship and fully operational but handing over to me to reap the harvest. He did it in truly Biblical style – Gift one should give and good things one should do in such a manner that even left hand does not know what the right hand has done.

2. Having taken over the great warship, it took about a week for me the ignorant to understand its foxle (forecastle), midships and quarter deck. I took an approval from the fleet office for a day's sailing off Visakhapatnam, which got approved.

3. The sailing went off very well. For entering the harbour, as a typical handling characteristics for LST Class, as per SOP, one engine remains in ahead mode and other in astern mode. This is to enable its slow speed handling for direction maintenance as the rudder becomes very sluggish. Further, LST's had only one steering motor. If this motor failed, there was nothing available to manoeuvre the ship in narrow channels for entrance and exit. To restart Engine in astern mode, it has to be shut down first then started, since these ships have fixed pitch propellers.

4. The ship was about 5 Nautical Miles off the harbour and I asked the Navigating Officer and Executive Officer to shut down the starboard engine and restart in astern mode prior to entry to the channel as per SOP. At this

both of them suggested that they would shut down and restart the engine, once they reach the channel entrance. They gave some reasons for it, which I did not understand but accepted it considering they had the experience on board for almost an year and it was a familiarization sea sortie for me.

5. The ship entered the channel with both engines in ahead mode, still the starboard engine was not shut down and restarted. At my insistence, now the engine was shut down. By this time the ship was already inside the channel. Now the first of Murphy's law prevailed – things go wrong at the right and most critical time. Its starboard engine failed to restart despite multiple attempts. The ship was moving at a much higher speed (12 knots). Multiple merchant ships entering and exiting and barges operating in the area was making the high speed movement of Ghorpad risky

Adversity does not come alone. Murphy's second rule prevailed. The steering gear of the ship failed. As it is the ship was moving at a much higher speed of about 12 knots against the recommended speed of 4 to 6 knots and to add to the misery, starboard engine had failed. With only one engine running ahead, there was no reverse control and now steering gear had failed, thus there was no directional control available.

7. The 1000 tons Warship was merrily moving out of control at about 12 knots and was heading directly to HSL (Hindustan Ship Yard Limited) Jetty. I could visualize what could happen if the 1000 ton warship collides with jetty at a speed of 12 knots. Despite being a familiarization sortie, I took over control, which was until then with Navigating Officer.

8. I ordered for stopping the port engine and ordered to drop stern anchor. Despite the port engine being stopped and stern anchor being dropped, the ship was still heading towards the jetty at a good speed of 8 to 10 knots. From the opposite side a merchant ship was also coming. I had two options – to either collide against the jetty or against the merchant ship.

9. Now I ordered the Port (left) engine to be started in astern mode. At this the Navigating Officer and The Executive Officer both shouted in unison with suggestion, "No sir, do not start the engine in astern mode, it is prohibited, else the propellers would foul with anchor cable causing a huge damage to propellers and to engine both".

10. In flash of a second, I remembered my CO's PCT (Commanding Officers' Pre Concession Training) at Lonavala in which my friend Sreenivas (CO Kesari)

had asked the question, "If stern anchor is dropped, won't it foul with anchor cable?". The instructor, a young Engineering Officer (a Lieutenant) said, "No, it would never foul, as the ship is so designed". He proved it with ships design and calculations (anchor cable length, average depth in a channel, depth of propeller below water line and distance of propellers from astern edge)

11. I decided to go with instructor's suggestion (so what he was years younger to me in age and junior to me in service) and overruled NO's & Exo's suggestion. I ordered full astern on the Port engine. The speed of the ship gradually slowed down and when it stopped, the ship's forecastle was barely a couple of feet (about two to four feet) away from the jetty. There after it made sternway, in a couple of seconds went over the stern anchor and beyond, but no damage happened to the propellers.

12. A great mishap was averted, an accident was avoided and a colossal damage to a Naval asset was prevented the repair of which would have cost Navy a fortune. Possibly my first sailing could have become my last sailing as the Commanding Officer INS Ghorpad. All these aversion, avoidance and prevention were possible because I complied blindly with full belief in my instructor, though a very junior Lieutenant, at Lonavala during my PCT.

Third Event

1. It was my third solo sortie of aerobatics, loop, roll, barrel roll, roll of the top and spin.

2. Having completed loop, roll, barrel roll, roll of the top, it was the spin manoeuvre. With instructor, it is permitted to do three spin turns, but during solo spin, the flight cadet must initiate the recovery process after first spin so that at the end of second turn it has recovered fully.

3. I too initiated the recovery after very first spin but the aircraft did not recover and it entered the third spin. I was at my wits end what to do! Suddenly I remembered my instructor, then Flt Lt Rodney Assey's golden words, "If ever you find aircraft recovery difficult, keep the control stick and rudders in neutral position and hold them firmly, that's it".

4. I did the same, and the aircraft gradually recovered on its own at the end of fifth spin. This process of recovery was not specified in SOP. What golden words of my instructor which was based on his own experience. That was the first and last experience of mine of five spins, that too in a solo.

5. Today I am able to narrate the two life saving and one strategic asset saving events, because I followed my Teacher / instructor's instructions unquestioningly.

Conclusion.

1. Therefore, we must believe in our teacher, in our instructor and in our mentor, blindly, unquestioningly, in letter and spirit to the hilt. Their teachings go beyond that is mentioned in books. There is profound knowledge, research and experience hidden in their teachings like pearls at the bottom of the sea. Blindly we should believe in them irrespective of their age or gradation and should comply what they have taught us. Someday it may save ours / yours life and avert a disaster, as it happened thrice with me.

2. That's why, even in our Shastras it is said, “गुरु गोविन्द दोउ खड़े काके लागूं पाय? बलिहारी गुरु आपणों गोविन्द दियो दिखाय (Teacher and God both are standing, whose feet should I touch first? Definitely My Teacher's. He is greater than Govnd! It's he who has enabled my rendezvous with Govind the God”)

Dedicated to all teachers on the day of Guru Purnima which eulogises our great Gurus such as Guru Dronacharya, Muni Ved Vyas, Mahamuni Shukracharya, Maharshi Parshuram, Guru Dadhichi and many more.

RESCUING ROUEN

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Navy Day is celebrated on 4th Dec each year. ‘Rescuing Rouen’ is an apt story to pay tribute to the Indian Navy.

It was a cold night on 14th December 2023. The waves of the Arabian Sea were calmly shimmering in the moonlight, when a merchant ship, MV Rouen, sailing under the Maltese flag, departed from Gwangyang Port in South Korea, heading toward Genoa, Italy.

Onboard were 17 crew members—9 from Myanmar, 7 from Bulgaria, and 1 from Angola—each engaged in their daily duties.

Suddenly, about 380 nautical miles east of Somalia’s Puntland coast, Somali pirates hiding in the dark launched a swift and aggressive attack using high-speed boats. 35 armed pirates stormed the ship. With sudden gunfire and screams echoing, panic spread across the vessel. The crew had no means to resist. The pirates quickly took control.

The navigation system was hijacked, and the ship was diverted toward the Somali coast. MV Rouen was now completely in pirate custody, and the crew became hostages. The pirates’ intentions were clear: to use this ship as a “mother vessel” for future attacks across the Arabian Sea.

For over a month, the ship remained trapped near the Puntland coast. The condition of the hostages worsened daily—scarcity of food and water, constant fear of violence, and growing uncertainty. The crew was mentally and physically drained. Malta and Bulgaria tried to help, but Somalia’s instability and the pirates’ brutality blocked all avenues. Months passed—there was no ransom negotiation, no rescue mission in sight.

Eventually, Bulgaria appealed to India for help.

The Indian Navy, known for its strength in fighting piracy, took up the mission. At the Southern Naval Command Headquarters in Kochi, a bold operation was planned. It was named Operation Sankalp.

For three months, the Indian Navy tracked every movement of MV Rouen. Despite the pirates' efforts to hide the ship along the Somali coast, the Navy's P-8I surveillance aircraft and drones closely monitored them.

In March 2024, when the pirates attempted to sail the ship back into the Arabian Sea for another attack, the Navy decided: Now is the time.

On 15th March 2024, the Indian Navy's destroyer INS Kolkata intercepted MV Rouen about 260 nautical miles east of Somalia. Drones were deployed to scout the ship, but the pirates showed aggression—they shot down a drone and opened fire on INS Kolkata.

The Navy responded with warning shots using 76mm guns and machine guns, causing confusion among the pirates. The ship's steering and navigation systems were disabled. The pirates were now immobilized.

By 16th March morning, Operation Sankalp reached its climax.

An Indian Air Force C-17 Globemaster, having flown 10 hours and over 1,400 nautical miles, circled above the Arabian Sea. Inside were 18 elite MARCOS commandos, led by Lt Commander Harshul Bhatt, with two combat rubberized raiding craft (CRRC).

At dawn, the MARCOS commandos parachuted into the sea under the cover of darkness.

It was like a Hollywood thriller—shadows dropping into the ocean with steel resolve and unerring aim. Upon landing, they boarded their crafts and set out toward the hijacked ship.

With support from INS Subhadra, P-8I aircraft, high-altitude drones, and MQ-9C Guardian, pressure was kept on the pirates.

By afternoon, the MARCOS commandos quietly boarded the deck of MV Rouen. The air was tense with the smell of gunpowder. The pirates resisted, but were no match for the precision and speed of the Indian commandos.

One by one, all 35 pirates were captured. Fear in their eyes, defeat on their faces.

By morning of 17th March, the ship was completely rescued, and all 17 crew members were saved unharmed. When MARCOS hoisted the Indian tricolor on the ship, even the waves of the sea seemed to cheer “Bharat Mata Ki Jai!”

This mission wasn’t just about rescuing a ship. It was a declaration of India’s strength—from the depths of the ocean to the heights of the skies.

Operation Sankalp showed the world that today’s India is not weak, but powerful.

The 35 captured pirates were brought to Mumbai where legal proceedings were initiated—for the first time in a decade, sea pirates were tried in Indian courts.

Bulgarian President Rumen Radev thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and called it a “historic mission.”

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said, “The Indian Navy has proven that we are true guardians of peace and security at sea.”

Analysts compared MARCOS to U.S. Navy SEALs and UK’s SAS.

When MARCOS liberated MV Rouen, it wasn’t just a rescue—it was a message from India’s soul, teaching pirates a lesson and showing the world that challenging India means choosing destruction.

Lt Commander Harshul Bhatt and his brave MARCOS warriors etched the honour of the Indian flag onto the chest of the sea.

A big shabash to the Indian Navy and Indian Air Force!

A DRINK WITH A FIELD MARSHAL

Anonymous article contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

(April 3, 2012 at 11.11 pm. This was written in 2007. Being exturned now to honour the late Sam Bahadur on his birth anniversary)

Two and a half decades ago I was a merchant banker, a stint in my career which probably gave me my most memorable moments. But the cherry on top of that very motley cake was when I was asked to be present at the press and brokers' conference to launch a certain company's maiden public issue. Not that these conferences were unusual, one was perpetually in and out of them those days; but this was out of the ordinary, for the Chairman of the host company would be present himself, and the worthy was no less than Field Marshal SHFJ Sam Maneckshaw himself.

From the moment I received the invitation I went into overdrive as they say these days. The press conference was a lunch affair and I was there well before anyone else. The company chaps and advertising agency people were busy making arrangements, the hotel staff were setting the buffet, and amidst all this, looking slightly lost, in a cream suit and arms akimbo, surveying the distance was the famous pair of eyes and the telltale nose crowning the now white moustache. I walked up to him, clicked my heels and bowed, and said, "Field marshal, may I have the honour of shaking the hand of a fine officer and gentleman, and the only Field marshal in my life?!"

He held his hand out with a twinkle of his blue/grey eyes, with a dismissive wave of his hand saying "Oh come on. Don't be silly! Who the devil are you?"

I said I was a dreary banker with a taste for soldiers, at which he laughed. But by now the press was trickling in, and soon he was mobbed. But my moment with him I prederved for the evening, when the brokers would leave him to me. In any case they couldn't tell the difference between a Field marshal and a court martial: I was reasonably sure of having the old boy to myself.

Just before the evening's brokers' affair began, I sidled up to Sam Bahadur and told him I would be hi-jacking him immediately after the audio visual and his ritual speech. I told him I wanted to talk to him as a soldier, not as a company chairman. That intrigued him. He raised his eyebrows in mock wonder, before he was led away to the dais. Half an hour or so later, I rushed up to him and

said “Now Field marshal!” The cocktails were on , the broking community was tanking itself up, and I quietly led Sam to a sofa on the sidelines. Calling the supervising waiter I instructed him to look in on us every twenty minutes to refill our glasses, but otherwise to leave us alone.

Settled in well with our drink, I asked him the first question. “Field Marshal, what happened at the Sittang Bridge in Burma in April 1942?” He nearly choked on his drink. Recovering, he screwed up his eyes and looked very curiously at me , almost disbelievingly “How the hell do YOU know about the Sittang Bridge?” God heavens man, no one’s asked me that in fifty years, even in my own army!” he said incredulously. I smiled and quietly told him I knew he got his MC in that action. “You astonish me!” he said “and you said you were a banker?”

“Yes Field marshal. As I said earlier one with a taste for soldiers. So could the bridge have been saved? I know that decision is debated to this day. Jackie Smyth’s position ... and Hugh Jones taking his own life so many years after it was all history..”

The FM shook his head in wonder and incredulity at my knowledge. “God! How the hell do you know all this??” he kept asking. I reassured him it wasn’t entirely unusual for bankers – or some at least – to be interested in military history.

And for the next twenty minutes I had the unique privilege of an eye witness account of that infamous military disaster during the retreat from Burma. The FM’s own moment of glory had come while leading the defence of ‘Buddha Hill’ on the wrong side of the still intact Sittang Bridge, when he was critically wounded, shot in the thigh and abdomen: his CO thought he was dead, and promptly gave him the Military Cross – his own, as it happened.

After a refill of glasses, I brought him up to 1962, and the debacle against the Chinese. I asked him about the late gen. Kaul and slyly reminded him of his nickname for Kaul’s acolytes, “Kaul Boys.” He guffawed into his drink, saying, “trut you to remember that!” But the old boy was nothing if not a gentleman: he refused to say a word about the man who had vilified him and sidelined him, and brought such infamy on the fair name of the Indian Army.”Thank God the government finally saw reason” was all that I could get out of him. Modest for someone who replaced the very same Kaul as Corps Commander of the thoroughly demoralised IV Corps. Yet not above a soldier’s vanity to be

indifferent to praise, he blushed a pretty red when said his appointment was a shot in the arm that the army so badly needed then, and how later his advice to Mrs Gandhi carried the day in Bangladesh operations.

This piece would be unconscionably long if I were to narrate all the stories he told me about his famous chats with the Prime Minister (she called him Sam). But one, I think, must find place.

He was Army Chief at that time and his daughter came home from boarding school unexpectedly. His wife was away in London. Father and daughter decided to spend an evening out discoing in Delhi's nightspots. At one of those they were dancing very close, cheek to cheek – so he said. The next morning the Prime Minister summoned him. "Sam, will you step across for a minute?" He went in saluted and stood, waiting for her to speak.

"Sam. I don't know how to say this." "Yes ma'am what is it?" "Well you were seen by people last night.." "seen? Where?" "Well. Some disco or the other, dancing.

This time Sam decided to have some fun. "You see Ma'am, my wife's away shopping in London, I'm a soldier, I'm lonely, I needed a woman."

"But Sam. At your age .. you ought to be ashamed.. I mean she was young enough to be your daughter.. cheek to cheek they said."

"But Prime Minister. She WAS my daughter!"

At which Mrs Gandhi laughed and said "oh Sam. You are impossible! Still I wish you were more discreet about these things.." And Sam told her that there wasn't much chance of that with her RAW tails all over the place.

Four hours later I took leave of him – even Field marshals have to sleep But before parting he invited me to his place in Coonoor and paid me a compliment I cherish. Shaking my hand warmly he said, "You know, you should have joined the army. You'd have been one of us!"

A LETTER TO A SOLDIER

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Major General Sudhir Vombatkere wrote this letter to a young man who was soon be commissioned as an officer into the Australian Army. The names of the soon-to-be-commissioned Cadet and of his mentors have been changed by the author. It was published in The Citizen on 27 Nov 2020.

The letter succinctly conveys the ethos of the Indian Army Officer. A veritable masterpiece; worthy of being read again and again by officers, young and old.

Dear Thomas,

I know your mentors John and Jill Philips from their times in India. They informed me that you would be passing out of the Australian Military Academy, Duntroon, on 03 Dec, that guests and invitees are not permitted at your Passing Out Parade because of Covid, and suggested that I write to you even though you do not know me.

I recall how proud and excited I was when I passed out of the Indian Military Academy (IMA) at Dehra Dun (how similar it sounds to Duntroon!!) on 10 Dec 1962, to be commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Indian Army. So I can understand how proud you would be feeling on having successfully completed the tough training at RMC, Duntroon, and also how proud your parents and your mentors would be feeling on this momentous occasion.

I congratulate you as you transform from being a Cadet to becoming a tough and strong professional soldier who will command troops.

When passing out of IMA, we take an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of India, and I am sure that you will do likewise on your Constitution. I mention this because you must never forget that your country comes first, even before your government, your national leaders or your military leaders, and the values in your Constitution must ever be upheld come what may, even to the peril of your life. Because that is the vow of a soldier. I would quote the dictum that officers of the Indian Army follow, in the decisions which they take especially in situations of mortal danger to their men or themselves:

**“The Safety, Honour and Welfare of your Country come First, Always and Everytime:
The Honour, Welfare and Comfort of the Men you Command come Next;
Your own Ease, Comfort and Safety come Last, Always and Everytime.”**

The sequence of country first, command next and self last is every bit as important as the sequence of the imperatives of safety, honour, welfare, comfort and ease, which are different for your country, for your men and for yourself as their leader. There is also the prayer of a soldier, which I value the most, before going into battle: Oh God, give me the strength that I ask nothing of you!

You are entering an honourable profession, the profession of the soldier. A soldier is not a mercenary, purchasable by the highest bidder – he is a proud upholder of moral and ethical values. In battlefield situations, the young officer leads from the front, setting an example to his troops. He will know and feel fear, but he will never show it. Physical courage is nothing but overcoming fear. Fear is overcome by a combination of confidence in your own training, in your training with your troops, in the teamspirit and mutual trust and respect that a leader builds with his men, and knowing that you are fighting for a just and good cause.

Battlefield situations calling for physical courage are not frequent, thankfully! But you will be in situations frequently calling for a much more important kind of courage – moral courage. I know of soldiers who have displayed amazing physical courage under enemy fire in their younger days (some even awarded for gallantry), failing in moral courage later in life. I understand moral courage as “speaking truth to power”. However, one needs to note that when one speaks truth to power, that truth must always be spoken respectfully and with due deference to rank, age and position. In this connection, I would strongly recommend that you read a book which I have recommended to many young officers and even to senior officers. It is a Taylor & Francis publication titled “On the Psychology of Military Incompetence” by Norman Dixon – it could well be the first book which you purchase with your first pay!

I believe that earning the respect of the men under your command is far more valuable than the respect of your peers or your seniors. Rising in respect is far better and more valuable than rising in rank. The men under command see through any airs which a young officer fresh from the Academy may display,

far more quickly and accurately than one's peers. So above all, be truthful to yourself and all will go well with you.

Finally, the most important advice which I can offer you is that it is your own responsibility to maintain yourself physical fit, mentally alert, professionally sound, emotionally stable and spiritually sensitive. If you can do that, in the words of Rudyard Kipling in his poem 'IF', you'll be a Man, my son!

I hope you will not take amiss my giving you so much unasked for advice! As an old soldier, a senior Veteran, I send you my blessings and good wishes for a happy and successful career of honourable soldiering. May there be peace and harmony in this world!

Aum, shanti, shanti, shantih!

Maj Gen S.G.Vombatkere, VSM, of the Indian Army.

REQUESTS TO MILITARY ADVISERS

Contributed by

Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

This is a story by Lt Gen Sudhir Sharma.

When the Kargil war broke out on the steep, icy and rugged slopes of the Himalayas, I as a Brigadier found myself stationed as the Defence Advisor to the High Commission of India in London, UK.

I was eager to be back in India and participate more actively in prosecuting the war against the invaders at Kargil. However, I was perhaps destined for other things and stayed in London for the duration of the Kargil war.

I was busy coordinating the war effort in UK with much diplomatic and military logistics support work, which reached its crescendo in the hey days. Much work had to be done in UK in support of the war efforts.

On one such busy day, at about noon, my assistant buzzed me on the intercom and said “Sir a Pakistani gentleman is on the phone line. He insists that he wants to speak to you.”

This was an odd request. Since the war was at its peak, my first thoughts were, it must be someone angry and hostile or more likely, a case of mistaken identity. I told my assistant to recheck.

He confirmed that he had done all the requisite filtering and due diligence. The Pakistani gentleman indeed wanted to speak to the Military Advisor of India.

On being put through, an extremely polite gentleman spoke to me in halting English and a rather soft and sad voice. After apologizing, he narrated the following incident....

The man, settled in UK, had his mother staying with him. His sister's son was in the Pakistan Army and reportedly on the Kargil front. For last four or five days there had been no news about him. The boy's parents in Pakistan were distraught and his grandmother in UK had fallen sick worrying and was crying constantly.

He said that he had approached the Pakistan High Commission repeatedly, but had been rebuffed stating that there was no Pakistan army involved in Kargil.

The family had also received similar vague replies from the authorities in Pakistan too.

He added that an Indian neighbour and friend had advised him to approach the Indian Military Advisor in London. The neighbour had told him, "Believe me, If the Indian Army can help you in any way, they surely will. They treat their opponents with due regard and dignity."

I could faintly hear the old lady demanding to speak to me in chaste Punjabi. On being put through to her, she blessed me and in the most endearing way and beseeched me in the name of Allah to help trace the whereabouts of her grandson, who was a Captain in the Pakistan Army.

I was moved and I promised that I'll revert with whatever news I could gather.

I had been keeping in regular touch with the Army Headquarters in New Delhi in pursuance of my duties as the Military Advisor in London. Luckily one of the top men in the Military Operations Directorate overseeing the Kargil War was a great-senior officer, whom I knew. (Then Maj. Gen. J.J. Singh, who rose to become the Army Chief and later Governor of Arunchal Pradesh).

I called him up and narrated the story. He promised to revert back soon. Despite his hectic schedule he called back after a day, informing that indeed such a Captain had taken part in the war of Kargil and unfortunately he had died a brave death.

His body had been returned to Pakistan with due military honour befitting a gallant soldier.

The next day with a heavy Heart I called the number of the Pakistani gentleman.

He urged me to speak to the old lady who asked me pleadingly if a mistake in identification could have been possible.

After some words of solace, I told her that unfortunately her grandson had met the same fate as many soldiers do during war.

She blessed me in a broken voice and the line went dead.

Next day one of the local radio of UK in its daily programme narrated this anecdote and praised me and the Indian Army for their truthful reporting and honour, with which they treat their martyrs.

The same story was carried in the local press highlighting the irony that an Indian Army Brigadier had informed Pakistani parents regarding their son's whereabouts in the Kargil war when the same information was not coming forth from any other source; including Pakistan.

A British General said, "A country which does not respect and honour its war dead is perhaps a country not worth fighting for".

War is so unforgiving and futile. Least we can do is, to perform the sacrosanct duty of a nation and acknowledge, respect and honour all soldiers as they unflinchingly perform their solemn duty.

PS by Maj Gen B N Rao: When one is posted abroad we get strange requests. Gen Sharma's story reminded me when I was AMA in the High Commission of India in Dacca in the mid-1970s. One morning a group of six or seven children, all teen agers from good families, turned up in the Military Wing demanding to meet me. In the group was the daughter of our next door neighbour Mitali. She told me that the next day was the last day for screening of the Hindi film Bobby in a Calcutta theatre and they had asked someone to buy tickets for them. They urgently wanted short term visas to fly to Calcutta, see the movie and get back. Could I help? I took them along with their passports to the Consular Wing and requested the Second Secretary to kindly help them out.

It was a happy group of kids who returned from Calcutta after seeing the movie, shopping, sightseeing and gorging in restaurants. They would ever remember their trip to India nostalgically.

A SOLDIER'S DIGNITY

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM and Bar (Retd)

I was reading a story the other day...and it struck a chord. This is how it went...

An old duke used to hold an annual dinner for the retired officers of his regiment, and every year chose 10 different people to attend the dinner. One year, post dinner, he found that his silver precious snuffbox was missing, and very candidly asked those present to turn out their pockets. 9 of them did, but one gentleman refused, and walked out in a huff. So the others automatically assumed, he had stolen it: and as expected, belittled the old man and forgot about it ...

But life is full of twists, and 4 months down the line, a lazy handmaid dusting the armchairs, found the snuffbox, stuck in the upholstery...and took it to the duke.

The duke was horrified, as he had been a part of the badmouthing and guiltily decided he needed to go in person to apologize to the officer.

He went to the soldier`s sparse home and after much talk...asked,..” if you hadn’t taken the snuffbox, why did you walk away??”

To which the upright soldier replied “, the only thing I had left was my dignity and honour, and if you did not trust me then, I didn’t want any part of proving it!!”

THAT is how soldiers are: they assume the world understands them and will respect them and take care of their needs.., because they have been taught that character, courage and integrity matter more in the battlefield than money ever will

Have a blessed day.

A SOLDIER'S FATHER

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM and Bar (Retd)

Reproduced below is a poignant article by Wg Cdr Venki Iyer, IAF describing an unfortunate event.

The helicopter appeared over the late morning horizon, we were to receive Mr Lachhman Singh Rathore who was visiting our Flight Unit to perform the last rites of his son, Flying Officer Vikram Singh.

Only the day before, I had sent the telegram; "Deeply regret to inform that your son Flying Officer Vikram Singh lost his life in a flying accident early this morning. Death was instantaneous." It was the first time for me – to meet and manage the bereaved next of kin, in this case the father of the brave officer.

While most of the desolate family members insist on seeing the body, many a time there isn't a body to show!! Flying Officer Vikram Singh's remains were only a few kilos – scrapped from what was left in the cockpit. We had to weigh the wooden coffin with wood and earth.

The pilot brought the helicopter to a perfect touchdown. Soon Mr. Lachhman Singh Rathore was helped down the ladder. A small and frail man he was, maybe 80 years old, clad in an immaculate white dhoti and kurta.

As I approached him, he asked in a quiet and dignified whisper. "Are you Venki, the Flight Commander?" "Yes Sir." "Vikram had spoken about you. I'd like to speak to you alone for a minute."

We walked to the edge of the concrete apron. "I've lost a son and you have lost a friend. I'm sure that you have taken great care in arranging the funeral. Please tell me when and where you want my presence and what you want me to do. I'll be there for everything. Later, I would like to meet Vikram's friends and see his room and, if it is permitted, visit his work place. I then would like to return home tomorrow morning."

A commander couldn't have given me clearer instructions.

The funeral, with full military honours, was conducted in the late afternoon. After the last echoes of 'Last Post' had faded away, Lachhman Singh spent the evening talking to the squadron pilots. Vikram's room-mate took him to see Vikram's room. Lachhman Singh desired to spend the night in his son's room instead of the guest room we had arranged for him. Early next morning after a tour of the squadron area, my boss took him to his office.

A while later, a staff car took Lachhman Singh to the civil airfield two hours away.

As the car disappeared round the corner, I remarked to my boss, "A brave man he is. Spoke to me like he was a General when he told me exactly what he expected from us during his stay here. I have never seen a more composed man on such an occasion. I admire him."

"Yes. Mr Lacchman Singh Rathore is a warrior in his own way. He sired three sons and has lain to rest all three of them. His first son, Captain Ghanshyam Singh of the Gurkha Rifles was killed in Ladakh in 1962 Indo- China war. His second son, Major Bir Singh, died along the Icchogil Canal in the 1965 Indo-Pak war, in an ambush. His youngest, Vikram Singh, who had the courage to join the Indian Air Force, is also gone now. He has given more for the country's defence than all of us put together.

"Yes he is a brave Indian. In fact he is more Indian than anyone else. His sacrifice can never be repaid by the country. He is almost a martyr himself."

A TAMBRAM & PEKING SOUP

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM and Bar (Retd)

It was the summer of 1986, life in India was going as usual. Rajiv Gandhi had been the Prime minister for 2 years and Congress dominated the entire political scenario of the country on the account of the sympathy votes they garnered after the death of Indira Gandhi in 1984. The economy had begun to grow at 5% after roughly 3 decades of stagnancy. The mood in the country was upbeat and the politicians in the Raisina corridor of Delhi were preparing for the next elections (mind you this was the time before the Bofors scandals broke out and scandalised the Rajiv Gandhi Government).

On the morning of 2nd May, 1986 a phone rang in the Military Operations Directorate, in Army Headquarters New Delhi. It was no ordinary phone call, it was different. The call had directly come from the Director of Intelligence Bureau (IB) informing the Army Headquarters that Chinese had occupied Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh and were stocking up their positions and preparing for a War like which happened in 1962. The message was immediately conveyed to the then Chief of Army Staff General Krishnaswamy Sundarji .

Now Sundarji was an unconventional Army Chief. A first generation Army officer, son of a Physics Professor and a Maths Teacher, he was a Tamil Brahmin (Tambram as they call today). He had joined the Army rather than MBBS just to prove his father that he was a brave man. In the Army, he had the reputation for being a strategic thinker and an intellectual.

Without any delay, he sprung into action. The Chinese had occupied the Thiag La ridge in Arunachal Pradesh overlooking Tawang and were demanding Indian Army retreat from Arunachal Pradesh and the government handover Arunachal Pradesh to China which they claim was South Tibet.

This was preposterous according to Sundarji. He immediately moved the 17th Mountain division to Arunachal Pradesh under Major General JM Singh and asked the 33 Corps to move to Arunachal Pradesh.

For 4 months, the Indian and the Chinese troops looked eyeball to eyeball. The Govt in New Delhi was nervous. The Chinese were dead sure to call the Indian

bluff as they knew that India didn't have roads to supply and sustain their troops for more than a year.

The winter continued and politicians in New Delhi grew nervous. In the absence of any roads, the Indian Army was using mules to stock supply, which was unfeasible in the long run according to Major General JM Singh as the Chinese had superior all weather roads. Infrastructure in Arunachal Pradesh had been neglected for a long time. The winter was over and the Chinese were preparing to teach India another lesson.

Surprisingly Sundarji was completely quiet during those months refusing to give interviews. For 6 months, he had worked on a plan to mobilise troops and teach the Chinese a lesson. Audacious of him. Spring of 1987 arrived and the standoff was continuing. The atmosphere was tense. And Sundarji made the first move. Using the newly induced Mi-17 Russian helicopters along with older Mi-8s he airlifted 3 brigades (10,000 troops) overnight and outflanked the Chinese. Now Indian troops had an immense advantage sitting at the mountain tops within fortified positions looking down at the Chinese troops below. All day, using megaphones and loud speakers Indian Army soldiers would blast messages in Mandarin humiliating and demoralising the Chinese. The logistics and supply lines of Chinese were cut off. In fact the situation became so bad that the PLA soldiers started committing suicide. The Chinese were incensed at this. The Indian Ambassador in Beijing was summoned and was abused by the Chinese Foreign Minister in the most parliamentary language.

Before the Chinese could react, Sundarji Struck again. He moved another Infantry division based in South India to Arunachal Pradesh and occupied the Namka Chu Valley.

In 1962, Indian Army had been brutally defeated by the PLA there and they had occupied the Namka Chu valley which gave PLA towering altitude advantage over the Indian Army garrisons located in Arunachal Pradesh. Not only was the Namka Chu valley reconquered but the area was supplemented with Mi-35 attack helicopters and Bofor guns ... The Chinese were really terrified then. In a mere 14 days, they had lost the advantage they had gained over 25 years.

All this happened without Rajiv Gandhi even getting a whiff of it. When the complexity of the situation was known, Rajiv Gandhi lost his cool. General Sundarji was summoned to PMO and when he was asked about the plans to deal with Chinese, he replied nonchalantly that the Army was ready to go on

an offensive and occupy roughly 10,000 Sq Kms in Tibet ridge line and hold on to it and ultimately force the PLA to retreat to pre-1962 positions. As he said these words, there was silence in the room and Rajiv Gandhi was looking at him bewildered.

What followed was a shameful assertion of Indian political establishment lacking a spine. Sundarji was reprimanded by the PM and was asked to move back, which he unwillingly did. His Military Operations Directorate staff remember that he told the PM and the Defence Minister that India was losing a golden chance and the country would pay for it in future. Ironically it turned out to be true in 2017.

Rajiv Gandhi and Congress got brownie points and won praise from China apologists for dealing with the Chinese in a mature manner. Now 35 years later, the question is 'Was General Sunderji right' ? Today, the answer is Yes. We as a country are paying price for short term political brownie points.

Now Sunderji was not limited to China only, he scared the shit out of General Zia in 1987 by conducting an exercise involving 500K troops on the Rajasthan border (Ex-Brasstacks). He was the first Indian Army Chief who openly argued that Pakistan should be prevented from becoming a nuclear state and was an advocate of conducting nuclear tests. In fact the 1998 Pokhran tests were based on the plans formulated by him in 1988.

Ironically, the Chinese were impressed with a man of Sundarji's calibre and invited him for a visit in 1993 after his retirement. In Beijing , when the Marshal of PLA asked Sunderji what he would like to eat, with a poker face, the General replied, "I as an Indian would like to drink Peking Soup", which meant that he could manage and predict the Chinese easily, needless to say the PLA Marshal was left red-faced and could smile only in reply.

Yet today, General Sunderji remains a controversial man, maligned by Congress affiliated media and journalists just because he stood up against the then PM Rajiv Gandhi.

GANDHI AND THE MATH MAHTMA

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM and Bar (Retd)

This article is a teachers' Day tribute scripted by Cmde Srikant Kensur, IN, reproduced as received.

In my school, I was the academic topper from the very beginning. I also excelled at debating, elocution, quizzing and essay writing. I took part in plays and skits and was a competent compere. I played good cricket, passable hockey and was decent at boxing, swimming and horse riding. I was lousy at cross country and few other things but that did not seem to matter, when one had so many good things going for me. Of course, all of this was relative and contextual.

The previous school toppers had done very well at NDA and many had gone on to win medals for best overall cadet or best in academics. Thus, when I got selected for NDA in my first attempt and ranked a high 25th in the All India merit there was near certain assumption that I would be soon making waves in the Academy with my 'overall brilliance'. I too got carried away by that euphoria and harboured similar dreams.

Alas, that was not to be and it did not take long for my world to come crashing down. My initial days were a near disaster and I simply got blown away. I could not cope up with the physical 'ragda' but it was the mental agony of ragging and humiliation that was worse. I just could not adapt to what I thought was an unthinking, cruel, strange and alien world. The food, people, routine everything seemed rotten or tortuous. Since the idea of dropping out or running away was not an option (my dad and whole biradari had high hopes on my becoming a gazetted officer of Govt of India) I remained in a state of trauma.

So, naturally, my performance graph plummeted and in the first four semesters, I had to come back twice for retest (GCI) so that I could not fail the semester. Instead of being a 'torchie' and having a grade point average of 7 plus, my CGPA hovered around sub 4 or 4 point something. News travelled fast to my hometown, the campus I stayed in and the school.

My Dad was aghast (poor chap thought it was a girl problem) and many well-wishers were bewildered.

With esteem eroded and confidence corroded, people do different things to insulate themselves and build a self-defence mechanism. Some end up reserved and crabby, others wrap themselves in a cocoon and some become bullies themselves. But the default NDA setting, for many of us, was a variation of inverse snobbery, where we celebrated our ordinariness with gusto and started thinking that being mediocre was a natural state to be. It was a survival tactic to maintain sanity but over a period of time it became our calling card. Thus, when I entered the final year (or the fifth term) in July 84, my only desire was to just somehow pass out and put this phase behind me. I guess many in class D of the 68th course had similar feelings of indifference or ennui about the last two terms.

Thus, it was with this mentality that class D of my course began our semester and we awaited our Maths class and our new teacher. In walked a short, diminutive person with a hurried manner about him. It was Mr Padmanabhan, the Registrar. Eyebrows went up. Why did the Registrar choose this class? Was it only a one off or was he with us for the whole semester? He was a Reader in Maths Department for heaven's sake?

In his quiet but firm manner Padmanabhan sir set our doubts right. He was with us and it was not by chance. He expected us to study Maths and not sham it out. He would not take any shirking lightly. He would not tolerate any sleeping in the class. Mathematics was his religion and he would not stand anyone disrespecting it. But there was a way to understand Maths and to enjoy it. He would try and make us do that (Was he nutty?). And then he dropped the bombshell. He said "Gentlemen, you are as good as anyone. Better than the guys in Class A. I want one of you to be the Mathematics topper and I will push you guys towards that".

So that was it. We were the guinea pigs. All our dreams of a quiet semester evaporated. This man was going to make our life miserable. Who the hell wanted to do well in Maths, we just wanted to pass with minimum fuss? As it happens, Maths had two papers for the final year – Tensor Analysis and Mechanical Maths. The syllabus seemed intimidating, the names were tongue twisters. And now Paddy (~~an obvious nickname isn't it~~) wanted us to master these.

Thus began our Maths lessons. He came on strong, would make us think and not brook any laziness. We had to pay attention but the force of his personality commandeered us to do it. His favourite phrase was 'that's all'. It was said with a flourish – to kill an argument, to threaten us of dire consequences, to prove a

point, to imply QED, but most often to encourage us to perform implying that no task was impossible.

Over a period of time, much against our own reservations, we started enjoying the sessions with him. He made Maths interesting as he promised even though he was a teacher of the old school, conscious of protocol and maintaining a distance. At his seniority he had taught several batches, many of whom were now Senior Officers in NDA. He made us aware of that fact but not with a view to intimidate us. Occasionally, very occasionally, if you answered well or grasped a concept he would allow a little smile from the corner of his mouth. That was the best reward you could ask from him. In the first phase test, class D performed well much against our own expectations with a few of us (including yours truly) actually scoring maximum or near maximum marks.

Paddy sir was not over the moon, his expression was 'look I told you, you guys could do it'. So it happened that few of us who had performed a shade better were chosen by him to be the 'task force' that would top the subject at end of our sixth semester. This was bad news for two reasons. One, it meant he would continue with us for the sixth semester too. Second, I was in that chosen group to make the assault on Class A's hegemony. There were others too but I recollect one name - Cadet RR Gandhi, a similar short guy with a similar scholarly look (Wonder what he was doing in our class?).

Mind you, over time, Paddy sir managed to enthuse the whole class about this project. Each one of us started liking the bloke despite all his idiosyncrasies. As for me, I had no choice now. I had to take the plunge, brush off the rust and inertia and get back to studies. But, for the first time in my life, I found Maths interesting. Analysis in particular made me understand the logic of Math.

Both RR Gandhi and I, and, possibly others, from the class D got an A plus in Maths at the end of the fifth semester but Paddy was not happy with the effort. He was indeed a hard man to please. He wanted us to go for the book prize for topping the subject. We had to beat or match the guy in Class A. That class had as its teacher the HOD and doyen of Maths, Prof KR Venkateswaran. We had to take on the high and mighty. So it was back to more work. Meanwhile, rest of the course was taking note of those class D chaps suddenly. As both Gandhi and I performed well in both the phase tests, there was a strange sense of belief. Maybe we could do it. Not impossible. The others in our class too encouraged us.

When the final exams happened, I did very well in Analysis. One hurdle passed. Fingers crossed and eyes down for the next one. Gandhi had done well too. We cheered for each other. It became our common mission now. In Mech Maths, I opened well but got into time trouble. I made a late surge but it was not enough. I knew that without attempting the last question there was no way I could get the prize. Surprisingly, I did not feel any dreams shattered but just a sense of letting my Maths Professor down. In the last one minute instead of making an attempt to solve the final question, I wrote in bold at the end of the paper for Mr Padmanabhan, "Sir, sorry for letting you down". A little unconventional perhaps but that just about summed my emotion. It was a relief to know that Gandhi had done well.

So that was it then, I thought. The final days of camp Trishul, preparing for the Passing Out Parade (POP) and the welcome relief of no classes meant that Paddy and Maths had receded from our horizon. Until the day of the Commandant's Dinner when the book prizes are awarded for the toppers. Unlike in the school, I had never figured in this list at NDA, so I was not worried. But I prayed for Gandhi. Technically, I still stood a chance if the others in contention had also muffed up somewhere but that was unlikely.

My heart beat quickened as the prizes for sixth term began to be announced. As the MC intoned 'the prize for mathematics goes to Cadet RR Gandhi', I let out a loud hurrah on my table much to the amazement of my dinner companions. Why was I cheering for a guy not from my squadron or school? But I am sure that day, all of us from class D cheered as RR Gandhi went to the centre table to receive his prize. And I am sure, that day, Paddy sir, like Mogambo khush hua, must have smiled widely. Did anyone from Class A also win? I don't know, nor do I care. But we the underdogs did it. And Gandhi was our man of the match.

I did not meet Prof Padmanabhan then or before passing out. But after reaching home, I wrote him a letter of thanks and gratitude. I am sure it would be evident to everyone that Paddy sir carried no grudge against class A nor was he on a mission to win a prize for Class D. But what he did was much deeper and more profound. He made us, a bunch of hopeless, under confident, cynical fellows believe in ourselves. He made us understand that no glory is beyond reach if one aspires for it and works hard to attain it. He made us sure of ourselves. He was the classic coach who taught us to enjoy the game as well as excel at it.

Unbeknown to myself but slowly, my recovery process had started in the final year itself. With As in Maths and Physics, I could go past 5 in my FGPA. I was

now a five pointer even if I had barely done that. Having started somewhere sub four, this was considerable achievement as those in NDA or similar institutions will understand. I topped in my squadron in Common Service Subjects and went to my sea cadet's phase on board Beas a more fulfilled man.

Happily for me, the Navy turned out to be a much better experience. I topped one of the subjects in cadets' time, did exceedingly well as a Midshipman and ended up after Sub Lieutenants Course with full 12 months seniority. The trauma of the past was well and truly past. At a philosophical level though, the dark phase was a necessary development in my life. It taught me that one cannot treasure success without failure; it taught me that failure can be overcome and, above all, it taught me to treat both triumph and disaster as two imposters as Kipling had asked us to do in his beautiful poem 'If' that hangs on the walls of our cabins at NDA.

At that moment, I resolved, rightly or otherwise, to always work in the future for credibility, for excellence, to enjoy my work and to be amongst the top few but never to be obsessed about topping. A topper carries too much tension and burden. While some people are doomed to succeed, others can't handle that pressure. I would love to top but without the 'collateral damage'. Anyway the bridesmaid has more fun than the bride. But it is important to be positive, to believe and to belong.

When I was posted back at NDA in 1994, as Div O, Prof Padmanabhan had retired but, happily for me, had settled in Pune. I could renew our association and I was overjoyed to meet him again. Mrs Padmanabhan was a delightful host and seemed a perfect partner for our Sir. Both she and sir were also wonderful to my wife and struck a great rapport with her. Thereafter, I have communicated off and on, due to the vagaries of service. I met him again in 2016 and since then have been in touch on phone and whatsapp. Couple of years ago, he shifted to Gurgaon, to live with his daughter and son-in-law (Col Kuber, Retd, 60th course NDA). Even now, sprightly at 86, he is much active and constantly encourages my pursuits and passions and always enquires about my wellbeing.

RR Gandhi is now an Air Commodore in the Air Force, doing very well. I met him last year when he came to Mumbai as part of the NDC course visit. I was delighted to renew our acquaintance after 33 years. We have been in touch ever since. I never told Gandhi that I cheered for him that day in May 1985. I

am telling this to him now as a toast to our class of 68 D and in fond memory of those moments. In fact, meeting him again was a catalyst for this article.

On this Teachers day, I would like \to remember this wonderful and revered teacher of mine Prof Padmanabhan. The Maths that I learnt from him may be long forgotten (to his everlasting displeasure perhaps). But the lessons of life he taught me are eternal and permanent. He was the Math Mahatma to us and RR Gandhi the agent in a mission that was to transform many lives including mine. Especially mine. This is to you Sir. And Sir, one more thing. That's All.

THE FAMOUS PAINTING OF SM MAUJI RAM

By

Ashok Ahlawat

While watching the Netflix drama series Downton Abbey, I always wondered about the selection of names of characters. George Barrow the Butler and Lady Sybilla. The screen writer and producer Julian Fellowes probably knew the family of General George Barrow and his wife Lady Sybilla of the Indian Army. Just a conjecture. Let's go back to the late nineteen twenties to the United Provinces, today's Uttar Pradesh.

The air was getting warmer every day and the hot weather was coming. Soon it would have full sway over the plains of India, from Peshawar to Calcutta. The offices of Eastern Command Headquarters at Lucknow started packing up to move to the cool hills of Nainital. The Command Headquarters shifted to Nainital every summer. They would halt at Bareilly enroute.

Her husband was the army commander and Nainital had a special pull for him. He had been born there in 1864. Her husband's father had also been a general in the Indian army.

"George who are these boys in native costumes?" she asked him. A carriage was driving the general and his wife to a bungalow in Bareilly. She had seen recruits who had arrived in their native garments to the centre.

"My dear they are the fresh recruits who have arrived for their military training" her husband replied.

Mrs Sybilla Barrow was an artist and she looked around her new surroundings with a sensitive eye. She wanted to paint one of those young men she had seen. She got her art box opened and laid out her painting materials in a room with lots of natural light.

"Dear would you mind calling a few of those young boys we saw here. I would like to make a portrait of one of them."

"Bilkul." said her husband. He spoke good Hindustani. He sent a message across to the Centre Commandant. The Centre Commandant told the Subedar Major of the Jat Regimental Centre. Soon a couple of recruits in dhoti and kurti reached the bungalow. Mrs Barrow sketched for some time and then threw down her pencil. She dismissed the recruits and when her husband came home ,she said,

"Some boys came today. I tried to sketch them. They won't do. Please ask them to send some better ones."

The next day the Subedar Major sent some more recruits to sit for Mrs Barrow. She selected one or two of them and started drawing. After some time she put her pencil down and took a deep breath. These recruits were also sent back.

A puzzled Centre Commandant called the Subedar Major and asked him "Sahib why can't you select and send good recruits to Mrs Barrow who wants to draw an ideal Jat young man."

"Sahib I have sent a fair sample of our young men from all over. I have sent boys from Bikaner, Rohtak, Hissar, Meerut. I really don't know what is it that the memsahib is looking for?"

Colonel Warden,the Centre Commandant told Subedar Major Mauji Ram.

"SM sahib. Would you go to the General sahib's bungalow and assist Mrs Barrow in finding what she has in mind."

The SM presented himself at the General sahib's bungalow and Mrs Barrow, the army commander's wife came out to see him. Like her husband she too spoke Hindustani and had a deep love for India and its people. The SM salaamed the memsahib and asked,

"Memsahib what kind of recruits are you looking for. I have sent you the finest recruits as per your wish."

Mrs Barrow had never seen the Subedar Major. She took a long look at him. The SM was a fine looking man. His six foot three inches gave him a stately majesty and he had a clean cut sculpted face. He stood there, a picture of soldierly dignity that long years of service had imparted to him.

" SM sahib I am sure you selected the best men but they won't suffice for what is in my mind" she said.

"Thik hai memsahib! I will go back and search for some more recruits straight away."He said and turned to leave.

"Wait a moment SM sahib. Would you please don't mind if I ask you to go and sit on that chair next to the window."

Mrs Barrow started sketching the Subedar Major.

"But memsahib I am an old man" he protested.

"Never mind SM sahib.I think you will do perfectly."Mrs Barrow started making the portrait of SM Mauji Ram.

The SM would go to the army house and many sittings later, the two paintings got completed. Mrs Barrow imagined how he would have looked as a young recruit and drew him out of sheer power of her imagination.

Both the paintings of Subedar Major Honorary Captain Mauji Ram,OBI are displayed in the Jat Regimental Centre,Bareilly.

The portrait of young Mauji Ram has become a leitmotif and acquired a symbolic aura for the Jat Regiment. Today it is embossed as the regimental escutcheon and the iconic symbol of the Jat soldier. The Jat Regiment memento is the miniature bust of Subedar Major Honorary Captain Mauji Ram Ahlawat, OBI (Order Of British India, instituted 1837) who died in 1960 .He belonged to Dhandlan village in Jhajjar district of Haryana.

His Son Major Ran Singh Ahlawat who also joined his father's battalion. After surrender of the British Empire forces to the Japanese in Mala, on raising of Indian National Army he joined the INA. He was a staff officer of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose in the Indian National Army. He faced the Red Fort trials of INA officers. His grandson also joined his regiment as an officer. Two of his great grandsons are serving officers in the Indian Army.

LADY COURAGEOUS

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

This true story below is best narrated as written in his own words by Maj. Gen. Raj Mehta, General Officer Commanding (GOC) 19 Infantry Division (now Lt. Gen. Retd) in the Baramulla Sector of the Kashmir Valley. It vividly describes the type of life in insurgency ridden areas.

This true life war zone incident is about a lady doctor of rare grit which gives new meaning to the Hippocrates Oath that doctors serve under.

It was just past the witching hour in Baramulla, where militancy in Kashmir began in 1988 and (in 2017) still goes on. I must have dozed off in the first interlude of sleep in an active 18 hour day when I got a call on the phone. The operator displayed his urgency by prefacing the call as urgent “... IED phata hai Sahib. Capt Devika Gupta aap se baat karna chahti hain. MI Room se bol rahi hain ...” Soldiers in Kashmir sleep with their weapons and I was no different. In two minutes I was in uniform... the QRT (Quick Reaction Team) was ready too and we were racing out of the GOC’s bungalow that nestled on the banks of the Jhelum River.

The MI Room was close by and there was subdued activity. The wounded Rashtriya Rifles soldier was part of a night domination patrol when he had stepped on an IED (improvised explosive device). His intestines had spilt out and his team had rushed him to the MI Room, where the MO, Capt Devika Gupta, her hands encased in blooded white gloves right up to her shoulders, started stitching him up to stop the intense bleeding. My staff had reacted fast and placed an armoured car, a South African made bullet-proof Casprier and a three vehicle Gurkha QRT to escort the lady doctor and patient to the Base Hospital at Srinagar, 60 kms away, if that was needed. All standard operating procedure during my time as GOC.

“Sir” Devika told me on arrival. “It is touch and go. I have put almost 150 stitches on him. He has to reach the ICU at Srinagar for immediate operating as his vitals are collapsing. I need to monitor him and hold a drip otherwise he will die on my hands. I need an open jeep not this ‘tank’ (she called the narrow ceiled Casprier that was meant for war - not casualty evacuation). It was past 1 AM now and the Baramulla - Pattan road was notorious for terrorist fire on our convoys because the road was cut through low hills and gullies near

Pattan, a very trouble prone area. I was the GOC and morally responsible for any orders I gave. In this case, I felt she had to go in a Casprier if she was not to lose her own and her patient's life in an ambulance Gypsy and told her the same in no uncertain terms.

Generals are trained to anticipate trouble and the moment I said what I had to and my men started jumping to respond, a quiet firm authoritative voice intervened --- "Just a minute General Sir" that was Devika in a voice that wasn't hers .. so my mind registered. She was dressed in a blood splattered green military sari and had just got up from stitching the soldier's abdomen. She was actually just five feet tall, soft, petite, well mannered and very good at her job but for some reason when she pulled herself up and snapped her beret on over her short hair that dark night, she seemed to be taller than I. She was.

She walked up to me close enough for me to see her angry flashing blazing eyes. "Sir, who is the GOC?" "Have you any doubt?" I asked her. "No I have no doubt. Now tell me who is the doctor treating the soldier?" I understood. GOCs aren't stupid. Anyone would understand and I certainly did. "Sir, the boy is my patient. Do not interfere. If you do you will carry the responsibility for his death. I will carry him in an open Gypsy and NOT the Casprier. If I die, my husband will grieve for me; you need not bother. (He was the Medical Specialist at the Base Hospital; a great lad whom I had met at the BH while looking up my wounded soldiers) and Sir you may later court-martial me if you wish to but let me go now—" With all my men waiting for my reaction at being 'dressed down' by this chit of a girl, with just three years of service to my 36 years, I did the only thing possible any officer and Gentleman would have done in a war zone – I saluted her.

"Devika I am sorry I interfered. Go. God is with you. There were at least two people hiding their tears that dark night and she was just one of them.

The drama had not yet ended. At Pattan, the area I was most worried about, one of the Gorkha escort vehicles broke down at about 2:30 AM. The brave gusty doctor asked her escort to catch up after repairing the broken down vehicle and proceeded the last 30 kms unescorted by anybody but God who was with her.

On the terror grid no one is given special privileges, man or woman, as everyone is committed to specific jobs so it was with relief when Devika called me up at about 4:30 AM ... "Sir, the soldier has been operated upon and will

make it. I joined in the operation. It is Sunday. Can I have half a day off? You are aware that I am six months pregnant and my hubby has arranged for me to have my term tests this morning”

I called up the Corps Commander. The Army Commander was also in station and was spoken to... So was the Chief of Army Staff. Three days later she was awarded the Chief of Army Staff’s Commendation Card for her heroism and devotion to duty – a rare honour.

A few months later this tigress delivered a baby. A child who would one day hear about her great feisty mum; a woman who sorted out a protective General – and won.

When some of my peers say or write that women are not suited for the uniform, I react very strongly in their favour because the women I have seen and interacted with were tigresses in the main.

THE CHAMBAL CHALLENGE

By

Lt Gen Harwant Singh (Retd)

With the start of the Indo-China war in 1962, a Junior Command Course at The College of Combat, Mhow, was terminated and every officer instructed to forthwith to rejoin their units. In my case there was a signal from Army HQ, which required me to stay put at Mhow. Two days later, I was handed over my posting order to J&K with immediate effect, giving no joining time.

I had taken my car (Hindustan-14) to Mhow and had no option other than to drive it straight back to Punjab, where I could leave the car and proceed to J&K. Since I did not have much time, I decided to drive non-stop to Delhi. The stretch between Gwalior and Agra involved driving through the Chambal ravines; better known for its dacoits and lawlessness. In the 1960s, driving by oneself even during the day was not without some risk.

Therefore, for me to drive through this section of the road at night was perilous. It was approaching midnight that on approaching a defile formed by the low hills I found the road blocked by a tree. I realised that I had run into an ambush and there was no scope to turn back because the trap had been carefully planned.

As I brought the car to a halt, a number of men with guns, and bandoliers strung across their chests, appeared. Their faces were covered for obvious reasons. They asked me to step out of the car which I dutifully did. They searched me for cash and removed my watch and wallet. Thereafter they got down to searching my baggage and the car. While they were busy rifling through my baggage and taking fancy to my clubs in the golf bag, someone announced that the Sardar had come. Everyone pulled back a little and there appeared a sturdy young man with a large moustache. As he drew near, he suddenly sprung to attention and gave me a smart salute.

“Sahibji. Tussi ethay ki kar rahe ho?” (Sir. What are you doing here?)

From his voice and face, latter day moustache notwithstanding, I recognised him. He was my tank gunner and had been discharged after seven years of engagement. I responded to his query, and asked him *“Nahar Singh. Toon aye ki kaam pharaya hai?”* (Nahar Singh. What is this work you have taken on?)

“Sahibji aadmi ko kuch na kuch taan karna chaida hai; valey baith ke vi ki karna hai?” (Sir one must do some work. There is no point in sitting idle).

I told him *“Tenu asi eh kum taan nahi sikhlaya si”* (We did not train you for such an activity)

“Sahib ji tohadi ambush loan di sikhlai kum ah rahi hai. Sadi ambush wich kuch nuks hai” (Sir, your training in laying ambush is proving useful).

He then addressed his gang. *“Dekhya sadhi regiment de officer kiney dalair hun, ekeley hi raat nu is sadak tey chal rahey hun”*. (See how brave are the officeres of our regiment.They travel alone on this road at night). This bit was perhaps to project his own pedigree.

I asked him if his family (wife) knew what work he was doing? To this he answered *“Saari gallan family nu thodian dassi dian hun. Oh soch di hai ki main police da naal kum kar han”* (you don't disclose everything to your family. She thinks I am working for the police).

At this, one of his gang interjected *“police vi to eh hi kum kardi hai”* (police too do this sort of work). This raised much laughter amongst them. Then he told his men to quickly make tea. While we waited for tea Nahar Singh chatted about his time with the regiment and his old friends.

All my stuff was put back in the car, my watch and wallet returned and the tree shifted for my car to pass. After the cup of tea and much bon homie and hand shaking, I took leave of Nahar Singh and his gang.

THE DRIVER REMEMBERS SAM

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

An encounter with a driver who drove one of India's most-loved soldiers, Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, for 22 years.

It has been 9 years that Field Marshal S H F J 'Sam' Manekshaw' passed away.

But in Wellington, the quaintly beautiful cantonment town in the Nilgiris, where the field marshal retired to, his memories live on.

Each year when I go for my annual lecture to the student officers at the Defence Services Staff College located in Wellington not very far from Coonoor and Ooty, at least one anecdote about Sam Bahadur the Legend gets added to my stock. In 2012 I garnered more than my usual quota because I came twice in close succession!

Nothing prepared me for my trip this time though!

As I came out of Coimbatore airport, an LO (Liaison Officer) in his crisp Madras Regiment uniform was as usual standing with the customary placard to receive me.

As we walked to the black Ambassador staff car, shining in the bright 30 degree sun, a tall man, his hair neatly combed and parted, wearing the chauffeur's khaki uniform, greeted me: "Good Morning Sir! I am Kennedy!"

I wished him back distractedly since I was busy looking at messages on the mobile after a two-hour long flight.

As we started our drive to Wellington, Kennedy asked: "Shall I put the AC on Sir?"

After replying the affirmative, just to be polite, I tossed a remark: "Have we met before, Kennedy?"

He said: "No Sir, but I have seen you on TV and last year I also saw you at the function in the field marshal's honour!"

Impressed and flattered at the same time, I ventured to ask Kennedy how well he knew the field marshal. "Sir I drove him and Madam around for 22 years!"

My mind snapped back to attention from the numbness that a long flight induces.

Here was a variation of a situation that I encounter almost every fortnight: the talkative taxi driver who wants to impress you with his knowledge and wisdom. But this was different.

Here was a man who saw the field marshal closely for over two decades!

You would be foolish to let go of this opportunity Nitin, I told myself.

The planned short nap be damned. The inquisitive reporter in me was now wide awake!

So what is your most significant memory of the field marshal, I shot off the first question, my pen poised over the small notebook I fortunately still carry in my shirt pocket!

"Oh, so many of them Sir," Kennedy replied. I wanted to immediately ask a counter-question: Which one is most precious, but years of training as a print reporter made me hold back.

After a minute or two, Kennedy, who was perhaps trying to recall his memories, said: "Whenever I went to his house with the staff car from the college (Defence Services Staff College), the first thing he would tell Solai (the field marshal's batman), Kennedy ko chai pilao, bread mein jam lagao, butter lagao! Each time, without fail, the field marshal would make me eat the bread-butter and drink tea," an emotional Kennedy remembered.

"The field marshal had cows at home. The household made its own cheese," he added.

And how often did you go, was my next question.

"Definitely once a fortnight. He was very particular to use the staff car only for official purposes," Kennedy revealed.

Now there was no stopping Kennedy.

"Very often Madam (the field marshal's wife, Silloo) would drive him to the market in her Maruti 800. He would purchase the essentials from the market himself -- vegetables, meat -- he loved doing that," Kennedy recalled.

"You know something Sir, he bought the plot of land in 1960 when he was commandant of the Staff College, but even as a major general, he did not have enough money. He told me once 'Kennedy, I had to take out money from my provident fund to buy this land'."

As we left behind the plains of Mettupalayam and started the gentle climb up the Nilgiris, Kennedy was in full flow.

"The field marshal never said it openly, but Madam and other family members often made it clear that they were never happy with the way the government treated him after retirement. They gave him the baton, 5 stars and nothing else," Kennedy said. "Not even a dedicated car," an angry Kennedy recalled.

Now this was interesting and a little disconcerting. Was this man sharing what he had heard and saw or was he making it up mixing facts with gossip and innuendo?

Yes, one knew about the cold shoulder the field marshal got from successive governments, but would he, even if he was unhappy, give that impression to anyone, leave alone his chauffeur? I wasn't sure, so just to change the subject, I asked him is Kennedy your real name?

"Real name Hridayraj Sir, but I was born in November 1963, the same month President Kennedy was killed. My father -- we are Christians, by the way Sir -- thought Kennedy was a good man, so he gave me the name Kennedy. Everyone knows me as Kennedy around here Sir."

"What else do you remember?"

"He was a pucca soldier, Sir. He would never eat his breakfast without getting fully dressed. Also, he always used to deliver the last lecture for the staff course."

"Many senior officers, including chiefs from Delhi and elsewhere, would meet the field marshal whenever they came to Wellington. Often I would take them

to the house. You know something Sir, I have driven more than 500 three star officers in my 27 years of service. I have been a driver to so many chiefs -- General Rodrigues, General Sundarji (after his retirement Sundarji settled in Wellington), General Malik, General JJ, General VK, General Kapoor..." Kennedy was unstoppable now.

We were nearing Coonoor.

"Tell me more about Sam, the father and husband," I gently prodded him.

"Oh for him, madam's word was final. The field marshal was a loving father and grandfather. One of his grandsons looked exactly like him. Long nose, tall and fair. I never saw him scold any one. And he was always kind to people like us. When madam passed away, he was a broken man. We knew he wouldn't last long without his biggest strength," Kennedy said, clearly choking.

"You know Sir, President Kalam was the one who gave him more dignity than any one else. I drove the President to the hospital where the field marshal was admitted," Kennedy recalled. Kennedy was extremely angry at how the government treated the field marshal in death. "No chief came for his burial. Defence Minister Antony sent his junior minister. Is this the way we treat our heroes Sir?" he asked.

I had no answer.

As we neared the Staff College, I asked Kennedy to share some photographs of his with the field marshal. And sure enough, later that evening, he came with the photographs.

Over the next two days Kennedy drove me to the college, to the market and to dinners, coming up with one anecdote or the other about the legend. As he dropped me back to Coimbatore airport on Saturday evening, I couldn't help but envy him for having had the privilege of seeing the legendary soldier so up close.

Kennedy has a decade more to serve, but nothing will be as exciting for him as his years with Field Marshal Manekshaw.
An anecdote by a journalist...

Nitin Gokhale

THE ELOQUENCE OF SILENCE

Anecdotes Collected by Maj Gen B N Rao. AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Can you hear a pin drop? What is the meaning of pin drop silence? Following are some of the instances when silence could speak louder than words. These anecdotes were forwarded to me by different army friends at different times by e-mail / WhatsApp.

Take – 1

After the 1971 Indo-Pak war, Field Marshal Sam Maneckshaw once started addressing a public meeting at Ahmadabad in English.

The crowd started chanting “Speak in Gujarati. We will hear you only if you speak in Gujarati” Field Marshal Sam Maneckshaw stopped. He swept the audience with a hard stare and replied –

“Friends, I have fought many a battle in my long military career. I have learnt Punjabi from the men of the Sikh Regiment, Marathi from the Maratha Regiment, Tamil from the Madrasis, Bengali from the men of the Bengal Sappers, Hindi from the Bihar Regiment and even Nepali from the Gorkhas. Unfortunately there was no soldiers from Gujarat from whom I could have learnt Gujarati!”

The crowd was stilled into silence.

Take – 2

Robert Whiting, an elderly US gentleman of 83 arrived in Paris by plane. At French Customs, he took a few minutes to locate his passport in his carry on.

“You have been to France before Monsieur?” the Customs Officer asked sarcastically. Mr Whiting admitted that he had been to France previously. “Then you should know enough to have your passport ready.”

The American said “the last time I was here, I didn’t have to show it.” “Impossible. Americans always have to show their passports on arrival in France!” The Customs Officer sneered.

The American senior gave the Frenchman a long, hard look. Then he quietly explained -

“Well, when I came ashore at Omaha Beach at 4:40 am on D Day the 6th of June in 1944, to help liberate your country, I couldn’t find a single Frenchman to show a passport to ...”

The Frenchman wilted in his shoes.

Take – 3

Soon after getting freedom from British rule in 1947, the de-facto Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru called a meeting of senior army and government officers to select the first General of the Indian Army, “as we don’t have enough experience to lead the same.”

Having learned under the British only to serve and rarely to lead, all the civilians and most men in uniform present nodded their heads in agreement.

However one senior Army officer, Nathu Singh Rathore, asked for permission to speak.

Nehru was a bit taken aback by the independent streak of the officer, though he asked him to speak freely. Rathore said “You see Sir, we don’t have enough experience to lead a nation too, so shouldn’t we appoint a British person as the first prime Minister of India?”

The stunned silence was unbelievable.

After that deafening pause, Nehru asked Rathore “Are you ready to be the first General of the Indian Army?” Rathore declined the offer “Sir, we have a very talented Army officer, my senior, General Cariappa, who is the most deserving amongst us.”

This is how the brilliant Gen K M Cariappa became the first Commander –in Chief of the Indian Army and Nathu Singh Rathore – its first ever Lieutenant General.

Take-4

When 50 (Independent) Parachute Brigade returned to its permanent location, Agra, after the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the Mayor of Agra accorded a civic reception for the troops. After a welcoming speech, the Mayor presented a cheque for Rs 100,000/- to Brig Inderjit Singh Gill, the Para Brigade Commander, for the welfare of paratroopers.

Brig Gill in his speech thanked the Mayor for the gift and then added in his typical anglicised Hindi that the whole world knows Agra because of the Taj Mahal, Hotel Clarke Shiraj and because of the Parachute Brigade. But he said that he had never seen a dirtier city than Agra.

“I therefore return the cheque to you Mr Mayor, to use the money to clean up the city of Agra”

The Mayor was struck dumb. The momentary silence was followed by thunderous applause from all the troops present.

Take -5

The anecdote narrated below is of an exchange between Senator John Glenn and Howard Metzen Baum. It eloquently explains why men and women in the Armed Forces serve in uniform for a living.

Senator Metzen Baum to Senator John Glenn. “How can you run for Senate when you have never held a real job?”

Senator Glenn. “I served 23 years in the US marine Corps. I served through two wars. I flew 149 missions, and my plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire on 12 different occasions. I was in the Space Program. It wasn’t my check-book Howard, it was my life on the line. It was not a 9 to 5 job where I took time off to take the daily cash receipts to the bank. I ask you to go with me as I went the other day to a Veterans’ Hospital and look those men – with their mangled bodies – in the eye, and tell THEM they didn’t hold a job!

“You go with me to the Space Program at NASA and go, as I have gone, to the widows and orphans of Ed White, Gus Grissom and Roger Chaffee... and you look those kids in the eye and tell them that their dads didn’t hold a job.

“You go with me on Memorial Day and you stand in Arlington National Cemetery where I have more friends buried than I’d like to remember and you watch those waving flags. You stand there and think about this Nation, and you tell ME that those people didn’t hold a job, and I’ll tell you Howard Metzen Baum you should be on your knees every day of your life thanking God that there were SOME MEN – who held a real job! And they required a dedication to a purpose-and a love of country and a dedication to duty – that was more important than life itself. And their self sacrifice is what made this country possible.

I have held a job, Howard. How about you?”

No reply.

Take - 6

Conversation overheard on the VHF Guard (emergency) frequency 121.5 MHz while flying from Europe to Dubai.

Iranian Air Defence Site –“Unknown aircraft. You are in Iranian air space. Identify yourself”

Aircraft - “This is an United States aircraft. I am in Iraqi air space”.

Air Defence Site. “You are in Iranian air space. If you do not depart our air space we will launch interceptor aircraft”.

Aircraft. “This is an United States FA-18 Fighter. Send ‘em up. I’ll wait”.

Iranian AD Site – (total silence).

THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

This is the story of Gunner Shardool Singh from Punjab and Havildar Abdul Hameed from Tamilnadu. Shardool Singh was from the Regiment of Artillery and Abdul Hameed from the Army Service Corps. They met each other in tragic circumstances.

The year was 1979. They were travelling in a vehicle which was part of a military convoy from Srinagar to Jammu. Both were proceeding on their annual leave. After crossing Ramban, their vehicle skidded in the snow and plunged into a deep gorge, 300 feet down. Most of the occupants of the vehicle were killed on the spot. But both Shardool Singh and Abdul Hameed survived, though very seriously injured. The army evacuated them immediately by helicopter to the Command Hospital, at Chandigarh.

Shardool had both eyes damaged but had otherwise escaped with bruises and contusions only. Hameed, however, was unconscious and in a precarious state. At the hospital he was placed on the DI List (Dangerously ill) and admitted in the ICU. By midnight he came to his senses and asked the Sister attending him, as to the fate of “the tall handsome Sardar Gunner?” She told him that he was out of danger but was likely to lose his eyesight since both his eyes were hurt in the accident. Out of curiosity she asked him as to how he knew him?

Hameed said “while travelling, that boy was quite anxious to get home fast because he told me that he was married just six months back. He wanted to present his wife the Pashmina shawl he had bought for her in Srinagar.” After some thought he requested the Sister to kindly let him know of his condition in the morning.

After two nights, Sister Anusuya Theresa was on duty again in the ICU. Hameed’s condition had further deteriorated. He was on life support system. With great difficulty, he gestured to her to remove his mask so that he could speak. The Sister placed her ear close to his mouth. Hameed told her that he wanted to donate his eyes to the “Handsome Sardar” if that could help him get his vision back. The Sister immediately rushed to the office cupboard and came back with the necessary form to enable him to do so. Hameed signed it. Then he made one more request. He wanted to meet Shardool immediately.

The Sister knowing from her experience that this might be the last wish of the patient, brought Shardool in a wheel chair. Shardool was overwhelmed and tears were falling from his bandaged eyes. Hameed was quite composed, like most human beings who reach their final moments.

“Shardool. I had an ambition to make a pilgrimage to Haj in my lifetime. Now it is impossible. Though you may (Allah willing) have my eyes, being a non Muslim you cannot make it either. But try and visit Nagoor Dargha once, anytime convenient to you.” Those were his last words.

The surgeons were able to restore eyesight fully in one of Shardool’s eyes and were able to restore partial vision in the other.

Years rolled by. Indira Gandhi was assassinated in 1984. The anti Sikh sentiment led to much meaningless violence across the nation, reverberating even in the South as far as Coimbatore.

In December 1988, Shardool decided to fulfil the ambition of his benefactor. He found out about the Nagoor Dargha, which is visited by people of all faiths. He reached Chennai by train. Col Raman who was his Battery Commander in 1979, was in Chennai with the IPKF. Learning from Shardool, who was a Havildar by then, the purpose of his visit, immediately made arrangements for his onward journey.

Shardool returned from his trip looking emancipated. Shardool met and thanked Col Raman for his help. Shardool opened up after Col Raman enquired about the trip.”Sahib, after the accident, I felt that I also should have died instead of living as a blind man. Suddenly the Sister in the MH told me about the offer made by Havildar Hameed whom I befriended only during our short journey together. I could only hear his voice, since my eyes were bandaged. I felt that it was not Hameed but one of our own Gurus speaking. His last wish was so simple and practical, considering the great sacrifice he was making. I till today revere him as I do my Guru. To me, it was not a request. It was a command from my own Guru. But it has taken me nearly 10 years to fulfil his request. I am really ashamed. The visit to Ngoor Dargha taught me many great lessons.

“In every religion, there are outstanding men, who live a normal, ordinary life, but full of pure thoughts. The man who is devoted to his own religion will never dare to insult other religions. In Nagoor I saw people from all faiths

paying their homage, but none sacrificed his own faith. I went around the Dargha four or five times as if showing to Hameed through his own eyes, the place he revered so much.”

Col Raman was impressed by this narration. Simple but great truth coming from the Sikh soldier. “Okay, Shardool. What have you resolved after your visit to the Dargha? Everyone who visits the Dargha, I am told, makes a vow”.

“Sahib, I have taken two vows. First to follow in the footsteps of Hameed in helping others.”

“That is commendable. And what is the second vow?”

“Sahib I will never trim my beard in future. I shall follow all the tenets of my Sikh religion scrupulously and try to become a better human.”

WHEN ARMY RUNS IN THE DNA

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Lt Gen Baljit Singh (Retd) Chronicles the laudable military heritage of a family from a village in Jalandhar — a tradition that many can associate with

It is not uncommon among the fraternity of India's armed forces to come across the second or even the third generation from a family having also proudly made the profession of arms as their life's calling. But a few days ago, when I chanced upon a collage photograph of four generations of a family in military uniform in an unbroken chain, my immediate reaction was to reach out to the veteran patriarch, from the Brigade of Guards (Col Mahinder Singh Minhas), and compliment the family on their laudable military heritage.

What followed next was truly a humbling experience. Their family lore had its origins dating back to the 1880s when Achhar Singh, a native of Daroli Khurd village (Jalandhar district), enlisted in the 69th Punjabis (formerly the Madras Native Infantry) of the British Indian Army. By the dint of his hard work and dedication, he rose to be a Havildar when WW-I broke out.

Achhar Singh had four strapping sons, three of whom (young bucks Labh Singh, Gardhara Singh and Hazara Singh) gladly followed in their father's footsteps. With the earthy wisdom of a Jat Sikh peasant, Achhar Singh had charged the fourth son to stay back, care for their mother and mind the family's meagre agricultural holding. There is no record whether they fought on the battlefields of France-Flanders or Gallipoli-Palestine, but were downright lucky that Labh Singh alone was KIA (killed in action).

In the Punjab countryside of the 1900s, a small village that Daroli Khurd was, its adult population would have been around 500, but unmindful of privations and the risk of loss of limb, even of life, the pull of service in the Army was obviously held in such high esteem that a tablet embedded in the entrance arch to the village gurdwara memorialises to this day their contribution thus: "From This Village, 91 Men Went to The Great War 1914-1919. Of These, 6 Gave Up Their Lives."

In the periodic post-war readjustments within the Army, several Infantry battalions were merged to create the Punjab Regiment in 1922. Havildar Achhar Singh had by then retired with his honourably earned war-time pension, but his sons Gardhara Singh and Hazara Singh soldiered on in WW-II, in Field Marshal Slim's 14th Army, upon the battlefields of Burma.

And as is well documented, the Punjab Regiment acquitted itself extremely well in the battles of Kohima (lately adjudged the best battle of all in WW-II), Imphal and right through to the VJ Day, 1945. Both brothers carried forward the legacy of their father with distinction, Gardhara Singh becoming the Subedar Major of 2 Punjab and even more so, he was invested with the OBI title "awarded by the Viceroy of India for long, faithful, distinguished and honourable service".

He capped his career in 1945 when the Viceroy, Field Marshal Wavell, made "...Subedar Major Gardhara Singh, Sardar Bahadur, OBI, 2nd Punjab Regiment.....an Honorary Captain". What a grand roller-coaster career ending in 1949!

Hazara Singh, in the meantime, had been shifted to another battalion from where he too went on pension as a Subedar Major.

While Honorary Captain Gardhara Singh busied himself in creating a modest cenotaph in the memory of their KIA brother Labh Singh on their farm land, his two sons were commissioned from the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun; Manmohan into the Corps of Signals and Mahinder into 5 Guard, in 1971. Mahinder had the family claim to 1 Guard (being the erstwhile 2 Punjab), but unfortunately, they had no vacant slot. Both the brothers became veterans of the 1971 war, Manmohan from the Shakargarh offensive on the western front and Mahinder from the Jessore sector on the eastern front.

Mahinder's elder son is currently commanding a company in 12 Guard while the younger, a Wing Commander, is posted at the Air Headquarters. Only time will tell whether the DNA will carry forward the family legacy into a legend.

SECULARISM IN A HOUSE OF GOD

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Major General S P S Narang (Retd) narrates a spiritually uplifting experience he once had during a stopover at a Gurudwara, while driving from Dehra Dun to Chandigarh. It is best described in Gen Narang's own words.

"Last November, I was driving from Dehra Dun to Chandigarh — a fascinating four-hour journey, with the added attraction of visiting Paonta Sahib Gurdwara. I had to break on the way to give myself and my car some rest. And what better than entering the abode of the Guru. Besides the soothing kirtan, it is the langar that one savours, seated on the floor among a multitude of people from all walks of life. Some partake of all meals as they have no other means to satiate their hunger.

Breaking bread with them gives an indescribable spiritual high, and to experience this, one doesn't have to belong to any one religion. I, too, enjoyed the langar and came out to get on with my journey.

I stopped to buy some knick-knacks from a kiosk outside the Gurudwara. Just then, I spotted a family of Gujjars (Muslim nomads who rear cattle and goats in mountainous areas and sell milk), in an intent discussion in front of a tea vendor. The family comprised an elderly couple, two middle-aged couples and four children. Three of the women were partially veiled. They seemed poor as the eldest gentleman (probably the father) counted coins and some crumpled notes.

Undoubtedly, the issue was how much they could afford to buy. They asked for three cups of tea and four samosas (popular Indian snack).

Gathering courage, I asked him, "*Kya aap sab khana khayenge?* (Would you all like to have food?)"

They looked at one another with a mixture of surprise, apprehension and hurt self-respect.

There was silence. Sometimes, silence can be loud. The innocent eyes of the kids were filled with hope. "*Hum kha ke aaaye hain* (We have eaten already)," the father of the children responded.

There was an instant retort: "*Kahan khayaa hai subeh se kuch bhi, Abba?*"
(Where have we eaten anything since morning, Papa?)

Hearing that, a dull ache in my chest caught me by surprise. The stern look in the eyes of the three men and the pleading moist eyes of the women said it all.

I insisted that they come with me. They agreed, reluctantly. We entered the Gurudwara.

A good feeling descended over me as I deposited their shoes at the Jora Ghar (shoe-deposit room in all Gurudwaras). The elders were awed by the architectural marvel.

However, there was fear in their eyes, which was understandable. They were entering a non-Islamic place of worship for the first time.

But the children couldn't care less, their innocent faces single-mindedly focused on food. Some onlookers flashed strange looks from the corner of their eyes. But then I followed the children, adopting their easy attitude as they excitedly chose head wraps of different colours. (Everyone is supposed to cover their heads inside a Gurudwara).

Except for the eldest member, all accompanied me inside, and emulating me, bowed their heads and touched their forehead to the floor. Many others must have noticed, as I did, that these children went through this ritual with utmost reverence. They took Parshad (offering) from the Bhaiji (the priest) who asked them if they needed more? The children gladly nodded.

We entered the Langar Hall and I took the kids along to collect thaalis (stainless steel plates).

They did it with joy, like only kids would. Seated opposite us was a newly-married couple. The bride, with red bangles accentuating her charm, asked the children to sit beside her, and two of them sat between the bride and the groom. The way she was looking after them, I could tell she would make a loving mother.

Langar was served, and though I had already eaten, I ate a little to make my guests comfortable. One had to see to believe how they relished it. The initial apprehension had vanished and they ate to their fill. I have no words to describe the joy I experienced.

We had nearly finished when an elderly Sikh and a youth with flowing beard (perhaps the head Granthi and sewadar-helper) sought me out.

I was overcome by fear, and more than me, my guests were scared. I walked up to them with folded hands.

He enquired in Punjabi, "*Inhaan-nu tusi le ke aaye ho?* (Have you brought them in?)" I nodded.

The next question had me baffled, "*Tusi har din path karde ho?* (Do you say prayers every day?)." I almost blurted, "Yes", but it would have been a lie. So, with utmost humility I said, "No."

Expecting an admonishment, he surprised me: "*Tuhaanu tha koi lorh hi nahin. Aj tuhaanu sab kuch mil gaya hai ji* (You don't need to. Today you have attained everything)." I was flabbergasted. Was it advice or sarcasm?

He added, "*Inhaanu Babbe de ghar Iya ke te langar shaka ke tusi sab kuch paa laya. Tuhaada dhanwad. Assi dhan ho gaye* (By bringing them to the Guru's abode for langar, you've got everything from God. Thank you. We are blessed)."

Then, with folded hands, he walked up to the elderly couple and requested them: "*Aap jab bhi idhar aao to langar kha ke jaaiye. Yeh to uparwale da daya hai ji* (Whenever you happen to pass through here, please come and have food. It is god's gift)."

I escorted my guests out of the Langar Hall. Just as we were about to pick our footwear, one of the children said, "*Humme aur halwa do naa.*" (Get us some more sweet offering). We five went in to get more parshad. Finally, as they were about to depart, the elderly lady whispered something to her husband.

I enquired, "*Koi baat, Miyaji?* (Is there any problem, Miyaji?)"

Almost pleadingly, he said, "*Yeh keh rahin ki, kya aap ke sar par haath rakh sakti hain?* (She is asking, can she keep her hand on your head?)"

I bowed as she blessed me with tears in her eyes. A wave of emotion swept over me.

Is it my imagination, or for real, that I often feel the beautiful hand of a Muslim lady, wrapped in purity and love, on my head?”

A Point to Ponder From the Contributor. Ever wondered why one hardly ever sees a beggar in Punjab? Because the Gurudwaras welcome everybody to come and partake langar without reservation: as often as need be. The Sikh community is extremely gracious, welcoming, generous and compassionate. During natural disasters or when occasion demands, the Gurudwaras run food kitchens which serve lakhs of people for months together. Everyone is equal in God’s house is their belief. And the Sikhs are to be admired for it.

SOME UNKNOWN TEACHERS

By

Lt Col Noel Ellis

Let me begin by folding my hands to all my 'teachers' who touched my life and moulded me into what I am today. A big thank you to each one of them. So far for the teachers who were responsible for my formal education. My parents included.

I also wanted to thank all those who taught me indirectly too.

They rarely spoke to you authoritatively but they gave you a lesson on the quiet, your own children included.

My teachers were my jawans under me. The first thing they taught me was 'unflinching obedience'. One command and they would just obey. One order they could die for you. They would come to 'attention' on your word of command. On the command of 'Hilo Mat' no one moved even if a fly sat tickling his nose. That obedience could never be duplicated by anyone else.

'Punctuality' was taught by my driver. He was never late. A time was given to him to reach my house; he would be there fifteen minutes 'before time'. How could he be late? If you scolded him for being too early, next time he would halt his jeep round the corner and wait and still reach six minutes before the stipulated time, as you insisted not to make him wait for more than five minutes. My salute to all those who drove me around. Can we learn a lesson here?

My teacher was my company 'Barber.' He would be shitting in his pants as he would be cutting the hair of his boss. Scared to death, but he would not let his hands shake. If one had stable hands like him in such pressure, no way could your weapon waver. I bow to them.

The best teachers were the cooks. Those days the fauji rations were 'some' rations. They could cook a banquet out of a vegetable, which would have travelled weeks, on all possible modes of transport including the last leg on a porter or a pony or even being air dropped. Those guys were masters of their trade.

I wish I could get up at three in the morning, cook breakfast and have the packed lunch ready before we left for the Road Opening Party and be so happy to receive the company in the evening with a hot cup of chai and a garmaa-garam dinner to follow, days on end*.

Without them troops could NEVER have functioned. The 'dependability' as a quality had to be learnt from them. The stove might fail, but the meal would always be served hot, irrespective of the heat, chill, rain, hail, snow, or sandstorm. A salute to those tireless men too.

Now that I have hung my boots, even the cobbler on the street has been a teacher. If you took a pair of shoes for repairs, he would nurse them, clean them, polish them, shine them with such dedication and then hand them over with a tip or two on how to maintain them.

One also needs to learn from the modern "Masters in WhatsApp Studies" people. A recent forward on Cyrus Mistry's death has gone viral. God bless his soul. He was in a Merc with tons of air bags and safety measures but still died in the car crash.

The reason was he was not wearing a seat belt. How tragic and how cruel the hands of death can be is understood from this example.

All those 'preachers' not practicers, who have understood the necessity of wearing seatbelts while sitting in the rear seats are sending pictures of the accident along with advantages of wearing one. Discussions are on in various groups on the subject. However, most of them are forwarding this while driving, that too on the wrong side, while taking a shortcut and having four people including aging parents sitting in the back seat.

I do not want to thank such 'virtual teachers'. My jawans were warriors but God save us from these WhatsApp warriors who throw empty packets of chips out of their car windows and lie to you with a straight face that they never ate chips their whole life.

Teachers in school today have a tough life. Parents have stopped teaching children at home, that is why. Probably they are too busy to teach their offspring about how to conduct themselves in society. They pay the school, so they want to extract the last penny out of them. They want their children to do well, but with no effort from their side.

I quote, “We expect teachers to reach unattainable goals with inadequate resources. The miracle is this that they do,” was said by an unknown author and it is absolutely true. Let us thank them once again. How do they do it? I wonder!!

JAI HIND

BAND OF COURSEMATES

A BOND FORGED OUT OF SHARED HARDSHIP-

Brig Sandeep Thapar (Retd)

If there is one bond which defies any definition, it is that of a coursemate — someone who has had the misfortune of training with you in a defence academy! It's an association that lasts till your grave. Unlike other relationships, this one does not wax or wane according to the weather. To put it simply, coursemates are your brothers from different mothers.

Perhaps since it is forged out of shared hardship (tough physical indoctrination) and adversity, it possesses a unique, life-long glue. The fact that you haven't met for 30 years is immaterial — when you do, he'll greet you with an adjective, a guffaw and hold you tightly till you are gasping for breath. Then, within minutes, he'll tell your wife all your dirty secrets of the Academy days.

Names distorted in academies get stuck for life (SS Kandal becomes Scandal, Cooper for Kapur — we even have a Haddi because he was thin once, now he's obese but still retains that name). Like Alibaba and his 40 buddies, this is a band of fairly responsible citizens of the country while on the job, and an uncontrollable crowd when they get together. Their collective acts of misconduct are state secrets — to be carried to the grave.

What money can't buy, a coursemate placed in the right spot can do. Get your name/unit projected up the ladder, get you out of any sort of trouble, allot your unit stuff beyond its entitlement, jump your name to get you the reservation, shift all your unit's under-performance parameters out of the boss' purview.

Planning a holiday? Shimla? Shillong? New York? The first query is — any coursemate there? If yes, no worries of accommodation, travel, food, liquor. Send him a message. Whether he's in station or not, is committed or free, that's his problem.

The current rank or status does not matter — we will always stay buddies for life. So what if you've quit midway and made millions outside. He will still insist on calling you by the Academy nickname you are embarrassed about — in front of your own staff. After one lunch, I saw a three-star coursemate get into the front seat (next to the driver) of another coursemate's official vehicle,

since the rear seat was already occupied by two others (one three-star, one single star). Just so that they could chat en route till office.

A coursemate is the only one who will land up at your son's wedding uninvited, leaving you furiously thinking of an explanation why you didn't invite him. He is also the first one to reach the spot on death or hospitalisation in family. There are umpteen examples of coursemates reaching out to help another's parents in the station while the son is struggling to get home. The trend of marriage between children of coursemates is seeing a slowdown now — primarily because the families have realised that after such marriages, the two coursemates party and enjoy more than the newlyweds.

The bond has its gradations too. Those from the same regiment have a closer connection. The next is courses done together. Higher Command type or Staff College types have better affiliation because families have also known each other. But the real adhesive is OTA/IMA/NDA. Nothing is a stronger bonding agent than the front rolls taken together 40 years ago. My wife of 34 years knows this through her own experience — she was left stranded in the market while I went to pick up a squadron type from airport. She's made her peace now with my squadron and knows all 27 of my squadron mates by name.

SAB KUCH RAM BHAROSE

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The following article by Col Harjinder Singh, Sena Medal (Retd) of the Jat Regiment tells the story of a soldier in his unit named Ram Bharose. The meaning of the name may be interpreted as 'everything depends on Lord Ram'. Col Harjinder writes -

I was commissioned in July 1988 into 9 JAT located at Chaubattia (Uttarakhand). On completion of attachment at Jat Regimental Centre, Bareilly I was asked to join the unit and a 1 Ton (load carrying military vehicle a little larger than a Jeep) was sent to pick me up. My buddy in the Centre was from 9 JAT too. He had forewarned me to be careful since I was to be driven to the unit by a driver with the name of Sepoy Ram Bharose. Finding me a little tense during the journey, Ram Bharose broke his silence and said, "*Saab: Ghabrao nahi, mera naam zaroor Ram Bharose hai par aap unit safety se pahunch jaengay*". There was little more interaction and I soon realized that Ram Bharose was quiet but sharp and shy but intelligent. I reached the unit safely and got busy with regimental duties.

Few years later suddenly Sepoy Ram Bharose was in the news. My buddy excitedly broke the news "*Saab, Ram Bharose ney 2IC saab ki jeep thokh di*". That was the end of Ram Bharose since the 2IC was CO (designate). I met Ram Bharose and told him not to worry; things would be sorted out.

A few years down the line I was appointed Adjutant of my battalion. Once I had settled in the chair, I detailed Ram Bharose to undergo a pre-course on weapons. He did extremely well on the pre-course but the CO refused to send him on the course for reasons best known to him.

Few more years passed by when one day while I was on a staff posting I received a special BRO (Battalion Routine Order) of my unit, which read "Commanding Officer was pleased to inform that Havildar Ram Bharose has been awarded AX grading in Platoon Weapons Course". (AX is the highest grading attainable on an army course) For me, this was an excuse to open a bottle of Old Monk.

When I returned to 9 JAT after my staff tenure I was received at the railway station by none other than Ram Bharose, who was now the MT Havildar of the

battalion. We celebrated his AX grading along with his promotion with the MT Platoon boys. After few drinks, I asked the MT JCO " Dhuli Saab, MT Platoon kaise chal raha hai"? And prompt came his reply "Saab, sab kuch Ram Bharose chal raha hai".

In Sept 2002, polling for assembly elections were taking place in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. Due to proximity to enemy, Commanding Officer had warned everyone to be careful of enemy's sinister designs to disrupt the polls. Due to paucity of officers Naib Subedar Ram Bharose was made in-charge to coordinate the security of rear area. On 16 Sept 2002, at around 3 pm we suddenly heard a massive exchange of fire from the general direction of the rear location. No one knew what was happening. I inquired from the Adjutant, he too was lost and said, "Sir, sab kuch Ram Bharose hai". After some time Ram Bharose was on line saying " Sir, Ram Bharose. Hum ney teen atankwadi ko thok diya hai". Ram Bharose with four other drivers of MT Platoon had rushed towards village Manpur where grenades had been hurled on the polling booth by a terrorist. Going beyond the call of duty, Ram Bharose led his team from the front and without worrying about his personal safety neutralised three terrorists in just about ten minutes. Naib Subedar Ram Bharose was awarded Chief of Army Staff Commendation Card for his act of bravery. Till date, I feel he deserved a much higher decoration then what he got; probably he was destined for this recognition only.

In the year 2006, I took over the command of 34 Rashtriya Rifles (RR) Jat. In one interview parade, to my surprise, I found Ram Bharose standing with his posting order. Having been promoted to Subedar he was sent for his RR tenure.

In the evening, I called Ram Bharose to my office, and inquired about our unit. While leaving my office he had a request, "*Saab , mujhe MT mein maat dalo, mai bhi kaam kar sakta hoon*". I asked about his choice; prompt came his reply "*Saab, aap ki QRT*" (QRT is the Quick Reaction Team that springs into immediate action in case of an attack by insurgents).

Despite reservations by the Adjutant and my Subedar Major, Ram Bharose's journey as boss of CO's QRT commenced. Operation after operation Ram Bharose ensured CO's QRT was never at Ram Bharose's mercy but always well prepared for every operational task. During a number of firefights, I noticed he maintained his cool and showed no fear on his face. He proved himself again and again beyond everybody's expectations; yet the joke in the battalion was

"CO Saab, Ram Bharose *chal raha hai*". He finally bid good bye to 34 RR (Jat) in 2009 after earning three outstanding operational reports.

Four years later in 2012, Four JCOs from 9 JAT were under review in DPC (Departmental Promotion Committee) for elevation to the rank of Subedar Major. Everyone in 9 JAT was putting their stakes on the other three JCOs. When the result was finally declassified, it was only Subedar Ram Bharose who was approved for the rank of Subedar Major.

Having been Subedar Major of 9 JAT for four years Ram Bharose finally retired as Honorary Captain with full military honours and enjoyed the fullest respect of each one of us in the battalion.

(Subedar Major is the highest rank attainable by an Other Rank (jawan). There is only one Subedar major in an Infantry Battalion. Being the senior most JCO in the unit, the Subedar Major (SM Saab) has a special equation with the Commanding Officer. Grant of Honorary Rank of Captain is a special distinction conferred on selected individuals to entitle them to enjoy the pension of a Captain).

Lessons from the story-

- Lesson No 1. Never judge a person solely by his name, colour, creed or caste.
- Lesson No 2. While your name is given by your parents, it is you, who decides your journey and its destiny.
- Lesson No 3. Never blindly go by anybody's judgement of a person unless you have physically seen and met him yourself.
- Lesson No 4. Life never denies you your legitimate right and honourable place provided you have the zeal to excel.

WHEN SAM CAME TO DINNER

I HAVE READ THIS STORY A FEW DOZEN TIMES BUT EVERY TIME I READ THIS STORY AMONGST OTHERS OF THE LEGEND THE MORE HE GROWS IN MY HEART

Another one of his many.... The Legendary Sam Manekshaw!
SAM BAHADUR a raconteur par excellence.

There was excitement all around our house because today was the big day. Lt Gen Sam Manekshaw was coming to our house for dinner.

It had all started a week ago when my father a colonel in the Army posted in Calcutta serving under the legendary Army Commander was called by him for some official work. The Lt Gen had just received promotion orders and was due to take over as Army Chief in a few days. At the end of the meeting my father congratulated him on his promotion and then hesitatingly told him that he would be honoured if he could have dinner at our house.

The hesitation was because it was well known that Sam did not accept invitations to private parties. My father went ahead and asked him anyway because despite their huge difference in rank Sam had always shown deep affection for my father.

To my father's surprise Sam accepted readily and a date was fixed for a week later.

Having invited the Gen on an impulse, the full import of the situation hit my parents when father came home and broke the news to my mother. Army protocol is very rigid and for a young colonel the visit from the Army Chief Designate was a matter of great stress. Everything had to be just perfect. The officer closest to Gen Manekshaw was a Colonel Mehta one of dad's close friends. Mehta Uncle came over that evening. Sam was quite eccentric in his ways we were told. For one he was very particular about how well the house was kept and so the whole house had to be painted. For another he never sat still in the drawing room and had a habit of wandering about the house poking his nose into bedrooms, bathrooms and so everything was to be ready for inspection. And then he had this habit of chatting up the servants, orderlies, drivers and enquiring about their welfare.

He drank only Scotch Whisky and his favourite brand was Dimple Scotch. He was a light eater with taste for western style cooking.

The most important thing we were told was that there were to be no Army Officers among the guests.

Our household was suddenly pushed into top gear. Painting began the next morning Carpenter, plumbers, electricians were requisitioned and pressed into

service. Servants were given brand new uniforms. Kitchens and bathrooms were made inspection worthy. A cook was brought in from Tollygunge Club and the menu finalised in great detail. A bartender was called in from the Command Mess and so was a waiter. The guest list was a problem. My parents had virtually no friends outside their Army circle, so random civilian acquaintances were invited for dinner much to their surprise.

The great man arrived dot at 7.30 and proceeded to walk around our house as predicted, made it a point to talk to the servants inquiring about their welfare and the welfare of their families. He then settled down with a drink. Gen Sam Bahadur as he was called was a great conversationalist. He soon had the other guests in a trance with his stories.

He made it a point to call us, the children to sit in and listen which was such a difference from other parties where children were banished to a bedroom with strict instructions to be neither seen nor heard.

Sam held us spell bound about the time he was in the British India Army and they were fighting the Japanese in the east. It was well known that as a young company commander Sam had shown exemplary courage leading his troops to charge and capture a Japanese machine gun position during the course of which he took 9 bullets in his chest and abdomen. For this valour in the face of the enemy he was awarded the Military Cross which the division GOC Maj Gen Cowan awarded him there and then taking it off his own chest and pinning it on Sam.

Dr Barton my ophthalmologist and part of the compulsory civilian gathering was fascinated by this incidence. Somewhere the doctor in him wanted more details, "but my dear Gen " said Barton "how on earth did you survive 9 bullets in the chest and that too in the middle of an enemy infested jungle?"

The Gen leaned back and took a sip from the crystal cut glass goblet in his hand. "A splash of Soda Avtar if you please." he said turning to my father, "I am not as young as I used to be"

"Well,"said Sam once the whisky had reached the desired flavour. "Doctor Barton it is a long story. "

"In 1934 I was commissioned into the Army and inducted in the battalion of Frontier Force. Our regiment was stationed at Khasa, a small village between Amritsar and Lahore. As one of the junior most officers in my battalion it was part of my duty to inspect the battalion Quarter Guard. Doc for your information the Quarter Guard is a hut which is guarded night and day. This is where the battalions arms ammunition and important documents are kept. Besides this there is a lock up in which prisoners from within the battalion are also housed. These poor sods are undergoing various prison terms up to a maximum of 21 days for minor misdemeanours under the military law.

One winter evening there was some commotion outside my residential quarter and I came out to investigate. I found a group of Sikh soldiers who were a part of our battalion in a state of extreme agitation. Now having been born and brought up in Amritsar I spoke Punjabi fluently. So I was able to decipher their story. Apparently one of their mates a sepoy by the name of Mehar Singh had taken a one day furlough to visit his native village which was close to where our regiment was stationed. And as happens so often in these volatile villages of Punjab, a fight broke out between two groups over a piece of land which both laid claim to. Mehar Singh who had gone with the sole purpose of visiting his ailing mother was needlessly drawn into the fight. In this group clash batons and swords were used freely by both sides and when the dust settled down one man from the other group was dead.

I looked at Mehar Singh sternly. Did you hit this man ? I asked him. The miserable man looked at me straight in the eye and swore on the Gurus that he had not rained a single blow on anyone leave alone the dead man. I knew at once that he was telling the truth.

In these village fights each party tries to implicate the most important member of the opponent group to cause maximum damage. Without doubt they had named Mehar Singh because being in Govt service he would lose his job if arrested. It was a very difficult and delicate situation. What could I do to help him? The sepoys looked at me for deliverance. I felt small and helpless.

"What was the time when this incidence took place ? "I asked Mehar, "6 pm sir." said Mehar, his voice a bare whisper.

And what time is it now? It was almost 7pm.

The faint beginnings of a plan began to form in my head. Could I pull it off ? Surely not. But then what were the options ?

Anyway there was no time to lose. I explained the plan to Mehar Singh and the company JCO. I then picked up my cycle and peddled furiously to the civil and military club some miles away. I was relieved to see that Cartwright had not reached yet.

You see gentlemen Cartwright was the local Superintendent of Police and he and I had become drinking buddies of late. I was a bachelor and Cartwright of the Indian Police Service was a forced bachelor since his young wife had not joined him from England. So both of us would meet at the club for a few.

I was just on my first chotta when Cartwright came striding in. I hastily stood up as he outranked me in rank and age. "Good evening sir." I said.

"Aah Sam good to see you here old chap. You know I hate drinking alone " he added.

"Koi hai ?" He said loudly and clapped his hands

The native waiter appeared. " Sahib will have his usual I think ?" He said obsequiously "haan jaldi lao " the whisky appeared and I toasted to his good health.

He seemed to be in a good mood "mud in your eye" he said raising his glass. " so what's happening in your life young Sam ? Found anyone foolish enough to marry you yet ? "

"No such luck " I replied nonchalantly. But my heart was racing.

I looked at my watch "Good God sir. I did not realise it was this late. Have to rush. My turn for quarter guard inspection today. Can't be late for that. You know our old man. Stickler for punctuality. Never hear the end of it."

"Come come now my dear chap. Surely you have time for another drink. At least let me finish mine."

"Sir I only have a cycle. Now if I had a jeep"..... I said desperately trying to spring the trap. And to my great relief the trap sprung !

"I have a jeep" he said. "Why don't I drive you down for your QG inspection. We could come back for a night cap and you could then cycle back home."

"Sir you are nursing an empty glass" said my father. The waiter took the Generals glass for a refill. Other drinks were refreshed and every one pulled up a bit closer for Sam had this habit of lowering his voice at crucial moments and no one wanted to miss a word.

"Ah where were we ? Cartwright and I finished our drink , told the waiter we would be back and true to his promise he drove me back to the battalion in his jeep.

"Tham !! Who goes there!!! "said the sentry at the regiment gate. I identified my self and he saluted. He then diligently noted down the number of the jeep driven by Sahib Bahadur Cartwright sahib SP. We drove the short distance to the QG.

Won't be long sir I said. Why don't I show you our drill ? I said opening his door and leaving him no option.

The sepoy on guard duty stood at attention and presented arms. I shone the torch on his face.

Naam ? I shouted.

Mehar Singh sahib he shouted back.

Kab se duty par MEHAR SINGH?

4 baje se sahib said Mehar Singh, as coached by me.

Show me the register. The JCO appeared with inspection register. I signed it.

As I straightened up I shone the torch at Mehar Singh.

Tumara boots polished nai hai. I shouted. And hang on a minute What is this ? Is that alcohol I smell MEHAR SINGH ?

I turned to Cartwright. Sir isn't this sepoy reeking of booze ?

Cartwright sniffed the air. " I say you are right. Man seems pickled. Not quite the done thing. " Subedar sahib is ko QG me band karo. Present him in the morning.

Mehar Singh's belt was removed as an indication of his arrest, his weapon was taken from him and he was marched to the QG cell. As the door clanged shut the new sentry marched into place and took up duty.

Sorry for that sir I said. But imagine the cheek of the blighter.

Yes said Cartwright. These natives are all the same. The jeep passed out of the camp with the gate sentry logging the number and time.

Sure enough the next day the thana SHO Allah Baksh appeared with a group of constables and asked to see the Adjutant. Mehar Singh was wanted for a murder he said. I let the system take over. Mehar Singh ????

How. ? He was on QG duty. At the time of the clash.

Registers were examined and found correct. I was called. I recorded my statement. But as we had expected the police were not convinced. Many people had seen him in the village.

"Allah Baksh" I told him. "You know they always try to implicate someone in service. "

"You know what I think sir" he said." I think the regiment is trying to protect Mehar Singh."

He then began to hold forth on this subject in some detail. I waited for the right moment to deflate his verbosity "Ok" I said " we are all lying. But is your SP. Sahib Bahadur Cartwright sahib also lying?"

"SP sahib Bahadur ? What does he have to do with this ?" He asked.

"You will find out soon enough my friend "I said. He was bundled into an army jeep and taken to Cartwright's office where the facts as we had stated were vouched to be true.

That took the wind out of his sails and Mehar Singh 's name was dropped.

So now the scene cuts to WW 2. 1942 we are fighting the japs and I take this machine gun burst to my chest and abdomen. As we retreat the CO orders all casualties be left behind. Impossible to evacuate them anyway. At that point Mehar Singh steps forward. There is no way he will leave Manek Sahib behind. He then proceeds to hoist me on his shoulder and carry me all the way to the field hospital. The doctor in charge took a look and decided that I would not survive. He asked me what had happened. I don't know what came over me but I told him that I had been kicked by a mule. That went down well with the doc for he said if I could joke in this condition It was worth trying From there I am evacuated by truck to the military hospital in Rangoon The rest is history says Sam. "We Manekshaws die hard "he jokes.

Another guest is curious. What happened to Mehar Singh ?

Mehar that old rascal. Well he retired years ago and went back to his village. Partition had occurred and his village was right on the border on the Indian side. The man took to smuggling gold and what not. And as they all do sooner or later he was caught. When asked for a defence attorney he told his sons to trace an army officer from his old "paltan" called Manek Sahib who he said would help him. Last year these boys came to see me. I was Army Commander, Eastern Command and somehow they reached here.

I had no option but to help. After all I owed my life to him. I managed to pull strings and call in favours and he was released. The cheeky blighter came here to Calcutta to thank me. This is what he had to say, " Sahib pehle tussi meri jaan bachai, fer mai thuadi jaan bachai. Hun fer tussi meri jaan bachai hai. Saab Bahadur hun tussi pange vich pao. Meri vari hai. Mai tuhanu bachawa ga !!!!
Sam let out a deep breath. I am too old for this now Mehar Singh. Thank you but no thank you. With that I arranged for his train ticket and an armed military escort to make sure that he reached home !

Author unknown

THE COST OF FREEDOM

By

An Anonymous IAF Transport Pilot

This is an article by an anonymous Air Force Officer who flew out the Kargil Casualties: The Just Missed Ones, The Injured Survivors. The Unknown Sikh Soldier in the Kargil War. It is reproduced as received.

I remember it as if it were yesterday. It was the 23 May 1999, and the Kargil conflict was ongoing, my crew and I were in Awantipur (Kashmir) to pick up 24 casualties (20 sitting & 4 on stretchers); the casualties on stretchers were extremely seriously wounded. The age of the passengers ranged between 19-27 years. Some had bullet wounds, where the bullet had gone through and through, but he still had his legs and could sit, stand and walk so wasn't on a stretcher (I guess, in a strange Army way, making them feel better, that's how the system works, it actually works. I have actually seen a Gurkha with a bullet wound, helping another Kumaoni who was limping along. It's a system that teaches one to be empathetic towards others). The men who were on a stretcher were the really badly hurt ones. They were those who had stepped on a land mine & had their legs blown off. A very different sight from those as seen on TV news videos, moving from wounded soldiers to heavy snowfall. The pain was terribly real. Also, it was not possible to merely change the channel.

The aircraft was the workhorse of the IAF, an An-32, it reeked of antiseptic and fear. As we waited for the last patient to arrive, I realised that my An-32 was also a micro India. The Naga soldier was seated next tall Jat, the Tambi was next to a Maratha, a Rajput was next to the JAK LI jawan, a Mahar was next to a tall Guards soldier & the tiny Gurkha next to an equally small and sturdy Kumaoni. All united by shades of Olive Green and the invisible thread of pain. Injuries they had suffered on our behalf.

In the ambulance, which was parked just at the edge of the ramp (behind the aircraft), was a Sikh Light Infantry soldier. He was really young. So young, that his beard had barely started to grow, a mere boy. He had lost both his legs in a land mine explosion. In an effort to distract him, I asked him, "Are you fond of cricket?" His eyes brightened up immediately, and he promptly said "Yes, Sir." Seeing his response, I addressed all my passengers (The World Cup was ongoing in England), India is playing with Kenya, and Sachin Tendulkar has

scored 140 runs in 101 balls not out. He has helped India reach 329 in 50 overs. Tendulkar has dedicated his innings to his father, whose funeral he had returned from the previous day. What do you all think, will we win?

'YES SIR' was the immediate answer in unison. All of a sudden, a Tendulkar Tsunami swept through the aircraft and that ambulance behind it.

Everyone forgot their pain & their injuries. They forgot their predicament. All they could talk about was Tendulkar & his century. Everyone started talking to the person next to them. Everyone broke language and cultural barriers, and new friendships were instantly formed.

I could see my new friend in the ambulance, talking animatedly. His eyes all lit up; his smile was ecstatic as he described Tendulkar's shots. His injuries and pain were forgotten briefly. He was happy, all my passengers were happy. For a brief period, everything was the way they ought to be.

Epilogue: When I landed with my passengers in Delhi, I shared the good news with them that we have indeed won the match, far away in England. My young friend, who was on a stretcher strapped securely, smiled at me. I shook his hand and wished him well. I was relieved it was dark, and he couldn't see my eyes. My crew and I stood behind the aircraft as they disembarked silently, wishing them well. Its men like these, the ones who were passengers on my plane, who silently walk away after giving their youth for all of us. They are the ones we owe our freedom to.

Dear country-men and women! Freedom doesn't come free.

You get it for free because it has been paid for in full by the lives and blood of our soldiers, sailors and airmen.

A SPLENDID SUCCESS STORY

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM and Bar (Retd)

On the occasion of Republic Day, on 26th Jan 2025, Wing Commander Akshay Saxena, IAF, a transport pilot, was conferred the Vayu Sena Medal (VM) for gallantry by President Droupadi Murmu. The story is of contemporary times and is as exciting as any thriller. This is a tale of how the Indian Air Force flawlessly executed a secret mission in foreign airspace and is reproduced as received.

In the spring of 2024, in a secret mission involving flying undeclared in foreign airspace 2,600 km away, an Indian Air Force C-17 heavy-lift aircraft flew non-stop for 10 hours to carry out a precision drop of Navy commandos and their equipment to help free a merchant vessel seized by pirates in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Somalia in Africa.

The bulk carrier, MV Rouen, had been hijacked by Somali pirates near the Yemeni island of Socotra and was intercepted by India's guided-missile destroyer INS Kolkata, on anti-piracy patrol under the Navy's ongoing Operation Sankalp that was launched in 2019 to safeguard sea lanes.

Pirates on board the ship were not only launching attacks on merchant vessels in the Arabian Sea but had also fired at INS Kolkata and had shot down a naval spotter drone.

The objective area was near the Somali coast, 2685 km from Mumbai and about 1,000 km outside the Indian Flight Information Region; that is the area in which Indian air traffic controllers exercise jurisdiction.

"The mission involved real threat of small arms fire from the pirates, over and above the extended mission timelines which involved flying into airspace of another country, undeclared and undetected, for close to four hours,"

The task to assist the Navy fell on No.81 Squadron, the 'Skylords', based at Hindon airbase near Delhi and the IAF's sole squadron operating the Boeing C-17 Globemaster-III heavy-lift aircraft that can airlift up to 77,000 kg of cargo and has a ferry range of 11,000 km. The mission was time critical and secret, requiring careful planning and execution.

The aircraft was piloted by Wing Commander Akshay Saxena, commissioned into the Flying Branch as a transport pilot in June 2006 and on the posted strength of the C-17 Squadron since February 2021.

Wing Commander Akshay Saxena, the Captain of the C-17 aircraft, decided to switch off all emitters, fly low level over the high seas in foreign territory and make his drop at dusk to avoid detection. Even after receiving the changed drop location only 90 kms short of the original drop point, he guided the crew to safely execute a precision airdrop thus resulting in the capture of the pirates and rescue of MV Rouen with its 17-member crew.

On March 16, 2024, the C-17 aircraft airdropped two Combat Rubberised Raiding Craft (CRRS) boats and a team of 18 Marine Commandos (MARCOs) with combat load to capture the pirate-controlled ship.

The operation to rescue MV Rouen lasted 40 hours and was also supported by the Indian warship, INS Subhadra, Sea Guardian high-altitude long-endurance drones and the P-8I maritime patrol aircraft. The IAF had termed the mission as a remarkable display of jointness and integration, resulting in all 35 pirates being captured; without any casualties to own naval or air force personnel.

“Wing Commander Saxena displayed effective inter-service coordination with the Indian Navy while maintaining heightened situational awareness both on ground and in the air. All possible measures were taken to maintain secrecy of the almost 10 hour long mission. During the flawless execution of the extremely gruelling mission the officer displayed exceptional courage, dynamic leadership, outstanding professionalism and steadfast determination,” the citation adds.

FLIGHT OF THE PHEONIX

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM,VSM & Bar (Retd)

Pheonix – word implying resurrection from the ashes.

This is a story from long ago, originally titled Air Force Day. The author is Arijit Ghosh and is reproduced as received.

It is an incredible tale of a newly independent nation and its people who had lived a large part of their lives under foreign rule and their idealistic desire to build their own identity. It's a tale of a generation that had seen two World Wars and an Air Force that had flown under a foreign Flag. It's a tale of men of great courage and grit, who endeavoured and succeeded against all odds to give their fledgling nation a sorely-needed heavy bomber aircraft when it could not afford one from the world markets.

These incredible men rummaged through an aircraft graveyard and came up with the remains of an iconic World War Two bomber that the world had junked and forgotten. In the stuff of fairy tales, they built two operational squadrons from that junkyard and flew them successfully for the next 20 years. Their names and incredible achievements are now long forgotten, unknown to most today, and therein lies a tale that bears retelling, time and again. Lest we forget!

The story begins at the close of the World War Two in 1945. The world had finally come to the end of one of the longest and bloodiest wars in human history, fought across multiple theatres all over the globe. It was a war that wiped out an entire generation. Those that survived were weary and anxious to go home, almost unbelieving of their good fortune.

In the Eastern Theatre, the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and the US Air Force (USAF) had operated the iconic B-24 Liberator Bombers out of small airfields in Eastern India at Ranchi in Bihar (now Jharkhand) and Panagarh, Dum Dum, Kalaikunda (Kharagpur), and Salua in undivided Bengal and from Chabua, Kumbhigram, and Jorhat in Assam, to attack Japanese military targets in China, Japan, Myanmar and Malaysia. They regularly flew operational missions over the Himalayas and euphemistically called them 'Flying the Hump'.

After the War, these aircraft could not be taken away to the homeland and were abandoned as junk at Chakeri airfield in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. The RAF was given the task of disabling them so that they could never be flown again, as the huge Allied military establishment in India, wound down after the War. And there they lay —broken, forlorn, and abandoned— with weeds and vegetation growing over them, once-proud aircraft that had struck terror in the hearts of the enemy across the globe.

To be fair to them, the RAF tried their best to damage the aircraft and make them unusable. Bulldozers and trucks were rammed into fuselages and cockpit windows, instruments were smashed and removed, and sand was poured into engines. But possibly, in their anxiety to go home, they may have cut a few corners here and there. Of course, no one in their wildest dreams imagined that there would be an attempt to fly those wrecks again. But they reckoned without the resourcefulness, need, and sheer determination of Indians.

Three years later in 1948, during the desperate days of the Kashmir Operations against invading Pakistani forces, the Indian Air Force (IAF) was tasked to assist the Indian Army in repelling the invaders. India had no bombers at the time other than the British Hawker Tempest, a fighter bomber that could barely carry two 1,000-pound bombs under its wings.

Desperate times called for desperate measures and the IAF loaded bombs into the fuselage —body— of Dakotas and literally rolled them off the aircraft without any aiming guidance.

The young country desperately needed a heavy bomber. But its finances just would not support such an ambition. It was then that someone at Air Headquarters thought of the aircraft graveyard at Chakeri and sent out a team to see if something could be salvaged from the wrecks of the nearly 100 B-24 Liberators rotting there.

The team reported back that it might just be possible to make some of them airworthy again by cannibalising parts from other aircraft. By then, production of Liberators had ceased in the United States and no aircraft company was able or willing to supply spares. No manuals were available and the Kanpur Air Force Base had no facilities to even work on these aircraft. They would have to be somehow moved to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) in Bangalore — known back then as Hindustan Aircraft Limited— for massive overhaul. Since the Indian Railways at the time also had no mechanism to transport these huge 67 ft long, 110 ft wide, 29,000-kg heavy aircraft to Bangalore from Kanpur, they were to be somehow made flyable to undertake the near suicidal

flight to Bangalore. Chances were that only around 10 per cent of the untested, cannibalised aircraft would make it safely to Bangalore. The rest were expected to perish midway, killing the pilots and who dared to fly them. Qualified American B-24 pilots were contacted, but the fees they quoted for each hazardous ferry was unaffordable for the new nation.

This brought HAL into the picture. From this moment, it becomes an HAL story. During World War Two, HAL had been part of the war effort, overhauling Allied aircraft and assembling fighters and bombers of US origin. As such, they had worked on another iconic World War Two aircraft — the Douglas DC-3 Dakota. The DAKs, as they were fondly called, had the same Pratt and Whitney engines as the Liberators.

At this stage, the HAL's Chief Test Pilot Jamshed 'Jimmy' Kaikobad Munshi and a team of HAL engineers under the leadership of a Mr Yellappa stepped up and took charge. This team undertook temporary repairs on the abandoned aircraft to make them flyable for that hazardous initial flight to Bangalore. They taped up cockpit windows, cannibalised parts from other B-24s, and did some basic 'first line' maintenance on the engines so that some of those massive aircraft would start.

The intrepid Jimmy Munshi on his part was willing to fly these roughly restored aircraft from a junkyard in Kanpur to Bangalore on what would essentially be suicidal missions. He had never flown Liberators or any four-engine aircraft before, although he had experience of the twin engine DC-3 with its similar Pratt and Whitney engines.

Scouring through the cockpits of the long-abandoned aircraft, Jimmy managed to painstakingly put together an entire flying manual for the B-24s. The story goes that things were so bad that an equally intrepid Mrs. Munshi refused to let her husband fly those missions alone and insisted on accompanying him in the cockpit in the co-pilot's seat, wearing a fur coat, because the heating system was inoperative.

Jimmy would open full power on the four engines, and if nothing blew up, do some fast taxiing around the tarmac to check that the engines were delivering enough power and that the brakes were functional. With minimum fuss, he would then take off from Chakeri to Bangalore — some 1,500 kms away — and fly with undercarriage down throughout the journey. This was because the hydraulic system that operated the undercarriage was unreliable and there

was no guarantee that the wheels would come down again once retracted after take-off!

And in this manner, in acts of fantastic courage repeated many times over, Jimmy flew out an incredible 42 Liberators to Bangalore where a team of HAL technicians waited to work on them and undertake a complete overhaul of the iconic aircraft.

It is said that HAL offered to pay Jimmy 'a handsome amount' per flight for the risk that he was taking, but he refused, saying he was just doing a job for which he was already being paid. Such was the idealism and nationalistic fervour of the time. India owes a debt to him and to Mr Yellappa and his men for attempting the impossible and making it work.

The rest is history. The HAL put together two squadrons of B-24s and the IAF acquired its first heavy bomber from an aircraft graveyard. They were used in a variety of roles, including maritime reconnaissance in the 1965 India-Pakistan War and even for photographing Mount Everest! The first six refurbished B-24s from the Kanpur graveyard were handed over to No 5 squadron of the IAF — the Tuskers— on November 5, 1948. Together with No 6 Squadron —Sea Dragons— the Tuskers operated these aircraft for the next 20 years until 1969 when they were finally retired from service.

A long-retired IAF pilot who flew them said, "I was lucky enough to fly these iconic aircraft and had the most wonderful experience of feeling the entire aircraft juddering under the power of four Pratt and Whitney 1830 engines at full power! The view from the gun turrets was unbelievable.

"The Dakota and the Liberator were a man's aeroplanes. The feeling of flying them was incredibly powerful and they needed you to be on your toes always. Flying Canberras on operations in a strategic photo recce [reconnaissance] squadron later was a much quieter experience compared to these."

Around 18,000 B-24s were built during the World War years. Surprisingly, for such a mass-produced bomber that participated in widespread operations in Europe, Africa, China, Burma, and India during World War Two, there were hardly any left for display in museums after the war and almost none in flying condition, except for the ones with the IAF. When they finally retired them in 1968, many air museums around the world clamoured for them.

Today, of the 13 Liberators left in museums there are just two in flying condition and both of them are from the IAF. Of these 13, six are from the Kanpur graveyard. These were flown from Pune in 1968-69 in inter-continental flights to museums in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, a testimony to the skills of the IAF airmen who maintained them.

The B-24 Liberator holds a very special place in Indian aviation history and is a tribute to the ingenuity of the Indian engineers who brought them back from the dead and got them flying again. Thanks to them and the intrepid airmen who flew them, the IAF was the last air force to fly these iconic aircraft for a good 20 years after the world had forgotten and abandoned them.

And that is an incredibly proud, never to be forgotten story!

Well done IAF. Kudos to HAL.

BOMBING BALAKOT

Contributed by Major Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Reproduced below is an article on Bombing Balakot written by Wg Cdr Sudarshan, received by me through the social media. Though I do not know the author personally, the facts, personalities and planning details appear accurate and authentic. It makes for exciting reading.

18 February 2019

Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa....Tony Dhanoa as he is called by his buddies, was driving to the South Block of Parliament buildings to attend a meeting called by Ajit Doval, the National Security Adviser to the government of India. Earlier, on the day of the gruesome terror attack, he had already met Air Marshal Hari Kumar, Chief of Western Air Command and had discussed the operational aspects of the likely retaliation and had advised him to be ready for some action at short notice. Yes in retaliation to the gruesome suicidal bomb attack by a JeM suicide bomber in which 40 CRPF soldiers were killed in Pulwama district of Kashmir on 14 February. He anticipated that the political leadership would not let the perpetrators of the attack go unpunished. But the brass tacks of the operations would have to be finalised shortly in this meeting with NSA.

The meeting was attended by only a select few. There were Chiefs of all three services, heads of RAW and IB who came armed with their inputs on terror camps across the border. The matter was discussed in minute details. Intelligence agencies homed in on around 15 camps run by different terror groups in Pakistan for a strike. But they decided to focus on the ones run by the Jeish because of its involvement in the Pulwama attack. Three such main camps were identified: in Bahawalpur in Pakistani Punjab, Sawai Nallah near Muzaffarabad (PoK) and Balakot in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK) in Pakistan.

The choice was soon made, the strike would be on the Syed Ahmed Shaheed training camp in Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the sovereign territory of Pakistan. The hilltop facility by the Kunhar river offered a sprawling campus, where recruits were imparted the advanced Daura-e-Khaas training in weapons, explosives and field tactics, tactics for attacking security convoys, planting and making improvised explosive devices, preparations for suicide

bombing, rigging vehicles for suicide attacks and survival tactics in high altitude and under extreme stress. Masood Azhar had been known to visit the place to give inspirational lectures, and he had entrusted the administration of the camp to his brother-in-law Yusuf Azhar, alias Ustad Ghauri, who is suspected to have masterminded the Pulwama attack. "Balakot was used for battle inoculation." Since it is about 50 kms from LOC deep inside Pakistan it has to be struck by air.

ACM Dhanoa's eyes lit up when he received the go ahead from the Prime Minister for the attack on the same day. He was a master strategist when planning for such an attack which was effectively executed during the Kargil conflict.

Why Gwalior and Mirages?

While returning from the meeting ACM Dhanoa had already broadly made some tactical preparations in mind. Secrecy is the utmost important aspect of this operation. Just two days ago on the 16 February IAF conducted a massive Fire Power Demonstration (FPD) "Vayu Shakti " in Pokhran desert involving most fighter aeroplanes participating in precision bombing. That would help in picking the experienced pilots. The Aero India show that was happening in Bengaluru would conclude on 24 February and the foreign delegates would depart. On 26 February the Prime Minister would inaugurate the newly built National War Memorial in New Delhi, even that event should go on as planned. So tentatively the attack should happen on 26 February, keeping aside a day for inclement weather. Further he met up with Air Marshal Hari Kumar and they decided normalcy must be maintained in everything including the birthday party of Air Marshal Hari Kumar and his farewell parties since he was retiring on 28 February! Mobiles must not be used and all the operational aspects to be discussed only during these parties maintaining secrecy. Normal training flying should go on in all air bases giving no room for suspicion to Pakistanis.

The reasons for choosing the Mirages were several. For one, Mirages were equipped with laser-guiding pods and more modern electronic warfare suits that could jam Pakistani air defences. Mirage 2000 fighters were based in Gwalior. The flying activities of an Airforce Station situated in Central India is not monitored by the Pakistani Radars or AWACS. Therefore these aeroplanes would form the strikers who would cross over into Pakistani airspace and drop

the bombs over the target. The Israeli SPICE 2000 and Crystal maze precision bombs were selected for the pinpoint attack.

25 February

To assess the operational readiness of all the combat units of IAF there is a dedicated Directorate called Directorate of Air Staff Inspection (DASI). On reaching a particular airbase the war plans for each department gets activated and their efficiency is checked. On 25 February this DASI team landed up in Airforce Station Gwalior for a surprise visit, ostensibly to assess their operational capability. The entire Airforce Station went into an overdrive, while inside the briefing room crew selection and tactical details were discussed about the attack on terror camp. Nobody else knew what was happening in the Aircrew Briefing Room.

Post Pulwama attack, highly strung Pakistan defence forces remained on high alert. The early warning aircraft Saab 2000 constantly kept flying, keeping a careful watch towards India. The aircraft has been usually landing back for refueling and crew change around 3:00 o'clock in the morning and took off again at around 4:00 O'clock in the morning with a new set of crew. This information helped in determining the entry time of Indian strike package into Pakistani airspace.

26 February

At 01:50 when the Mirages took off from Gwalior under the pretext of DASI inspection exercise even the airforce personnel didn't raise an eyebrow. The aircrafts then headed in northerly direction towards Bareilly local flying area where they met up with mid air refueller aircraft for refueling. Meantime four Jaguar aircrafts took off from Ambala and started a high speed run towards Bahawalpur in a deception tactic. In response to this Pakistan scrambled two F16 aircrafts that headed towards Bahawalpur to engage the Jaguars. The Jaguars then headed towards Rajasthan which confused the Pakistani Air traffic controllers.

The Mirages were flying along the foothills of Himalayas which helped them evade detection and now climbed up to 30000 feet before entering Pakistan airspace to escape from the possible Surface to Air Missile (SAM) fire and headed in westerly direction. For the first time post 1971 war with Pakistan, sixteen aircrafts crossed over the LOC and entered Pakistani airspace. Four

aircrafts remained within Indian airspace keeping guard for any intrusion by Pakistan aircrafts. Further, four Mirages split up and started a high speed run in the South westerly direction to further confuse the Pakistani radars. Now twelve aircrafts once in the clear zone of ground based missiles and guns descended to lower altitude and headed towards the target... Balakot terror camp.

0328 hours

That distraction allowed the accompanying low-flying formation of Mirage 2000s to head in the direction of Balakot. By the time they showed up on Pakistani radars, they were 150 km away from the jets that had been scrambled to stop them. The Mirages then acquired the targets and dropped the SPICE bombs they were carrying.

Five bombs struck the targets, three hitting the large complex housing 150 recruits, one hit the main U-shaped complex that had most of the leadership and the fifth hit building that had the master trainers. One target they could not strike was the abandoned school where Yusuf Azhar resided. That's because the aircraft chosen to strike it was unable to lock onto the target to release the bomb in the tight window of opportunity.

All the aircraft returned safely to their bases. Air Marshal Hari Kumar called up ACM Dhanoa and called out 'Bandar' which indicated that the operation was conducted and concluded successfully. Apart from Doval, Dhanoa informed the army and navy chiefs that the mission had been accomplished. All three armed forces went on high alert as they were prepared for retaliation from Pakistan. Meanwhile, the prime minister was informed of the success of the mission. Having ascertained that everyone was safe, Modi proceeded to follow his yoga routine at 4 am.

CHILDHOOD IN THE AIR FORCE

By

Athira Nair

(A SONOROUS POEM BY AN AIR FORCE KID)

In our earliest memories, to Air Force we're drawn,
As military hospital is where most of us were born.
Different corners of the country in each posting we've seen
In camps clean and green we have always been.
Studied in a KV or an Air force School,
Went by Green buses 'coz Yellow wasn't the rule.
Evenings were spent cycling, swimming or playing,
Moms would be walking, and dad's away flying.
'Bada-khanna' and Tambola, children would be taken,
But Rum-punch and dinner Nights, we were forbidden.
From one room to two, finally status house was fun,
Tenure came to an end, and we were back to square one!
Boxes and trunks got numbered and painted,
Soon all belongings into a truck got mounted.
Making new friends and change of school so common,
As adieus and farewells were bid so often.
'Eating-out' meant at the Mess or Institute,

For food-courts and restaurants, our substitute.
Parties were often held in the Ante-room,
Though, smaller groups preferred the Ladies Room.
He'pter or 'Queen Mary' brought Santa, not sleigh!
Christmas party and gifts surely made our day.
Festival time, in groups we'd roam,
Wishing friends from home to home.
Dads had uniforms for every season,
And also dress-code for each occasion.
All this and more, are amazingly clear,
Memories that bring out of nostalgia, a tear.
This was our childhood in the Indian Air force,
Lucky to have it, we realise in due course.....

IAF'S FIRST ASHOK CHAKRA

First Ashok Chakra awarded in IAF was to Flt Lt Suhas Biswas of Comn Sqn..

*On the 3rd of February, 1952, the U. P. Area command of the Indian Army was holding a tactical exercise in Lucknow. To witness this exercise, high ranking Army Officers decided to fly down to the exercise to observe.

The GOC-in-C Western Command Lt Gen S. M. Shrinagesh (later COAS) , the Quarter Master General Maj-Gen K. S . Thimayya (later COAS), the Chief of General Staff Maj Gen S. P. P. Thorat (later GOC-inC East), the Military Secretary Maj Gen Sarda Nand, Maj Gen Mohinder Singh Chopra and Brig Ajaib Singh boarded the IAF Communications Flight De Havilland Devon (HW 516), which captained by Flt Lt Suhas Biswas.

The Devon reached Lucknow and after the exercise was over, the Officers boarded the aircraft for the return flight to Delhi.

The Devon took off at 1800 hrs, and moments after the aircraft took off, the crew observed that the port engine was spewing smoke, and soon a fire broke out.

The Devon became difficult to control and as the fire kept creeping towards the main fuselage, Flt Lt Biswas put the Devon into a dive in an attempt to reduce altitude and attempt a crash landing before the aircraft fuel reserves caught fire and blew up.

As the Devon was put into the dive, the aircraft shuddered in the airflow and the engine mounting broke away, resulting in the burning engine separating from the wing and falling off.

Biswas levelled the aircraft and belly landed successfully at a village near the Sandilla Railway Station. All the occupants walked out of the crashed aircraft unhurt with the pilot being the last to leave.

*Flt Lt Suhas Biswas was awarded the first Ashoka Chakra to the Indian Air Force for the presence of mind, skill and cool courage in maintaining the stricken aircraft and saving the lives of many Senior Army Officers, which included two future Army Chiefs and an Army Commander.

The Air Force Chief, Air Marshal Subroto Mukerjee, had the passenger chairs removed from the wrecked Devon and presented it individually to each of the survivors of the crash with a Brass Plate mentioning the circumstances of the crash.*

FLYING TALES

ELEPHANT GRASS AND LOST AIR FORCE PROPERTY

By

Gp Capt Umesh Shastri

Callsign: Dagger1

A story that goes back to 1980 in our days as Plt Offrs, fresh out of Trg on Iskra ac. We had been posted to Tezpur to convert on to MiG 21s. One afternoon, a trainer (2-seater) sortie was planned for apna Tiger PV Deshpande. He was in the front seat, with the CO, Wg Cdr Jagbir Singh as the Captain/ Instructor in the rear seat. It was an Instrument Flg sortie, which was 'no sweat' for Deshu, as he was among the better ones, if not the best, of our band of 8 Pilloos.

The sortie was uneventful, and on completion of the exercise, the ac rejoined circuit for a landing on RW 05. This RW is oriented along direction 045, and has a parallel taxi track (PTT) on the northern side (that is to the left when the ac is on its landing roll).

After a copybook landing, Deshu at the controls lowered the nose wheel onto the RW, and commenced deceleration. And that's when all Hell broke loose!!

The left side main landing gear collapsed, folding inwards as though it was being retracted, and this happened at a speed in excess of 250-260 kmph.

Now the MiG21 is a fairly small aircraft, with short stubby wings. If the ac had had a larger wingspan, a landing gear collapse wouldn't have had quite the same spectacular effect as it did that day.

The ac canted sharply to the left as the left wing came into contact with the ground. This caused a swing to the left, and rapidly went off the RW into the unpaved earth located between the RW and PTT. The ground was soft and slushy, due to the massive rainfall that is characteristic of Tezpur, and the elephant grass was thick and tall. It's known as elephant grass as one can lose one's pet pachyderm in it and not know it!!

The ac exited the RW, cutting a swathe through the grass, and was lost to sight. For a brief moment, its right wing showed up as the ac hit some sort of a bund, slowing and gathering foliage and loose earth debris. And then.....SILENCE!!!

The ATC Offr reacted with a push on the alarm bell, and the Crash and Fire Fighting Rescue (CFFR) team swung out in a scramble. They dashed down the PTT towards the position directed by the ATCO, gathering speed as they went. But with no visual sighting, and no other signs (fire/ smoke etc) they were a bit lost, and asked for directions. The ATCO from his high tower was trying to spot the last position of the plane, but alas, the ELEPHANT GRASS hid her from his view. The CFFR veh slowed down to a crawl, and that was when they were presented with the sight of two disembodied white helmets (we call them bone-domes) bobbing through the grass and moving towards the PTT. Soon the two bone-domes emerged from the foliage, providentially still attached to two overalls, one green the other blue. Deshu and the CO had done a 'quick exit from cockpit' drill and moved upwind as per the drill. Both were thankfully safe and unscratched, and unlike James '007' Bond, they were shaken and stirred!!

Seeing them, the CFFR veh led by Crash Fire Tender1 (CFT1) charged in to the gap from where they had emerged. Hot on its heels was CFT2. It had traversed barely 10-15 metres when CFT1 got mired in the slush. And worst was that there was still no sign of the ac!! CFT1 called up on radio of his problem, and CFT2 halted in his tracks.

By now, Flt Lt Soumen Ghosh a senior Cat 'Aye' ATCO, an ex NDA (38 Course) Offr, who was about to go off duty heard of the accident, and had reached the Tower. With his vast experience, he rapidly took stock of the sit, and with supreme calm took over the CFFR coordination.

"CFT1 hold position, CFT2 back out towards the PTT", he rapped out on RT.

Once he could see CFT2 on the PTT, he directed the crew to drive down the PTT, use Link TT onto the RW, and look for the spot from where the ac had entered the grass.

"Enter kutcha area slowly, follow ac track, look for debris/ signs of ac".

Soon enough CFT2 driving very slowly reached the ac, which was very much in one piece structurally, even though damaged by its 'grass cutter' role.

Meanwhile, Deshu and the CO had been picked up and had reached the Sqn. The Court of Inquiry examined the ac in detail and concluded that it was a technical failure of the lock-down system of the landing gear. Deshu was soon aviating after a very short break.

So, all's well that ends well, right?? In a way yes, but there was an interesting aside to this accident.

THE LOST PROPERTY PART.

The AOC was Air Cmde Pynamoothil Simon George (later Air Mshl, now sadly late), and father of two fine lads who served in the Indian Navy with distinction, with the younger reaching the rank of Rear Admiral. He was puce with rage on his Stn having been adversely commented upon by the Court of Inquiry, as they had remarked about the 'wildly growing foliage on the Airfield operating areas'. So for about a month after the accident, mechanical grass cutters drawn by tractors (Jungle Jims) were deployed for Foliage Control and Airfield Maintenance. This effort was supplemented by all personnel on the Stn being pressed into community grass cutting every evening, in lieu of sports/ games. So all airmen, NCs(E) and even subaltern officers were seen playing golf except that instead of clubs they were seen wielding the ubiquitous 'talwars'.

One evening, close to the Sqn area, an Airmen hit a good swing, only to be stopped short with a metallic clang. As more efforts to 'cut' were met with more metallic clangs, the JWO in charge stepped in to take a closer look. Soon, the team took down some of the foliage with bare hands, and a chain link fence was revealed. Despite the fact it had been overgrown possibly for years, the metal was in relatively good shape, not much corrosion.....and the fencing was around a building, the contours of which were vaguely visible now through the dense grass and vegetation.

To cut a long story short, the vegetation was cleared with a major manual effort, and revealed a Nissan hut, the curiously shaped curved igloo like structures that were prevalent during the WW2, and which had been replaced with more modern structures. The locked doors were forced open, to reveal a long forgotten Logistics Store, with the last recorded documentation dating back to 1974. More to the point, it had been built as a temporary store, and war time augmented stores had been stashed there.

And after some time, the world in general, and AFS Tezpur in particular, had forgotten about it!

In those days, the Gnat fleet was facing extreme shortages of brake units. The OEM was a U.K. firm Dowty-Rotol, which had been indigenised to units manufactured by Dunlop. Now Dunlop was facing industrial action by its workers, and located as they were in West Bengal, they eventually declared a lock-out, leaving a gaping hole in the supply chain for wheel units, braking systems and tyres for IAF aircraft.

Well, found in the Nissan hut at Tezpur were literally hundreds of OEM's brake units, neatly packed in greasy butterpaper, quite in mint condition. Command HQ was advised, and an airlift of this manna from Heaven (well from Tezpur really, but we shall not quibble) was quickly arranged. Sharp uptick in the aircraft serviceability of the Gnat fleet, thanks to a grass clearing activity, triggered by an accident on a Base that was not even operating that ac!!

Yes, all's well that ends well.

HELICOPTER RECOVERY AT SIACHEN

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Reproduced below is an article forwarded to me on the social media. The writer is believed to be Air Vice Marshal Manmohan Bahadur, himself a retired IAF helicopter pilot.

“The report about recovery of an Army Dhruv helicopter from Khanda, a post at around 16,200 above MSL on the Siachen Glacier, in 2018, is wonderful news.

Besides the fact that a flying machine has been recovered, it is also great credit to the professionalism, and bravery of the men and aircrew of the Army Aviation Corps and the infantry men who helped recover the machine.

Reading the news coverage took me back to my days flying in that most inhospitable terrain – rightly christened the highest battlefield in the world. While the aircrew are in the limelight most of the time, it’s the technicians who have been the unsung heroes of the Siachen recovery. Now, heated hangars have been constructed but in yesteryears – and that’s just ten odd years back – the technicians would be up before dawn in those terrible sub-zero temperatures, to get the machines fly-worthy for early morning take-offs. It was worse at Base Camp, where in winters your breath would freeze on exhaling and the skin would be left on a metal part it touched with bare hands – but the aircraft mechanics pressed on regardless.

If one may add for the uninitiated that this was routine day-in and day-out stuff on the glacier – and is ongoing to this day since 13 April 1984 when Operation Meghdoot was launched! But the glacier throws up different challenges off and on, of a kind that tests one’s resolve, technical expertise and guts of the extreme kind.

One such incident occurred on 03 June 1990 when a Cheetah of 114 helicopter Unit (christened the Siachen Pioneers) flown by Flt Lt WVR Rao and Fg Offr Suresh Nair had an engine malfunction on landing at Amar Helipad situated at 19,500 ft (yes, you read it right; 19,500 feet above MSL). During those days, Siachen was a live battle zone with intense exchange of artillery fire between Indian and Pakistani troops. The aircraft just plonked on the matchbox sized,

makeshift 'helipad.' The 'buddy' helicopter rescued the crew of the stranded helicopter from Amar even as the Pakistanis started shelling the post, as the crew could not have stayed back because they were not acclimatised to those heights.

Then began the mind boggling planning on how to change the engine of the unserviceable helicopter at that height, in inhospitable terrain and adverse weather conditions, under live fire from the enemy and without heavy lift equipment. This had never ever been done in the history of aviation! The Cheetah engine weighs 182 kgs and requires a portable crane to lift it out and install a new one. At the best of times, at the helicopter base, it requires expertise and workmanship of a very high order, besides checks and double checks by many supervisors. Also the Cheetah can carry only between 25 kgs to 75 kgs of load to Amar due to the extremely reduced air density.

To cut a long story short, the following events happened. Amar was manned by troops of the Sikh Light Infantry (Sikh LI). These tough troops manhandled the unserviceable helicopter out of the small helipad to make space for the incoming rescue helicopters. How the Sikh LI troops managed to do this, only God and they themselves know. To do this they first made a snow wall ahead of the post to shield it from direct observation of the Pakistani post just ahead.

There was no time to lose. So in the subsequent days a technical team under Flt Lt G Sreepal was dropped by helicopter at an army post at about 15,000 ft for a shortened acclimatisation period. Some aviation fuel in 20 litre Jerry-cans was positioned at Amar, while in the helicopter carrying the engine it was planned to be kept at bare minimum to reach there. Wg Cdr Mahandra Goli, the Commanding Officer, flew the mission after a week to transport the engine. To carry the 182 Kg engine, the Cheetah was stripped of all non essentials by removing the tail rotor guard, rear seats, side panels, doors and after the aircraft was started up, the battery itself! The crew had no radio contact with anyone else thereafter, and could not have restarted their own engine if it failed in flight. Wg Cdr Goli landed at Amar and on hearing the noise the Pakistanis started shelling the post. The engine was off loaded by the infantry in double quick time while the helicopter was simultaneously refuelled using the 20 litre jerry cans. And while this was going on, artillery shells started falling around the helipad (thank God for the snow because the shells just get buried deep before bursting). Luckily there were no direct hits and Wg Crd Goli returned after the off loading.

Flt Lt Sreepal and his team who had been positioned at Amar by another helicopter, started removing the engine using a portable crane. Due to the extreme cold the metal had become brittle and it broke. Now the Sikh LI Soldiers and the IAF team manhandled the engine off the helicopter and fitted the new engine using sheer brawn – no words of praise can be enough for those brave Indian Army jawans and Air Force technicians. And by the way, they worked through the evening and night in freezing cold with a bitter wind blowing. Additionally while walking at those altitudes is a task in itself due to lack of oxygen, these people changed an engine that required opening tightly wound nuts and bolts, disconnecting pipelines and ensuring proper alignments – and the reverse for mounting the new engine. And the IAF men had gone there with a shortened acclimatisation schedule, a sure recipe for high altitude medical emergencies, if they occur.

On 13th June 1990, Sqn Ldr 'Chinky' Sinha and Flt Lt J S Malhi were dropped at Amar for the retrieval. After a quick visual inspection of the repaired chopper, and as he says, with a prayer on his lips, he vented the engine and put the switch to start – and it started at one go. At that altitude, in normal conditions, the engine would have been allowed to run and additional checks would have been done. But this luxury was not there as the noise would have activated the Pakistani troops. He just engaged the rotors and took off. Back at Base Camp, once again in Chinky's words, 'it was sheer bedlam' when he touched down – sheer ecstasy for having pulled off an engine change under such circumstances and the safe recovery of a helicopter from 19,500 ft. A world record for sure, unbeaten till date.

Folks, it is a different class of people who operate there; the Indian Army jawans, the IAF technicians and the aviators; if they have a little bit of swagger, give it to them!

And above all, God is working overtime to for each one of those brave Indians operating on the glacier and keeping them out of harm's way."

KEMPY'S NOSE

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The author of this article is anonymous and he describes it as an incredible story of indiscipline in the Eastern Air Force of 1976; or rather a tale of how not to do things. In reality it denotes what one course-mate will do for another, irrespective of consequences.

To continue in the author's own words -

The dark, ominous, thunder heads had been rising from the depths of Subansary valley all morning. The aerographic (atmospheric) winds pushed them up the slopes and the impetus helped it to climb higher and higher till the cataclysmic thermodynamics of thunder clouds unleashed enough energy to help them climb unrestricted to unimaginable height, hell bent on destruction around Mechuka (in Arunachal Pradesh). I was in the middle of it.

After waiting for several hours, I had got airborne from Dinjan in a MI4 (helicopter), on a bad weather day, to take the Army Commander on a reconnaissance of the Chinese border. The GOC-in-C had other preoccupations and hence I got airborne close to 1100 hrs, something which we had been told not to do, due to bad weather and turbulence inside the hills after 1200 hrs.

The Eastern Air Force, those days, was a different sort of IAF, much like the CIA operations in Lagos, a decade earlier, except that we did neither gun running nor dope peddling like the CIA, we were very socially useful and productive fellows. Most of the guys in Chabua were either the ones who had failed the promotion exams, or were there on punishment posting. The guys that the IAF did not want to have around in any self respecting squadron. Chabua was therefore the best of self respecting places to be. SOPs were made just for the pleasure of breaking the rule.

Anyway, to continue my story....., that day we went from place to place as desired by the Army Commander. He spent some time at each whistle stop and as the day went by, we got hemmed in by a line squall while we were deep inside the hills.

Flying in bad weather was nothing new to me; in those years I was compulsively drawn to it, it was exhilarating, the most adventurous thing that I

could do at the age of 26. As usual, I dumped collective, descended to the deck, with the MI4's wheels touching the Subansary river, more like driving a 'Jonga' (an army vehicle that resembled a cross between a jeep and a tonga) than flying an airplane. I zig-zagged along the river, acutely aware of a theorem propounded by my earlier Stn Cdr (Vir Narain). I whistled a morbid tune, taught to me by a navigator friend, it was called 'Point of No Return'. The MI4 was one hell of a helicopter to fly. In due course, we braved the weather and got out of the hills, to my recollection, around 1600 hrs (4 pm) about 45 minutes before sunset.

That is when I heard James Palapura on the radio. James was overhead Tezpur in a Mig 21 acting like an airborne FAC (Forward Air Controller) coordinating search and rescue over Dulanmukh range. I heard arguments, between a Caribou, a Chetak and James. The sensible guys in the Caribou and Chetak were calling off the search and going home due to impending bad weather and darkness. James was trying to order them back. I had no business to go anywhere other than directly east, back to Chabua, and get the Army Cdr off my back. Yet, curiosity overwhelmed me.

"James Sir", I called on the radio. "Who punched out?" I asked.

"Kempy", he said promptly, and gave me a quick rundown. It seemed Kempy (then Flt Lt Deviah, a course mate) had punched out from a Gnat earlier that morning over Dulanmukh after he got hit by ricochet and the engine flamed out. None saw him punch out, none noted where the aircraft went down. The place as you guys know is thick jungles, with crazy wild animals.

Just then my radio quit. That was not unusual. It was unusual if the radio ever worked in a MI4. We were quite used to flying the MI4 without radio, without navigational aids of any kind, without anything known or popular in aeronautics, all except a wing and a prayer.

I went into a tizzy, beset by a moral dilemma.

Do I pretend not to have heard about Kempy? Do I leave him there in the jungle and go home? Do I rationalise that I had no business to get involved? Do I make excuses that I had the Army Cdr on board? Do I make an excuse that it was going to be sunset, that the weather was bad, that I was about 40 miles north and headed in the wrong direction?

'God, I didn't even know if Kempy was dead or alive..... I said in monologue.

‘Oh God, my CO will make mice meat out of me’, I said to myself in self defence.

No ...in retrospect, I did not bring God in between and I did not consult with him either. I went mind dead for about four minutes while I contemplated the odds. In the fifth minute, I turned around and went back to a clearing near Passighat which I had over flown about ten minutes earlier. I went and landed on a volley ball court next to some tents and without switching off, I ordered the Army Cdr out. He was dumbfounded, initially for loss of words. But when it came, he let it fly at me, alternating between request, order, court martial, pleading and jostling. Actually he was a very fine man, a person I held in great awe. So I reasoned with him.

“Course mate down, Sir”, I said in clipped military parlance. “He needs me”, I told him with finality. “You are the Tiger, (head of the organisation in military parlance) the army is here, and they will take care of you”, I think I told him. “Kempy is down there, I got to go before the real tigers get to him”.

I think the Army Cdr made a request to take him along. I think I did not want to take him along lest I endanger his life. I was very young and impetuous.

Any way I then headed full throttle for Dulanmukh range. It was almost sun set by the time I reached there. I had to ask someone the general direction in which Kempy went down. I went and landed in front of the RSO’s (Range Safety Officer) hut and a WO ran out. He quickly pointed out the general direction and I was off the ground in a jiffy.

The jungles reek a musty smell as the sun begins to set. I noticed it because I was at tree top height flying with both side doors wide open. There was total green cover, thick foliage. I looked for a fire, broken branches, silvery flash of the Gnat’s fuselage or wings, a parachute, smoke, anything to indicate a crash site. There was nothing. I did not know where to go looking. I did mental calisthenics to try and figure out where Kempy may have crashed. Over the whirring sound of the rotor, I had caught only snatches of what the WO had told me at the range.

He had said something about cross wind. Yes, he had said that Kempy had ejected on the cross wind. That meant close by. James in his zealous enthusiasm had misdirected the search and others had gone looking for Kempy far and wide and had missed him.

“Kempy, where are you ?”, I shrieked over the noise of the wind and the MI4. Suddenly I heard him. I swear I heard him. It seemed the MI4 knew where to go to find Kempy. I swear I never flew it. It was the hand of God that held the cyclic.

I overflowed a hut in a patch of grass, and I thought I saw about 50 people milling about. The MI4 turned around on its own and this time I could see clearly that there was some commotion on the ground. I closed the throttle, yanked the speed down and set down the helicopter in a small clearing with very tall trees all around. When I switched off, the helicopter started juddering and after the rotors stopped, I realised that I had hit a tree while landing. About 7 inches of all the tail rotor blades had been cleanly shorn off. I also discovered to my horror that the Russians had made the tail rotor with ply wood. But at that time I was not too worried about the tail rotor. I ran forward to find Kempy.

Kempy was lying on a charpoy about 300 mtrs from where I had landed, where the villagers had brought him out from the jungle. He appeared to be semi conscious, groaning with pain.

He still had his helmet on, though the mask was dangling around his chest. His nose was completely smashed and his face covered with blood. His nostrils were choked partially with dried mucus and blood, still oozing plasma. He was labouring for breath through his mouth, spasms raking his chest. I think he had been like that all day, while the search was on overhead; the villagers were frightened to touch him.

The sun by then had set or was about to set.

I quickly got Kempy's helmet off, poured water on his face, cleaned his nose and mouth and made him drink some water. He seemed partially awake but he had no situational awareness or what happened to him. It also looked as if he had suffered a compression fracture of his spine. I knocked out the charpoy legs, loaded Kempy still on the charpoy into the MI4 and we went back to Chabua, unmindful of the missing portion of the tail rotor, the MI4 juddering and shaking all the way. 45 minutes later, when we landed, there was a big crowd on the tarmac, including the Station Commander and my CO, late Jayaraman. The docs took charge of Kempy and I think he was flown to Calcutta, never saw him afterwards, for a long time.

The CO took me by the elbow and marched me to his jeep. Never said a word; he went straight to the bar, where Durga the ever smiling barman poured us

both a large Rum with water, the favourite drink in Chabua. There were many others too in the bar. Jayaraman, took a sip and I think he could not control himself any more.

“I don’t know what to do with you”, he said.

“First you broke the 12 O’Clock rule”, he waved the glass in my face. My untouched glass still on the bar counter. True to Rimcolian tradition, I always took bullshit standing at attention. In RIMC, it was believed that attention was the only safe position to ward off predation.

“I can understand that you came out of the hills at 2 O’clock, I can forgive you if it went to 3 O’Clock. But I cannot suffer in silence if you decided to clear the hills at sun set”. His voice was quivering with emotion. There was pin drop silence in the bar. All drinks lay untouched on the bar counter. He took another sip.

“You got into bad weather”. He paused. “No, not just bad weather, you had to go and penetrate a line squall and mapped the Subansary river with your wheels to get out”. I began to wonder where he had heard that one. Then I realised that the army may still be searching for their Army Cdr. “I can understand if you left behind an army captain”, he said very softly. He took another sip of Rum and water. “I can understand if you left behind a Colonel. I can forgive you even if had left behind the GOC 2 Div”. He paused, seemingly at a loss of words. “you idiot, you went and left the Army Cdr on a damn BSF picket and he is sitting on a charpoy right now”. Jaya banged his glass on the bar counter, and lit a cigarette. Through a smoke ring, he kept staring at me.

“You went and chopped up your tail rotor, and had the audacity to fly it right back to Chabua”, he said softly. I thought I could make out a note of admiration in his voice.

“Sir”, I said pleasantly. “I shall go and pick up the Army Cdr first thing tomorrow morning”. Jaya was my best friend, my guru, my only mentor, my only benefactor in all my years in uniform.

“You will do nothing of the sort”, he roared like a lion. “I shall pick up the Army Cdr myself”, he said. “You”.....he paused for effect. “You are jolly well going on permanent detachment to Chakabama”. He said with finality. Chakabama, a helipad in the middle of nowhere in Nagaland was the loneliest place those days, detachment in Chakabama was akin to solitary confinement.

“But for now, Barman.....” he commanded, looking for Durga. “The drink will be on the house, put it all on Kartoos, (Hindi for cartridge; the author’s nick name) he will pay for the drinks tonight”.

He then raised his glass, like a formal dining-in night, “For now, let us drink to Kempy’s nose”. “To Kempy’s nose”, we replied in unison, drowning the glass of large Rum and water in one single bottoms up. That night, we did bottoms up again and again, each time toasting Kempy’s nose. My bar book was closed that night, I had exceeded Rs 75, the bar book limit.

Considering that Rum cost Rs 3.50 a bottle, and water cost nothing, we, including the visiting Gnat pilots, drank around 22 bottles of Rum that night, all towards Kempy’s nose.

Next morning I was packed off to Chakabama in the dicky of a MI4, I stayed there for three whole months before Jaya relented and brought me back.

Kempy now has a wonderful nose. Makes him very handsome and dignified. Every bit like his illustrious martial predecessors from Coorg. I cannot take the credit; it was the Docs at Calcutta who made Kempy’s nose look Coorgi, handsome and accomplished.

Me, I take the credit only for the incredible act of closing my bar book in one night, cheering Kempy’s nose”

SQUADRON LEADER AJJAMADA BOPAYYA DEVAYYA, MVC (POSTH)

Received through Social Media.

Squadron Leader Ajjamada Bopayya Devayya, son of Dr. Bopayya, was born on 24 December 1932, at Coorg, Mysore. He was commissioned as General Duties (Pilot) in the IAF on 6 December 1954. During the 1965 Indo-Pak War, No.1 Tigers Squadron, then based at Adampur AFB, was given the task of hitting Sargodha, the principle airbase of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF).

The Squadron's Commanding Officer, Wing Commander O.P. Taneja, decided to attack Sargodha on September 7th by leading a wave of four aircraft, to be followed by more aircraft at an interval of a 1000 yards each. However in the dark and because the pilots had to maintain radio silence for secrecy, one of the waves lost its way. Two more aircraft had developed engine trouble and came back. Sqn. Ldr. Devayya, the standby pilot, was asked to take-off. His squadron having no more aircraft left, borrowed one from the adjoining No.32 Squadron. He was too far behind to join up in time with the rest and was thus also the last one to turn back from Sargodha. The action was short and swift. As IAF Mysteres exited after a low strafing pass over Sargodha airbase, a lurking PAF F-104 Starfighter on combat air patrol latched on to their tail. The PAF pilot, Flt. Lt. Amjad Hussain, was looking for easy targets and the IAF Mysteres were short on fuel and endurance.

He found the first IAF Mystere, piloted by Squadron Leader Devayya, and fired a AIM-9 Sidewinder, the deadliest weapon in that air-war. But the Mystere surprised him with swift evasive action, sending the missile harmlessly into the ground. The PAF pilot closed in, gave the Mystere a burst from his six-barreled Vulcan cannon and climbed jauntily for more kills. Flt. Lt. Hussain knew the stodgy old Mystere had no chance against his nimble F-104. Little did Hussain realise that the IAF pilot he had shot, was neither down nor out, but pursuing him, nursing his wounded aircraft. The F-104 tried desperately to break free, but the Mystere pressed on and scored several hits with its 30mm gun. In the smoke-filled F-104 cockpit, a shaken Flight Lieutenant Hussain, struggled with controls but finally ejected.

Squadron Leader Devayya had waited too long for his Mystere's ejection seat to save his own life and perished on Pakistani soil. And there lay, buried with him, the tale of his supreme sacrifice. The action was over in less than two minutes, but it took 23 years to establish that it did, indeed, take place. What

Squadron Leader Devayya achieved in the pre-dawn skies that morning is now considered one of the most remarkable events in the history of post-world war air combat. After the aircraft returned from the successful mission, for the headcount and debriefing, no one had missed Devayya. Wing Commander Taneja, was told that he must have gone to No.32 Squadron to return their aircraft and to change. But when more than 40 minutes had passed, he insisted on seeing Devayya. It was then in the confusion of its first major wartime engagement, that the IAF realised that he had not returned.

Then, there was no way of saying what had happened. Squadron Leader Devayya was listed missing and was then declared dead, as is customary, a year later. But evidence of what he had accomplished first came, ironically in 1979, from Pakistani sources. The PAF commissioned John Fricker, a British writer, to compile their story. Fricker wrote what was expected; a flattering, fawning account of the air-war which the PAF won flaps down. If there was anything that the IAF could take credit for, he said, it was the destruction of a PAF F-104 by an infinitely inferior IAF Mystere over Sargodha on the morning of September 7th. The moment Wing Commander Taneja, who retired as a Group Captain, saw Fricker's book, he informed the higher authorities and told them it had to be Squadron Leader Devayya. No other pilot had claimed to have air-to-air combat and only two pilots were lost that day, Squadron Leader Devayya in the morning and Flight Lieutenant Babul Guha in the evening. But no one moved until 1987, when the Defence Ministry's War Studies Division, busy compiling the official history of the 1965 war, saw Fricker's book.

One researcher was Air Commodore (retd.) Pritam Singh who had seen action as a young Gnat pilot. He knew all the pilots in the Mystere formation and began to trace them. He picked up evidence of a Pakistani broadcast accepting the loss of a F-104, talked in detail to Group Captain Taneja (retd.) and pieced together other evidences. The jigsaw fell into place, though the one source from which Air Commodore (retd.) Singh had expected much, disappointed him. He remembered that Flight Lieutenant Hussain, whom Squadron Leader Devayya had shot down was yet again shot down over Amritsar in the 1971 war and was taken prisoner. He ferreted out Flight Lieutenant Hussain's interrogation report but it had no mention of the 1965 dogfight. Air Commodore Singh (retd.) did not give up. In November 1987 he presented the evidence to high command. His effort was to get the IAF to recognise that such a fight did take place.

Squadron Leader Devayya, according to him, was one of those old generation, WW-II type of daring pilots, an unusual sort of character. Unusual he had to be, for he chose to stay back and fight the F-104 even though the raid on Sargodha had stretched his aircraft's fuel reserves to its very limits. He knew that even if he won and survived, he would have to eject within Pakistan. When asked what chance a Mystere had against a F-104 even in ideal conditions, Group Captain Taneja's (retd.) reply was an emphatic, "absolutely nil." By staying back, Devayya saved the remaining Mystere formation from the marauding F-104. Finally, in April 1988, the President of India, R. Venkataraman, conferred the Maha Vir Chakra on Squadron Leader Ajjamada Bopayya Devayya, nearly 23 years after he died in an audacious air attack over Sargodha, Pakistan's most formidable air base. The evidence adds up to a stirring saga of his courage, sacrifice and flying skills.

Jai Hind!! Jai Jawan!

THE ANDAMANS SUBMARINE SAGA

By

Wg. Cdr. Prakash Kalavar (Retd)

Andamans - Islands of the Convicts

Born of collision between Indian Plate & the Burma Minor Plate, the Andaman-Nicobar archipelago is an extension of the Arakan Yuma range. It comprises no less than 263 islands, big and small, stretching nearly 600 km North to South in the middle of Bay of Bengal.

Although the Andamans have been likened to America's Indian Ocean Military Outpost of Diego Garcia, the Islands occupied a very marginal position, if at all, in India's strategic consciousness.

This was evident by the minimal presence of defense element in the Islands. Car Nicobar was a mere Staging Post with one junior Air Force officer and a handful of men supported by a weekly courier flight operated by IAF Dakotas from Barrackpore. Port Blair had a Senior Naval Officer (NOIC), with a notionally larger support complement. Chief Commissioner, A & N Islands, a senior Civil Servant (IAS) was entrusted with administrative management. Andamans was the land of the condemned and a re-location to the Andamans was the last punishment posting any one could look forward to.

All of this was about to change.

Situation - Mid sixties

In early 1965, there were reports of frequent incursion of small fishing vessels of Chinese origin into Indian territorial waters off Andaman Islands. These fishing boats, outwardly ramshackle, were in fact equipped with excellent storage freezers and modern high power diesel engines capable of speeds up to 14 knots. These incursions were perhaps a source of minor irritation rather than major political concern.

The Car Nicobar Courier

In the days gone by, 11 Squadron, then based at Barrackpore, operated a weekly courier to Car Nicobar. The aircraft was Dakota.

The Courier would depart B'pore early Tuesday morning for an "overseas flight" via Rangoon–Mingaldon and arrive at Car Nicobar by mid afternoon. The ever smiling locals, the "Holchu" would be waiting on the tarmac to welcome the crew with "Dabh" (tender coconut) and the Captain invariably reciprocated the gesture with a return gift of "POP" (cigarettes). The Courier would return to B'pore late Thursday afternoon. The good old Dakota and its crews did this all the year round.

The Submarine episode

On Mar 13, 1965 while at Car Nicobar, the Courier crew was given an additional task to carry out an air recce. Mr AN Maheshwari, Chief Commissioner, would be on board. They were to look out for a Chinese fishing boat. Apprehended the previous evening, the boat had slipped out from Car Nicobar jetty during night and the Indian Police patrol boats with a max speed of 8 knots were no match for these.

After takeoff, the Captain instructed the co pilot to take over controls and invited the Chief Commissioner to occupy the left seat in the cockpit for better view. Barely 5 nm from the coast, the co pilot sighted – not a fishing boat but a submarine. The CC saw it too, was all exited and instructed the crew to give a chase. The sub promptly dived and disappeared. An extended search for 3 hrs was an exercise in futility.

Back on ground all hell had broken loose. There were cipher messages flying all over. (No cell/Sat phones those days.) Next day, one more Dak arrived from Barrackpore with Flt Cdr and more senior officers for an in-situ enquiry.

Long and the short of it, the entire Jing bang - crew, Flt Cdr, CC et al proceeded to Port Blair for a de brief with Naval operations. After detailed discussions (read grilling of the Co-pilot) duly corroborated by the Chief Commissioner, it was concluded that it was indeed a submarine and it was probably of Chinese origin.

Fresh Air/Maritime searches were ordered and commenced. Three Indian Naval Ships- INS Ajay, Akshay & Investigator promptly arrived on the scene and joined the search.

Towards end of the month, the Defence Minister Mr YB Chavan made a statement in the Lok Sabha confirming that “While flying in a Dakota sometime this month the Air Force people saw a submarine cruising in Indian waters. Another submarine appeared within 10 days of first appearance near the same spot”. However, maintaining an appropriate politico-diplomatic protocol, he went on to declare that “he was quite sure that the submarine *did not* belong to China”.

A submarine was subsequently “reported sunk” in the Bay of Bengal.

Epilogue:

With this “Submarine Saga of March 13, 1965” started a permanent detachment of THE GOONEY BIRD, an 11 Squadron Dakota—with crew, at Car Nicobar, for regular coastal recce of Andaman Nicobar chain of Islands.

It was perhaps a symbolic “wakeup call” to the powers that be- to be confronted with the strategic importance of the Islands and the 6 degree / 10 degree channels running through them. It also marked the beginning of the transformation.

Today, there is a paradigm change in the scene.

Andaman Nicobar administration has a Lt Governor in Port Blair. October 2001 saw the establishment of Andaman Nicobar Command (ANC) also in Port Blair. This is India’s one and the only Tri-Services Defence Command and has a three star Commander-in-Chief (C in C) from Army, Navy & the Air Force in rotation reporting direct to the Chairman of Chief of Staff’s Committee. It also has the Indian Coast Guard in support.

Under the Tri services Command there is Defence presence starting from Landfall Island in North Andaman, all the way down to Indira Point, the southern tip of Great Nicobar, barely 87 NM from Banda Aceh (North Sumatra - Indonesia).

The crew that started it all...

F/O JP 'Munna' Bakshi... Captain, P/O PS Kalavar...Co-pilot (who went back to 11 Sqn in '83 as the last Wg Cdr to command the Sqn), F/O JB Shetty...Nav, P/O RS Uniyal 2nd Nav and P/O PJ Joseph...Sig.

VARTHAMAN KAAL

Present Tense

By

Maj Gen S. G. Vombatkere, VSM (Retd)

The present India-Pakistan scene is increasingly tense, due to Pakistan's support and sponsorship of militancy and terrorism in India. Wg. Cdr. Abhinandan Varthaman has hit the headlines for his courageous tackling and shooting down a Pakistani F-16 aircraft.

The PAF's USA-supplied Lockheed Martin F-16 Falcon is feted as the world's most successful combat-proven multi-role fighter jet aircraft, while India's MiG-21 Bison is to the international combat aircraft industry what Maruti Suzuki is to the Indian automobile industry. On 27 February 2019, twenty-four Pakistan Air Force (PAF) F-16 fighters crossed the border to attack military targets in India.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) scrambled eight MiG-21 aircraft to engage the numerically and technologically superior F-16s. Combat high up in the air ensued, and IAF's Wg Cdr Abhinandan Varthaman piloting a MiG-21, shot down a PAF F-16 aircraft. But immediately afterwards, he was targeted by another F-16. On his aircraft being hit, Wg Cdr Varthaman ejected and parachuted down, unfortunately landing in Pakistan-held territory. He was taken into captivity by the Pakistan Army, remaining unbowed and dignified during interrogation. He has since been repatriated to India.

Wg Cdr Abhinandan's courageous action in taking on a superior aircraft in air combat manoeuvring, once again emphasizes the adage that the "man behind the gun" matters as much and even more than the "gun" itself. Once again? Yes, independent India's Armed Forces have displayed the most conspicuous courage, elan and skill right from 1948 onwards, both at the individual level and at the forces level.

In November 1948, with the winter already set in, the Indian Army forces reached Zojila (meaning "Blizzard Pass") at 11,500-ft altitude, on roads built by the Madras Sappers from ancient mule tracks in one month under direct enemy fire of Pakistani forces on the heights. The Indian forces commanded by Maj Gen (later General) K.S.Thimayya, were spearheaded by Stuart tanks of 7

Cavalry Regiment and infantry on foot on their flanks. In a classic act of military deception, the Stuarts had secretly been brought from Srinagar over bridges known to be meant only for small vehicles.

The armour-infantry assault by Indian forces at that altitude was the 20th Century equivalent of Carthaginian warrior Hannibal's surprise attack on the Roman Republic in 218 BCE, with army elephants crossing the Alps into Italy. In a blizzard and biting November cold, the Indian tanks achieved military surprise, the Pakistani forces were routed, and Zojila was captured. This operation brought Dras, Kargil and Leh under newly Independent India. It was the first time ever that armoured tanks have operated at such altitudes, making military history.

In 1965, in India's short, sharp war against Pakistan's misadventure, Pakistan had US-supplied Patton tanks and US-supplied transonic F-86 Sabre jet aircraft, while India had vintage Centurion tanks in ground battles and subsonic Folland Gnat aircraft in air battles. Thus, India's strike force equipment on the ground and in the air was inferior to Pakistan's.

India's military displayed its superior fighting abilities when tank battles and dog fights in the air against technologically and often numerically superior Pakistani forces were won decisively, making military history. This was possible because of the unrivalled bravery combined with the motivation, fighting spirit, battle skills and sacrifice of the Indian soldier on the ground and in the air. Even today, captured Pakistani Patton tanks are displayed in military stations all over India, commemorating the superiority of the Indian fighting man.

During the 1971 war against Pakistan, the Indian Navy made naval history with three Russian origin Petya class frigates towing three Russian origin Osa-1 missile boats of limited range, to within close range of Pakistan's Karachi harbour. In the audacious operation, the Osa-1 missile boats closed in to launch their Styx missiles, sinking three Pakistan Navy war ships and destroying Karachi's oil storage facility, thus effectively blockading Pakistan's only sea port.

This again was military deception and surprise achieved by doing what the enemy least expected.

There are numerous acts of the most conspicuous bravery against insurmountable odds in adverse circumstances in the military history of independent India right up to the present, resulting in award of Param Vir Chakra, Mahavir Chakra and Vir Chakra to personnel of India's army, navy and air force. They are too numerous to relate here. This shows the excellence of India's soldiers, sailors and airmen, who protect and preserve India's sovereignty and integrity.

Wg Cdr Abhinandan Varthaman displayed his courage and fighting skills against a more powerful enemy, and brings to mind Mark Twain writing about bravery in war, who famously said that "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog" that matters.

A PAGE FROM HISTORY

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Some history not to be forgotten

The year was 1971 and the month November.

“If India pokes its nose in Pakistan, US will not keep its trap shut. India will be taught a lesson”

- Richard Nixon.

“India regards America as a friend. Not a boss. India is capable of writing its own destiny. We know and are aware how to deal with each one according to circumstances”

- Indira Gandhi

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi articulated these exact words sitting with the U.S. President Richard Nixon in the White House, while maintaining an eye-to-eye contact. This incident was narrated by the then Secretary of State and NSA, Henry Kissinger, in his autobiography.

That was the day when the Indo-U.S. joint media address was cancelled by Indira Gandhi who walked away from the White House in her inimitable style.

Kissinger, while ushering Indira Gandhi into her car, had commented, "Madam Prime Minister, don't you feel you could have been a little more patient with the President?".

Indira Gandhi replied, "Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your valuable suggestion. Being a developing country, we have our backbones straight - & enough will and resources to fight all atrocities. We shall prove that days are gone when a power can rule and often control any nation from thousands of miles away”.

Thereafter, as soon as her Air India Boeing touched down at Palam runway in Delhi, Indira Gandhi summoned the leader of the opposition, Atal Behari Vajpayee to her residence.

Post an hour of discussion behind closed doors, Vajpayee was seen hurrying back. It was thereafter known that Vajpayee would be representing India at the United Nations.

Donald Paul of BBC had jumped in with a question to Vajpayee, "Indira ji regards you as a staunch critic. In spite of that, are you sure you'd be at the United Nations shouting your throat (voice) out in favour of the Incumbent Government?"

Vajpayee had a repartee.. "A rose adorns a garden, so does a Lily. Each is beset with the idea that they are individually the most beautiful. When the garden falls in a crisis, it's no secret that the garden has to safeguard its beauty as one. I have come today to save the garden. This is called Indian Democracy."

The resultant history is all known to us. America sent 270 famed Patton tanks to Pakistan. They called the world media to demonstrate that these tanks were produced under exclusive technology, and are/were thus indestructible. The intention was very clear. This was a warning signal to the rest of the world that no one should help India.

America did not stop here.

Burma-Shell the only U.S. company supplying oil to India, was told to stop. They were sternly told by U.S. to cease dealing with India anymore.

India's history thereafter was only about fighting back. Indira Gandhi's incisive diplomacy ensured oil came in from Ukraine.

A battle that lasted just a day destroyed a majority of the 270 Patton tanks, in the Thar Desert. The destroyed tanks were brought into India for display at traffic crossings. The hot deserts of Rajasthan still stand as a witness where US pride was decimated.

A war that lasted eighteen days thereafter culminated in the capture of 93,000 Pakistani prisoners of war and separation of east Pakistan into an independent nation - Bangladesh.

Mujibar Rahman was released from Lahore Jail.

The month now was March - Indira Gandhi recognized Bangladesh as an independent nation in the Indian Parliament.

Vajpayee addressed Indira Gandhi as "Maa Durga".

These events had a packet of long lasting manifested fallouts.

- India's own oil company, viz. Indian Oil came into being.
- India expressed itself as a nation of strength in the eyes of the world.
- India led the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) from the front. Its leadership was unquestioned.

Times and events of such strength did however did get submerged into the great depths of yore and lore.

Truthful history till date nevertheless remains as a baton that needs to be passed down generations.

In a press conference when asked about President Nixon's action of sending the US 6th Fleet to the Indian Ocean Indira Gandhi replied that he reminded her of a person in the lunatic asylum snapping his thumb and middle finger continuously. When asked why he was doing that, the person snapping his fingers replied that it was to keep the elephants away. But there are no elephants here, he was told. "See. The snapping is effective isn't it?" he claimed.

A SLICE OF HISTORY: CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

On 15 September 1998, at the Convocation Hall of the Roorkee University, a frail old man was helped on to the stage to deliver a talk to the serving soldiers and veterans of the 4th Battalion of the Brigade of Guards (1Rajput) who had assembled to commemorate the bicentenary of the battalion's raising on 15 September 1798 in Sassaram, Bihar. The frail old man was Brigadier Bakshi Kuldip Singh, a former commanding officer, who then was well into his late eighties. We felt a tinge guilty in subjecting such a venerable old soul to this ordeal of addressing about a thousand odd officers and men. But once on the stage and behind the speakers table, the tiger in him resurfaced, and what follows is a summary of his stirring talk. It is an invaluable historical record of India's first Independence Day and the days following it. The account is given in the first person, in the manner spoken by Brig Bakshi Kuldip Singh.

"Here I wish to narrate the circumstances under which I brought my Battalion 1/7 Rajput (QVOLI) now 4Guards (1Rajput) in 1947 from Razmak in the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan on the Afghanistan Border. In 1947 the Razmak Division was commanded by Maj Gen. Lee Fleming and it had three brigades, one each at Razmak commanded by a British Officer from 5/8 Punjab, Gardai Brigade commanded by Brig (later President) Ayub Khan and the Bannu Brigade commanded by Brig Khan. 1/7 Rajputs at Razmak decided to celebrate the Independence night 14/15 August 1947 in a befitting manner. I sent an officer on casual leave to Delhi to procure two National Flags for all officers and men to take an oath of allegiance to defend the newly independent India.

The officer returned with two flags in the first week of August. 1/7 Rajput at that time had 50 percent Hindus and 50 percent Muslims in the Regiment. The Muslims were transferred to 5/8 Punjab which was also at Razmak and from the Punjabis we received two companies of Hindus. At this time, our Battalion had no British or Muslim officers posted and all officers were Hindus. There were two other Hindu officers in the Division and Brigade HQ plus some

signallers and clerks. At the stroke of midnight, on the night of 14/15 August 1947, when Nehru was delivering the 'Tryst with Destiny' speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort, we hoisted the Indian Tricolour on Pakistani soil, one in the unit lines and the other in the Officers Mess and we swore our allegiance to defend and protect our country.

During the last week of September, one evening I went to call on Maj Gen. Lee Fleming the GOC of the Razmak Division, at his residence. The Brigade Commander was sitting with him. This was tribal territory and very disturbed conditions were prevalent but I had failed to carry any weapon with me. But soon, my orderly Kalyan Singh, a Rajput from Agra, brought my loaded service pistol in one hand and a loaded .32 pistol in the other and placed them on a table in the Division Commander's drawing room and said in a tone of admonishment "Saab, aap apna hathiyar saath nahi laye hain."

The Division Commander's guard had not been able to prevent him from entering his house. Noticing this, Gen. Fleming remarked to the Brigade Commander "nobody on the Earth can stop the 1/7 Rajputs from doing what they want to do and they will be able to get out of Razmak when they choose to". Both the GOC and the Brigade Commander told me "Kuldip, the orders of the Pakistan Army Headquarters are such that we cannot help you. The Muslim troops have given their pouch ammunition to the Pathans, Masalchis and Khasdars and they are hell bent in ensuring that you do not take out your Regimental Colours and silver with you to India. The Pakistan Army HQ orders are that no help is to be given to you. We are the only two British officers here and there is nothing that we can do." However, he added, "two of the senior most officers in the new Pakistan Army, Maj Gen. Raza, the Adjutant General and Maj Gen. Nasir Ali, the Quarter Master General are ex officers of your Regiment. Could you ask them for help to get your battalion out of here."

I requested the Division Commander to make 1/7 Rajput the reserve battalion to the road opening force in October. In those days, the road from Razmak to Bannu was opened once a week during the daytime. Gen. Fleming told the brigade commander to do so as requested by me. He had been my company commander in the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun and in one of my reports had stated "an old head on young shoulders," when writing about me.

None of my officers or men knew of my plans, the only exception being my Subedar Major Devi Singh, an exceptional man and a pillar of strength. (Sub Maj Devi Singh was the uncle of Gen V. K. Singh, the former Army Chief and now the Minister of State for External affairs. Sub Maj Devi Singh was succeeded as Sub Maj of the battalion by his younger brother, Sub Maj Ranjit Singh, another exceptional old warrior.)

We had a barrack at Bannu, where we kept our stores and it also served as a transit camp for our leave parties. We quietly sent all our baggage to Bannu in small batches on road opening days. During the first and second weeks of October we carried out normal duties of the reserve battalion, but during the third week, I decided to make a run through to Bannu. On road opening days, both the Division HQ and Brigade HQ used to move to Razmak-Narl, the highest point on the Razmak-Bannu road. On reaching there, I got down from my jeep and saluted the Division and Brigade Commanders and thanked them for helping me. On the way was the Bakshahi picket, commanded by Capt Limey and was manned by one JCO and twenty-eight Hindu troops, plus some signallers. I made arrangements with them to ensure that nobody knew about the move of my battalion to Bannu. I also ensured that all communication links — wireless and land line — were cut off. I had to do this for security reasons for I did not trust the Pakistani officers who would let loose the Pathans to interfere with our plans. On reaching Gardai, I called on the Commander of the Gardai Brigade, Brig. (later President and Field Marshal) Ayub Khan. After saluting him, I told him I am off to Bannu. In 1943 I was DAAG in the Peshawar Division and he was the Brigade Major of the Brigade so we not only knew each other but were also friends. We shook hands and made our farewells. “We will meet at Panipat,” he said, to which I replied “I will be there to receive you with open arms”. We reached Bannu in the evening and pitched camp on the camping ground. I, along with my Adjutant then went to meet Brig Khan, the Bannu Brigade Commander and informed him that 1/7 Rajputs was in Bannu and requested him to come and inspect the Battalion. “How the hell did you reach Bannu,” he said. He had presumed that the tribesmen would not have allowed us to move out of Razmak.

Now that we are here, Sir,” I told him, “will you kindly make arrangements for our move to India.” “No Muslim train engine driver will agree to drive your train,” was his response. Fortunately, I had a wartime Emergency

Commissioned Officer who had earlier been in the railways and he said “Sir I will drive the train.” He trained another officer to also drive the train. At Bannu, almost all the non- Muslims came to see me and pleaded that I take their young girls back to India for their safety. Against all rules and regulations I brought three hundred non-Muslim girls to Amritsar. I requested that four or five elders accompany the girls to look after them. From our supplies, we provided two weeks of rations to them, as except for cash and jewellery, they could not carry anything else.

From Bannu, the battalion travelled in two narrow gauge trains to Mari- Indus, where we had to stop for two days to arrange for a broad gauge train to Attari. We put all the civilians in one bogey. Though uncomfortable and crowded, they were safe. From Mari- Indus we never stopped at any main station or town to avoid a general massacre. We reached Amritsar on 3 November, from where the train was to take the battalion to Ranchi. However, at the Amritsar Railway Station itself, we were met by Brig. M. S. Chopra along with his Brigade Major. They were carrying a TOP SECRET message from Indian Army Headquarters, asking him to inspect the battalion for fitness for war. After inspecting the battalion, Brig Chopra reported back to Army Headquarters that 1/7 Rajput was fit for any task that may be allotted to them and in addition they were carrying thirty days of contact rate ammunition and also their battalion heavy weapons. This was contrary to orders, which stipulated that only twenty rounds per man was to be brought out from Pakistan. The train was immediately diverted to Gurdaspur with orders for the battalion to relieve 77 Para Brigade commanded by Brig Usman. On being relieved, the Para Brigade was to move to Jammu as the raiders had started pouring into Kashmir. We took over the responsibility for the border from Madhopur to Dera Baba Nanak.

The next day we were visited by Lt Gen. K. M. Cariappa, the GOC in C Western Army Command. Gen Cariappa was an old officer of the battalion and we were very happy to see him after coming out unscathed from Pakistan. The General inspected the unit and was pleasantly surprised to see the battalion not only fighting fit but overflowing with war like stores, over and above the authorised scales. He said that he did not have a pair of woollen socks whereas 1/7 Rajput stores were over flowing with stocks of winter clothing. We had even more

than the authorised number of machine guns and 3 and 2 inch mortars. Gen. Cariappa requested us to share some of our excess stocks with other units who were woefully short of these essential stores. The very next day they were dispatched in trucks to the units that needed them and which were being inducted into Kashmir. I did however hold on to some extra machine guns which I needed for the defence of my sector, which earlier was held by a brigade. Thereafter, I was posted to Fatehgarh as Commandant of the Rajput Regimental Centre and Lt Col Guman Singh took over the command of the battalion. The battalion then moved to Kashmir and the command passed on to Lt Col BP Singh. The battalion went on to win one PVC, two MVCs and ten VrCs in the Kashmir War.

Commissioned in 4 Guards, Major Chandrakant Singh, VrC is a veteran of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, where he was wounded and awarded the VrC for conspicuous gallantry and courage displayed throughout the war. Popularly called 'Paunchy' by his friends, he took premature retirement in 1977 and is now involved in writing and speaking on environmental and defence related issues.

INDIAN ARMY: THE NATION BUILDER

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM,VSM & Bar (Retd)

An article by Lt Gen P R Shankar (Retd).

This article was published in 'Samman' on 14 Jan 2023 on the occasion of the Veterans Day. It is a tribute to the Indian Army, all the veterans and serving personnel who have contributed to building India into a power of consequence.

Nation building has many facets. It starts with the formation of a nation as it happened with India in 1947. Thereafter, it graduates to the homogenisation and consolidation of the nation to enable its progress as an entity. Nation building is also the process of unification of people within our boundaries and ensure sovereignty, integrity and political stability of the country. It is also the process whereby people of diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions who make India are held together as equals under the Constitution and its legal framework. Nation building promotes a conscious sense of belonging and being proudly committed to the country despite India's huge diversity. It ensures that people of different caste creed and religion, together build a common history and identity of being an Indian. It also involves building an integrated national economy and provision of infrastructure, education, scientific, technological and medical systems to promote the welfare of people. Nation building is a continuous process and can never be lost sight of.

Ever since India gained Independence, the Indian Army has been pivotal in most key aspects of nation building without much fanfare. As India grows to be a power of consequence in the comity of nations, the role of the Army in nation building will gain further importance and relevance as challenges unfold ahead. It is not out of place to suggest that the image of India as a global power will depend upon how we as a people evolve into the future. The Indian Army has a major role in building this future. *The role of the Indian Army in nation building must be seen through a larger prism and beyond merely defending the nation from external aggression.*

The Indian Army played a key formative role when a new-born India was still under consolidation. When the Britishers left, India had to suffer the

mayhem, massacres and mass migration of people in Punjab and Bengal. It was the Army which rose to the occasion to usher in some order to regulate the migration and ease the pain of partition. It reduced the number of casualties which could have otherwise become exponential. Soon after that, the Army swung into action to assist the Government in persuading the 600 odd princely states to join the Union of India by threat or treat. Prominent amongst them were Junagadh and Hyderabad. This consolidative process continued well into the 60's till Goa was liberated by force. It finally culminated when Sikkim merged with India and the Army was there to guard the new borders. Very importantly, the Army also thwarted the invasion of J&K by Pakistan in 1947-48. The Pakistan Army, aided and abetted by tribals and razakers were stopped at the gates of Srinagar by the Indian Army. In the following decades, the Indian Army played a protective role in repulsing Pakistan's repeated attempts to wrest Kashmir or parts of it by force in 1965, 1971 and 1999. In 1962, an ill equipped and poorly supported Indian Army suffered a debacle. After that, it has kept China at bay. A befitting reply was given to China in 1967 at Naku La in Sikkim. Thereafter, attempts to change the status quo along the LAC unilaterally by China by force were halted in their tracks during the Doklam crisis in 2017 and in Eastern Ladakh in 2020. *The Indian Army has been a critical factor in the formation, consolidation and protection of India as it exists today. It remains a guarantor of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation from external aggression.*

Besides protecting India from external aggression, the Indian Army has played a crucial role in quelling the various insurgencies, militancies, anti-national and secessionist movements which have plagued India especially in Kashmir, North Eastern States and Punjab. Many of these insurgencies have been violent and often abetted by Pakistan and China as part of their proxy/gray zone/hybrid wars with India. In quelling and controlling these movements, the Indian Army has ensured that these states remain an integral part of India. In almost all cases, the Indian Army has ensured that the writ of the Government of India runs in these areas at all times. It has also assisted the Central and State Governments in maintaining or restoring law and order, protecting the people and state property. In critical states like Assam, Punjab, J&K, Manipur and Mizoram, the Indian Army has been instrumental in restoration of democratic processes to ensure that the idea of India is not diluted and that alienation does not set in amongst the population. Most importantly, the Army has taken development and progress to these corners of India so that people in these areas benefit from all national policies and programs of upliftment. *The Army continues to play its integrative role in building India into a strong nation.*

The Constitution of India is the bedrock on which the nation is built and has progressed since Independence. There have been situations when it has been challenged and under strain for extended periods. At each instance, when the Constitution has been threatened, the Indian Army has upheld it. This must be seen in two contexts. Firstly, in many instances and places, the Indian Army has repeatedly restored and rebuilt democracy by enabling elections to be conducted in a free and fair manner so that people have been able to exercise their franchise without fear or favour. In doing so, people's faith in the Constitution has been revived and held firm to build a strong and democratic India. Very importantly, the Indian Army has stayed always within the bounds of the Constitution even when the democratic processes were diluted or weakened by political forces. Unlike our neighbours, Pakistan and Bangladesh, *the Indian Army has ensured that India is built into a strong nation by upholding the constitution and ensuring that the due democratic processes are allowed to function.* This has been an invaluable contribution of the Indian Army in building the nation.

India is a diverse country with people from all walks of life. They follow different religions, cultures and speak a multitude of languages. The Indian Army has a place for all of them irrespective of their background. Every Indian has equal opportunity to join the Army and serve the nation with pride. This is a practice followed since independence. Over the years, the Army has been a great social equalizer and up-lifter. It has been a shining example of national integration. It embodies the spirit of the Constitution in-toto. It has welded people from different walks of life into a disciplined team which operates as one unit through focused training, skill development, empowerment, and hard work. It is the true representative of the idea of India. Over the years, the Indian Army has also earned the trust of the nation in this role. Everyone considers our Armed Forces to be the best and most reliable service in the country. The Indian Army has fully repaid the trust reposed in it by not only defending our borders but by coming to the aid of people during their hour of need during riots, strikes, calamities, disturbances and natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, accidents and so on. *The Indian Army has not only aided by saving lives and invaluable government property during such circumstances but has also assisted in rebuilding lives of affected people and restoring essential services in affected areas even if it means rebuilding them.* The soldier is loved and respected by the people and is largely an inspirational figure. Every soldier who exits service, contributes to building the civil society and development of the nation with the skills acquired during service. The Indian Army contributes to nation building not only when its soldiers are in service but also through its veterans.

The Indian Army has played a huge part in building the technological strength of the nation. With every new weapon system which is designed, developed, and introduced into the Army, the technological strength of India has improved. Many breakthroughs have occurred in cutting edge technologies due to the participation of the Indian Army at grassroots level in developing them. Our capability in missile and rocket development is just one example. It is also to note that the Indian Army is supported by a vast system of defense research and production. This system contributes immensely to India's comprehensive national power. With the advent of AI, cyber, space, nuclear, three D printing and additive manufacturing technologies, the role of the Indian Army in nation building is only set to increase. In future the Indian Army will even be expected to rise to the challenges posed by climate change to India.

The Indian Army has not only excelled in roles, tasks, and duties within India but also in international situations. The Indian Army is highly sought and remains one of the largest contributors to United Nations in peace keeping roles. The UN has placed great trust in India across four continents — Africa, Asia, Europe and South America in countries as diverse as Korea, Congo, Kampuchea, Lebanon, Eritrea, Nicaragua, Bosnia-Herzegovina and more. This is largely due to the fact the Indian Army is seen as a professional force capable of achieving goals set for it even under trying conditions. At another level, the Army has been instrumental in creating Bangladesh in 1971 by defeating Pakistan in a fourteen-day blitzkrieg. The victory in 1971 war gave a long-time peace dividend, due to which India has built itself into a strong nation. The role of Indian Army in restoring the government in Maldives is also well documented. Besides this, many nations want their officers and soldiers to be trained in various institutions of the Indian Army and want to carry out exercises with it. It is a huge international acknowledgement of a professional force. Very importantly, soldiers of the Indian Army have also excelled in the field of international sport and have brought laurels to the nation by winning medals in Olympic, Asian and Commonwealth games. *Overall, the highly professional Indian Army has enhanced the international image of the nation considerably over years.*

As India rises to be a power of consequence and assumes centrality in world affairs, the role of the Indian Army will become even more pronounced. The military will have to play a greater role in projecting India on the world stage. The role of Indian Army in carrying out military diplomacy in national interests will increase. The Army's role in strengthening global and international partnerships will become critical. It will also have a greater role in protecting

the global commons, preventing drug trafficking and combating piracy. The Indian Army along with the other services will have to be prepared to be first responders in humanitarian assistance and disaster management. *The Indian army has a proud reputation heritage in these fields which it will keep up in the best traditions of the Service in this field of nation building.*

Last but not the least one should not forget the role of the Indian soldier in nation building. The courageous, hardworking, humble and frugal Indian soldier has been a symbol of unflinching devotion to duty. ***His scrupulous honesty, truly secular and completely apolitical nature has contributed immensely to nation building.*** Through the past seventy five years, he has stood sentinel in blazing heat, dust storms, hail, sleet, snow, icy blizzards and pouring rain over India's borders whether they are in the high Himalayas or the Thar deserts or the jungles of the North East. His indomitable spirit has provided India with a 'kavach' which has allowed it to grow. He has been a role model for every Indian to emulate. He is loved and respected by every Indian. He represents the idea of India.

The Indian Army Soldier is a true nation builder second to none.

REMEMBERING LT GEN HARBAKHSH SINGH

By

Captain Amarinder Singh
(Former Chief Minister of Punjab)

Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh passed away on November 14. Many don't know who the General was. Being out of sight for 30 years put him out of mind as well, and a few words is all that he warranted in sketchy obituaries and those too in local Punjab papers.

Born in 1913 in Badrukhan in Sangrur and having graduated from Government College at Lahore, he was commissioned into 5 Sikh in 1935. He was a graduate of the 1st course at the IMA after a year's attachment with a British battalion, The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, wherein he saw active service on the north-west frontier. He commanded a company of 5 Sikh in 1942 in Malaya against the Japanese. Severely wounded in the head, a steel plate, which he carried to his last day, was a constant reminder. He was in a military hospital when General A.E Percival, the Allied field commander, surrendered all Allied forces in Malaya and Singapore to the Japanese in 1942. Then followed three years of a miserable existence and near starvation as a Japanese prisoner of war. Released at the end of the war in 1945, he remained in hospital for some months with beri-beri and other problems brought on by malnutrition and inhuman conditions in Japanese POW camps. Posted as second-in-command of 4 Sikh on release from hospital, he was perhaps the only deputy ever to ride a horse on parade in an infantry battalion, as he was too weak to march.

We now come to three episodes in his brilliant military career which makes him stand out as one of the outstanding commanders in modern Indian history. India became independent on August 15, 1947, and Pakistani-backed regulars, irregulars and tribesmen crossed into the state of Jammu and Kashmir on October 22. In spite of a determined effort by the J&K state forces and by the initially inducted Indian troops, the enemy reached the outskirts of Srinagar on November 20 and the fall of the capital city was imminent. On November 21, reports came in of a concentration of around 3,000 enemy troops on the outskirts of Srinagar at Shalateng, just 4 miles from the city centre, preparing to attack the city. Colonel Harbakhsh Singh, then second-in-command of the newly inducted 161 Brigade was given the task of conducting the battle. He attacked Shalateng on the November 22 with two infantry

battalions, 1 Sikh and 1 (Para) Kumaon with a troop of armoured cars of 7 Cavalry and, in a brilliantly planned and executed operation, routed the enemy leaving 472 enemy dead on the field. The threat to Srinagar was now over. If the capital city had fallen, it would have been one of the greatest disasters in Indian history.

Promoted to command 163 Brigade, his was one of the two brigades launched by General Thimmaya, then in command of Sri Division (later 19 division), on May 17, 1948, to clear the enemy out of the Jhelum valley, up to Muzaffarabad and Domel. The first by 161 Brigade under Brigadier L.P Sen on the Jhelum axis, and the second in a flanking move by his 163 Brigade over the Nasta Chun Pass to Tithwal and beyond. While 161 Brigade was held up near Uri, Brigadier Harbakhsh Singh's offensive, as discussed by General Birdwood in his book, *A Continent Decides*, was a triumph. "Pakistan's situation was now grim, and had India only used air supply more aggressively to maintain the impetus of this outflanking success, her forces would so severely have threatened Muzaffarabad as to force a Pakistani withdrawal from the whole of the northern sector. Luckily for Pakistan, they paused". Tithwal fell on May 23. In six days, Brigadier Harbakhsh Singh had in a lightning move secured all territory starting from Handwara to the Kishanganga over the Nasta Chun Pass and Tithwal after fighting aggressive battles.

Finally after commanding 5 Division and 4 Corps for a while, during the Chinese operations of 1962, where many soldiers believe that had he been allowed to command the Corps during the second phase of the battle by the Chinese which started on November 20, the situation would have been quite different in NEFA. Sadly for the Corps, their old GOC, General B.M Kaul, was sent back to command, from a sick bed in Delhi, by Krishna Menon, the then Defence Minister. General Harbakhsh Singh was then given command of 33 Corps at Siliguri and he finally took over as the Western Army Commander in November 1964.

War clouds gathered once again in 1965. Pakistan took the offensive in April in Kutch and was successfully repulsed. In August, Kashmir became the target and on September 6 India went to war. The western Army offensive across the Punjab border which started at 4.30 a.m. on September 6 went well till Pakistan counter attacked 4 Division on the 11 Corps left flank at Khem-Karan. The 4 Division comprising 62 and 7 Brigades, a strength of six infantry battalions, had not quite recovered from the drubbing it received in 1962 at the hands of the Chinese, lost two-and-a-half battalions in a matter of hours,

less through enemy action more by desertion, and was virtually overrun. The situation on the 7th afternoon was grim, while the Division fell back to the village of Asal Uttar and hurriedly prepared a defended sector based on the surviving three-and-a-half battalions and the 2nd (Indp) Armoured Brigade. On the 9th, Pakistan's 1st Armoured Division, whose existence was not known to us, attacked the Division. Their operational order was captured by us. The plan was to attack and overrun the weak 4 Division while a strong combat group was to cut the lines of communication of both 4 Division, 7 Division on the Barki Axis and finally to cut the GT Road at the Beas Bridge, effectively sealing off 11 Corps HQs and Corps troops at Raya, and the LOFC of 15 Division in one sweep. The situation was extremely grim and as a consequence Delhi panicked.

Having returned to HQ Western Army at Ambala from 4 Division at midnight on the 9th and after a visit to the operations room, the Army Commander retired for three hours rest before leaving at four o'clock the next morning. The instructions to me, his ADC, was not to awaken him unless it was urgent. At 2.30 a.m. the Army Chief, General J.N. Chaudhary, called and spoke to the General and after a heated discussion centered around the major threat that had developed, the Chief ordered the Army Commander to withdraw 11 Corps to hold a line on the Beas river. General Harbakhsh Singh refused to carry out this order. The next morning, 4 Division stabilised the position and when the Chief visited command headquarters at Ambala that afternoon, the 10th, the crisis was over and the subject was not discussed. Had the General carried out these orders, not only would have half of Punjab been under Pakistani occupation but the morale of the Indian Army would have been rock bottom, affecting operations in other theatres as well.

His funeral was on November 15. Very few knew about it, therefore apart from his friends and contemporaries, former officers of the Sikh Regiment of which he had been colonel for over a decade, and others such as I, who had been on his staff, gathered at the Delhi cantonment to say our final farewell. The Army did him proud by giving him a send off befitting a great soldier. And while the ceremonies were on, and six Lieutenant Generals removed the National Flag from the body which was to be cremated, I couldn't help wondering how fortunate it was for the country to have had the right man at the right place at the right time. The words once used to describe Field Marshal Lord Wavell, seen apt for describing General Harbakhsh Singh: "He was essentially a soldier's soldier, and takes an assured place as one of the great commanders in military history".

The Last Post was sounded and the pyre lit, and as the smoke curled its way into the heavens and the bugle sounded reveille, transporting the General to Valhalla, to join the ranks of the many great soldiers who once trod this earth, there were moist eyes all around. As the mourners said their silent farewells, the words of Sir Walter-Scott from The Lady of the Lake came to mind:

Soldier, rest thy warfare is o'er,
Dream of fighting fields no more;
Sleep the sleep that knows no breaking,
Morn of toil, nor night of waking.

I said my final farewell, "Goodbye my General, till we meet again.

GREAT NATIONS HOLD THEIR ARMED FORCES IN HIGH ESTEEM

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

The following passage is extracted from 'Reminiscences' by Maj Gen M S Balhara, KC, AVSM, SM (Retd)

It was not just chance, that the sun never set on the British Empire. Many years ago, standing on the Rock at Gallipoli, I had wondered what these Brits and Aussies have in them, that even after a full half century and a quarter gone by, they still throng to this desolate place – thousands of miles away from their homes – only because their nation will never allow the memories of their martyrs to be forgotten. The annual ceremony at Gallipoli is an extremely poignant and emotional affair. Second and third generation descendants – some who never even saw the men who fell at Gallipoli, stand in solemn silence grieving with moist eyes and a lump in their throats. Australia sends at least three to four ministers while senior representatives from the British MoD as well as Pentagon are also in attendance.

These memories and thoughts got rekindled yet again in 2014 when we hosted Prince Andrew at the Kohima War Cemetery. The Prince was on a world tour in commemoration of the 75th year of the Queen's coronation. He had a two and a half day itinerary in India and had been advised to visit Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkotta and Delhi. These were the venues of obvious choice – after all what better way to rekindle our colonial past than to show Royalty around the capital and each of the three residencies.

Needless to say, at each of the venues he would have been assured of a grand reception and a gala time. But what did he choose? The Prince politely declined all offers of gala times and receptions. He requested for a one and a half day visit to the Kohima War Memorial. His reasoning was brutally simple. He was on a world tour to pay homage to those who had kept the Union Jack flying high. He landed in the sweltering heat of Dimapur, refused to take a helicopter flight to Kohima, because he wanted to get a feel of the road that had been rendered so vulnerable in the face of the advancing Japanese.

For a scheduled 45 minutes ceremony, he spent nearly two hours, visiting every grave. He returned next day to Delhi, visited the India Gate and flew out to Singapore the same day.

No visits to the Taj Mahal or any other place of tourist or diplomatic interest. He was kind enough to answer my query as to why he came all the way when a symbolic wreath laying would have sufficed. His answer? “Because we care. And when you care, no distance is too long nor a journey too arduous!”

Suddenly, it all became crystal clear – some simply will never forget their dead; some will simply not remember. It is not by chance that nations became great. Every great nation in history holds their armed forces in high esteem.

A second example is cited by Lt Gen M M Lakhera, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd), formerly Adjutant General of the Indian Army and ex-Governor of Mizoram, in his book titled ‘Toward Resurgent India’. This excerpt says it all.

I had gone to UK in 1995 as Deputy Leader of the Indian Delegation to take part in the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the victory in Europe (VE Day) during the Second World War.

I, along with four other Army officers, had just stepped out after attending the inaugural session and we were waiting on the roadside for the traffic to ease so as to walk across the road to the vehicle park.

Among those with me was Honorary Captain Umrao Singh, a Victoria Cross winner.

All of a sudden, a car moving slowly along the road came to a halt in front of us and a well dressed gentleman stepped out. He approached Umrao Singh and said “Sir, may I have the honour of shaking hands with the Victoria Cross (winner)?” He shook hands with him.

Evidently he had spotted Umrao Singh’s medals from his car and had stopped to pay his respects to a winner of the highest gallantry award of his country.

Then he looked at me and said, “General, you are from the Indian Army?” When I replied in the affirmative, he gave out his name saying that he was Michael Heseltine. I was absolutely astounded, as recognition dawned on me that he was the Deputy Prime Minister of UK.

I was totally overawed by such courtesy shown by a dignitary of the second highest status in the British Government, and humbly thanked him for having invited our delegation for the VE Day function. Again his reply was “General, it

is we, the British, who should be grateful to your country and your Armed Forces, who had helped us win both the First and the Second World wars. How can we ever be so ungrateful to forget your country's great contribution?"

Suddenly I became conscious that all the traffic behind his car had come to a standstill. I hurried to thank him and politely requested him to move along to relieve the traffic hold up. He stated "Sir, how dare I move off when (the) Victoria Cross has to cross the road?" Realizing his genuine feeling I and my colleagues quickly crossed the road. Reaching the other side I looked back and saw Mr. Heseltine was still standing, waiting to see the Victoria Cross safely across.

The whole world loves and respects veteran soldiers!

But do we?

LIVING WITH THE UNKNOWN

By

Lt Gen Ata Hasnain (Retd)

(Currently Governor of Bihar)

Browsing my timeline on FB I found this story of mine posted in 2020. The Covid times. I related this in an online Leadership session with the iconic company Mindtree. The story from Op Pawan:-

Mindtree is one of the top IT companies of India. The Company offers services in the areas of agile analytics and information management, application development and maintenance, business process management, business technology consulting, cloud, digital business, independent testing, infrastructure management services, mobility, product engineering and SAP services. Quite a mouthful.

However, its People's Head (they don't have an HR Head) approached me to speak on a fascinating subject - LIVING WITH THE UNKNOWN. For a soldier you could not get a better theme, since we live with the extreme unknown at most times. It was a talk replete with anecdotal references from Sri Lanka to the LoC, Siachen to Uri and Shopiyan.

On 21 Mar 1989 my unit 4 Garh Rif while operating in Op Pawan - Sri Lanka, was tasked to storm LTTE Supremo Prabhakaran's lair in the Wani Jungle along with 9 Para SF and some other loose sub units. It was called Operation Shamsheer and was a sequel to another operation which had resulted in the loss in action of the Commanding Officer of a neighbouring unit. Without going into the details of the operation, it was a two sided approach with 9 Para SF from the south and 4 Garh Rif from the North. Almost simultaneously leading elements of the two units ran into heavy density cluster minefields. The LTTE used the Johnny Mine devised and manufactured in Jaffna. It had 100 gm of explosive as against the 28 gm in a standard NMM 14 anti-personal mine. Among the first casualties were 8-10 men from 4 Garh Rif and the same number from 9 Para SF. There was no way that the mine casualties of 9 Para SF could be evacuated as there was no clearing for them to create a temporary helipad. 4 Garh Rif had a couple of casualties with gunshot wounds too as we had suffered in the first contact. The LTTE's elite cadres had fallen back to protect their supremo and were giving us battle well away from the camp. 4

Garh Rif casualties were evacuated through a clearing which had been identified early and secured but 9 Para SF had to cut trees and in fact blow up huge tree roots to create one for themselves a tiny clearing in the thick jungle and load casualties at low hover, a most difficult task. Army Aviation pilots such as Major Daman Saigal, Major Manoj Asthana and Major HS Kaura landed their Cheetahs with the rotors almost brushing the trees on the sides. That is how casualties could be lifted. Hats off. Major (now Colonel) Manoj Asthana is on this page too and comments very often; he is a coursemate.

One of the casualties to be lifted out was Major (now Maj Gen - Retd) Bhupesh Jain who later was our Military Attache in Washington. Major Bhupesh's leg was blown to smithereens below the knee and like all mine casualties he bled profusely. A wad of shell dressings had to be placed against the grievous wound to stop bleeding along with use of a tourniquet. He was in that condition for a fair amount of time awaiting the creation of a helipad. There was an acute shortage of water too in the scorching humid heat of the Jungle. Battles with groups of LTTE cadres were on at different places. I am not sure how circumstances brought us together, me and other officers of my unit to his spot but I was aghast seeing his wounds. I expected that he would be unconscious or semiconscious. Instead I found a most cheerful Major Saheb of the Indian Army lying there awaiting evacuation. He was chatting with the few men who were securing the spot. It was a surreal situation which presented itself - the sounds of MMGs firing from Ranjit helicopters flying above us and the ratatat of AK-47s on ground with efforts on to blow a clearing for helicopter evacuation. Battlefields are strange places indeed.

We tried showing our sympathy to Major Bhupesh, the usual words of encouragement; how he would recover and be fine, and all that. He was nonchalant about it. But his response was classic, something embedded in memory which I often talk about. He smiled - and said - "Cut the crap Sir, give me a cigarette, preferably WILLS". We gave him one from a crumpled pack, the last of the few we possessed and lit up one too. Never has a Wills Navy Cut tasted better. Major Bhupesh was evacuated with the same smile. He lost his leg and functioned as Adjutant of 9 Para SF for several months thereafter after returning from hospital back to the battlefield. He later transferred to JAK LI and raised 16 JAK LI, a unit which served under me in 2007-8 in Kashmir. The drills he had established in the unit helped in making it one of the finer units I have known.

Maj Gen Bhupesh and I have often discussed the operations in Sri Lanka counting this experience of Operation Shamsheer as one of the finest military experiences. He went up to be one of our very fine General Officers. However, it is the Wills Navy Cut cigarette which remains most embedded in our memory. Such spirit and ability to bear pain and disappointment in life, yet grow far beyond is exemplified by the attitude of our officers and men such as Bhupesh Jain.

A salute to that spirit. In retrospect I wonder if the ITC ever gets to know how its cigarettes bring cheer to soldiers in the most awkward situations. I am not advertising for cigarettes but just alluding to their ability to cheer people when things are all going wrong.

MORAL COURAGE

Lecture delivered by Field Marshal S. H. F. J. Manekshaw, MC

Reproduced below is a thought provoking speech delivered by Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw to officers of the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington (Nilogiris) on 11th November 1998.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, if I was talking to young officers or soldiers I would lay emphasis on physical courage but since I am talking to this gathering, I will lay emphasis on moral courage.

“What is moral courage? Moral courage is the ability to distinguish right from wrong and having done so, say so when asked, irrespective of what your superiors might think, or what your colleagues or your subordinates might want. A ‘yes man’ is a dangerous man. He may rise very high, he might even become the Managing Director of a company. He may do anything but he can never make a leader because he will be used by his superiors, disliked by his colleagues and despised by his subordinates. So shallow – the ‘yes man’.

“I am going to illustrate from my own life an example of moral courage.

“In 1971, when Pakistan clamped down on its province, East Pakistan, hundreds and thousands of refugees started pouring into India. The Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, held a cabinet meeting at 10 o’clock in the morning. The following attended. The Foreign Minister, Sardar Swaran Singh, The Defence Minister, Mr. Jagjivan Ram, the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the Finance Minister, Mr Yeshwant Rao and I was also ordered to be present.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, there is a very thin line between becoming a Field Marshal and being dismissed. A very angry Prime Minister read out messages from the chief Ministers of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. All of them saying that hundreds and thousands of refugees had poured into their states and they did not know what to do. So the Prime Minister turned around to me and said “I want you to do something”.

“I said “what do you want me to do?” She said “I want you to enter East Pakistan” I said “Do you know that that means war?” She said “I do not mind if it is war.”

“I, in my usual stupid way said “Prime Minister. Have you read the Bible?” And the Foreign Minister Sardar Swaran Singh (a Punjabi Sikh), in his Punjabi accent said “what has the Bible got to do with this?” and I said “the first book, the first paragraph, the first sentence, God said, ‘let there be light’ and there was light.

“You turn this around and say ‘let there be war’ and there will be war. Let me tell you. Its 28th of April, the Himalayan passes are opening now, and if the Chinese give us an ultimatum, I will have to fight on two fronts. Again Sardar Swaran Singh turned around and in his Punjabi English said “will China give an ultimatum?” I said “You are the Foreign Minister. You tell me.

Then I turned to the Prime Minister and said, “Prime Minister, last year you wanted elections in West Bengal and you did not want the communists to win, so you asked me to deploy my soldiers in penny pockets in every village, in every little township in West Bengal. I have two divisions thus deployed in sections and platoons without their heavy weapons. It will take me at least a month to get them back to their units and to their formations. Further I have a division in Andhra Pradesh and the Armoured Division in the Jhansi-Babina area. It will take me at least a month to get them back and put them in their correct positions. I will require every road, every railway train, every truck, and every wagon to move them. We are harvesting in the Punjab, and we are harvesting in Haryana. We are also harvesting in Uttar Pradesh and you will not be able to move your harvest.

I turned to the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, “if there is a famine in the country afterwards, it will be you to blame, not me”. Then I said “My Armoured Division has only thirteen tanks which are functioning.”

The Finance Minister, Mr Chavan, a friend of mine, said “Sam why only thirteen?” “Because you are the Finance Minister. I have been asking for money for the last year and a half and you kept saying there is no money. That is why.” Then I turned to the prime Minister and said, “Prime Minister, it is the end of April. By the time I am ready, the Monsoon would have broken out in the East Pakistan area. When it rains, it does not just rain, it pours. Rivers become like oceans. If you stand on one bank you cannot see the other and the whole countryside is flooded. My movement will be confined to roads. The Air Force will not be able to support me, and if you wish me to enter East Pakistan, I guarantee you a hundred percent defeat”.

“You are the Government” I said turning to the Prime Minister. Now will you give me your orders?” Ladies and Gentlemen, I have seldom seen a woman so angry, and I am including my wife in that. She was red in the face and I said “let us see what happens”. She turned around and said “the cabinet will meet at four o’clock in the evening.” Everyone walked out. I being the junior most man was the last to leave. As I was leaving, she said, “Chief. Will you please stay behind?”. I looked at her and said,, “Prime Minister, before you open your mouth, would you like me to send my resignation on grounds of health, mental or physical?”

“No. Sit down Sam. Was everything you said the truth?” “Yes it is my job to fight and win; not to lose.” She smiled at me and said “All right Sam. You know what I want. When will you be ready?” “I cannot tell you that now, Prime Minister, but let me guarantee you this - that if you leave me alone, allow me to plan, make my arrangements, and fix a date, I guarantee you a hundred percent victory.”

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The rest is history. India declared war against Pakistan on 3rd December 1971 after Pakistan launched pre-emptive air strikes against Indian airfields. The Indian armed forces liberated East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, held out in the West, capturing large tracts of Pakisatni territory; and when India declared a unilateral cease fire on 16th December 1971, it had taken more than 93,000 Pakistani prisoners. A feat as yet unparalleled by any other nation in the post world war era.

DOH LARGE RUM AUR DOH ANDE KI BHUJIA

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Military personnel find bliss in the simplest of pleasures. A hot mug of tea after a gruelling climb to a snowbound mountain picket, or a cool glass of lasssi in the sweltering desert; even a nice cold water bath after sweating it out on an outdoor exercise. Such happiness creates indelible memories when experienced in remote places and at unexpected times. The following experience of an Air Force officer named Bajpai is illustrative of one such occasion.

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The Major raised his glass, "to the great Indian Air Force". I raised my glass, "to the great Indian Army". "CHEERS". Our glasses clinked. I took a sip of the XXX Hercules rum as I leaned back on my chair savouring the bitter sweet taste of my favourite drink.

"Tell me Bajpai" asked the Major popping a few peanuts into his mouth, "What does a fauji need to be happy?"

I was stumped.

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It had all started with me bumping into the Adjutant on that fateful Friday.

"Ah Bajpai!! Just the person I was looking for", he exclaimed with a beaming smile.

I looked at him suspiciously. Generally, if your unit Adjutant calls you out with that sadistic grin, rest assured you are heading for an unpleasant task.

"You have to do a Pay Officer's duty", he said in a suspenseful voice.

Ahh.... no big deal. "No problem, sir", I smiled feeling relieved.

"Well, there is a catch", he became conspiratorial, "have you heard of a place called Jaswantgarh in Arunachal Pradesh"? His grin widened further.

As I packed my suitcase that night, I wondered about the trip. The route was etched in my memory, having flown to Tawang multiple times. I visualised the road journey..... Tezpur to Bhalukpong in the plains, then climbing up the mountains to about 6,000 feet..... descending into Tenga valley, again climbing up to 8,000 feet to Bomdila pass, then descend into Dirang valley..... start

"You mean the place near Tawang, across Sela pass?"

"Precisely", he nodded.

"So, what about it?" I asked cautiously.

"You have to do the payment there", his grin returned. "You are privileged to have a free road trip to explore the exotic and scenic beauty of Arunachal climbing again to Sela pass at about 14,000 feet followed by another descent towards Tawang for Jaswantgarh. Sounded exciting after all.

How naive I was.

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"Bomdila aa gaya hai saab", the Lance Naik said looking at me, probably hinting at a tea break. He was visibly uncomfortable. He probably never had an officer sitting next to him while driving that rickety 'Meat Van'.

"Chalo chai peethey hain", I looked at him and smiled. He relaxed and returned my smile shyly.

We resumed our journey to Dirang Dzong, descending on the other side of the ridge after the tea break.

I, with my suitcase and cash bag, was dropped on the roadside, near the Army camp gate in Dirang Dzong. The driver wanted to drop the meat in the Langar before dropping me at Officers Mess, which was fine with me.

As I sat on the chair at the roadside, thoughtfully provided by the sentry, I reflected at the turn of events during the past two days. I was given a seat in one of the Army jongas as part of the Army convoy from Tezpur to Bhalukpong, a small village at the foothills of the Himalayas. After spending the night there we resumed the journey as part of another convoy to a place called Rupa in

Tenga valley, HQ of one of the mountain divisions of the Army. The convoy ended there so I had to stay the night in the Officers Mess there. The only occupant (it being a family station), a young 2nd Lieutenant, was happy to have a company and looked after me well.

"But tomorrow being Monday, no convoy will ply in this valley. You will have to wait till Tuesday", he said after listening to my story.

"I have to finish this task ASAP. Can you please arrange something for me", I pleaded.

He pondered for some time, "Oh yes! There is a vehicle going to Dirang Dzong tomorrow but it's a 'meat run'", he looked at me apologetically.

"It will do, it will do", I exclaimed with relief.

SCREEEEEECH.....!!!

I looked up from my reverie and found an army jeep come to halt on the road. It backed slowly and stopped in front of me.

"AM I SEEING THINGS", the Major boomed with an exaggerated gesture of rubbing his eyes and staring at my flying overall and aircrew jacket. I quickly stood to attention and saluted.

"What is a blue overall doing on the ground instead of touching the sky with glory?" He asked with a broad friendly grin.

"Good afternoon sir, I am on my way to Jaswantgarh to....."

"Ok, ok", he cut me short, "I will hear your story on the way. Hop in".

We had started climbing through the winding roads towards Sela.

"Hmmm.....", he exhaled loudly after listening to my story, "so you are going to Jaswantgarh carrying cash for disbursement and you have neither a vehicle nor an escort. Air Force is great", he said with a teasing smile, "agar army nahi hota toh tu kya karta re?" He looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes. I nodded sheepishly and we both laughed.

"I am going to Baisakhi, slightly short of Sela. In any case it will be dark by then. You stay put with me for the night. Meanwhile I will make arrangements with Jaswantgarh for your pick up tomorrow." I nodded gratefully.

"Do you eat eggs Punditji?" he asked. I nodded again, suddenly feeling famished.

"You must be hungry. Dinner won't be ready by the time we reach Baisakhi. I will ask my batman to prepare 'ande ki bhujia' while we freshen up", he looked at me with a kind smile.

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I looked out of the room through the window, feeling relaxed and rejuvenated after the hot water bath. It had started snowing outside. The undulating landscape of hills and valley had turned white with a tinge of electric blue in the twilight. The whole scene was surreal. I turned my gaze inside the room. It was nice and cosy with a friendly warmth. The 'dhup dhup' sound of kerosene drops falling inside the bukhari was music to the ears. The friendly Major was great company. The aroma of freshly prepared scrambled eggs, mingling with the flavour of the rum was soothing and heady. Ahh..... life was wonderful. What else could I ask for?

"C'mon Pilot Officer, you haven't answered my question", he goaded, "What does it take to make a fauji happy??"

"Doh large rum aur doh ande ki bhujia", I blurted out. Time stood still for a moment.... and then... the room reverberated with laughter.

HAHAHAHAHAHA..... HAHHAHAHAHA.....

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.....HAHAHAHAHA....

"Kya hua?" my wife rushed in looking alarmed.

"Aaah! Nothing..... bas yoon hi", I smiled and winked.

"Day dreaming again", she muttered.

A lot has changed since that snowy evening in Baisakhi ages ago but the feeling of utter bliss is still fresh in my mind. I am sure we all have had our own "doh large rum aur doh ande ki bhujia" moments when it didn't matter what rank or position we held, how big or small our house is, what material wealth we have acquired, etc., etc. All that mattered was a good soul companion, mental peace and a clean innocent heart filled with joy and happiness. Maybe we have tucked such moments somewhere in the back of our minds and forgotten about them.

"HELLO. Sun rahe ho?"

"Haan.... bolo"

"I am ordering pizza for dinner. What will you have?"

"Doh large rum aur doh ande ki bhujia".

"Tum nahi sudharoge", she shakes her head resigned. I close my eyes and stretch on the recliner smiling inwardly.

Kaun kambakht sudharna chahta hai!

HOR LAI PANGE

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

'Hor Lai Pange' is a Punjabi phrase the rough equivalent of which in Hindi is *'aa bail mujhe maar'* or needlessly inviting trouble upon oneself.

This hilarious article is an excerpt from the diary of a young Lieutenant (name unknown) but such situations in the army are not quite as rare as one would imagine. To continue in the words of the anonymous Lieutenant -

"I was a Lieutenant posted in a unit commanded by Major Gill. Upon receiving communication that the Sector Commander Brigadier Gill along with his wife and a grown up daughter would be transiting through our unit, I was called by Maj Gill, an earthy Jutt (Jat Sikh) who eyed those who conversed in English with disdain. He spoke in Punjabi only, even with South Indian troops. His culinary knowledge went no further than *Makki di Roti* and *Sarson da Saag*. Both of us were bachelors.

"Kaka jo mein kai reyaan palle ban lae" (lad, listen carefully to what I tell you). He gave me the itinerary of the Commander in chaste Punjabi. He told me that Brig Gill would arrive with his family in the evening, stay the night in our guest room and leave for the Sector HQ next day early in the morning. We were to host the Commander and his family for dinner. Major Gill left the arrangements to my devices. With a look of contempt he said in Punjabi that he had heard the Gill's were anglicized in their ways. He kept muttering under his breath and then dug into the file before him.

I saluted and left his office wondering how two Gills could be so much unlike.

Our 'special cook' was on leave. Army men are supposedly 'Jacks of all trades' and can make a meal out of anything e.g. when in search of food in an adverse situation beyond raiding the enemy or living off the land; but the Army never thought it necessary to include cooking in the training manuals. A 'propah' dinner had to be laid out. And that was it.

While taking stock of the unit CSD canteen, I came across a box containing a pressure cooker. The carton had been partly eaten by rats and a recipe book was peeping out. Here was the solution. The recipe book was studied and a menu was chalked out.

Cooking is not rocket science I realized. The instructions were carefully followed by *langar* cooks under my supervision. The meal began to take shape. There was no recipe for a pudding and no formal meal is complete without one. Improvisation was resorted to at which the Army is adept. In mountains we were entitled to dry fruit in our rations. There were more nuts and raisin than custard in the dish that was put together.

The Gills were received with the customary military fanfare. Brigadier and Mrs. Gill made a handsome and sophisticated couple. Their daughter was a charming young lady deserving second, third, fourth, fifth and many more looks - an absolute darling. The dinner went off well. But it was the pudding which stole the show. The young lady very sweetly asked what was it called? Major Gill's heart sank. He looked at me. Without batting an eyelid I said 'Darling Pudding'.

A week later the unit received a telephone message from the Sector HQ. Attach your Officers Mess 'special cook' with Sector HQ for 14 days for training of Sector HQ 'mess cook'. Maj Gill called me and said..... "Hor lai pange."

Narrating the article my mind went back to when I was a 2/Lt doing my infantry attachment with 19 Rajput at Damana in the Jammu Sector. 19 Infantry Brigade had organised a TEWT (tactical exercise without troops) and the responsibility was given to 4 Madras which was then part of the brigade. That battalion also had an officer named Major Gill who, like the Gill in the narrative above, was only comfortable speaking in Punjabi. During the tea break Major Gill could be heard giving instructions to the Tambis in Punjabi, to lay on the tea. The Brigade Commander, Brig R S Noronha (later Lt Gen and Vice Chief of the Army Staff) who heard him, chided the officer "Gill, you have been with the Madras for 15 years now and you still haven't learnt to speak Tamil?"

Major Gill retorted with a straight face "Sir, my troops all understand Punjabi".

'CALL SIGN - ONE'

By

Colonel Manoj Asthana
Artillery/Army Aviation

The Army has always specialised in the use of codes and call signs.
The Commanding Officer of the Regiment is very proudly called the Tiger and the Second -in- Command is well you guessed it -the Lamb.
The Commanding Officer is also addressed as .the Father of the Regiment and the Second- in-Command, very appropriately, the Mother.

Along with this loving Father -Mother team, there are yet another species, as the Panther, Rabbit, Eagle and Sparrow to complete the family.
The Army jungle has it all.
While The Brigade Commander of Artillery is known as the Bull, the coveted title of COW should have rightfully gone to the Commanding Officer's Wife, but she prefers to be called the Tigress, being the Tiger's wife.

I do not know how it feels to get elevated from a Tiger to a Bull---but Bulls do have some special privileges as the Bulls are more star studded than the Tigers.

The Army nick names are also used in telephonic conversations,
One telephone operator was frantically trying to call up the Commanding Officer's residence, asking for the Tigress ;
as Mrs Bull urgently wanted to speak to her.
When the Tigress diplomatically advised the operator that it is not appropriate to address the Brigade Commander's wife as Mrs Bull,
he smartly corrected himself....
"Right Madam please speak to Mother Cow".

The Brigade Commander's wife for some unknown reason hung up right away and then commenced a sequence of events on which none of us had any further control till the time the Brigade Commander got posted out.!!.

The Commanding Officer is also very affectionately called -The Old Man ,but it may not always be a brilliant idea to extend this courtsey to his wife. It's fine

for her to be a Tigress but to address her as the Old Lady may probably be the first step towards a professional suicide.

Nor would it pay dividends to call the Second-in-Command's wife as Mrs Lamb or Sheep ,as this could herald the beginning of a long and arduous route march ,since the Second-in Command is normally the incharge of such events .

This fetish of codes is as rampant in the Air Force too.
As a young Captain during my Army Aviation training I could never understand why Left was called Port and Right was known as Starboard .

Further to make it worse , my flying instructor insisted on saying Zing for Port and Zang for Starboard .
So now if we had to turn Left ,he could say" turn Port", but would say ---- "Zing".
We kept Zinging and Zanging on all take offs and landings till I mercifully converted to Helicopters .

Amongst the feathered friends the use of Roger D is a most common one between the Pilots and the Traffic controllers.

Once an old and bold Pilot informed me that during the Second World War the women controllers of the Royal Air Force introduced the transmission --Roger D ---D for Darling while talking to Pilots in the air. The Army radio operators were quick to introduce Roger D, in normal Army radio transmissions minus the D .

An exasperated radio operator of an Artillery Regiment Commanding Officer, transmitted to the Second -in-Command
" Hello TWO, This is call sign ONE .I am Rogering you for so long, why don't you Roger me???"
To this the seasoned Second-in -Command replied " Hello ONE, this is call signTWO.
I will also Roger you but only after I become call sign ONE !!--- Over and Out".

IT HAPPENED ONE EASTER

Contributed by Maj Gen B N Rao, AVSM, VSM & Bar (Retd)

Reproduced as received on the internet.

It is very difficult for NDA Cadets to visit Pune city till they have passed their Drill Square test in their second term. Even after passing the Drill Square test, they may get permission to visit Pune barely twice or thrice per term on liberty, with special permission, during the rest of their stay in the Academy. Hospitalisation in the Command Hospital (Southern Command) at Pune provides Cadets an opportunity to make the most of it as the tales below would illustrate.

When in my first term, once when four of us were doing 'toe touches' on the beam, the support gave way and we all fell and hurt ourselves. We were evacuated immediately by Military Ambulance to the Command Hospital at Poona (as Pune was then known) since Khadakvasla in early 1960 only had a Sick Bay and not a full-fledged Military Hospital.

One would expect that being admitted in hospital would be a matter of concern to the Cadets. But it was not so. All four of us were very happy to be away from the strict regimentation of the Academy and looked forward to taking it easy in bed, visiting friends and relatives on out pass, eating out and seeing movies in West End or Empire; two prominent cinema theatres in the Cantonment in those days.

I was admitted for a sprain in the Sacroiliac Joint and stayed in hospital for a week. Being a local cadet, it gave me an opportunity to visit home on at least two occasions. Of course, I had to give a different (fictitious) pretext each time to get the Ward MO to sign an out-pass.

One cadet who had sprained his ankle and had his ankle in a cast, would slip off the plaster cast in the evenings and go and visit his girlfriend. On his return, before going to bed, he would hammer his ankle with a spoon and slip on the cast. So next morning the doctor would notice that the swelling had not subsided and prolong his stay in the ward. He thus managed to linger in hospital for six days till he was found out and ignominiously discharged after being administered a stern warning by the Ward MO.

Stories about such shenanigans by cadets admitted in hospital abound. But the story below by an ex-NDA officer, received anonymously on what's app, literally takes the cake. It is reproduced as received.

Command Hospital, Pune had two Officer's Wards.

Upper - For Majors and above, or, very serious cases.

Lower - For Captains, Cadets, Under Training etc.

The lower ward was notorious, to say the least. Young, hot blooded, mostly bachelors, always getting into mischief, loud n raucous.

Unrefined baby-faced rams.

Result ~ Nurses (even young Lady Docs) would shy away from entering the Ward. Such a shame!

Landed up there in Feb '83 with a broken jaw.

For broken bones, cure is immobilize by cast plaster.

For me, they immobilized my jaws by stitching my lower n upper teeth with braces and wires.

(I wrote on top of my Med Case File : SHUT UP CASE).

We were nearly 40 patients in the ward.

Come Good Friday.

A Christian, Sub Lieutenant from Navy, wanted to go for the Mid-Night Mass.

Broken ribs and both arms. All plastered. Can't remember his name. We called him Dork (classic Naval Dope).

Would need help to reach the Church.

Couldn't wear shirt-n-tie, so we drew a tie on his chest cast. He wore a sleeves-shorn jacket.

5 more of us, none Christian, planned to join him.

Result: One auto rickshaw, 5 plastered patients plus me, in it.

2 mid-thigh plastered guys on either side (plasters jutting out). 2 arms plastered cases in laps, n me with driver.

Reached the Church, sat in the last row to draw minimum attention, and, fastest exit (midnight, out from the Hospital, straightforward punishment case).

Mass finished, we beelined for the door (as fast as the 2 guys on crutches could).

Reached our Ward unscathed and undetected.

Saturday too was quiet.

Hurrah, we are in the clear.

Or so we thought!

Easter morning. All Hell Broke Loose.

Before we had woken up (sleep in till 7 am since breakfast was laid at 7), 1st of MANY Nurses, Lieutenant Sheri prances in, with a Broad Beaming smile and an Easter cake.

Greetings, laughter, hand shaking...

It was just the beginning.

By 10.30 am, we had 23 cakes in the ward. Many more, than the cakes, Nurses, including the Matron (head nurse, a Brigadier) had trooped in n out.

Totally missed B'fast.

Doctors rounds was also a similar story ~ more smiles, more wishes and hand-shakes.

We were absolutely shell-shocked.

Cherry was the Registrar striding in. A known No-Nonsense certified Psycho-terror.

Opening line "Who all went to the Church last night?"

Common thought 'We are done in - as in doomed'.

We six raised our hands.

Next Salvo

"How many Christians ?"

One.

Barks Colonel Mathews. "Nice. Appreciated. Happy Easter to all". Marches out.

Whole Congregation had noticed the motley group.

Since the Church is in the Cantonment that accounted for 95% of uniformed Church-goers.

We had become celebrities over night.

More than that our Ward had become 'The Place'.

Not the plague ridden, goon-den, or rogue dungeon.

Doctors on round to The Upper Ward, would drop in to chat, Food from Nurses Mess, Trainee Nurses from Army Nursing School visiting after classes, outright flirting n dating, n 2 hook-ups (that I know of) resulting in betrothal n weddings.

ALL because of a quirky idea of 6 bashed up jokers attending Mid Night Mass on a Good Friday.

I would say my Hail Marys on this day.

