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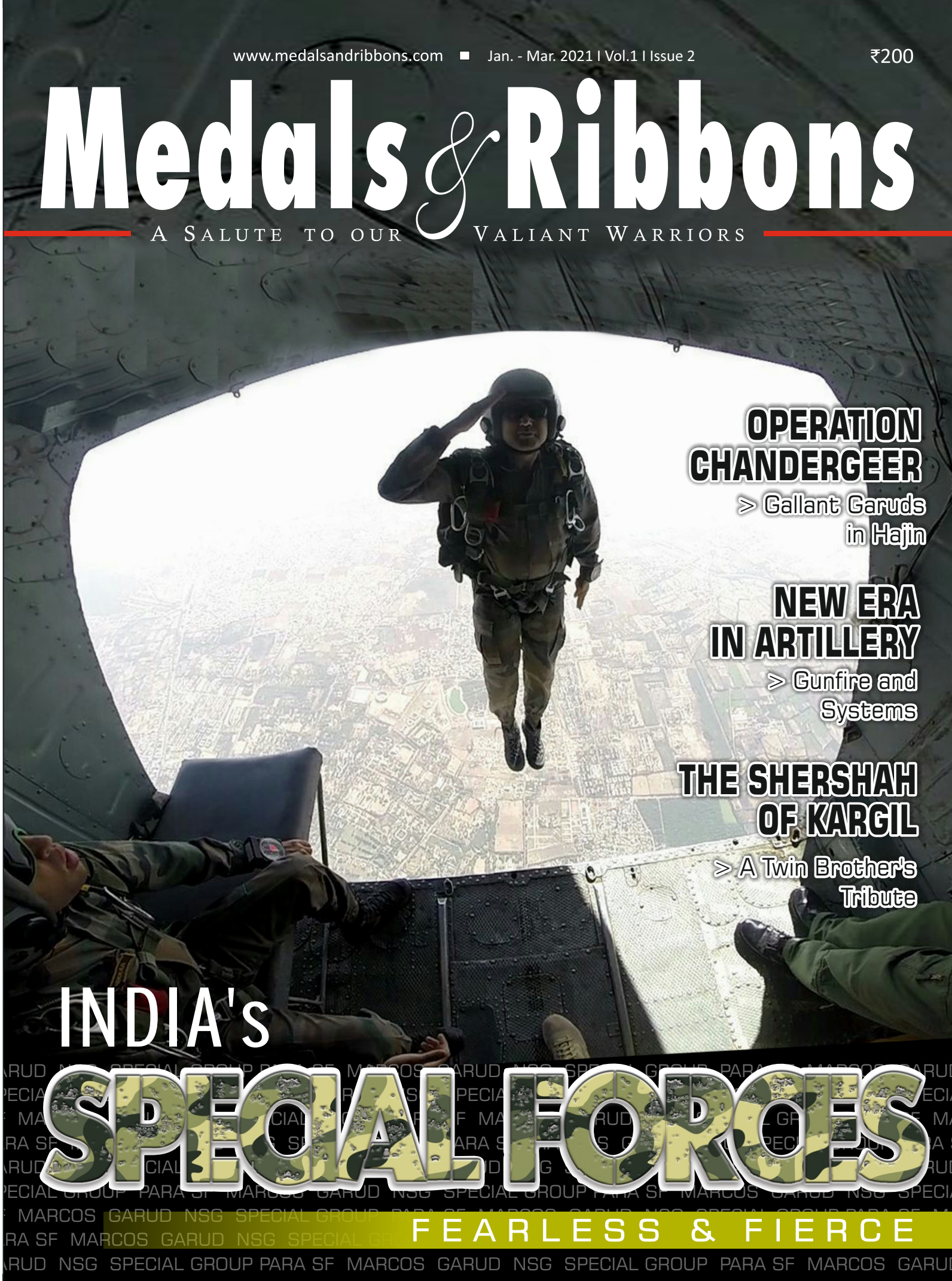
Medals & Ribbons

A Salute to our Valiant Warriors



OPERATION CHANDERGEER

> Gallant Garuds in Hajin

NEW ERA IN ARTILLERY

> Gunfire and Systems

THE SHERSHAH OF KARGIL

> A Twin Brother's Tribute

INDIA's SPECIAL FORCES

FEARLESS & FIERCE

DEDICATION

THIS ISSUE OF MEDALS & RIBBONS IS DEDICATED TO THE FIVE MARTYRS OF 4 PARA (SF) WHO SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES ON 5TH APRIL 2020 ON THE SNOWCLAD SLOPES OF THE SHAMSABARI RANGE NEAR RANGDORI BAIHK, KUPWARA (J&K), WHILE NEUTRALIZING FIVE PAKISTANI TERRORISTS IN A COUNTER-INFILTRATION OPERATION.



JC-413798Y
Late Subedar Sanjiv Kumar,
Bilaspur, HP



No 4093303X
Late Paratrooper Amit Kumar,
Dehradun, Uttarakhand



No 14871569H
Late Paratrooper
Chhatrapal Singh,
Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan



No 13623013P
Late Paratrooper Bal Krishan,
Kullu, HP



No 13625231Y
Late Havildar Devendra Singh,
Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand

FOUNDER'S NOTE

Col David Devasahayam





The year was 1997. Red on !...the light had turned red and we all paratroopers got ready to jump. As an officer you lead the stick (a group of paratroopers) and are the first to jump from your aircraft. As the light turned to green our coordinator touched me on the back and I stepped out. The tug, as your service parachute opens and you gently descend earthwards was truly a magical moment of my service career. Around you were your men also descending towards the landing zone. Jumping alongside that day were my good friends and Coursemates Manoj Naravane (the present Chief of the Army Staff) and Ajay Gairola. We were regular Infantry Officers but now on deputation as 37 year old
Lt Colonels with a Cabinet Secretariat controlled special forces group...a two year opportunity to wear the coveted maroon beret and permanently earn the paratroopers' wings.

The Special Forces have always held a unique charm, a certain enigmatic romance. As discussed and decided by the Editorial team that each issue would comprise of a focus on one principal matter, the Special Forces was a unanimous first choice for this issue. As you read you will realize "Men Apart Every Man an Emperor" truly personifies these lion hearted officers and men.

A lot of young reader feedback of our first issue requested that the articles should be kept interesting and readable. They will predominantly remain our focus as we definitely want the crème de la crème of the youth to strongly consider the Armed Forces as a possible career option and hope many will be inspired to join the Armed Forces and therein, if found suitable, even the Special Forces.

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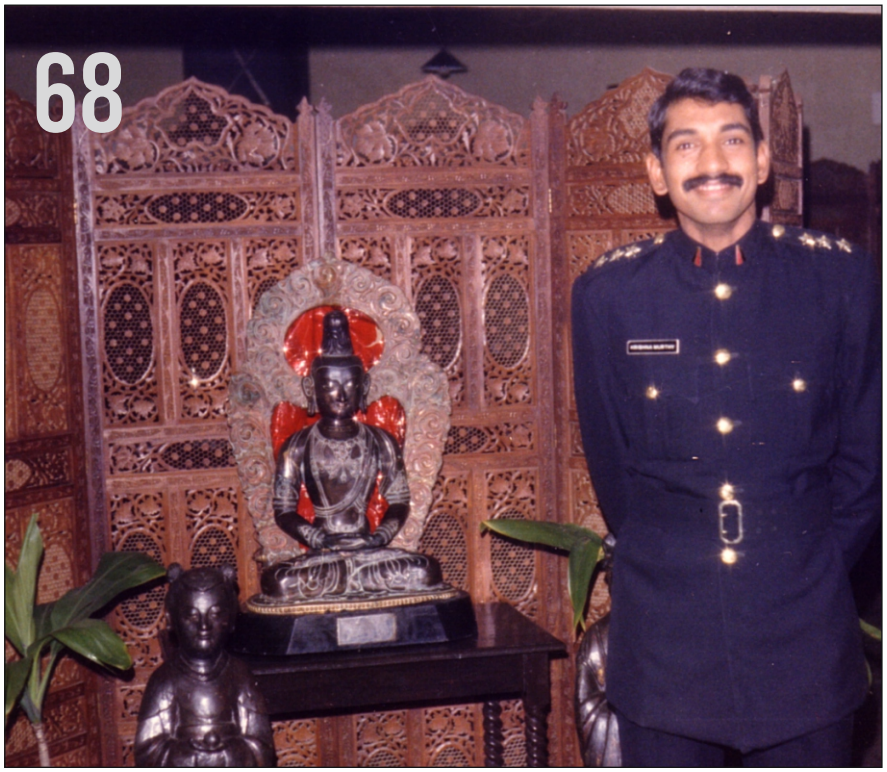

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Medals & Ribbons
A Salute to our Valiant Warriors

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Lt Gen J S Sandhu, (Retd).

India's Special Forces (SF) have been at the forefront of operations in the last three to four decades in Sri Lanka, J & K and in the Northeast. They gained greater recognition after the Mumbai 26/11 counter-terrorist action and the post-Uri surgical strikes of September 2016. Deservedly, Special Operations and the SF take centre stage in this issue. We take the readers through the early beginnings of SF during the 1965 Indo-Pak War, when the Meghdoot Force came into being and morphed into 9 Para Commando, our first SF unit. There are engrossing and inspiring narratives of some of the actions of our SF, and we have also showcased their Regimental Training Centre as a photo feature. In light of the recent indictment of the Australian SF excesses in Afghanistan, we have discussed the aspect of ethics in operations too.

The Artillery has modernized into a powerful degradation and destruction capable arm, from its earlier supporting fire primary orientation. An insightful analysis on the new era in Artillery has been included, to highlight the doctrinal changes in their role and employment.

In keeping with our tagline "A Salute to our Valiant Warriors", we pay homage to late Captain Vikram Batra, PVC and late Major L Jyotin Singh, AC, who were martyred in Kargil and Kabul respectively. An Army Mother's Unrequited Hope - a poignant tribute to a dignified veteran couple, pining for their 'missing in action' son, is also a must read.

The Editorial Team realized the importance of informing our young readers of career choices as officers in the Armed Forces. An informative article on this Honourable Career has hence been included, and subsequent issues will also include such content of value. We have also commenced a 'Wellness Page', wherein Dr. Renuka David clears some misconceptions regarding Covid 19 treatment. There are other interesting and educative articles in our Money Matters, Second Innings and Opportunity Sections, besides some light reading anecdotes. To cap it all, as an End Note, Lieutenant General Mohinder Puri, a renowned military leader who led the operations in the Kargil – Dras Sector in 1999 has penned his Recollections, giving us valuable guidance on leadership in combat.

I am confident that readers will give Medals&Ribbons a "thumbs up". We look forward to your views and comments, and invite content contributions especially from veterans and ladies, who can narrate to us past actions and experiences: suitable remuneration will be paid. For details please visit www.medalsandribbons.com

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Oct. - Dec. 2020 ISSUE

Dear Col David Devasahayam
Greetings!!

First and foremost Many Congratulations Sir on a great start to an excellent Magazine "Medals & Ribbons" by Scholar Warriors of the Armed forces symbolizing the Glory & Pride of the men in uniform.

Sir, being an Ex Services officer from the 76th Regular course commissioned in the Armoured Corps, I felt extreme Joy and connectivity reading each and every article written by our seniors reflecting the "Service Before Self" ethos of the Armed Forces.

I retired in the Rank of a "Major" from the Army having served as an Army Aviation Pilot and Tank Squadron Commander in an Armoured Regiment and later as an "Arjun Tanks" Project Manager at DRDO before joining the corporate world as a Senior Executive in the Software Service Industry. A graduate of the Defence Institute of Advance Technology (DIAT) in Tank Technology had the privilege of serving in DRDO as a Trials Officer for Arjun Tanks in early 90s when Dr Abdul Kalam was the Head of DRDO.

Presently Founder and President at Priamba Soft LLC https://www.priambasoft.com and Sriseshaa Technologies LLC sriseshaatechnologies.com a Technology Innovation Co in Healthcare application and Automotive applications for connected and electric cars .

I am happy and feel lucky to have come across this initial launch of the Magazine and wanted to write in and Thank you for this Great effort, I am settled in the US and run a Charitable Organization (www.shradhaa.org) helping to provide educational resources and career counseling to spouses and children of soldiers of Indian Descent.

I would like to subscribe to the magazine and can be associated in any way possible, kindly let me know your thought

Thanks and Warm Regards
Major Krishna K Chari- (Ret.)
President Shradhaa Foundation (shradhaa.org)
Co- Chair ATEA North East, US(www.ateausa.org)
CEO and Founder
Priamba Soft LLC
http://www.priamba.com

Dear Col.David Devasahayam,
Greetings-Vanakkam.

I am a former Master of the History Department of the Sainik School, Amaravathi Nagar, Tamilnadu.

I am 88 years old. This is by way of self introduction.

I had the pleasure and fortune of seeing and reading the Vol.01 of Oct.20-Dec.20 Magazine "Medals and Ribbons" fondly sent by one of my students Mr.Ashok Bright, now in Australia. I read it in the WhatsApp.

I congratulate you on your initiative taken with the best of intention of honouring men / women of the Indian Armed Forces and presenting the profile of such persons, highlighting their acts of valour and achievements.

Deservingly, the maiden issue is being blessed by all the top brass of the three wings. I feel this magazine should reach the portals of OTA, IMA and all the Sainik Schools. It will serve as an effective motivating and inspiring factor. Hope it will happen.

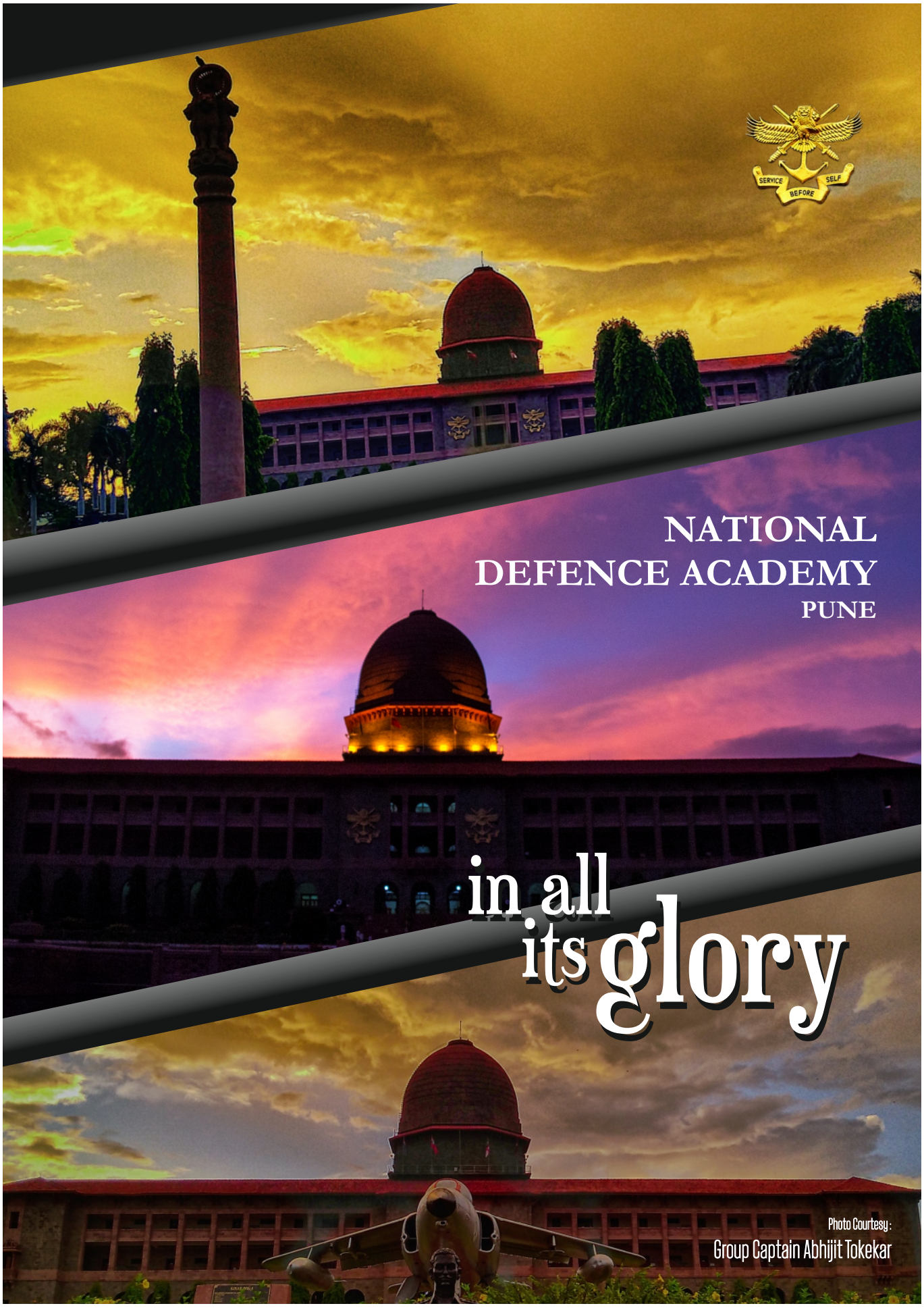
With avid interest and admiration, I could read the article of Lt.Gen. Anbu. I feel happy to say that he was one of my students with fine character, endowed with vision, passion, fortitude and a sense of empathy. True to his name he radiated a feeling of compassion and kindness.

I shall be much thankful if you could favour me with Lt.Gen. Anbu's postal address and also a photocopy of his article, so that I could wish him and his family.

My good wishes to the new born baby magazine with Medals and Ribbons. Let the Magazine find a wider appreciation in the years to come.

Please bear with my shaky handwriting.

With good wishes,
Yours sincerely
M.V. Somasundaram
35, Thirupanalwar St, East Shanmugapuram, Villupuram.



NATIONAL DEFENCE ACADEMY

PUNE

in all its glory

Photo Courtesy :
Group Captain Abhijit Tokekar





Artillery in Yesteryears





TOWARDS A NEW ERA OF ARTILLERY

With mediumisation and induction of new equipment in the Indian Artillery, there has been a quantum jump in the destructive capability, which will no longer be limited to a 'fire support' role only. The author describes these changes and the resultant conceptual variations which are possible.

"God fights on the side with the best Artillery" – Napoleon Bonaparte

The Past

1. As I pen down this article, my thoughts fly back to the year 1980, when we were commissioned into the renowned Regiment of Artillery. Life was pretty simple then. The basic gun was the good old, time tested QF 25 Pounder Gun – ubiquitous among the Royal Indian Artillery during the Second World War. The overall inventory was simple too, ranging





Recent Inductions – Pinaka, ULH, Dhanush and K9 Vajra





from 120mm mortars, 75/24 Gun, 25 Pounder Gun, 100mm Gun, 105mm IFG, 5.5 Inch Howitzer, 105mm Abbot (SP), 130mm Medium Gun and the Grad BM Rockets. The average fighting range of field guns hovered around 11-13 km, while the medium guns' planning range was around 22 km.

2. All technical procedures were manual and time consuming. While getting the guns into action and aligning them in the correct direction, we struggled for each degree & minute for accuracy. At the Command Post, every activity revolved around checks and limits for accuracy to the tune of minutes.

3. Similarly, on the tactical front, we remained focused on one major operational imperative, and that was to provide timely and continuous firepower. To achieve that, it was mandatory to keep pace with the supported arm and keep the guns in range with the progress of operations. The range of our gun systems was limited, somewhere on the outer periphery of the close battle, with our reach falling just beyond the objectives. The moment an operation fell beyond the range of supporting artillery, an operational pause was imperative while guns were moved forward.

4. Thus, the operational expectations from Artillery in those days was entirely in the tactical sphere – the prime mission in battle being to provide continuous and effective firepower to the supported arm unit / formation for the envisaged task or operation at hand. Bulk of the artillery units were dedicated to "close support" tasks, with a few medium and rocket units in the "general support" category to take on some targets in depth or for counter bombardment tasks.

The Present

5. Commencing in 1990s, Artillery embarked upon an ambitious yet pragmatic modernisation plan aimed towards overall capability development. Apart from a rapid expansion in number of units, the modernisation process involved mediumisation that implied acquisition of a varied mix of 155mm gun systems and long range vectors like the indigenous Pinaka, Russian Smerch and the joint Indo-Russian Brahmos Missiles. The modernisation process also involved major reorganisation of Surveillance & Target Acquisition (SATA), which changed the face of the simple Divisional Locating Batteries to versatile SATA Regiments and Batteries. The current weapon profile is extremely versatile with a right mix of all categories of mortars, guns, rockets and missiles. The 155mm Ultra Light Howitzer (ULH) and 155mm K9 Vajra (SP) have been inducted and operationalised, while the indigenous 155mm Dhanush Guns and 155mm Sharang (upgraded 130mm) are about to be inducted. In addition, the SATA units are holding modern Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) like Heron, surveillance equipment / radars (ELM 2140 & LORROS), weapon locating radars (ANTPQ 37 and the indigenous SWATHI), survey (DGPS) and meteorological equipment.

6. These state-of-the-art guns and equipment are riding on a totally new technological base, having operational efficiency and accuracy of fire through automated inbuilt features and linkages. Each new gun platform is an autonomous machine that knows its precise geographical

position on earth, and hence easily moves, deploys, gets aligned in the required direction within seconds, fires and comes out of action within no time, moves to the next position and repeats the same cycle; all with deadly accuracy and consistency with minimal dispersion of fire. These guns can even fire independently without the directions of a Command Post. Similarly, the weapon locating radars (WLR) are technically efficient with a chilling accuracy of detection, enabling fast response to enemy fire and their subsequent destruction. Automated fire control systems have enabled instant digital transmissions from the observer end to the gun end in a matter of seconds and without any voice transmissions. The manual and painstaking technical procedures of the past on various instruments and guns have simply been washed away!!

7. While we may applaud and also thump each other's backs for ensuring that the ongoing transformation process has remained on track, one must not lose sight of the fact that "modernisation is not restricted to mere replication of existing platforms". The new technology has to be absorbed by the gunners who have to train to handle the equipment proficiently. The main challenge thereafter lies in integrating the new systems, revising doctrines and reorienting the leadership with regard to the greater potential of Artillery in any futuristic conflict scenario, as also in the national dynamics.

9. There are four capability trends across the globe that are transforming the Artillery tenets & doctrines, which help us appreciate the contours of a futuristic battlefield, and exploit the new artillery systems to the hilt. These capability trends are, firstly, increase in range and better mobility of gun systems; secondly, increase in accuracy & lethality of fire, especially with rapid developments in the field of precision guided munitions / kits with multi sensor and active seeker capability; thirdly, better responsiveness that is being made possible due to the ongoing



Swathi WLR

revolution in big data processing and emerging technologies to develop efficient sensor to shooter communication links in a networked environment; and finally, an increasing array of effective defensive measures for enhancing survivability on the battlefield.

10. So, how then would Artillery facilitate effective prosecution of operations by the Army across the entire spectrum of conflict and in all possible conflict scenarios or in situations short of war?

The Future

11. Before elaborating on the implications of each of the capability developments on employment & application of artillery fire, we should be clear that the basic functions of Artillery will remain the same. These include degradation of objectives & other high value targets, breaking up enemy concentrations, providing firepower to facilitate manoeuvre and lastly counter bombardment fires. All these functions have a common underlying requirement of decisively shaping the battlefield in each phase of operation. Let me highlight the



Brahmos Missile

impact of each of the capability developments.

12. **Increase in Range & Mobility of Artillery.**

(a) With each passing day, ranges of standard artillery systems are being enhanced. While the modern 155mm guns and howitzers already have ranges between 30 to 50 km using conventional or improved conventional munitions, rocket systems have generally achieved ranges between 70 and 90 km. Research and development is on to increase these ranges further, perhaps to as much as 70 km with guns & howitzers using special ammunition,



Precision Fire

and rockets could go further to the 150 km bracket. The conventional cruise missiles like Brahmos can effectively engage targets upto 300 km. The most telling impact of this general increase in range is that Artillery today can be considered an Arm that can seamlessly operate with ease across all spaces in the strategic, operational and tactical domains. Extended ranges alter the battlefield matrix because commanders can influence wider & deeper. To fully exploit this range capability, we need to ensure that the functions of surveillance, targeting, guidance, post-strike damage assessment (PSDA) and delivery of devastating fire, are all prosecuted on a common integrated network centric platform, with RPAS as a vital entity in the entire process.

(b) A further consequence of the increase in range and better mobility at the tactical / operational level is that with the same number of guns, a larger number of units/formations can be supported on a dynamic and time sharing basis with minimal redeployments. It also implies that guns may be dispersed further to the rear for better survivability, and operate as a centrally managed divisional or corps fires group, but still provide support to each manoeuvring formation. This further implies that as a concept for all future requirements, artillery should preferably be employed in a centralised mode and decentralised to battle groups only when necessitated by operational or terrain compulsions.

(c) Our adversaries too are fielding systems with longer ranges. This means that dispersion in battle will be most essential, not only for the troops in direct contact but also along the lines of communications. Survivability of vital areas in depth will thus be critical, necessitating development and creation of effective defensive shields around the vital nodes. And finally, with the ability of Artillery to influence contact and depth battle with increased ranges, the focus should now shift to concentration of fires from different locations in small pockets, rather than concentration of guns & fire units. This will also enhance survivability in a battlefield.

13. **Increase in Accuracy & Lethality of Fire.**

(a) Mediumisation & Precision. Mediumisation, i.e increase in calibre, coupled with the precision munition revolution, has profoundly reshaped the stature of Artillery as an "Accurate & Lethal Arm"; in other words, Artillery has the capability to shape the battlefield very accurately. The development of multi-guidance systems has made it possible to strike dynamic ground targets with pinpoint precision in any space of the battlefield, whether tactical, operational or strategic. While global demand and competition are driving down costs to make precision strikes feasible for even tactical purposes, the reality is that the cost of such munitions still remains prohibitively high. Should we continue with the old and time-tested concept of delivering massed fires or should we switch over to a preference for precision fires?

(b) Massed Fires Vs Precision Fires. Technology today permits precision fires, and so the planners may tend to shift their focus from mass to precision particularly with regard to deep engagements with minimum collateral damage in a bid to achieve victory fastest with minimum effort. But both massed fires & precision fires will remain relevant in their own ways. In fact, depending upon the target profile and resource availability, accurate massed fires with a mix of conventional and dual purpose improved conventional munitions duly guided by a RPAS network can create havoc upon the enemy (as was illustrated in the Russian Artillery Assault on Ukrainian Mechanised Forces in 2014). Massed fires are also essential for an "assured break-in operation". Also, the wish list for precision guided munitions has to be toned down with a pragmatic cost analysis and realisation of the technological vulnerabilities of precision ammunition that rely on external guidance signals. So, while precision munitions are necessary, the same cannot be an en-masse substitute for conventional munitions. The solution, therefore, lies in arriving at a right mix and scaling of conventional and precision munitions. Further, the emerging technologies in "point precision" and "area precision" need to be tapped and developed indigenously, as also a host of cheaper technologies that have emerged in the form of "course correction fuzes" and "precision guidance strap-on kits".

14. **Better Responsiveness through Integrated Sensor to Shooter Links.** An integrated battlespace management system is increasingly becoming important for optimal exploitation of modern Artillery systems, in joint operations with the Air Force. Such systems will enable multi-dimensional visualisation of the battlefield in real time by way of fusing disparate sensor feeds into a common operating picture. The quantity of sensor data is continuing to expand, but in a high-intensity conflict, the capacity to process it is still very limited. It is visualised that Artillery, in the coming decades, will be suitably supported by a mix of low orbitting satellites, near-space persistent surveillance devices and a variety of RPAS & ground sensors to cater for its surveillance, targeting & PSDA requirements. Big Data Analytics, Artificial Intelligence and Swarm Technology would need to be utilized to enhance capabilities. And once, joint structures for surveillance and targeting from Division level upwards are fully in place, the capability of Artillery to execute theaterised surveillance and firepower missions in a Joint Operational Environment would receive an impetus.

15. Enhancing Survivability. Our modern artillery guns like the Bofors, K9 Vajra and Dhanush have already enabled us to shoot & scoot rapidly within seconds and minutes. Also the autonomous gun systems with automated fire control systems have made it possible to deploy a battery or regiment on extended frontages for dispersion in order to escape enemy fire. Technological advances are enabling ground forces today to counter rockets, artillery and mortar rounds through a range of soft and hard kill capabilities. Tremendous improvements have been made in production of efficient weapon locating radars like the indigenous SWATHI radar, which, once grouped with adequate number of shooters (medium guns & rockets) can bring about accurate, deadly and responsive counter bombardment within seconds, and in turn ensure own survivability. Going further, a host of technologies are coming up in the field of high-fidelity search and seek radars or lasers and high-powered microwaves, as also ballistic missile defence capabilities that can neutralise large numbers of rockets, missiles, guided munitions & RPAS. All these capabilities, once fully developed, matured and fielded as an integrated system, will further enhance the operational efficiency of Artillery as an Arm.



RPAS

Role of Artillery in Future

16. It is essential to highlight two major shifts that are taking place with regard to the role of Artillery.

17. **Guarantor of Effect with Destructive Fire.** Artillery is in an advanced stage of an all-encompassing transformation in its surveillance, targeting, counter bombardment and fire delivery platforms, resulting in enhanced reach, accuracy, lethality, faster mobility and responsiveness. It will be imprudent to unleash this power only for the traditional contact battle in form of supporting fires and tactical surveillance. A short and high intensity war warrants accomplishment of military objectives and getting to the enemy's centre of gravity through military assets that can "guarantee destructive effects" across the entire depth and width of the battle space. Thus, it is time to revisit the concept of employing fires from merely supporting the contact battle to a more deadly purpose. The aim of Artillery fires should thus shift towards destruction rather than mere neutralisation. However, this aspiration should be treated with pragmatism, in tune with logistical status particularly in terms of ammunition availability. It will be prudent to state that Artillery fires should be employed primarily for destruction in the critical stages of an operation, especially in an offensive mode, eg the break-in operation. The "Neutralisation Role" will always remain relevant in other situations, particularly to maintain the tempo of operations in any operational cycle. In future, its role may possibly grow to a pure annihilation / destruction one. That

The "new look Artillery" is bound to dominate the battlefield, either as an overwhelming and punishing force, or as a stopping force.

notwithstanding, against any adversary along our borders, the "new look Artillery" is bound to dominate the battlefield, either as an overwhelming and punishing force, or as a stopping force.

18. **Strategic Deterrence/ Compellance.** Another role which is clearly emerging for Artillery is of strategic deterrence, by virtue of its long range, accuracy and lethality. In addition, the strategic mobility of the Ultra Light Howitzer (ULH) and the battlefield mobility of the K9 Vajra (SP) contribute to the deterrent effect. Yet another dimension of deterrence will emerge once our RPAS get weaponised and that too with a SATCOM capability. Also, add on the Strategic Forces units armed with the Prithvi & Agni Missiles that are being manned by the Gunners. The environment today has been sensitised to the fact that Artillery can create strategic situations on enemy territory even without transgressing the borders. So, one can state with utmost confidence that Artillery of today and the future, has transformed itself into an instrument of power that is available with the Nation to create Strategic Deterrence, or to enforce Compellance through the National Flexible Response Strategy, particularly in situations short of war. It has a definite role in the escalatory matrix for which the long range guns / vectors will play a vital role. This may include posturing or firing for signaling our power, and to establish positive control over the escalatory ladder.



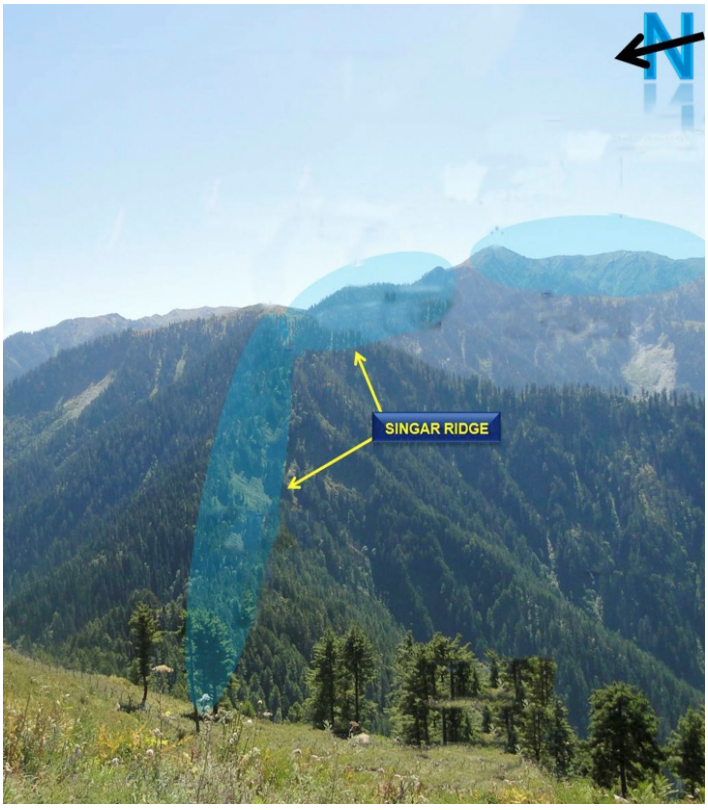
Conclusion

19. Through this article, I have endeavoured to convey the enormity of the transformation that has taken place in the Regiment of Artillery in the past four decades or so. We are fortunate to have witnessed this paradigm shift from the simple 25 Pounder Gun to the potent mix of 155mm guns, rockets & missiles duly integrated into automated networks of surveillance, targeting and fire control. The game has only started and this process of modernisation will continue over the coming decades, which, I am sure, will culminate with Artillery emerging as an even more deadly and devastating Combat Force Multiplier of the Indian Army.



Lt Gen RS Salaria, PVSM, VSM *was commissioned into 7 Field Regiment (GAZALA) in June 1980, the regiment which he later commanded. A graduate of Long Gunnery Staff Course and the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, the General Officer has also attended Higher Command Course at Army War College, Mhow and National Defence College at Delhi. His staff appointments include exposures to operational & logistical management at various Headquarters. The General Officer, apart from an instructional tenure in School of Artillery, was also a UN Observer in Angola and the Defence Attache in Tajikistan. The General Officer commanded an Artillery Brigade & Artillery Division. The General served as Commandant School of Artillery till his retirement in March 2020.*

OPERATION SINGER : Targeted strike along the Line of Control (LC)



The surgical strikes of 2016 became a household name in urban India. Targetted strikes along the LC had been taking place earlier too, the size and level of the operations were however on a smaller scale. In this article, the author describes a swift, short, targeted strike near the LC wherein terrorists were neutralized at their launchpad, indicating a variation to normal counter infiltration actions. Some names and locations have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

August 2014. For Pakistan and ISI, peak infiltration season – to send in 'cannon fodder' to fight their perceived Kashmir Liberation proxy war. Kupwara District had traditionally been favoured for infiltration due to its harsh terrain, inclement weather, dense forests and steep rivulets. A number of nalas (rivulets) flow Northwards from the towering Shamsabari Range into the Kishanganga River (Neelam River in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) to the North of this range. The terrorists trudge up the jungle clad slopes along these nalas, at times on dark nights, accompanied by guides for some distance. They were also trained to handle GPS and used 'Alpine Quest', a software app for navigation too.

Major Ashta led his small team of Special Forces Commandoes down from the Singer Ridge, an offshoot from the Shamsabari Range in Kupwara's Keran Sector. Intelligence sources had indicated that terrorists had arrived at a launchpad near Bugina on the banks of the Neelam River. As the commandoes made their way through minefields along cleverly disguised safe lanes, Ashta thought about the task at hand. He was to maintain surveillance along these nalas and pick up the terrorists movement.

The Special Forces Team came out of the minefields and silently moved down towards the LC. There was some thinning of the forest cover, consequently visibility improved. They had to be more cautious now. Ashta knew that Pakistani villagers tended to move up and cut trees for firewood and other purposes. Joginder, the leading scout, stopped at the edge of a clearing. Ashta moved up and saw some village dwellings further downhill, with maize fields dotting the landscape. The Special Forces squad took position, and scanned the village carefully.

Kupwara District had traditionally been favoured for infiltration due to its harsh terrain, inclement weather, dense forests and steep rivulets.

After a while, they saw a Pakistani soldier coming down from his post near the village. He made his way towards a prominent house, having a larger courtyard. Ashta sensed that this would be a suitable launchpad. As the soldier reached the house, a couple of tall, Pathani suit clad men came out and received him. Ashta smiled silently, his gut feeling was right – the men were armed, likely to be terrorists. The three of them sat down around a table in the courtyard. Ashta would have loved to fire at them then, but some clouds wafted up from the Neelam River and obscured the dwellings. As nightfall was approaching the Special Forces team made their way back to their forward infantry company base.

Ashta discussed the strike and its finer details with the Commander at Kupwara. They would be able to fire effectively at the terrorists launchpad from the edge of the clearing. The Commander queried whether they would be going across the LC. Ashta replied that by his reckoning they would be just about at the LC. How far would the Commandoes be from the target house was the Commander's next query. Ashta confirmed it would be about 400 to 500 metres. After some deliberations, Ashta received the green signal – Ashta jumped up with joy, in eager anticipation of a worthwhile commando action.

Early morning next day, the para commandoes moved down – Ashta and his buddy with a rocket launcher, two snipers, two light machine gunners, and two back up buddy pairs to support extrication. The team moved carefully, weapons ready – surprise too was important. Fortunately, a light drizzle commenced, drowning their sounds. By 11 o'clock, they were in position – no movement at the launchpad. The wait commenced, time appeared to crawl – soldiers often feel so while in an ambush. Around 1 o'clock, the weather cleared and visibility improved. The Special Forces Team was soon delighted to see the same Pakistan Army soldier moving towards the terrorist's house. Gazing at him through his binocular, Joginder realized that he was possibly in his thirties, and he was carrying a large



Representational Image

tiffin – food for the terrorists! Sensing impending action – the commandoes readied their weapons. On reaching the dwelling, the Pakistani soldier was received by three men, two of them armed. Thereafter, two more armed terrorists joined them at the table. The tiffin was opened, a feast possibly. The soldier stood by, lounging casually as the terrorists ate and chatted. Ideal time to engage – Ashta signalled the 'open fire'. The snipers opened fire, accurate single shots – the light machine gunners immediately joined in, spraying the table and the terrorists around with long bursts of accurate fire. Ashta and his buddy blasted the courtyard with an 84 mm High Explosive rocket. Swift, sharp strike – entire action would have lasted a minute or so. Ashta's team could see villagers running out of the fields, some women too scampered towards their dwellings. All hell had broken loose in the terrorists launchpad, Ashta could observe three to four of them lying near the table, lifeless. A couple of them may have crawled away. The terrorists group had been neutralized.

The Special Forces warriors pulled back to base swiftly, unscathed. Later, intelligence reports from across the LC revealed that four terrorists and the Pakistani soldier had died, the fifth terrorist was critically wounded. At Kupwara, the Commander complimented the Commando Team, "Well done, excellent operation! A classical targeted strike along the LC!!"



Lt Gen J S Sandhu, *PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) was commissioned into 6/5 GR (FF) in June 1980. He has vast operational experience having commanded his unit and formations in Jammu & Kashmir including the Srinagar Corps. He has also been an instructor in institutions of the defence services and retired as Military Secretary in Army Headquarters in 2019. He was a leader of great repute within the army. He is now the Editor of this magazine.*



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THE MEGHDOOT FORCE

- Genesis of Indian Special Forces (SF)

An extremely interesting narrative of actions behind enemy lines in the Poonch and Akhnoor Sectors in 1965 Indo- Pak War. The narrative highlights the role of Lieutenant Colonel Megh Singh and his 'Band Of Brothers' whose actions set the stage for the raising of Para Commando Battalions.

The Parachute (PARA) Commando battalions of the Indian Army, presently called Special Forces (SF), have their genesis in the Meghdoot Force of the 1965 Indo – Pak War. The MEGHDOOT FORCE morphed into 9 PARACOMMANDO, which split in June 1967 to form 10 PARACOMMANDO, earmarked for operations in the desert sector. The two Commando battalions proved their worth in the 1971 War with their daring raids at Mandhol (Poonch) and Chachro (Sind). In 1978, the existing 1 PARA battalion was converted to COMMANDO, and christened as 1 PARACOMMANDO. Later, all three were renamed as PARA (SF). Subsequently, HQ Special Forces and the Special Forces Training School were set up at Nahan in Himachal Pradesh. As the years went by, more units were brought into the PARA (SF) configuration. 21 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY, a regular infantry battalion, was converted to 21 PARA (SF) in 1996. The airborne battalions 2,3 and 4 PARA were configured as SF between 2003 and 2005 – becoming 2 PARA (SF), 3 PARA (SF) and 4 PARA (SF) in the process. 11 and 12 PARA (SF) were also raised in the last decade.

How did this process of establishing India's PARA (SF) commence? This story began in 1965 with Lieutenant Colonel Megh Singh, Vir Chakra when he raised the MEGHDOOT FORCE and the BADAL FORCE. At 1500 hours on 13 September 1965, the Draft War Establishment prepared

by Major Megh Singh was transmitted to the Army HQ and at 1600 hours something most unusual happened …The Government of India sanctioned the War Establishment virtually instantly, in the midst of the Indo Pak War. This sanction was then passed on telephone to the originator by the Army HQ with an added message that Major Megh Singh will be the Commanding Officer of this new unit, in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. This episode indicates the giant stature of that physically diminutive personality, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Indian Prime Minister. Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan was not merely a slogan.

Thus was born the unit named as 9th Battalion The Parachute Regiment which actually came into physical existence several months later on 01 July 1966 after the war at Udhampur, the then location of India's HQ 15 Corps. The unit was mandated to carry out operations in mountainous terrain.



Lt Col Megh Singh

Lieutenant Colonel Megh Singh, Vir Chakra

Megh Singh, a Rathod Rajput from Rajasthan was born on 01 March 1924 and was commissioned into Patiala State Forces. During the Second World War, the Maharaja of Patiala offered the services of his army to the British Monarch. Megh Singh's unit thus became a part of the 8th British Army and participated in the Italian Campaign. As a young subaltern he gained the experience of operating behind the German Lines in the tough terrain of Apennine Mountains. After independence, his unit became part of the newly created Brigade of Guards as 3 GUARDS. Major Megh Singh was a professional leader, served as an instructor at Indian Military Academy and later in Nagaland gaining rich experience in Counter Insurgency Operations. He attended Defence Services Staff College in 1955–56. In 1965, he was under some "cloud" and had sought retirement. Meanwhile he had been posted to HQ Western Command as General Staff Officer Grade 2 (Training) and reported there on 09 August 65.

By then, Pakistan had already started sending infiltrators in large groups into J & K. These infiltrators were carrying out convoy ambushes, attacking isolated posts, cutting lines of communications and disrupting essential services. One day during the morning briefing, while discussing these actions and the resultant casualties, the Army Commander thinking loudly and a bit in anguish said "can't we do something about this". Megh Singh also present for the briefing, stood up and said "Sir, I have the experience of operating behind the enemy lines, permit me to select few men and allow me to cross the ceasefire line into Occupied Kashmir. I will destroy their supply bases, rear dumps and mounting bases. Soon the infiltrators will be left with no logistic support and ultimately would be rendered ineffective."

Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, Vir Chakra looked at Megh Singh and then and there gave his decision "Megh, if you succeed in your mission, I promise that I will myself pip you with the rank badges of a Lieutenant Colonel." This incident is mentioned in the book 'In The Line Of Duty: A Soldier Remembers' by Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh.

Meghdoot Force Comes into Being

Major Megh Singh left Shimla on 22 August 65 and reached HQ 25 Infantry Division at Rajouri on 24 August 65. Luckily Major General Amreek Singh, the Division Commander had been his instructor at the Staff College. A free hand was given to Megh Singh to select the men to compose his force. He was then personally taken by the GOC on 27



An SF Commando Ready for Combat - Representational Image

August to HQ 93 Infantry Brigade at Poonch, the planned area of operations. Brigadier Zora Singh, the Brigade Commander was equally helpful and so were Commanding Officers of 3 RAJ RIF and 3 RAJPUT, both being old friends. He selected his men out of volunteers from these two battalions. 2/Lt Mohinder Singh, Naib Subedar Hamid Khan and 30 Kayam Khane Muslims were selected from 3 RAJ RIF and similar numbers came from 3 RAJPUT under 2/Lt N K Mukherjee and Naib Subedar Dil Jan. Major Megh Singh addressed his newly composed force :-

"Commandos, I am an unknown entity for you. You know nothing about me, as to who I am, where I have come from and what for. You are seeing me for the first time and must be wondering about my capabilities to have first asked you to volunteer and then lead you into this totally new type of mission. We have met personally today only. However our association dates back not to one year or one generation but to thousands of years. I am a Rajput from Rajasthan and most of you are from that area. History is evidence that our forefathers had lived together, worked together, fought together, won victories together and whenever required perished together in defending the honour and dignity of our motherland against our enemies. With such glorious tradition it does not matter whether we know each other or not. We will fight shoulder to shoulder in thickest of battles".

The above speech was given by Major Megh Singh on 27 August 65 to a group of 02 Officer's, 02 JCOs and less than 80 men who had volunteered and were selected from 3 RAJPUTANA RIFLES and 3 RAJPUT along with some sappers from 402 Field Company. A notable fact was that knowingly Megh Singh had selected 1 JCO and 30 Kayam Khane Muslims from 3 RAJ RIF. In his words, *"I had no doubts about the fighting qualities and integrity of Kayam Khane Muslims."*

Continuing with his talk to the volunteers, he spoke thus *"I have come as a volunteer with the express permission of Western Army Commander, to organise operations behind the enemy lines and create a situation in that it may become extremely difficult for Pakistan to support these infiltrators who are operating in our territory from the bases across the ceasefire line. I have decided to select you all for your fighting qualities, irrespective of caste, creed or religion. You will prove to Pakistan that when security of India is at stake then all Hindus and Muslims will unite. As worthy members of your respective communities, you will make any required sacrifice and prove your mettle, I have no doubt about. Let this golden opportunity not slip away, lest it may never come again. This is a big test for you all. What you achieve or fail to achieve will not only reflect on you, your community, your Regiment and your unit but it will have a profound effect on history too. In case you fail, history will hold you guilty. I know your worth and that is why I want you to join me.*

Finally he concluded, *"I am fully qualified to lead you in such types of operations, as I have operated behind the enemy lines in World War II in Italy and have planned and participated in many raids in Nagaland. I shall always be at the head of your column, even if it is to be done at the cost of my life. In return I wish to have your loyalty, obedience and co-operation. In the end, if there is anyone among you, who is not prepared to serve with me, he is free to walk out and go back to his unit"*

Not one person walked out. In fact they all stood up and gave a pledge that they would not hesitate to sacrifice their life to protect the dignity and honour of India and the National Flag. In the next fortnight, these men would be pioneers in the field of unconventional warfare in the post-independence Indian Army.

These officers, JCOs and men were then put through four days of intensive training and were launched on their first mission on 01 September 65. Thus was born the Force which in the first SITUATION REPORT of HQ 93 Infantry Brigade was referred as MEGHDOOT FORCE.

The Operations in Poonch Sector

Within the first 10 days of its raising, the Meghdoot Force had carried out five operations behind the Pakistani lines. These included infiltration into the Bandi Gopalpur Area to disrupt lines of communications of the enemy on the Road Dwarandi–Bandi Gopalpur from 01 to 03 September, thereby preventing enemy reinforcements reaching their RAJA POST which was being attacked by 93 Infantry Brigade. Thereafter, on 5th and 6th September, the Force captured NEJAPIR POST in conjunction with the brigade attack on RAJA and CHAND TEKRI POSTS, and followed up with the capture of ARIDHOK POST on 07 Sep. The Meghdoots continued their commando actions and raided an enemy Administrative Base South West of Kahuta on 8th September. The force then was tasked to effect the Uri Poonch

Link Up with own troops who had advanced Southward from Hajipir Pass. This link up was effected on 9th – 10th September.

GOC 15 Corps was so impressed with the results achieved by MEGHDOOT FORCE and its effectiveness behind the enemy lines that he ordered the Force to shift its area of operations to Chhamb Sector, where Pakistani troops were advancing towards Jaurian. Accordingly on 13 September, Major Megh Singh reported to HQ 15 Corps and had a meeting with the GOC, where he received the good news that the Government of India had agreed to the idea of a Commando Battalion. He framed the draft establishment for such a unit, and it was telegrammed post haste to the Army Commander and to Delhi. The sanction of the new organization was received the same day.



Lt Col Megh Singh with His Highness Maharaja (Honorary Brigadier) Bhavani Singh

The Chhamb Sector

While Major Megh Singh moved to Akhnoor, the Force itself was still in Poonch. In order to launch the Force into operations soon, Lt Mohinder and 12 men were helilifted from Poonch to HQ 10 Infantry Division at Akhnoor. Lt N K Mukherjee had to revert to his parent unit. However Megh Singh got his choice of other officers who were Captain C M Malhotra from 10 GUARDS, Captain B M Narang of 3 GUARDS and Captain B P Mathur, AMC. All these officers had operated with him in Nagaland during 1963-64. "Out of them Chandan Malhotra had displayed outstanding courage and devotion to duty of a very high order in number of operations that I had organised against the hostiles in Nagaland. He was also a volunteer to join me in my present assignment", said Major Megh Singh. A signal was immediately flashed by Army HQ to make these officers available, wherever they might be.

On 17 September the Army Commander and Corps Commander met Megh Singh at Akhnoor. The Army Commander was extremely pleased to see Megh Singh and patted him for the sterling actions in Poonch. Megh Singh moved with them to the forward Infantry Brigade, where he was briefed for the raid missions by Brigadier Manmohan Singh who happened to be a GUARDS officer too. Both the Generals wished him good shooting. While he was at the Brigade HQ, a band of Ex Service Men led by Naib Subedar Kanwal Singh met Major Megh Singh and volunteered to work with him in the Chhamb Sector. As these men hailed from the Chhamb area, Megh Singh realized that they would be of great help in guiding the MEGHDOOTS inside the enemy held territory. Megh Singh immediately spoke to the Corps Commander, and an on the spot decision was taken to issue weapons, equipment and uniforms to this band of 50 men. Thus was born BADAL FORCE, basically a civilian force. This Force gave an excellent account of themselves during the raid on the enemy base at Thil and during the attack on Nathal, the two actions which were under taken by the MEGHDOOT and BADAL FORCE in the Chhamb Sector.

While having tea with the forward troops on 18 November, All India Radio morning news broadcast mentioned that Major Megh Singh of MEGHDOOT FORCE had been awarded the VIR CHAKRA. This had a considerable morale boosting effect on all ranks of the Force. That night the Meghdoot and Badal Force raided the Thil enemy base.

On 22 September morning at around 0430 hours during the raid on Nathal, Megh Singh got hit by a machine gun burst. One bullet grazed over his left shoulder, second one passed through his left hand fingers and the third pierced through his right thigh. He did not let anyone know about it till the capture of Nathal. 2/Lt Sohal too was wounded. It was only by 1130 hours after a fierce battle that the base was captured. Reinforcements from 3 J&K Militia reached Nathal by 1230 hours and by dusk on 22 September, Meghdoot Force reached Sunderbani with the wounded and dead and along with all the captured weapons. This marked the end of the operations of Meghdoot Force. Major Megh Singh and Lt Sohal were evacuated to Military Hospital at Udhampur and other officers and men went back to their respective units.

Lieutenant General Harbaksh recalls in his memoirs "On the morning of 24 September 65, Megh Singh had just been evacuated from Akhnoor with a bullet in



Lt Col Megh Singh receiving the Vir Chakra Gallantry Award from the Hon'ble President of India

his thigh from one of his many escapades behind the enemy lines, in the presence of the Corps Commander, I pinned the rank of a Lieutenant Colonel on his shoulders". Thus the General Officer Commanding in Chief of our Western Army kept his promise.

The Vir Chakra Citation of Major Megh Singh

"Lt Col Megh Singh, then a Major with a Brigade in Jammu & Kashmir successfully conducted three important raids into enemy territory between 01 September and 11 September '65. On 02 September, his force blew a big culvert on Kotli – Bandi Gopalpur Road, disrupting the enemy's line of communication inside their territory. On 06 September, his column captured two important Picquets NEJAPIR and ARIDHOK. Again on 10 September, his column went 2 miles deep into enemy territory and affected the Uri -Poonch Link inspite of heavy enemy fire. In all these actions, by his exemplary courage and initiative, Lt Col Megh Singh inspired confidence in volunteers under him, causing confusion and casualties in enemy camps and facilitating the success of the Brigade's Operational Plan."

During the 22 Day War, MEGHDOOT FORCE conducted seven operations behind the enemy lines and inflicted 600 casualties on the enemy while losing 10 men. Nejapir was captured by Meghdoots with only one casualty. Capture of Aridhok would have required at least a battalion with full fire support, whereas Meghdoots captured it in broad daylight. Kahuta was captured with 60 men which otherwise would have required a minimum of an infantry brigade. At Thil, 35 men of Meghdoot Force pushed out a battalion of the enemy and thereafter beat back three of their determined assaults.

Undoubtedly, the Meghdoot Force delivered telling blows on the Pakistan Army, and is the worthy predecessor for the 9 PARA (SF), a unit with large number of operational successes and glories in J&K since 1965. After the war was over, things got back to "NORMAL" once again and it took 9 months for the issue of implementation orders for raising 9 PARA COMMANDO battalion. It seems there was a bid by GUARDS to have the Special Forces within their fold. However parachuting being one of the basic skills for the Special Forces, the new force was given to the Parachute Regiment. Lieutenant Colonel Megh Singh was deservedly the first Commanding Officer, and Subedar Major Guggan Singh, also from the Meghdoot Force was the first battalion Subedar Major.



Colonel Awadhesh Kumar *was commissioned into 9 PARA COMMANDOS in Jun 78. He has vast operational experience and served in OP PAWAN and OP RAKSHAK. He led the first SF deployment in Kashmir and has done a stint on Siachen Glacier too. He was associated with the creation of SF cell in Military Operations Directorate in 1987, and was Staff Officer to Commander, Ad Hoc HQ SF in OP PAWAN. The onus of raising HQ SF and SF Training School had fallen on him in 1993 as GSO2 till the arrival of Commander SF eight months later. He has trained abroad in Heavy Dropping from C130 Hercules and other training activities associated with helicopters. After retirement in June 2010, he has settled down in Agra.*





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THE FIRST RAID
by the Meghdoot Force

In any conflict, the first action for a unit is the most crucial, as it sets the tone for subsequent operations. Success in the first action raises the morale, and troops get emboldened for further victories. For a newly raised team of volunteers with not much contact amongst each other earlier, the first raid was undoubtedly a crucial test. Col Awadhesh Kumar narrates the minute details of this first action of the Meghdoot Force.

"Megh, I am planning an operation in the next few days to capture RAJA post and CHAND TEKRI Post opposite my brigade. Therefore I want you to ensure that during our attack, enemy is not able to rush any reinforcements to these posts from its major base in area Dwarandi, even area Bandi Gopalpur is having many administrative echelons. You are going to help me out by disrupting his road communication between DWARANDI and BANDI GOPALPUR. So plan your time and routes of infiltration and exfiltration, etc and let me know", thus spoke Brigadier Zora Singh, Commander of Poonch Brigade on 30 August 1965 at his Headquarters (HQ).

As necessary before launching any military operation, detailed information of the terrain and enemy locations is required. Megh hence visited various posts to the West of Poonch as these gave a good view of the routes leading to Bandi Gopalpur (now called Bandi Abbaspur) and the road coming from Bandi Gopalpur towards Dwarandi.

Undoubtedly, there were risks but the enemy would not expect someone to infiltrate through this wellguarded route, so Meghdoot Force could achieve complete surprise, surmised Megh as he surveyed the area. But this kind of audacity required good field craft, stealth and a bit of luck.

After dusk on 01 Sep 1965, the Meghdoots left their base and moved to the Cease Fire Line. With 2/ Lt N K Mukherjee leading, the Meghdoots entered the selected nallah and crossed into Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), a total of three Officers, two JCOs and 63 Other Ranks. The force was self-contained for three days and was carrying about 100 kg of Tri-Nitro-Toluene (TNT) explosives. It was for the first time after independence that a determined band of Indian Army soldiers were going for a planned commando mission deep inside the enemy held territory.

Senses on alert, with nerves on edge, any unexpected sound and the commandoes would promptly go to the ground. It took time to get the column moving again. Losing contact within the column was quite frequent (and believe me, knowing that every finger in proximity is on the trigger, and fully tensed, making contact again in pitch darkness is really a terrifying prospect which I have myself faced in the jungles of Sri Lanka). The going was very slow…… it would take a few more years of training when the warriors of 9 PARA (SF) would transform into expert fast moving, noiseless mountain/jungle creatures or perfect ghosts, while moving at night.

Before twilight, on reaching a suitable area, the Meghdoot Force set up a commando base or simply put, went into hiding. The hide was about nine kilometres inside enemy held territory. They rested that day and reviewed the errors committed the previous night. As darkness fell on 2nd September, Major Megh Singh proceeded further with a smaller force of three Officers, one JCO and 13 soldiers including two Sappers. The rest of the force remained at the hide under Naib Subedar Dil Jan, as a reserve.

The progress of this small 'band of brothers' was naturally faster, though barking of dogs from isolated houses/villages enroute was quite scary. On hearing such barking they always went to ground before moving again. During one such halt, suddenly the dogs started barking once again. Taking the barking as a cue of some other activity in the vicinity, Mukherjee used his binoculars to scan the area ahead. He spotted an enemy patrol of about 15 troops heading towards the Meghdoots. Quickly, maintaining absolute stealth the commandoes shifted their position and froze in the darkness. They had a more important task to do, rather than ambushing this patrol. The enemy patrol passed through and the incident gave every Meghdoot full confidence in his field craft and in his battle skills.



Representational Image

Megh Singh and his 16 Meghdoots reached area Bandi Gopalpur, the administrative base of the enemy, around midnight. There were several administrative installations and artillery positions. In fact guns were intermittently firing towards Poonch. Each time the guns fired, Megh Singh and his men had a feeling of acute indignation but they were too few in number to raid and destroy the guns. So they moved towards Dwarandi, parallel to the road. A short while later, headlights of three vehicles were seen in the distance coming from the Bandi Gopalpur side. A quick ambush position was taken but soon the vehicles switched off their headlights, they had possibly halted somewhere along the road.

After an hour, Megh Singh decided to move again towards Dwarandi. Four kilometres down the road, they came to a big culvert about 30 to 40 metres long and so located that no diversion off the road was possible. This was an excellent location to completely disrupt the enemy's road communication links. There was a big house looking like a barrack located quite near to the culvert and overlooking a good portion of the road.

Prior to blowing of the culvert, it was necessary to first target the enemy if any in the big house. Mukherjee's party crawled to the



Representational Image

house and reported that the house was totally empty. His party then set up a road block position towards Dwarandi.

Major Megh Singh took position towards Bandi Gopalpur with a small party. Lt Mohinder Singh's party along with Subedar Hamid Khan and the two Sappers were tasked to blow up the culvert. It was a strong concrete culvert and there was a lingering doubt in the minds of the officers whether the explosives were adequate to destroy it. The explosives were placed at appropriate points on the structure as advised by the Sappers (expertise in explosives too would come to the Special Forces within a few years). Once the safety fuse was lit, every one waited with bated breath at a safe distance. Then there was a loud explosion as nearly 100 kg of TNT went up in a flash.

The culvert had nearly vanished and with this the road communication between Dwarandi and Bandi Gopalpur was completely paralyzed till reconstruction of the culvert. Now with all the enemy positions in and around the area fully alerted, the onerous task of getting back safely began. As it was their first mission many kilometres inside enemy held areas, there was nervousness amongst the commandoes. There were no flanking friendly troops, no supporting force behind nor any mortar or Medium Machine Gun to give fire support. To return to base you would have to fight it out. The gutsy warriors quickly took stock and scooted from the area.

Major Megh Singh decided to follow the shortest and quickest route back. The Force moved along existing tracks through the villages and maize fields instead of the treacherous nullah. They counted on the biggest advantage that villagers were unlikely to suspect that these men so deep inside were not from the Pakistan Army. The only danger was a head on encounter with an enemy patrol. Their audacity paid off, no enemy patrol was encountered enroute and without any mishap Megh Singh and party reached the hide location. Then the Meghdoot Force headed back towards the ceasefire line and were back in own territory at dawn on 3rd September. The news of the success spread like wildfire within the brigade sector. It boosted the morale of the troops and also enhanced the reputation of MEGHDOOT FORCE in the entire 15 Corps Zone. Within no time the brigade HQ received a number of requests from volunteers to join this Force for subsequent operations. Brigadier Zora was extremely happy to have this Force in his sector. Thus ended the first operation of Meghdoot Force, it was a small step towards greater battle hardiness. Hereafter it was just DIL MAANGE MORE.



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India's SPECIAL FORCES
- Fearless and Fierce

There have been several restructuring steps taken in the last couple of years to make the Indian Armed Forces more potent and ready to meet contemporary challenges. One of the major steps taken has been the raising of the Special Operations Division. This joint organization would fuse the assets of the three Armed Forces and other agencies to enable synergistic conduct of future special operations at the strategic level. The author recounts the role and development of Indian Special Forces, and discusses relevant aspects for meeting emerging security challenges.

"I would only send you into harm's way when it was absolutely necessary, with a strategy and well-defined goals, with the equipment and support that you needed to get the job done. Because that's what you rightfully expect and that is what you rightfully deserve"

- President Obama Farewell Address, 3 Jan. 2017

Introduction

Special Forces of any nation are its crème de la crème, highly specialized to execute unconventional operations in politico-military sensitive environments. They are selected, trained and equipped for undertaking tasks across the entire spectrum of conflict and employed on high risk missions. As their employment is characterized by surprise, low visibility and clandestine nature, they are tools of statecraft ideally utilized below the conventional threshold to meet hybrid and asymmetric challenges.

The US Doctrine for Joint Special Operations has defined Special Operations as "Operations conducted by specially organized, trained and equipped military forces to achieve military, political, economic or psychological objectives by

unconventional military means in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas. These operations are conducted during peacetime competition, conflict, and war, independent or in coordination with operations of conventional, non-special operations forces". Over the past two decades, the US Special Operations Forces (SOF) have been in the lead in fighting terrorism in Iraq & Afghanistan, and the conceptual approach with application has come from their extensive intervention and power projection experiences.

India's Special Forces trace their origin to Meghdoot Force, an ad hoc Commando unit that was organized with volunteers from various Infantry units by Major Megh Singh.

Indian Special Forces have been employed extensively in all major operations to include Operation Pawan (1987-89), Operation Vijay (1999), and extensive counter insurgency operations in Jammu & Kashmir and the North East states of India since early 1990s. The successful special operation destroying militant camps along the Indo-Myanmar border in June 2015 and the surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LC) in Pakistan occupied Kashmir in September 2016 have proven the distinct ethos and motivation of these gallant men in combat and special missions. The brief history of our Special Forces is a saga of courage and valour, led by young professionals with guts and glory.

Major Operations - a Rich Heritage

1971 Indo-Pak War : 9 Para Commando conducted a classic raid on an artillery battery deployed near village Mandhol in Poonch Sector on the night of 13 December. An intense gunfight took place with Pakistani soldiers, but the raiders destroyed all the six guns and returned to their base. This raid resulted in Pakistan military assigning additional soldiers to defend their artillery guns in the sector.

10 Para Commando executed multiple vehicle borne raids at Chachro, Virawah, Nagarparkar and Islamkot



located about 80 kms inside hostile territory, disrupting supply lines, creating confusion and capturing installations between 5th and 8th December 1971. The unit displayed its desert warfare skills by traversing a distance of over 500 kms and executing the raids with no casualties.

1987-89 Operation Pawan : While the initial heliborne assault in Jaffna University on the night of 11 October 1987 by 10 Para Commando resulted in a tragic failure mainly due to lack of adequate intelligence, the Para Commando battalions regrouped and made sustained efforts subsequently. This resulted in the capture of Jaffna Peninsula and forced LTTE militants to take refuge in forests. This battle experience led the units to be deployed in Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa in 1988. The Special Forces undertook many successful raids and search & destroy missions in the most difficult jungles of North East Sri Lanka. The units returned with invaluable operational experiences which laid the foundations for their special skills in fighting counter insurgency.

Counter-Insurgency Operations : Special Forces units have conducted major successful operations in Jammu & Kashmir and North Eastern states with professional finesse and proficiency over the last two decades. Their, role, tasking and expectations have increased substantially as a counter-terrorism force, conducting pro-active raids and hostage rescue missions. Over the years, the recognition of their spectacular achievements by highest awards of the nation for bravery and sacrifice is a testimony to the levels of motivation and risk-taking abilities. They have demonstrated single minded devotion and superlative leadership at all levels in critical missions.

Exceptional leadership has been the hallmark of Special Forces, making them the ultimate force multiplier with their do-or-die attitude across the spectrum over the past two decades.

Leadership as the Defining Factor

Exceptional leadership has been the hallmark of Special Forces, making them the ultimate force multiplier with their do-or-die attitude across the spectrum over the past two decades. There are many extraordinary tales of fearlessness and sacrifice among India's elite warriors, some well known and most under the wraps for confidentiality reasons. To briefly elucidate the tale of valour and raw courage of one such brave heart, Major Mohit Sharma whose life portrait adorns the entrance to the Ministry of Defence office in South Block, his innocent smile greeting the Defence Minister, Chief of Defence Staff and Service Chiefs every day, as he was awarded India's highest honour, Ashoka Chakra in 2010.

Mohit was so thin and skinny that he had to make extra efforts to gain weight and join the National Defence Academy in 1995. After excelling in training in the academies, he joined an Infantry unit only to volunteer for a Rashtriya Rifles battalion, honing his skills and techniques in counter insurgency operations. But his heart craved for more action and adventure, and he volunteered for Special Forces. Undeterred by not making it in the first attempt due to health reasons in 2002, he volunteered again and broke the glass ceiling by donning the coveted Balidan badge in 2003. Those who knew him are witness to his never-say-die spirit, risk taking ability and raw courage while operating in Shopian sector in South Kashmir. His covert operation to infiltrate the militant group Hizbul Mujahideen and neutralize the top leadership single handedly in 2004, is a folklore study encompassing all the tenets of guile, courage and intuition.

Having been a valiant warrior in fighting insurgency in the jungles, he led a team in dense Haphruda Forest of North Kashmir to track infiltrating terrorists in March 2009. In the course of the operation, heavy exchange of fire wounded his two scouts but he recovered them to safety and killed two terrorists. In spite of serious wounds sustained in the gunfight and sensing danger to his buddies, he charged and killed two more terrorists at close quarters and was awarded the Ashoka Chakra for his exceptional gallantry beyond the call of duty on Republic Day, 2010. His story continues to motivate the new generation of 'Band of Brothers' in the Special Forces, as are the sacrifices of other Ashoka Chakra awardees to include Captain Arun Jasrotia (1996), Major Sudhir Walia (2000), Paratrooper Sanjog Chhetri (2004), Captain R Harshan (2007), Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan (2009), Havildar Gajendar Singh (2009), Havildar Bahadur Singh (2009) and Lance Naik Mohan Goswami (2016), who demonstrated the fighting spirit and 'Never Give In' attitude in service to the nation.

Framework for likely role and tasks

The employment of Special Forces in war is focused on 'Shaping the Battlefield' with reconnaissance, disruption and dislocation missions to increase friction for the enemy by disproportionate damage to critical assets. The 'Concept of Relative Superiority' through surprise and shock action is the raison d'etre for Special Forces to execute significant missions in support of conventional operations by addressing the enemy's centre of gravity.

The operational spectrum of warfighting is being driven by technological advancements in communications, computing, armament and mobility with war fighting changing the paradigm to asymmetric warfare, terrorism and proxy wars. With conventional wars receding as an option, limited short duration engagements below the nuclear threshold with punitive strikes are emerging as likely conflict scenarios. The Special Forces in coordination with Cyber, Space and Artificial Intelligence capabilities can provide us a credible response mechanism to deal with emerging challenges comprehensively.

India's rise as a major economic power with increased strategic interests in the immediate and extended neighbourhood can be best safeguarded by enhancing the role of Special Forces to address various contingencies. Leading nations of the world have employed Special Forces as a highly flexible and low-cost tool of statecraft to achieve political outcomes without resorting to escalatory conflicts. Special operations are aimed to achieve psychological dislocation of an adversary's critical assets and being sensitive in peace time, need political oversight at the highest level. They are 'High Risk, High Gain' missions focused to deliver disproportionate results. A foolproof degree of planning, accurate intelligence

and detailed preparation is mandatory to ensure desired outcomes. Special Forces employ both direct and indirect approaches to execute allotted missions, maintaining a fine balance between 'Need to Know' security and extensive coordination with various agencies. A high level of individual, terrain related combat expertise with proficiency in cultural and language skills is inescapable for mission success.



Present Status in the Geo-strategic Environment

As our Special Forces evolved and trained for high risk operations, a holistic assessment points out that they have been utilized sub-optimally on tactical missions routinely rather than strategic and unconventional missions for high value targets. Analysts have pointed out that the potential of Special Forces to serve as instruments of national policy has not manifested itself due to rapid proliferation of units, inadequate high technology equipment and lack of appropriate command & control structures. The Special Forces truths that 'They cannot be mass produced' and 'Quality supercedes Quantity' appear to have been overlooked by planners.

However, in keeping with the serious challenges posed by the two inimical nuclear armed neighbours and regional constraints, the Special Forces units have focused to achieve enhanced operational efficiency with cohesive training, terrain specialization and effective equipment. The highly successful surgical strikes executed in September 2016 brought to fore the potential of Special Forces to deliver at the politico-military strategic level. All the skills and rich combat experiences of the elite force had combined to deliver under the toughest and most challenging situation prevailing on the LC.

The increased awareness and exposure of the environment to Special Forces tenets and operational philosophy, with the willing support of the political leadership to exploit the attributes of unconventional forces led to the establishment of the Special Operations Division in 2018. By virtue of being a joint force with dedicated intelligence, strategic mobility and advance weaponry and mandated to function in crisis situations, it has great potential to meet the politico-strategic tasks in future. As India's geo-strategic influence increases, the force can undertake diverse roles to include safeguarding our national security interests and assets, rescue of Indian nationals, assistance to United Nations peacekeeping missions and friendly foreign countries when required. The centralized command and control hierarchy with requisite interfaces with other agencies and a versatile joint structure empowers the Special Forces fraternity to live up to and meet emerging security developments.

Conclusion

India's Special Forces have proved their mettle in the most challenging combat situations over the last few decades steeled by their ethos, commitment, espirit-de-corps and superior leadership. As Indian national security interests and assets expand with expanded foreign policy objectives, Special Forces would be called upon to protect and project our strategic capacities. The recent raising of the Special Operations Division has been timely and reflects the need for a robust joint force to address security challenges in India's sphere of influence. Towards this end, the optimal employment, deployment and exploitation of restructured Special Forces to meet our foreign policy, security and economic interests is an idea whose time has come.



Major General Ashok K Dhingra *was commissioned into 1 PARA (SF) in 1983 and has varied operational experiences, including in Sri Lanka (IPKF) where he was severely wounded. He went on to command his Battalion in Jammu & Kashmir. He has also commanded the prestigious Parachute Brigade and a Division on the Northern Borders. He was the Defence & Military Attache to USA during 2013-16 and raised the Special Operations Division integrating the Special Forces of the three Services, prior to superannuating in March 2020.*



Indian SF commandos slithering from a MI - 17 helicopter

SPECIAL AIR OPERATIONS OVER THE YEARS

Most special operations have an air component as a vital cog in the operation. Special Forces personnel have to be often flown in and out of the area of operations, invariably in secrecy and with complex coordination. In this article, the author recounts various such missions wherein the Air Force played a crucial role.

The need for having a select group of warriors to take on special tasks was felt centuries ago. Between 27 BC and 426 AD, Roman fleets used small, fast, camouflaged ships operated by selected men for scouting and commando missions. In Japan, Ninja warriors were used for reconnaissance, espionage and as assassins, bodyguards or fortress guards. Chinese strategist Jiang Ziya in his Six Secret Teachings (475-221 BC) mentions recruiting talented and motivated men into specialised elite units. The British Indian Army created the Corps of Guides in 1846 and the Gurkha Scouts in the 1890s for special roles. In 1940, the British Commandos were formed to unleash a reign of terror down the enemy coast in German occupied Europe.

"The future was in air dropping them"

One of the primary missions of the Special Forces (SF) is to conduct unconventional or clandestine guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines. Most major armies created SFs during World War II, and they served in all theatres. Advent of aviation made insertion of troops behind enemy lines easier and also helped to extricate SF troops after a mission. Air operations conducted in support of special operations and other clandestine covert and psychological activities are called Special Air Operations. SFs are inserted through physical landing at an airstrip with minimal facilities and aids, or Para-dropped behind enemy-lines.

All major Air Forces of the world have special operations aircraft. USA, because of global commitments, has an entire Command dedicated to special operations – the Special Operations Command, which handles missions ranging from precision application of firepower, infiltration, exfiltration, resupply and refuelling of SF operational elements. The Indian Air Force (IAF) has a variety of transport aircraft capable of special operations, viz., An-32, Il-76, C-130J Hercules and C-17 Globemaster. The IAF also operates a range of helicopters capable of special operations, such as the ALH variants, Mi-17 variants, the Mi-26 and CH-47 Chinook, while



Lt.Col.Pannu (driving the jeep) with other officers of 2 PARA at Tangail



C17 Globemaster

Armed helicopters / Attack Helicopters viz., Light Combat Helicopter, Mi-25/35, AH-64 Apache, provide the teeth to a mission.

Let me recall some of the documented Special Air Operations since World War II.

Operation Longcloth: The Burma Campaign (WW II) [1] [2]

Shortly after Japan went to war against the Allies in 1941, Japanese troops swept through British territory, carrying out lightning strikes in Hongkong, Malay and Burma. The British were pushed back swiftly, almost to the border of India.

By the beginning of 1943, the British and Americans were ready to push back the Japanese. Lieutenant Colonel Orde Wingate, a specialist in irregular warfare with proven experience in guerilla operations in Palestine and Abyssinia was assigned to the Burma theatre. Wingate developed a strategy called Long Range Penetration (LRP). His theory was that formations of troops supplied from the air could operate for long periods in the jungle. LRP envisaged brigade strength forces infiltrating Japanese-held territory. Resupplied / replenished by air, with no dependence on supplies by land-based transportation, it would permit the forces to be mobile and unpredictable. It was envisaged that they would cause havoc against enemy supply and communication lines. The British Army created a special force called the Chindits for such operations who entered into Burma in early February 1943. The campaign was given the code name Operation Longcloth. This was the first time the Chindits and LRP were being tested.

Air supply was provided by a detachment of Lockheed Hudson and DC-3 Dakota aircraft of 31 Squadron Royal Air Force operating from Agartala in eastern Bengal. Fighter escorts were provided when the range permitted but were not available when drops had to be made at short notice. The drops would be undertaken at the designated drop zones, selected by the Chindits. By end of March 1943, the Chindits had advanced so far that they were at the extreme range for their air supplies and airdrops were becoming difficult. In late March 43, Wingate was ordered to withdraw. Of the 3,000 officers and men that went into Burma only 2,182 came back, after having operated deep in enemy held territory for several months. However, Wingate had proved that his LRP theory could work. Most importantly, it proved the possibility of using air supplies for maintaining such operations in the jungle.

The Tangail Airdrop: Eastern Theatre of the Indo-Pak War of 1971 [3] [4]

The Tangail Airdrop was an airborne operation mounted on 11 December 1971 by the 2nd battalion of the Indian Army's Parachute Regiment (2 PARA) during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. The main objective of the operation was the capture of Poongli Bridge on the Jamuna River to cut off the Pakistani 93rd Brigade and prevent it from reaching Dacca (Dhaka) for defending it.

The Tangail Airdrop involved An-12 (Antonov), C-119 (Fairchild Packet), DHC-4 (Caribou) and DC-3 (Dakota) aircraft from 11 Squadron and 48 Squadron. The 700 paratroopers were led by Lt Col Kulwant Singh Pannu. The mission took off from Dum Dum (Calcutta) and Kalaikunda (Kharagpur) airfields on 11 December at 1423 hours and touched ground at 1630 hours. By 1900 hours, they had captured their main objective, cutting off the Pakistani 93 Brigade retreating from the north. The paradrop behind the enemy lines was India's 'trump card', which led to the fall of Dacca. 2 PARA were subsequently the first Indian forces to enter Dacca. Lt Col Kulwant Singh was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra (MVC) for his leadership in battle. For their

[1] Operation Longcloth by Andrew Knighton (https://www.warhistoryonline.com/world-war-ii/operation-longcloth-fighting-panache-glamour-cheek-second-world-war-burma.html)
[2] Chindits Special Force Burma 1942-44 (http://www.chindits.info/Longcloth/Main.htm)
[3] Lt Gen Nirbhay Sharma in The Print dated 11 Dec 2019) (https://theprint.in/author/lt-gen-nirbhay-sharma-retd).
[4] Aviation and Defence Universe (https://www.aviation-defence-universe.com/tangail-airdrop-landmark-operation-1971-indo-pak-war/)

role, the unit received Battle Honours for Poongli Bridge and Theatre Honours for Dacca.

The Hostage Rescue Mission at Entebbe [5] [6]

On 27 June 1976, an Air France flight was hijacked at Athens by four radical elements. The airliner was forced to fly to Entebbe, Uganda, where the hijackers were joined by additional accomplices. The hijackers held Jewish and Israeli passengers hostage in the terminal building of Entebbe airport, demanding the release of 53 militants imprisoned in Israel, Kenya, West Germany, and elsewhere.

The Israeli Government assumed the responsibility of the situation. Opinion was divided within the decision makers in Israel about staging a rescue operation due to the high risk involved. While this was being debated, the Special Forces were instructed to go ahead with the planning and preparation for a rescue mission.

It was planned for four C-130 Hercules and two Boeing 707s to undertake the 4000 km trip, carrying 180 soldiers, 40 aircrew, 21 doctors and other staff. Fighter escorts were planned for the mission. Only one C-130 Hercules would land at Entebbe for the actual rescue, carrying 33 soldiers, a car, a jeep and other equipment. Since the plan was to insert during the night, the aircrew of the Hercules practiced landing on an unlit runway.

On 03 July 1976, the mission got airborne from Sharm el Sheikh at about 1530 hours, though the green signal from the government was still awaited. The planned route often involved flying at very low levels. It was only at 1830 hours, when the aircraft were over Ethiopia, that the go ahead was received. Operation Thunderbolt was ON. Despite the long flight, often at low levels, through turbulence and bad weather, the Hercules landed at Entebbe at 2301 hours, just one minute behind the planned landing time.



The Hostage Rescue Mission at Entebbe

As soon as the plane landed, the soldiers disembarked with a car and the jeep. After a firefight lasting just seven minutes, in which one Israeli soldier, Yoni Netanyahu, lost his life, the soldiers reached the hostages. The soldiers escorted the bewildered and sleepy hostages to the waiting airplane, which took off immediately. Between the C-130 landing with the commandos and taking off with the hostages, only 52 minutes had elapsed. The Hercules flew on to Nairobi for refueling. All seven hijackers and 45 Ugandan soldiers were killed. As a part of the plan, another commando detachment raided a nearby Ugandan airbase and destroyed 11 MiG fighters parked there to prevent them from scrambling in pursuit.

The Entebbe Raid is considered one of the most successful special operations ever conducted.

Operation Eagle Claw (Iran Hostage Crisis and the Attempted Rescue) [7]

The Iran hostage crisis was a diplomatic standoff between the United States and Iran. Fifty-two American diplomats and citizens were held hostage for 444 days from 04 November 1979, to 20 January 1981 in the US Embassy in Tehran, after a group of Iranian college students took over the Embassy. When diplomatic negotiations failed to win the release of the hostages, President Jimmy Carter ordered the U.S. military to attempt a rescue mission called Operation Eagle Claw. The mission was launched on 24 April 1980.

Eight helicopters were sent to the first staging area, but only five arrived in operational condition. One encountered hydraulic problems, another was caught in a sand storm, and a third showed signs of a cracked rotor blade. While planning the operation, it had been decided that the mission would be aborted if fewer than six helicopters remained operational, despite only four being absolutely necessary. The field commanders advised President Carter to abort the mission,

[5] Entebbe Raid (https://www.britannica.com/event/Entebbe-raid)
[6] https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/we-had-ensured-we-would-shoot-first-remembering-the-entebbe-raid/story-nlAjymYVrg976XIzE0J5OJ.html (Updated: Jul 02, 2020) by Pramit Pal Chaudhuri
[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Eagle_Claw

which he did. As the U.S. forces prepared to withdraw, one of the helicopters crashed into a transport aircraft that contained both servicemen and jet fuel. The resulting fire destroyed both aircraft and killed eight American servicemen. It also resulted in the death of one Iranian civilian. Five helicopters were abandoned by the US Forces and were captured by Iranians. This failed mission brings out the risks involved in undertaking special operations.



6 PARA gets ready to fly to Male in Nov 1988

Op Cactus : Special Operations by Indian Armed Forces in Male, Maldives. [8] [9]

India carried out an extremely important Special Operation in 1988 when a group of mercenaries besieged the island of Male, the capital of Maldives, in an attempted coup to overthrow the government of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. The runway for Male is on the adjacent island of Hulhule, a distance of more than 600 Km from Thiruvananthapuram. An appeal from the Maldivian Government was received by the Indian Government in the early hours of 3rd November 1988. The heavy lift Il-76 Squadron of the IAF at Agra, 44 Squadron, and the co-located PARA Battalion were pressed into action at about 1100 hours. Very little information was available on the number of mercenaries, their weapons and the extent of their operation. There were no aviation maps of Maldives available. The crew of the Il-76 aircraft planned with whatever information they could gather. By 1800 hours, two Il-76 aircraft with troops and load were ready for departure. The lead aircraft landed at Hulhule at round 2200 hours after nerve-wracking uncertainty about the runway being fit to land and whether the airport was under hostile elements. It was a daring act fraught with risk, but was successful due to the courage, skills and capabilities of the Il-76 aircrew and technicians. On landing, the runway was immediately secured by the paratroopers. After commandeering boats, the commandos crossed over to Male, located and rescued President Gayoom. Within hours, the control of the capital was restored to President Gayoom's government. Buildup of forces continued the next day, with IL-76s, An-12s and An-32s flown to the Maldives from Thiruvananthapuram, while IAF Mirage 2000s made low passes over the scattered islands in a show of force. What is not so commonly known is that two Mi-8 helicopters of the IAF, one of 112 Helicopter Unit and one of 119 Helicopter Unit were also despatched to Maldives on 04 November 88, taking off from Thiruvananthapuram and landing at Hulhule, after flying more than 600 kms over a featureless sea, encountering bad weather enroute. Over the next few days, they made a valuable contribution by providing inter-island transportation for the troops and thereby restoring the writ of the Government. Op Cactus demonstrated the swift and effective Indian military response, made possible by the IAF's strategic airlift capability.

Operation Neptune Spear : Killing of Osama Bin Laden [10]

The hunt for Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind of 9/11, lead the Americans to a non-descript, three storied building in Abbottabad, Pakistan, a garrison town of Pakistan. Located deep within Pakistan, it would be a complex task to reach him and neutralize him. US Navy Seals were assigned to the mission. The plan was to use helicopters for the actual mission. A total of 79 commandos and a dog (Belgian Malinois) were involved in the raid, which took place on the night of 01- 02 May 2011.

Getting airborne from Bagram Air Base in north eastern Afghanistan, the Seals staged through Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan, and flew into Pakistan air space. Two modified Black Hawk helicopters were used for the raid itself; these were the "stealth" versions that flew more quietly and were harder to detect on radar than conventional models.

The much larger Chinook heavy-lift helicopters were employed as backups, some inside Pakistan and some on the Af-Pak Border. The mission was

[8] Op Cactus (https://indianairforce.nic.in/op-cactus)
[9] IAF'S Mi-8 Helicopters in Op Cactus by Wing Commander R Raju Srinivasan (Retd)
[10] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_Osama_bin_Laden

supported by an array of other aircraft, including fixed-wing fighter jets and drones. The Air Force had a full team of combat search-and-rescue helicopters available.

The raid was scheduled for a time with little moonlight so the helicopters could enter Pakistan "low to the ground and undetected". The helicopters used hilly terrain and nap-of-the-earth techniques to reach the compound without appearing on radar and alerting the Pakistani military. The flight from Jalalabad to Abbottabad took about 90 minutes. According to the mission plan, the first helicopter would hover over the compound's yard, while the commando team slithered to the ground, and entered the building from the ground floor. The second helicopter would fly to the northeast corner of the compound and deploy the interpreter, the dog and handler, and four SEALs to secure the perimeter.

As they hovered above the target, the first helicopter experienced a mishap and crashed. The pilot managed to cushion the crash. None of the SEALs, crew, or pilots on the helicopter was seriously injured in the soft crash landing. The other helicopter landed outside the compound and the SEALs advanced into the house as planned.

In the ensuing action, Osama bin Laden was killed in the raid, along with some others. The SEAL team leader radioed, the code word for success - "Geronimo, EKIA" (Enemy Killed In Action).

While bin Laden's body was taken by U.S. forces, the bodies of the four others killed in the raid were left behind at the compound and later taken into Pakistani custody. The raid was intended to last 40 minutes. The time between the team's entry in and exit from the compound was 38 minutes.

Since the damaged helicopter was unable to fly the team out, it was destroyed to safeguard its classified equipment. The SEALs "packed the helicopter with explosives and blew it up". One of the two Chinooks held in reserve was dispatched to carry part of the team and bin Laden's body out of Pakistan.

Operation Just Cause

In late December 1989, United States SF personnel executed an air invasion of the Republic of Panama using C130 variants and MH-60 helicopters. Panamanian President Manuel Noriega was captured, and taken back to USA.

Hellfire Mission

On 3 January 2020, a United States drone strike near Baghdad International Airport targeted and killed Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), while his cavalcade was moving out of the airport. Soleimani was Iran's commander of the Quds Force. The drone strike is a pointer towards future special operations wherein machines would replace the SF personnel, in some viable operations.

Future Perspective

There is no doubt that SF are force multipliers who can achieve strategic objectives through deep operations. Special Air Operations will invariably be a part of such missions, and long range air insertion offers an option for providing surprise and an asymmetric response across the entire spectrum of conflict. As you would have realized, planning and execution of the Special Air Operation is extremely complex. The type and number of aircraft, the routes, timings, evasion of detection by hostile radars and hostile aircraft, contingencies, etc., have to be thought through in great detail. The failure to cater for contingencies resulted in the botched hostage rescue operation in Iran in 1980. And excellent planning enabled the SEAL Team 6 to achieve mission success despite the helicopter crash at Abbottabad in May 2011. The Israeli air operation at Entebbe was also very complex.

Competent SF teams cannot be created after an emergency situation occurs but must exist and be ready to strike anytime. Since these operations are designed to achieve strategic objectives, joint operations are the key to their success. Both aircrew and surface forces have to train rigorously and need to synergize their resources towards joint operations. Furthermore, regular interaction at planning and trial stage with multiple users is imperative to foster mutual trust, better coordination and interoperability. This intertwined arrangement at all levels will ensure high degree of operational preparedness with sufficient robustness that will not degrade during combat due to friction and facilitate optimal mission accomplishment. The newly raised Special Operations Division of the Indian Armed Forces would facilitate development of such synergy.



Group Captain TR Ravi VM *(Retd), a Transport Pilot in the IAF has an accident / incident free flying of close to 8000 hrs. He has been a Cat 'A' Flying Instructor and an AEB Examiner on a variety of transport aircraft. He was selected to be the first Flight Commander of the first C-17 Squadron of the IAF. He has been the Chief Operations Officer at Yelahanka air force base. He is a Distinguished Graduate in Aviation Resource Management from Keesler Air Force Base, USAF. He has executed the ONLY heavy wide-bodied aircraft landing at Mechuka close to the Sino-Indian border in Arunachal Pradesh. He has received commendations from the C-in-C and Chief of the Air Staff. He is a recipient of Vayu Sena Medal for exceptional dedication to Service.*







THE PARACHUTE REGIMENT TRAINING CENTRE (PRTC)

The history of the Parachute Regiment is adequately documented in Mr K C Praval's book India's Paratroopers: A History of the Parachute Regiment of India Vol-1 (& hopefully also Vol-2 which is likely to be released soon).In this photofeature, the author describes the special role of the PRTC in nurturing young boys into 'men apart'. The author also interacted with Brigadier K P Singh, VSM, Commandant, PRTC, and his frank responses are also covered.

Early Days and A Walk Down Memory Lane

Parachute Regiments came into being in the Second World War which saw the advent of Airborne Operations. The first Indian Airborne Formation was the British Indian Army's 50 Parachute Brigade, raised in October 1941, which comprised 151 Parachute Battalion (British), 152 Parachute Battalion (Indian) and 153 Parachute Battalion (Gurkhas). These three battalions were part of an Airborne Brigade, part of the British 1st Airborne Division. The Indian Army Parachute Regiment was thus initially, officially on paper, raised on 01 March 1945 with these battalions along with rudimentary Attachments & Detachments. The war ended and by late 1945 orders were issued for disbandment due to postwar British Army reduction and restructuring. 50 Parachute Brigade continued as an Airborne Formation,

but with normal infantry units, namely 1 Punjab, 2 Maratha Light Infantry and 3 Kumaon Rifles. Much later, still on a casual note, on 15 April 1952, the Parachute (Para) Regiment was re-raised absorbing these units, which had already been trained as airborne troops except for the fact that they had not adorned or were allotted the maroon beret. They had since preferred to continue with their respective Regimental headgear.

On 1 May 1952 an ad-hoc training wing at Kota, under the aegis of the Brigade of Guards was established for re-establishing PRTC. However the quality of manpower vis a vis the strength that was required for the recruits to start earnest training in the numbers desired was not found forthcoming. This initial augmented strength did not match the kind of standard, mentality and psyche that was required. Hence for a larger selection base and to acquire better troops a regular centre was sanctioned at Agra on 13 March 1963. The new Centre was housed at Kherian camp next to the Air Force Base, Agra in September 1963.

Raising of new units started and 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 Para Battalions were raised. This status continued till the 1965 Indo-Pak War. Post 1966, the Para Commando Battalions were raised. In the late 70s and early 80s, 8 Para was converted to Mechanised Infantry, and became 12 Mechanised Infantry Battalion.

In February 1965 PRTC had moved to Gwalior. A Para Holding Wing was established in 1966 at Agra to facilitate the Jump Training while the Recruit Training continued at Gwalior. Subsequently in October 1975 the PRTC moved back to Agra. The Para Holding Wing, still at Agra Air Base was merged with another sister organization called the Army Airborne Training School. The ever important Pay & Allowance Office also moved to Agra from Mathura.

Subsequently in January 1992 the PRTC moved to Bangalore less the Para Holding Wing, occupying the erstwhile location of the

A Professional Chat with Brig. K P Singh, VSM

Commandant, PRTC

During the visit to PRTC, Brig Sanjay Thapa (Retd) had a professional tete –a – tete with Brig K P Singh, VSM, Commandant PRTC. The discussion is reproduced here.

Sanjay : It is indeed a major challenge to convert raw young village boys into trained soldiers. What component of training is the most difficult for the recruits?

KP : Majority of the recruits have moved out of the protected environment of their homes and







Pioneer Corps Training Centre. It remains at Bengaluru till date.

Training a Paratrooper

The initial training for the Para Regiment recruits does not really vary in terms of contents from any other regular Infantry Regiment Centre. However the emphasis on being ruthless to the endurance attributes of an individual, be it physical or mental, does play an important part throughout the 34 weeks of recruit training. The young soldiers are allotted a Para Battalion at the end of the attestation. He is also allotted a dedicated non - airborne parent unit to fall back to, in case he doesn't clear the 'maroon beret' probation.

The attested young soldiers then report to the allotted Para Battalion, mostly of their choice, with the proviso that they would undergo & qualify in a probation at those units (be it an Airborne unit or a Special Forces unit), before being accepted. There is also a system called non-para volunteer (NPV) which is exercised by the Para Battalion to return him to his parent unit for further service, if a person is not found fit for airborne duties.

In the units the young soldiers are initially sent for the Para Basic course so that they can earn their wings. The static line basic qualification is for five jumps - three normal daytime jumps, one with battle loads, and one by night. It's only then the wings are awarded which they proudly wear on their chest.

The jump training is done under the aegis of the Indian Air Force at Agra. The jumps were earlier done from Caribou or Dakota or AN 12 or C116 Packet aircraft, but are now done mostly from AN 32 aircraft. But, at times the jumps can also be from the IL76, the C17 Globemaster, the C130 Lockheed Martin etc. Or for that matter, the soldiers can also



villages for the first time in their lives. Military lifestyle is alien to them and initially they feel socially isolated. I think the biggest challenge for them is not the physical hardships but the psychological adjustment to military discipline and military life.

Sanjay : What are the major differences in training carried out in PRTC, vis-à-vis other infantry regimental training centres?

KP : The PRTC is structured akin to other Infantry Regimental Centres to impart basic military training to recruits. The training is standardized, policy based and centrally enunciated for all Regimental Training Centres. However, based on the operational requirements of Special Forces (SF) and Airborne units, we orient the recruits to their role and tasks. We include practical and situation based training, slithering and Fan Test, progressive training to dispel fear, and focus on enhanced physical fitness and mental endurance training.

Sanjay : How do you screen recruits for SF units, and other PARA units? Is volunteer the only criteria?

KP : Recruits volunteer and are allotted to various SF or PARA units based on vacancies. In addition, there is lateral induction wherein volunteers from other Arms and Services, who have less than six years service are accepted after they clear the probation. Their probation is conducted in the units.

Sanjay : Many training centres conduct some training other than recruit training, like precourses, leadership capsules. What other training is conducted here in PRTC?

KP : Like other Centres, we also conduct pre-courses training, leadership capsules and technical trade cadres for Regimental personnel. In addition, PRTC is also a nodal centre for Para Motor Training for the Army Adventure Wing.



Sanjay : Resettlement of Exservicemen (ESM) is also a major function for Centres, and Bengaluru would have many job opportunities available. Could you highlight some resettlement opportunities that have been tied up in the local station, and what skill development training is being conducted by PRTC?
KP : Resettlement of ESM is indeed a vital function of PRTC, and we assist ESM in resettlement by providing Soft Skill training and reskilling individuals on Security Supervision and Personal Security Officer jobs. We facilitate their certification through Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY) and Nettur Technical Training Foundation (NTTF). Our Depot Company Commander also helps organize placement opportunities.

Sanjay : Welfare of war widows is an important regimental duty. Has PRTC developed a systemic contact and support programme for war widows of the Regiment?
KP : Welfare of Veer Naris is our solemn duty, and the Regimental Centre is the nodal agency for outreach to widows. We follow an "Atoot Bandhan" programme in our Regiment, wherein Regimental Officers are nominated to remain in touch with Veer Naris and Battle Casualties, thereafter they regularly update the Records in PRTC. Preference is given to Veer Naris for jobs in institutions run by PRTC. The Centre also runs a Boys Hostel primarily for wards of martyrs.

Sanjay : Many new training aids like IWESS, paint ball guns, etc have been inducted in recent years. Could you let us know which training aids do you find most suitable in your Centre?
KP : Training Aids like IWESS and Paint Ball Guns help in enhancing assimilation of a subject. We use this equipment during outdoor tactical training, it enhances realism and improves the tactical acumen of the recruits.

jump out from helicopters like the Chinook, the MI17 or the indigenous ALH, Dhruv. As they continue in service the soldiers hone their capabilities in Small Team Insertion and Extraction, Slithering / Rappelling /Abseiling, low hover exit, frogman casting and combat free fall using High Altitude Low Opening / High Altitude High Opening technique.

The Facilities

The Regimental Centre has adequate training facilities and infrastructure. Besides the routine infrastructure like swimming pool, short range, obstacle course, simulators etc, the PRTC, Bengaluru has some notable facilities like the Fan jump high tower, perhaps the closest to parachute jumping without an aircraft. There is also a unique rock face and an artificial mountain craft base. The Centre also boasts of a dedicated Baffle range within its perimeter. The Army Aero Nodal Centre is also rightfully co-located from where Para motoring, Para sailing and Para Gliding is conducted, for basic training as well as for preparing personnel for various events /competitions. More innovative training structures continue to take shape. Motivation plays an extremely important part in imbibing Regimental spirit and pride in one's Regiment and unit, amongst the young soldiers. The Centre has hence developed a Motivation Hall and maintains a somber War Memorial on the campus too.

A Salute

The Parachute Regiment has over the years excelled in all operations and activities and has made worthy sacrifices, possibly more than other Regiments. Among the singular awards and decorations that the Regiment has been bestowed with are eight Ashoka Chakra awards among the 58 such awards that have been awarded since 1952. The Para Regiment and The Special Forces, have been a crucial component in all our operations.



Brig Sanjay Kumar Thapa, *SM (Retd) joined NDA in July 1977. He has served with 9 PARA (SF) and uniquely qualified in all the training skills desired for special operations. He has extensive operational experience. He has also been an assessor in the Services Selection Centre (South) at Bengaluru, prior to his superannuation in June 2015. Thereafter, he was absorbed in the CRPF to establish the CoBRA School,(a specialised institution purely for selection and training of CRPF personnel to contest the Maoists in central India) at Belagavi in Karnataka.*



OPERATION CHANDERGEER

GALLANT GARUDS IN HAJIN

The Garuds were raised as a commando force within the Indian Air Force, to add to airbase security, and also take on special tasks as a part of air operations. They played a major role in a counter terror operation in Hajin, in J&K, in November 2017 when operating along with the Army. In this fictional account of the operation, the author builds the story leading to the action. Some of the names of the personalities have been changed. To bring in realism, the narrative has been adapted to actual places and events.

Hajin

Hajin – a small bustling town strewn along the western bank of the Jhelum river as it meandered northward towards the Wular Lake in Bandipur district of North Kashmir. Hajin is more renowned as the home of Mohammed Yusuf Parray aka Kuka Parray, the dreaded nemesis of Pakistani terrorists and leader of the Ikhwan – ul – Muslimeen, a valiant, irregular counter-terrorist outfit, which worked alongside the Indian Army in the 90s. Kuka Parray picked up several of his followers, the Ikhwanis, from Hajin and surrounding areas, while Liakat, the Ikhwan deputy leader, did likewise from Anantnag and other areas of South Kashmir. The Ikhwanis took to arms in 1994 as they found that the Hizbul Mujaheddin was being unduly favoured by the Pakistani establishment, and other groups were being marginalized. The Ikhwan primarily acted against the Hizbul Mujaheddin. After the 1996 elections and setting in of political processes, the Ikhwan found it difficult to operate as they had no legal cover. The Ikhwan had gained notoriety too, as several Ikhwanis had amassed wealth, while wielding their 'strong arm clout'.

The wheels of fortune turned further against the Ikhwanis in 2002 when Mufti Mohammed Sayeed took charge as Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir. He had won adequate seats, promising to defang the Special Operations Group

(SOG) of Jammu & Kashmir Police (JKP), who had been accused of several human rights abuses. Mufti Mohammed had promised to provide the healing touch to society, and stated that he would hold the Ikhwanis accountable for the excesses committed. The early years of the new millennium were agonizing for the Ikhwan, they felt unrewarded and forlorn. Many Ikhwanis joined other political platforms to survive, some of them made peace with the separatist forces.

The changing political fortunes played out in Hajin too. Kuka Parray was ambushed by terrorists in September 2003 while on his way to Sonawari near Hajin, to witness a cricket match. He died on the way to hospital. Javed Ahmed Shah, another important Ikhwan leader, had been killed a month earlier in Srinagar. The separatist forces gained ascendancy in Hajin, several Lashkar - e - Taiba (LeT) cadres took refuge in the areas surrounding Hajin, which became a terror hotbed.

Mohammed Ramzan Parray and Rashid Parray were brothers staying in Parray Mohalla, Hajin. They watched the unfolding events with trepidation and unease. They had been Ikhwanis and had reaped a good fortune too. Ramzan's son Nazir had joined the Home & Hearth Territorial Army, and was with the Baramulla Division of the Indian Army. Rashid's son Nissar was a Special Police Officer (SPO), working with the Bandipur Police. The family's ties with the security forces were known, and Ramzan and Rashid Parray were possible targets for the LeT cadres in Hajin. The brothers moved with abundant caution, changed their locations frequently at night, and prayed to Allah for safety and security. Their life was on a knife edge.

The Post Burhan Wani Agitation

On 7th of July 2016, in a sleepy village near Kokernag in South Kashmir, a sudden, swift counter terror operation by 19 Rashtriya Rifles (RR) rocked the Valley. Burhan Wani, the young, charismatic social face of the Hizbul Mujaheddin, hailing from Tral, was eliminated. Large scale protests engulfed Kashmir, and stone pelting became the chosen tool to strike at the security forces and the administration. A police station in southern Kulgam was attacked, weapons looted, and the station burnt. Several schools were torched too. In Hajin too, the security forces went on the backfoot, their movements were challenged vigorously by stone pelters from rooftops, windows and alleys.





15 RR troops moving into a cordon

The struggle was intense, and the security forces slowly wore down the resistance. Pellet guns, riot control gear, movement checks, curfew, arrests of ringleaders gradually brought down the violence, and the situation became calmer by November. The Army, which had paused the counter terror operations decided to regain the ceded operating space again.

Col Vikramjit Singh, Commanding Officer 15 RR, had just attended a discussion at Sharifabad, wherein ways to regain operational ascendancy had been deliberated upon. Hajin would be a hard nut to crack, he thought pensively, as he returned to his Headquarters at Manasbal. His unit was responsible for operations in and around Hajin. He decided it would be best to move into the alleys of Hajin deliberately with greater numbers, with the police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and break the Sangbaaz (stonepelters) citadels. It was tough going. Every second or third day, troops of 15 RR, CRPF and JKP moved into different mohallas of Hajin, faced the brickbats and boulders, arrested many youth, slowly expanding their areas of influence. It took the security forces over a month, and the results started showing. Intelligence leads on the terrorists started coming in again, and 15 RR was able to launch specific operations again.

In mid December, on a specific intelligence lead received from JKP, 15 RR surrounded a house in Rakh Hajin on the eastern bank of the Jhelum River. The several attempts by the Sangbaaz to break the cordon and help the terrorists escape were foiled by the CRPF men,



Photo Courtesy : english.voiceofjindaism.in

Kuka Parray, sitting in centre, with fellow Ikhwanis

while the Company Assault Teams (CATs) of 15 RR engaged the terrorists with accurate fire. In the ensuing firefight, three Pakistani terrorists were neutralized. One of the killed terrorists was related to Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, the LeT leader involved in the 26/11 Mumbai carnage. It was a telling blow to the LeT cadres in Hajin.

There was anguish within the terrorist groups in Hajin – no terrorists had been killed in Hajin for nearly two years, and they had felt safe. There were nearly 18 to 20 terrorists operating in the area in smaller groups of two to three terrorists in a group. Abu Talha, their leader, made a brave face as he queried his local supporters – the Over Ground Workers (OGWs) – "Who leaked the information of our Mujaheddin brothers location to the Army? I want to know soon."

Garuds Move In

During an audacious attempt by the Jaish - e – Mohammed in January 2016 to strike at Pathankot Airbase, the National Security Guard had neutralized the terrorists before they could create havoc. It was realized that the Garuds, earmarked as first responders in airbase security, needed to be given actual operational experience, akin to the 'live situation training' done by the Special Forces of the Indian Army in Kashmir. In mid 2017, a squad of Garuds was deployed in Kashmir under Squadron Leader Chauhan for live operational experience. After the initial pre-induction training at the Corps Battle School, the Garuds were placed at Manasbal with 3 Sector RR. A troop of 31 RR (Commando) was also at Manasbal, and the Garuds learnt the ropes, as they operated with them and with 15 RR. Chauhan realized that the key to operational success was intelligence and actionable, precise and timely information was extremely rare. He got down to developing close links with the police and the other local contacts.

In the meantime, 15 RR continued with a string of operational successes, and Abu Talha found his cadres dwindling to single digit numbers. He realized that local people were providing information to the Army and police, he needed to make an example of such 'sources', and frighten them into silence and meek submission to the writ of the LeT. Frustrated and grim, he decided to kill the Parray brothers - Mohammed Ramzan and Rashid.

A Gruesome Night

One night in June 2017, Abdul Parray, an OGW staying in Parray Mohalla called up Abu Talha. He had been tasked to look out for Ramzan and Rashid Parray. He told the Lashkar leader that Ramzan Parray was at home. Abu Talha and his terrorist cadres Zubair and Rafiq reacted swiftly and reached the mohalla. They asked a neighbor to knock at Ramzan's door and ask for some medicine. Hanifa Bi, Ramzan's wife opened the door. The terrorists hiding nearby barged in swiftly and held Hanifa hostage, while they searched for Ramzan. They found him in an inner room, and dragged him out. Hanifa pleaded for her husband, and wouldn't let go of him. Abu Talha fired a burst from his AK 47 onto her legs, and she fell back, bleeding and in pain. Her daughter Sanaa also tried to shield her father, but Rafiq dragged her away. She was screaming incessantly, so Rafiq whacked her hard with a heavy staff, again and again. Abu Talha and Zubair dragged Ramzan Parray out, and Rafiq joined them. The Lashkar cadres took Ramzan away, firing a few warning bursts towards the family as they left. The pain and fear filled screams of the mother – daughter duo continued, amidst tears. Some neighbours had watched the terrorists enter and leave from behind their curtains, frightful and alarmed. A short while later, they nursed Hanifa and Sanaa, and took them to the health facility. Rashid Parray, who was a short distance away, rushed to the clinic to see his bleeding sister-in-law and niece. The next day, Ramzan's mutilated body was found near the road to Sonawari. Another Kashmiri killed gruesomely by

so called Pakistani Mujaheddin, to strike fear amongst the people, and terrorise them. But who will wipe the tears of the close family members, and hold the LeT accountable?

Vengeance

Nazir and Nissar immediately returned home on learning of Mohammed Ramzan's brutal killing. Rashid too was shaken, and sought protection. Rashid took Hanifa Bi, Sanaa and his family to Baramulla, and rented out a place near the Army Camp. He felt safer there. Rashid, Nazir and Nissar met senior Army officers, and were agitated. With cold steel in their eyes, and a grim determination, the sons said that the Pakistani terrorists will pay for their cruel and barbaric acts, and indicated that they will get the intelligence about the killers. Nazir was hence attached to 3 Sector RR at Manasbal, and would operate with 31 RR (Commando).

Nazir's friends and relatives condoled him, but information sharing was rare. Many of his close contacts were scared, no one wanted to meet Ramzan's fate. Slowly, Nazir garnered some tidbits of information of localities frequented by the terrorists, the houses they visited, the OGWs who helped them. Taufeeq, one of his friends hailed from Chandergeer, a hamlet strung along the road from Hajin to Chewa and Hakbara, in the midst of fields. Chandergeer was a few kilometres east of the Jhelum River. Taufeeq was in love with Firdausa, her house was often frequented by Abu Talha and his gang. Firdausa and other ladies in the house had to provide 'comfort' to the Pakistani terrorists – such sexual favours and the hedonism of the Pakistani terrorists is a truism in Kashmir, remaining unspoken, accepted as fate with numbness and sealed lips. Taufeeq indicated to Nazir that he would help. He wanted to save Firdausa.

Operation Chandergeer

Nazir informed Squadron Leader Chauhan about Firdausa's house in Chandergeer, as a possible LeT haven. 31 RR and the Garuds discretely checked out the location and became familiar with the routes to it. Colonel Vikramjit, Major Negi of 31 RR and Squadron Leader Chauhan then worked out a plan for a cordon and search of the target house when required.



RR troops moving for the cordon in Chandergeer

At about 3 p.m. on 18 November 2017, Taufeeq informed Nazir that the terrorists were at Firdausa's place. Operation Chandergeer was launched. 31 RR troops moved from Manasbal in civilian vehicles along the Manasbal – Hakbara – Chandergeer Road, while the Garuds moved from Hajin in two Sumo vehicles on the Hajin – Chandergeer – Chewa Road. These lead elements were followed by 10 CATs of 15 RR moving from Sudurkoot and Manasbal. By 4 p.m. or so the troops were around the house and closed the cordon. 31 RR commandoes were towards the road in front of the house, whereas the Garuds deployed behind the house, covering the getaway towards the fields. The 15 RR CATs covered the remaining two flanks.

Abu Talha realised that the Army had surrounded them and conferred with his mates. They had seen the troops towards the road, and towards the Southern buildings. There was an alley to the North, he surmised that the troops may possibly be towards the other end of the alley. The paddy fields towards the West were an option, but that was open ground. At this time of the year, the fields were dry, with the winter frost having set in. The LeT cadres decided to make a dash through the cordon, firing grenades from their Under Barrel Grenade Launchers (UBGLs) and shooting their way out. The six LeT terrorists knelt facing West, and silently said their prayers. They were tense, afraid, and thought of their kith and kin in Pakistan. It was unlikely that they would survive, some of them had regrets too.

Weapons ready and loaded, they moved out shuffling along the walls of the house to the North, with Rafiq leading. Rafiq spotted a soldier towards the alley, who shouted at him. Rafiq opened fire, with a UBGL grenade



landing near Naik Chander Singh of 15 RR. Chander felt hot splinters course through his thigh as he fired back. Rafiq staggered as two bullets hit him in the shoulder and in his abdomen. The terrorists started running towards the open fields, Rafiq couldn't lift his weapon to fire, as a few more bullets hit him. He lumbered slowly behind the other terrorists.

It was around 4.45 p.m. and the terrorists were blinded by the sun in their eyes as they moved westward. The Garuds led by Squadron Leader Chauhan and Sergeant Khairnar lay in wait at the edge of the fields, in position with weapons ready. The terrorists were firing blindly to shock the troops. As grenades fell nearby and bullets whizzed past, the Garuds returned the fire. Not an easy situation, blasting grenades cause the eardrums to start singing, dust is kicked up and aimed fire is not simple. Ricochets from the grenades and bullets add to the danger. Corporal Jyoti Prakash Nirala had taken position behind a tree with his light machine gun (LMG). His LMG fired long, steady, aimed bursts, unerringly onto the panicked terrorists. The LeT cadres fell down, one after another in a heap. A couple of the injured terrorists continued to fire towards the Garuds, as Nirala looked up from the side of the tree. Two bullets hit Nirala on his face and he fell down mortally wounded. The Garuds engaged the fallen terrorists with accurate fire, and there was a lull in the firing. Six Pakistani LeT terrorists lay in a heap to the West of Firdausa's house. The entire action had barely lasted two to three minutes.

An eerie silence engulfed the neighbourhood, disturbed intermittently by distant shouts from a few stone pelters who had gathered near the road towards Hakbara. The Army soldiers carefully made their way towards the bullet riddled bodies, wary of any sudden firing or explosion. The SOG personnel joined them. Abu Talha, Rafiq, Zubair and their three mates lay dead. The medical assistant rushed to check Corporal Nirala, an ambulance coming along in quick time, but he was no more. Naik Chander Singh was wounded in his thigh, he was swiftly shifted to Manasbal for onward evacuation to Srinagar.

Operation Chandergeer had struck a deadly blow to the morale of terrorists in Kashmir, and particularly in Hajin. Rashid, Nazir and Nissar thanked Allah for enabling their act of retribution. Their joy was visible when they met the operations party at Manasbal. Colonel Vikramjit knew that only a couple of LeT cadres were now left in the area. The OGWs and other mentors were shaken, their writ and control weakened. The Sangbaaz were quiet too, and stayed away from the streets for a while.

On 26th January 2018, Corporal Jyoti Prakash Nirala was conferred with the Ashoka Chakra posthumously by the President, for his valour and professional mettle in eliminating the LeT terrorists in Chandergeer, despite bullets whizzing past and grenades falling near him. Counter terror operations continue in Kashmir, eliminating large numbers of terrorists every year. The Indian Armed Forces too lose some gallant warriors, while living up to the 'Naam' and 'Izzat' of their outfits. We salute these Yodhhas, the Rakshaks of our nation!!



Lt Gen J S Sandhu, *PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) was commissioned into 6/5 GR (FF) in June 1980. He has vast operational experience having commanded his unit and formations in Jammu & Kashmir including the Srinagar Corps. He has also been an instructor in institutions of the defence services and retired as Military Secretary in Army Headquarters in 2019. He was a leader of great repute within the army. He is now the Editor of this magazine.*



Marcos Demonstration during Def Expo February 2020 at Lucknow

Indian Navy's Special Operations:

Building Joint Regional Capability

Indian Armed Forces are likely to be co-opted in multinational engagements in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean region, in the coming years.Such involvement may be in the form of special operations or larger conflict situations. The author emphasises that the Indian Marine Commandoes (Marcos) have honed their skills for such contingencies, and interoperability is being developed further.

In signing the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) with the United States, India has signalled its geostrategic position and intent in times of a contested world order. With the signing of all four basic security agreements with the United States, commencing in 2002 with GSOMIA, LEMOA in 2016, COMCASA in 2018 and now BECA[1], military cooperation between the two countries is at a new level. (Please see the expanded forms in the note)[2] These agreements allow India to step forward and undertake a variety of missions, especially within the region, in a more planned, methodical and coordinated manner. The intrinsic capabilities that come with the agreements will provide an operational edge.

Power & Responsibility

As a major power and player in the Indo-Pacific and as a supporter of the freedom of the seas, come some responsibilities. These include building and using a capability to intervene in the regional context. The Indian Navy (IN) and, specifically, its special operations instruments are an important part of this responsibility. They allow flexibility along the escalatory ladder; reach within the wider Indo Pacific; can be covert as well as overt; and, provide options for missions in the grey zones of peace-time. Moreover, they can be focused or restricted in time and space thus providing planners multiple options in their application over the spectrum of threats.
Given the geo-political security requirements within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the larger Indo-Pacific, underlined by the Prime Minister's articulation of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All) a cooperative, multi-national approach is obviously advantageous. Therefore, agreements with the United States and others facilitate a larger role for India in the region.
The maritime domain is different from land and space domains in some ways. The ideas of freedom of navigation, or of the high seas (i.e. waters beyond the 12 nautical mile limit of territorial waters), exclusive economic zones and the concept of shared "global commons" are different from the relatively straightforward understanding of

1. https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1667841
2. GSOMIA: General Security of Military Information Agreement; LEMOA: Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement; COMCASA: Compatibility and Security Agreement; BECA: Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement.



Marcos Demonstration during Def Expo February 2020 at Lucknow

sovereignty defined by land borders and national air space. Unlike armies or air forces, navies more regularly "greet" each other on these international highways and operate in the "commons." This characteristic of sea power, more than other attributes, enables bilateral or multi-lateral cooperation and makes inter-operability easier. The span of such inter-operability is from HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) to "constabulary" cooperation as in anti-piracy and counter-terror operations.

From Frogmen to Special Forces (SF)

While the IN's "frogmen" did commendable work in the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh[3], it was a few years later that the Service started thinking of creating an equivalent of the Royal Navy's Special Boat Service (SBS) or the US Navy's SEALS. Consequently, the IN raised the Marine Commando Force (MARCOS), originally known as the Indian Marine Special Force in the year 1987.

The MARCOS's birth in 1987 was no accident. India was involved in Sri Lanka in what turned out to be a strategically perplexing war. Operationally we lacked adequate intelligence and tactically we faced a competent and complex adversary in the LTTE. Sri Lanka was where the MARCOS were baptized in fire as part of the IPKF operations, and much was learnt while tackling the LTTE.

"Agni Pareeksha" in Sri Lanka and Maldives

The Tamil Tigers took maritime terror to a new level at sea with the "Sea Tigers." One now understands what baptised with fire means; it is not just the ability to survive, but deliver results when operating in an environment against a potent opponent with the first few batches of operators just out of training. The MARCOS were blooded in and achieved considerable successes of which the attack on Guru Nagar jetty under withering fire is well known. Then Lieutenant (later Commodore) Arvind Singh was awarded the MVC for this action.[4] Operation CACTUS, off Maldives and boarding of the ship, MV Progress Light, to force the surrender of the escaping hijackers after a failed coup, was probably the first Maritime Interdiction Operation (MIO) by MARCOS as early as 1988. Op ZABBARDAST in 1992, which involved interception of an LTTE vessel smuggling arms and ammunition, was another early success.

Honing Skills

As is said, the sound of a bullet leaving the barrel is quite different from when it whizzes past your ear fired by an adversary. A key Naval decision to deploy MARCOS in the Counter Terror (CT) environment of J&K valley has been operationally and tactically useful. Much learning, validation of concepts, and operational experience has been gained in the valley with benefits in a maritime environment as well. Anti-piracy, MIO and Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) operations, as well as supporting the Navy during Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), HADR operations are some areas where the skills built-up have been tested in missions. The intervention of MARCOS at Mumbai's Taj and Oberoi Hotels on the night of 26/11 during the early hours of Operation Black Tornado helped in stopping the indiscriminate killing of civilians. The teams prevented the terrorists from having a free run and commenced casualty evacuation saving many a life. This pressure was vital until the National Security Guard (NSG) -- the force mandated by an Act of Parliament -- was handed over the operations.

3.Readers may be interested in a fine account of the three major stages of the IN's special ops in the book, Operation X: The Untold Story of India's Covert Naval War in East Pakistan, co-authored by Captain Samant, MVC, IN (Retd) and Sandeep Unnithan, (Harper Collins, 2019).

4. https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/defence/story/19880430-indian-marine-special-force-earns-its-battle-honours-against-ltte-797220-1988-04-30

A Special Forces (SF) operator is a unique, self-motivated and spirited sailor, willing to take carefully calculated risks. His expectation from life, others and his own comrades are distinct. He considers himself and his force elite in the best sense of the word. Over the years, the training pattern of MARCOS has advanced and the core skill development process for operations in all three dimensions of land, air and sea has strengthened. Role specific mission requirements necessitate advanced training with a variety of specialist agencies and with high technology equipment. Obviously, small team operations, especially from and in the maritime dimension require each team member to assume greater individual tactical responsibility. Thus, greenhorn operators without active operational experience cannot be deployed for most missions. Any Special Force worthy of its role would ensure individuals are provided that time, which in the case of MARCOS could be anywhere between 2-3 years before they can even be considered part of an active team for a mission at a regional level. By the end of this process an operator gains much skill, experience and maturity, and is ready to integrate for operations alongside other forces. This forms the basis of mutual operational trust.

Seapower and Special Operations

Seapower is a better placed national instrument when compared with land power and air power from ashore to cooperate and operate with other navies for some mutually beneficial objectives. Whether regional or extra regional, a vast number of nations have interests in the IOR and across the Indo-Pacific, even if in some cases it may be restricted to just trade, under-written by the freedom of the seas. Further, international waters are often environments for illegal activities, short of war, ranging from one of the oldest and very traditional threats like piracy to newer tactics of terrorism and are often neutralised in cooperation with like-minded nations and their naval forces. The area is also known for its share of natural disasters which often require coordinated multinational efforts as was illustrated after the Dec 2004 Tsunami. Some of these circumstances require rapid, precise and specialist intervention by trained forces. Special Operations Forces are at times the best instrument for such missions and therefore their coming together and being the first responders makes much sense.



Photo Courtesy : www.ssbcrack.com

MARCOS' exposure to advancement in terms of technology, best practices, techniques, and operational learning have been easier as an integral part of the Indian Navy, which today operates widely and exercises frequently with other navies across the Indo-Pacific. Within all these cooperative engagements, SF also train together. In fact, even before MARCOS were officially raised, IN officers from the diving cadre were being deputed to train with USN SEALs in the US from the early 1980s. Over the three decades the MARCOS have come of age and today unquestionably have operational experience, interoperability and local as well as regional knowledge, making them ideal for undertaking Special Operations in the regional maritime domain.

"Two Plus Two" May Add up to More Than Four!

Following the India-US "2+2" ministerial meeting in end-October 2020, issues of capacity- building and other joint cooperation activities in our neighbourhood and beyond are areas where views have converged with the US.[5] These convergences reiterate aspects of Freedom of the Indo-Pacific as well as of the clear articulation of a rules-based order especially at sea. Given the geopolitical circumstances, alignments in the neighbourhood, and perceived threats in the maritime domain, a variety of opportunities emerge in taking this forward. Signing of agreements are enabling, procedural

5. Press Statement by Raksha Mantri, Rajnath Singh following India- USA 2+2 Meeting in New Delhi. Posted On: 27 Oct 2020 4:30PM by PIB Delhi



Photo Courtesy : www.reddit.com

steps when operational trust has been built and intent to work together serves mutual national interests. It is after many years of boots on ground operator-level training through multiple exercises with like-minded forces, that true interoperability is achieved.

Undertaking a Regional Joint Special Operation requires not just an understanding of each other's Standing Operating Procedures (SoPs) and drills but also integrated structures, shared encrypted communications and intelligence, equipment compatibility and, above all, tremendous mutual trust to go live with weapons, ammunition and ordnance. After years of investment in cross training programmes, and with the core interoperability requirements now being facilitated by way of the recent agreements, maritime special operations capabilities are perhaps now better poised to multiply in effectiveness.

Enablers Being Put in Place

Great initiatives can be wasted if not thoughtfully implemented. The time is now ripe to set procedures, structures, systems, protocols, equipment profiles, technology in place and the effort has to be directed towards common missions. Within the IOR, the MARCOS have displayed sufficient operational capability and acumen for intervention in the region. Taking on similar missions in the region under the Naval or Armed Forces Special Operations Division (AFSOD) umbrella can only get better with technology cooperation with the US under GSOMIA and ISA (Industrial Security Agreement), logistics support through LEMOA, encrypted communications through COMCASA, and now geospatial information through BECA.[6] However, correctly envisaging and aligning the "How? Who with? Where? What for? With what?" to Special Operations are just a few factors that should set us thinking. With the setting up of the AFSOD, certain structures are already in place; however, it would be prudent to undertake a detailed analysis and study prior to implementation. This would provide the right framework for the future of joint mission capability in the region, else outcomes may not meet the expectations of stakeholders. In exploring joint regional capacity building and cooperation activities in third countries, integrating other nations and benefiting from their capabilities, local presence and knowledge would be valuable. This will require considerable formal efforts through established MoD, MEA, defence attaché channels and informal engagements through think tanks, Subject Matter Experts, and perhaps some non-government bodies. A holistic approach towards this, involving all stakeholders with experience, will certainly help achieving actual interoperability and mission success.

India has journeyed a long way in coming to realise its rightful position in the world order and in leveraging its Comprehensive National Power (CNP). Ray Cline describes CNP as a function of nonlinear, multivariable indexes which integrate both capabilities and commitment, according to which `Will' is an important variable and contributes towards a nation's Perceived Power `Pp'.[7] India's `Will' to undertake surgical strikes using SF is an indication of its belief in its Perceived Power, and if this intent needs to be maintained and elements of the agreements on paper translated into action, Maritime Special Operations in the IOR could be an ideal way to take this forward.



Commodore Shiv Tewari *was commissioned into the Indian Navy in January 1990. The officer specialised as a Clearance Diver and Marine Commando and has had the singular honour of commanding all three operational units of the MARCOS. He has done his tenure in the CT environment of J&K, time at sea as Executive Officer of a Corvette and Command of an Amphibious ship, and as Deputy Commandant at the Naval War College, he took early retirement to pursue a career other than his military service. He is the Co-founder of Arista Risk and Corporate Solutions an initiative putting 30 plus years of learning into developing integrated solutions aimed `towards a secure future'.*

6.https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/beca-india-united-states-expert-vikram-mahajan_in_5f9ba594c5b61b5109e6109e
7.https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1110/MR1110.ch3.pdf


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MILITARY ETHICS ARE "SPECIAL"

FOR SPECIAL FORCES

Ethical conduct in operations is indeed a moral 'force multiplier', just as unethical conduct creates a major setback. The Indian Armed Forces have also faced such situations, the Machhal case and the recent Rajouri labourers encounter in Shopian are examples. Fortunately, such cases have been few in recent years. The author emphasizes the ethical perspective in grey zone operations, in the light of the recent Australian Defence Forces (ADF) investigation.

This issue of Medals & Ribbons has highlighted the role of Special Forces (SF) and gives a clear idea of how important they are across the spectrum of conflict, from low intensity to a large scale war. Indeed, they are special and their roles in the grey zones of counter-terrorism (CT) and counter-insurgency (CI) operations are well understood. In this short piece, we take a look at the centrality of a strong ethical code that is necessary especially in the tough tactical conditions in which commandos operate. When SF fall short in their warrior ethic, the consequences can be severe - often strategically - even when the transgressions were at the tactical level at which the fighting took place.

In mid-Nov 2020, Australia went through quite a churn with the publication of the four-year investigation report (redacted version in media) on allegations of crimes against civilians and prisoners by the Australian SASR (Special Air Service Regiment). The enquiry was conducted by Major General Paul Brereton, an infantry reservist as well as a Judge Advocate General senior officer. While the details of the report need not be recounted here, a few findings are important. Essentially, a few soldiers of the SAS Regiment were found to have been involved in the "alleged killings of 39 Afghans in 23 separate incidents either as principles or accessories…" (ASPI, The Strategist, 21 Nov 2020). These killings took place over several years of the ADF's active participation as a US coalition partner in Afghanistan from 2002. Most of the incidents took place in 2012 and 2013. The inquiry established that none of these killings were in "the heat of battle" but rather involved the execution of prisoners, farmers and civilians under custody. An even more sordid aspect was the "blooding" of fresh SAS troopers who were encouraged to shoot a prisoner in what almost was seen as a rite of passage. These cases were hushed up or "combat reports were written in ways that would minimise attention from higher command. A kind of collective organisational blindness descended on SF rotations." (ASPI).

Other comments from within Australia talk of the impact of a sense of entitlement. SF "saw themselves as above reproach…had a sense they were elite, entitled and beyond the scrutiny of those outside the fence. The normal rules did not apply to them. The report found younger soldiers viewed their patrol commanders as 'demi-gods'. Disobeying their instructions, it was feared, would lead careers to ruin." (The Guardian, 19 Nov 2020).

As a consequence, Australia and the ADF have certainly lost a lot of face not only in Afghanistan, but within their own environment. Prime Minister Morrison, and General Angus Campbell (the CDF), have publicly apologized to their counterparts and to the people of Afghanistan and termed such behavior as totally unacceptable and unsoldierly. It is possible that in coming months there may be courts martial, more acrimony and political and diplomatic difficulties. In a more immediate sense, the egregious conduct of a

very small proportion of soldiers brings opprobrium to the entire ADF. That, as any army would know is unfair and incorrect, but media spotlights leads to such problems. And, it takes time to set things right and recover prestige and honour.

Are there pointers for SF everywhere, including our own? Perhaps there are. Given the complexities and uncertainties under which SF often operate, officers and jawans not only need to have very sharp tactical reflexes, they have to have a finely tuned moral compass. Those who have had greater opportunities to study military ethics know that some of the most difficult cases of "what may be the right thing to do" involve special operations. In more conventional fighting, they may be behind enemy lines or in CI/CT, the front may be blurred anyway. It is indeed difficult to discern between hostiles, "friendlys" and neutrals. There are risks that the target in the gun-sight may be any of these categories. So, ethical decisions may also be split-second and the decision to pull or not pull the trigger may often be underwritten by such a consideration. After all, there have been cases where soldiers have withheld their fire but paid for it with their own lives. There are no easy answers. However, it is also true that in the heat of battle, targeting errors are viewed differently in terms of collateral damage. What happened in the SASR inquiry was clearly not in the line of duty. Yet, military-ethical training and education help develop the "instinct" towards ensuring right reactions in both cases.

Education and training in military-ethics is carried out in stages, consciously as well as by osmosis from observing right leaders in their actions and deeds. SF teams are often small, tightly knit and a good leader who encourages professionalism combined with ethical foundations may actually achieve better results with greater consistency. He is likely to demonstrate to his team that elitism is about superior conduct, professionalism and not really about regimental snobbery, shoulder patches or maroon berets.

Indian SF have undoubtedly brought credit to their service and benefits to the nation. There could, at the same time, be risks of elitism and a sense of entitlement that may result in excesses that ultimately rebound on unit pride and the Indian Army's own good record in CI/CT. But, there are really important benefits of a sharp military-ethical foundation. If we are to see the purpose of any warfare as achieving the objectives of "politics / policy with other means" (vintage Clausewitz) then atrocities, especially those not "in the heat of battle" can create setbacks. This is true for all in uniform, but especially so for SF who may get deployed in more difficult missions where risks are perhaps higher and the tactical situation fuzzier. In the Australian case, think about how "tactical corporals and privates" and perhaps young officers create huge strategic setbacks because of poor leadership and even poorer ethical grooming. The SASR is not the only elite band of SF that has been found wanting. This has happened to American Green Berets, SEALS, the British SAS, the Russian Spetsnaz where, in relatively less hostile environments, small team leaders have made poor ethical choices when they ought to have done better. It could happen anywhere.

In CI/CT, the government's forces are the instrument for ensuring secure enough conditions that enable better, more lasting and appealing values of governance, as opposed to the anarchy and disruption that insurgents and terrorists have to offer. If in the mountains soldiers benefit from occupying the physical high-ground, in CI/CT (or COIN in Western parlance), the moral high-ground is equally valuable. A seemingly plausible and strong statement can be made—and is often made—that terrorists and militants do not respect laws of conflict or human rights, so why should security forces? However, the key lies in using security forces, under state - directed, measured violence to keep the peace while demonstrating ascendancy of the principle of legitimacy and creating the conditions for governance and a more enduring peace on better terms. "Tactical" corporals and majors have to absorb this and do their bit at the ground or sea level to contribute to the strategic objectives of winning the peace. Since SF play a key role in such environments, their military -ethical foundations combined with professional acumen and personal valour will always be special. Is that why the word "special" is a prefix that is not to be taken lightly?



Rear Admiral Sudarshan Y Shrikhande, AVSM, *(Retd) was commissioned in Jul 1980. During his illustrious service, he commanded IN ships Nishank, Kora and Khukri and served at sea for several years. He is a post- graduate (with distinction) of the Soviet Naval War College (1988), DSSC Wellington (Scudder Medal), Naval War College and of the US NWC with highest distinction (2003) winning the Levy, Bateman and Forrestal Prizes. He is a strategic analyst of repute and post retirement is involved in teaching strategy formulation, operational art, force structuring, RMA, China, the Indo- Pacific, the Peloponnesian War, leadership and ethics in several military as well as civilian institutions. He is associated with the National Maritime, Vivekananda International and Observer Research Foundations as well as FINS. He has participated in Track 1.5 dialogue with China and the US and in a US State Department Indo-Pacific Dialogue and Simulations Conference in Sydney as well as at other national and international conferences. He is also studying for a PHD in sea-based nuclear deterrence.*





THE SHERSHAH OF KARGIL: A Twin Brother's Tribute

Even now, when Vishal Batra steps onto the icy peaks of Kargil, the words 'Yeh Dil Maange More' reverberate in his ears. They were among his twin brother's last words to his Commanding Officer before he was killed in action during the Kargil War. In this M&R exclusive, we feature his moving tribute to Capt Vikram Batra, Param Vir Chakra, (PVC), 13 Jammu & Kashmir Rifles.

In 1990, our father Girdhari Lal Batra started giving my twin brother Vikram and I, Rs50 every month towards the school bus fare. While I chose to conform to the intent of its allotment, and travelled to school by bus every day, Vikram had other ideas. He opted to walk, and instead spent that princely sum in the canteen! We were just 14. Even at that young age, he was different from the rest of us, showing uncommon spunk, spirit and enterprise. I always dreamt that I would be able to visit Vikram as a commanding officer of a regiment. Sadly, some dreams are never meant to be realised. But for me, and every Indian, Vikram still commands those treacherous peaks in Drass and Kargil. The 'Shershah of Kargil' – that's what the enemy called Vikram. They used to fear his arrival in the missions; that is the mark he made on them while at battle in those unforgiving mountains.
At some point in the years spent growing up, Vikram had marched way ahead of all of us…

Memories: An Idyllic Childhood

Capt Vikram Batra, PVC (posthumous) was fondly called Luv by our family and friends, and I, his identical twin (younger by just 14 minutes), was Kush. Our childhood was spent in the idyllic hills of Palampur. True to cliché, we made the most of our identical looks - playing pranks, filling in for each other and at times even getting punished for one another's tomfoolery! But our similarities went beyond the physical. We also had the same interests.

Vikram and I started playing table tennis at age 10, and ended up representing our school at the All India Nationals. It is another story that Vikram went on to become the school champion for five consecutive years! I'd like to believe that I had a big part to play in that; after all, I chose to lose to him in the semi-finals in the fifth year, so that he could make the school record. Deep down in my heart, I knew that my brother was always meant to be a winner, right from the start.

In 1988, a famous television serial titled 'Param Vir Chakra' used to be broadcast every Sunday on Doordarshan, which we used to watch avidly at our neighbor's house (we didn't have a television set at home then). One couldn't have fathomed at that point - 32 years ago - that Vikram would also become one of the 21 recipients of this highest Gallantry award in a battlefield.

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

Patriotism & Passion: The Call To Arms

Even as schoolboys, we were in awe of the men in uniform, as our school was inside the Army Cantonment at Palampur. The passion to join the Indian Armed Forces was somewhat natural, as most of our classmates and friends were from an Armed Forces background. Both of us were used to seeing men all around in Combat and OG. Though National Defence Academy was always the first choice, we also wanted to enrich our life experiences by attending college in a big cosmopolitan city. Both of us joined the DAV College at Chandigarh, also marking the beginning of hostel life as independent individuals.

The dream of joining the Forces never took a backseat. In fact, we had a lot of friends with a defence background even during our stay in the hostel, each one of them with a dream to don the uniform. For them, it was about carrying forward the legacy of their fathers or grandfathers, but for us, it meant a new world, a new way of life and a dream that had been embedded in our hearts from our school days.

My brother didn't just dream. He put in a lot of planning and hard work into a clear step-by step process to achieve his dreams. The first step was joining the National Cadet Corps (NCC), Air Wing at DAV College, Chandigarh. While it didn't mean directly donning the uniform, he imbibed the basics of discipline, professionalism, courage, fearlessness, camaraderie, a secular outlook and an understanding of what was to follow later. It also meant inculcating team spirit and building leadership traits by mobilising people from different walks under one banner and then taking them through the daily routine of PT, drills, adventure activities, social services and developing an all-round personality with a sense of duty, moral and ethical values, commitment and dedication. Having attended the camps like DCAT 1 and DCAT 2, he excelled and ensured that he booked his berth for the prestigious Republic Day Parade on 26th January 1994 at Rajpath. Leading a contingent was a dream for Vikram that started taking shape, and having been declared as the Best Cadet for his Directorate, the journey had already begun.

NCC became a part of his daily life, and he soon received the prestigious 'C' certificate, it was also the time to get into serious studies that were needed for the Combined Defence Services (CDS) Examination preparation. Spending nights at the college campus library and burning the midnight oil had become a routine. Vikram knew well enough that it was now or never, and he in no way wanted to leave anything to chance! In October 1995, we appeared for the CDS examination. In January 1996, we received news that both of us had cleared our written examination. Vikram cleared his Services Selection Board (SSB) in the very first attempt in March 1996 and opted for the Indian Army. I, on the other hand, was rejected twice by the SSB, and settled for business administration. How thrilled and proud we all were when he made it to the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun.

The Pipping Ceremony: A Dream Realised

On 6 December, 1997, Vikram Batra's dream came true. He took the oath as an Officer of the Indian Army. In the words of Field Marshal Philip Chetwode, who first used these words during the setting up of IMA, "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."

Mom and dad pipped the stars on his shoulder. He stood there grinning from ear-to-ear in his crew cut, several kilos thinner after the rigorous training! It was a grand moment. But it wasn't going to be an easy life and Vikram knew that.



Having been commissioned into 13 JAK Rifles, his first posting was in the strife-torn town of Sopore (District Baramulla in Jammu & Kashmir). Vikram had some intense face-to-face actions with terrorists in Sopore as part of counter-terrorist operations. We knew that he was born to fight against all odds. It was during his annual leave when Vikram visited us, that we would chat for hours about the challenges he faced in Sopore. I realised how much passion I myself had for the Forces. There was always great pride in my heart that my identical twin, Vikram was such a wonderful officer, marching ahead in life much faster than I could imagine. During our conversations, we would talk of the day that he would command his unit and I would get a chance to attend some of the regimental functions with his family and children. That dream is lost now.

Victory: The Kargil War

It was around this time that Kargil happened, and he was asked to move to help his colleagues and fellow soldiers flush out the Pakistani intruders who had entered Indian territory. His first mission was to capture Point 5140 at 17,000 feet. With the roaring sound of their regimental war cry, 'Durga Mata Ki Jai', Vikram led his company on the night of 19 June 1999. He had promised his Commanding Officer Lt Col Y K Joshi (later Lt Gen and Army Commander, Northern Command) that he would have his morning tea at Point 5140.

He led the attack so ferociously that he was intercepted by some of the enemy soldiers and challenged by them not to climb to the top, else he would lose his life. Vikram replied, "We'll see in an hour who is at the top". He strategically regrouped his men and lobbed a hand grenade destroying one of the bunkers, and killed five Pakistani soldiers in a close hand-to-hand combat. As promised, he radioed a message to his Commanding Officer, "Yeh Dil Maange More" by hoisting the tricolor atop Point 5140 on the morning of 20 June 1999.



His last statement to one of our friends before proceeding to the Kargil War, was that he would either hoist the national flag, or come back wrapped in the tri-colour

The last call he made to our parents was when he went for his first mission at Point 5140. It had given us all jitters, but we knew that Vikram was a daring officer, who treated every challenge like a cakewalk. His last statement to one of our friends before proceeding to the Kargil War, was that he would either hoist the national flag, or come back wrapped in the tri-colour. He kept his promise, and those prophetic words still haunt us.

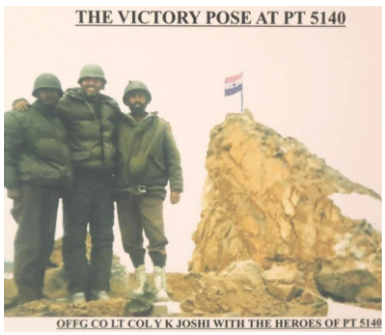
A Hero's Sacrifice: Immortalised At 24

It was months later, at the Western Command Headquarters, that I met the Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) who was with Vikram the day he was fatally wounded. He was the last man to speak to Vikram. Subedar Major Raghunath Singh (now retired Hony Captain) started wailing when he saw me. He was in disbelief – as if it were Vikram standing in front of him. He recalled the last moments of Vikram's life.

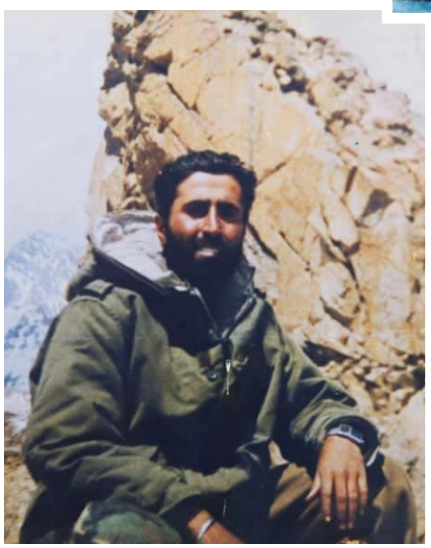
A young officer Lt Naveen, Vikram's junior, was hit by a grenade and needed urgent help in the second mission at Point 4875 (they say this was the most strategic feature for the Indian Army to recapture, as the entire Srinagar-Leh National Highway was visible from this feature). This mission was led by Vikram on 7 July 1999. The JCO wanted to go out and help, but Vikram stopped him. The enemy was firing heavily. "You have a family and children back home. I will do this," Vikram said, stopping the JCO, and instead going out himself. As Raghunath Singh narrated this incident to me, he wept like a baby, inconsolably.

Vikram jumped onto the other side of the cliff to silence the machine gun that was firing indiscriminately, and got into a close combat with three Pakistanis. He put them to death before being hit by a sniper from a close range. Having realised that their commander had fallen, the charged company went berserk with anger and destroyed all the enemy bunkers. The tri-colour was planted atop Point 4875—they call it 'Batra Top' now for his supreme sacrifice, and giving the











company the edge it needed to recapture this strategic feature. Vikram reached Palampur in a coffin before the sun rose on 11 July 1999. He was wrapped in the tri-colour, lying calm, almost as if he was trying to catch up on the sleep he had lost during his arduous assaults on those treacherous peaks. Vikram was awarded the country's highest gallantry award, the Param Vir Chakra, posthumously. He was only 24. I can still imagine him saying those famous words at 17,000 feet, "Yeh Dil Maange More", after victory over the enemy.

It has been over 21 years since that day. A lot has changed. A lot remains the same. I have grey strands in my hair and lines around my eyes. Vikram will stay youthful for eternity, immortalised at 24. Time cannot touch him. There has hardly been a day when I don't talk about him. I recently travelled to Drass and Kargil and paid tribute to my twin and all his fellow soldiers who laid down their life at 'Batra Top' on 7 July 2019 to commemorate 20 years of his martyrdom day, along with the sacrifice of all our men for protecting their motherland. 'The call of duty' - the mention of this phrase takes me back to the days he was to be commissioned as an officer. Vikram, you continue to live in the heart of every Indian, inspiring soldiers and civilians alike. **'O Captain, my Captain, my brother, my twin, I salute you.'**



Vishal Batra *is the identical twin of late Capt Vikram Batra, PVC, younger to him by just 14 mins. The twins studied at DAV Public School and Kendriya Vidyalaya, Palampur. Later, Vishal Batra completed his Masters in Financial Control from the Institute of Management Studies, H P University at Shimla. After a few years with TATA Finance Limited (Asset Financing Division) and IDBI Bank (Retail Banking Division), he joined ICICI Bank. He is presently working as Retail Business Head - North with ICICI Bank Limited and has been with the bank since 2001. He is based at Chandigarh and handles retail business of the Bank in eight states / Union Territories (Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Chandigarh, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh).*



Death Defying Bear Hug: Maj (Dr) L Jyotin Singh, AC

In this article, Lt Col L Manongba Singh narrates the story of a young martyr from Manipur, who was trained twice over to save lives – One on the Hippocratic oath as a Doctor; the other as a Soldier with a formal promise & covenant for loyalty and allegiance to the country. "The vower agreed to obey all commands of the President of the Union of India and from any officer set over him, even to the peril of one's life".

Major Laishram Jyotin Singh's 'train ride with us on Planet Earth' began in Nambol, a small but prosperous town astride the Tiddim Road in Manipur. This satellite township had witnessed the last stand of the Japanese Army at Red Hill (Maibam Lokpa Ching) in the Second World War in Manipur, before the tide turned against them. Today, Nambol is home to the Symbol of Reconciliation & Peace - India Peace Museum, sponsored by the Japanese Foundation.

This cocktail of borough cum countryside environs was home to a young boy, Jyotin, son of Laishram Markando Singh and Laishram Ibeyaima Devi. Born on May 14th, 1972 at Nambol Awang Leikai, he was blessed with two kind ladies as elder sisters Dr. L. Binakumari Devi & Smt. L. Ragini Devi (lecturer in mathematics) & a younger brother Professor L. Boeing Singh (Civil Engineering Professor at IIT Guwahati). Children of humble parents (father a State Govt Agriculture & Horticulture Department employee and a home maker mother) they all grew very tall in their own worlds as very highly accomplished professionals. Jyotin, the third child surpassed them all.

'Ibungo' as he was fondly called, did his schooling from Manipur Public School (MPS). He was the Placard holder of the MPS boy's contingent during state Republic Day Parades at Imphal. This was a position of pride for any teenager. Ibungo was very conscientious and diligent, he would reach Imphal at daybreak for tuitions, rest at a friend's place, and then attend school. He loved playing football, athletics, bodybuilding and trekking. He was destined for competition right from childhood.

He did his MBBS from the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal in 1996. His love for sports made him pursue and complete a two year Postgraduate Diploma in Sports Medicine from Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports in 2001, under Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Patiala. To quote a friend, "He would always wear a suppressed smile which would explode into a grin occasionally. He was always ready to help a friend in distress." The desire to reach out far beyond the lovely

meadows of his birthplace Nambol, the self imposed disciplined life that he inculcated as a young boy struggling through his schooling days, brought him to the portals of Army Medical Corps (AMC). He was commissioned into the AMC on 15th February 2003.

Reminiscing about his initial days after joining the army, his colleague Lt Col (Dr.) MKK Maring narrates "Four of us, Capt Ch Keishing, Capt L Jyotin Singh, Capt M Athikho & self, all from Manipur & alumni of RIMS joined the AMC in the same month. Fresh from medical college and with no army background in the family, we were a big humour in uniform. There were hiccups galore - sudden changes in our daily routine from civil lifestyle to military discipline, coping with mess etiquette, etc. During our pre-induction training in the hospital, the unit Company Havildar Major taught us drills and saluting. One day, the drill master gave a command 'Baiye Salute'; Jyotin promptly lifted his left arm and saluted in style. The drill master nearly fainted!! We then went for Medical Officers Basic Course at Officers Training School, AMC Centre & School, Lucknow. After completion of training, Jyotin was posted to Arunachal Pradesh in High Altitude Area with a medical unit of Border Roads Organization.

We were all young, handsome but clumsy men. At the end of the course, because of hard and rigorous training we all became refined gentlemen & probably better Doctors. We then parted ways on postings, to meet again for a brief while at Leimakhong / Silchar in 2009. Little did one realise that, this was the last time we would meet. I pulled his legs to get married".

One of his colleagues Major (Dr.) N. Jiten Singh (Retd) recalls that Major Jyotin was looking after not only the GREF personnel but also provided medical care to civilians and their families in that remote area of Arunachal Pradesh. The local populace was so happy with him that



The four Doctors from RIMS, Manipur at AMC Centre and School, Lucknow.

one of the local elders wanted him to marry a girl from the village and settle down there. While serving at the Military Hospital at Agartala, Major Jyotin at times wore several hats as a Medical Officer cum Quartermaster cum Adjutant & sometimes as officiating Commanding Officer of the unit. Apart from routine hospital duties, Jyotin shared his Sports Medicine expertise with his troops.

Jyotin, an excellent football and badminton player, would spend most of the evenings playing football with the Jawans of the unit or badminton with the officers of the garrison. This gave him an opportunity to interact with all ranks and he was indeed popular. The shy young lad from Nambol, Major L. Jyotin had transformed into a dedicated soldier, officer and doctor.

In September 2007, Jyotin was asked if he was keen to go to Hyderabad for the World Military Games in Oct 2007. Maj L Jyotin was advised to volunteer for such events as he had the qualification and experience to deal with athletics and sports medicine. This exposure would widen his horizon and earn him a life time experience dealing with armies of the world. Major L Jyotin Singh reached Hyderabad for the World Military Games from 14 Oct to 21 Oct 2007. There he worked hard, especially in the anti doping cell of the games, to the satisfaction of all and got a certificate of appreciation from the International Military Sports Council. Due to his competence and previous performance at World Military Games he was again detailed to provide



The martyr's brother Prof. L. Boeing School receiving the Ashoka Chakra from the Hon'ble President on Republic Day, 2011





medical cover for one of the disciplines at Pune during the Delhi Commonwealth Games in October 2008.

In December 2009, Jyotin reported to Delhi to undergo training for the Indian Medical Mission to Afghanistan. The night prior to departure for Kabul, Afghanistan, Dr. N Jiten and Jyotin met up at Delhi Haat, a favourite spot for North Easterners based in Delhi. He confided that an engagement was expected soon after his return from the Afghan Mission, with a girl of his parent's choice. He had not informed his parents about going to Kabul, as they might get worried. As destiny would later unfold, the two friends had their last meal together that evening. A few days after he landed in Kabul, he sent some photographs of the snowy residential compound to Jiten.
On 26th February 2010, news flashed that six Indian nationals had been killed in a terrorist attack in Kabul. The name of Major (Dr.) Laishram Jyotin Singh headed that list.

The Fateful Morning

Kabul at an elevation of 1791 metres is pretty cold in February with average temperature normally below 0 Degrees Celsius. Major Laishram Jyotin Singh had commenced looking after patients thronging the Indian Mission Hospital as part of the Indian Medical Mission team to Kabul on 13 February 2010. On 26th February at about 06.30 a.m. three Burkha clad terrorists and a driver tried to drive their car past the concrete mobile barriers placed at the entrance to the Noor Guest House in Shar E Naw, an upscale place in Kabul where Jyotin and other Indian staff were lodged. The neighbouring guest house had other international guests. When the Afghan Security guards and private armed security personnel challenged the car, three of the terrorists alighted and rushed away. The driver then detonated the car and himself about 60 metres short of the entrance to the guest houses. The blast left a 12 feet wide and 6 feet deep crater. Two of the terrorists then entered the neighbouring guest house. The third terrorist (whose 'Joridar' had blown himself up with the car bomb) rushed into the Noor Guest House. All the four terrorists wore explosive laden suicide vests. Of the two terrorists who had rushed towards the neighbouring guest house, one of them blew himself up with the suicide vest. Later it was confirmed that the terrorist accompanying him had escaped from the site through a blast hole in the wall.

The terrorist who entered Noor Guest House was searching every room for Indian residents. He started firing and hurled grenades while looking for 'Hindi Speaking' residents / guests. This terrorist found himself standing in front of the door of Maj Jyotin Singh with the AK 47 Assault Rifle in his hand. He had probably exhausted his grenades.

Maj Laishram Jyotin Singh was now standing face to face with the courier of death itself, clad in a deadly suicide vest who was about to lift his AK 47 Rifle for a 'Deathly sweep in front of him'. The next rooms few feet away were occupied by other Indian colleagues and officers, who too were unarmed, as per the diplomatic protocol and agreements with the Afghanistan Government.

The instinctive response of the hero would leave many dumbfounded. Probably he had no time for thinking about actions and reactions. It was sheer instinct of the Saviour, a split second action driven by the desire and mental focus to save lives. The sportsman in the Doctor too triggered the auto-motor action to react in the best possible defensive manner.

Major (Dr) L. Jyotin Singh pounced upon the terrorist standing just a foot or two away from him. The terrorist dropped his assault rifle on being surprised by this most unexpected reaction of the gallant doctor, and wrestled with Jyotin. The strong physique of the sportsman in the doctor ensured the terrorist didn't get the better of him. In desperation, the terrorist



Bust of Late Major (Dr) L. Jyotin Singh at the Jyotin Memorial Park in Leimakhong, Manipur

detonated the suicide vest that he wore. In milliseconds, both the bodies were blown into smithereens by the powerful RDX. Young Jyotin gave the Bear Hug of Death and saved further killings and annihilation that the terrorist would have brought down upon the others in the adjacent guest rooms. As eyewitnesses and a senior official described, the abdominal parts of the martyr were completely blown apart; it was only his serene face and appendages which had burn marks but no severe injury was seen. He achieved martyrdom in the highest traditions of the country and armed forces – That of Unsurpassable Gallantry in the Face of the Enemy. A Doctor, an Officer and a Leader of men, trained twice over to save lives – who saved his dozen odd unarmed colleagues. What more could one ask from such a valiant leader.

From eyewitness accounts it was also learnt that these terrorists spoke "Urdu' and not 'Pashto or Dari' which are in use as the lingua franca of the Afghans. It was believed that these terrorists were from Lashkar –e- Taiba who had carried out a joint operation with the Taliban.

The mortal remains of late Major L. Jyotin were brought home by a special flight of the Indian Air Force (IAF) on 28th February 2010. The IAF aircraft landed at Imphal airport at around 2:30 pm. Family members, relatives, friends and the Army Divisional Commander, Army officers and troops were at the airport to give a befitting Military Funeral to the Hero. The funeral cortege wound its way to Nambol for the last rites.

Late Major Jyotin's mother had one lament that her son never informed her that he was going to Kabul, thinking that they might object to his assignment and probably get him married early to change his mind from flying away. But he had already scripted his own destiny – to return home a hero.

On 26 January 2011, Late Major Laishram Jyotin Singh (MR-08609) was awarded the Ashoka Chakra, posthumously, by the President. Professor L. Boeing Singh, the youngest sibling of the hero, received the Nation's highest gallantry award from Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil, the Honourable President of India on behalf of the martyr. He is the first AMC officer to be awarded with this highest honour.

Ashoka Chakra is the peacetime Equivalent of Param Vir Chakra, awarded only for the "Greatest of the Ultimate Brave". Since inception of the award in 1952, only 83 individuals have been bestowed this prestigious Gallantry Award. The parent organisations, AMC and the army have ensured that the sacrifice of Jyotin Singh is not forgotten. AMC Centre & College, Lucknow has honoured this bravest son of India by dedicating its main auditorium in his name – 'Major Laishram Jyotin Singh, AC, Auditorium'. In addition, a prominent 'Chatuska' at the sprawling campus of AMC Centre has been named as 'Maj L.J. Singh, AC, Chauraha'. In December 2016, all ranks of Military Hospital Hissar, Haryana, contributed and installed a life size bust of the brave Doctor at a prominent crossroad of the Military Hospital. In Dec 2011, Leimakhong Military Garrison in Manipur ceremonially installed a bust of the 'Doctor', made by Sculptor Shri L. Phonindro Singh of Nambol. The then Divisional Commander also commissioned a park in his name – 'Jyotin Memorial Park'.

On 14th August 2020, the Manipur State Government instituted a new scheme called 'Major Laishram Jyotin Singh, Ashoka Chakra (Posthumous) Ex Gratia Scheme for Natives of Manipur killed in action' while serving in the Armed Forces or Assam Rifles or CPMFs. An amount of Rs 5 Lakhs as Ex Gratia would be paid to the Next of Kin of any martyr.

The youth and society needs luminaries. Here is a lionhearted knight, who has proven beyond doubt his bravery, dedication & loyalty to the country and humanity. The state of Manipur must use this tale of heroism as an inspiration for the young and capable minds.



Lt. Col. L. Manongba (Retd) *was commissioned into 6/ 11 GR on 07 June 1980, and took premature retirement in November 2003. In his second innings he was witness to epochal events, where he saw the birth of a new nation, i.e. South Sudan. At that time he was working as General Manager of a Petroleum Company in East Africa (South Sudan). He was elected as an Executive Member of the 1st Commercial Association of South Sudan (Petroleum Association of South Sudan). Since 2016, he has been overseeing the ECHS Polyclinic in Imphal, and is in the forefront of ESM activities in Manipur.*



A Typical British style Bungalow in McCluskieganj

An Army Mother's Unrequited Hope

An emotive account of hope amidst pain and despair, borne with fortitude and dignity by an elderly Army couple, who waited long years for news of their missing son from the 1971 War with Pakistan. The sacrifice of parents is no less than that of those martyred. We bow with respect.

"Bring back, Bring back O! Bring back my Bonnie to me, to me"

After a cold bath dot at 5 AM, come hail or frost, she would squat on the carpeted floor facing the portrait of a twenty year old lad, in the crisp uniform of a Lieutenant of the Sikh Regiment. After a brief yearning gaze, she would lower her eyes, open the Bhagwad Gita at random and recite on in soft murmur, uninterrupted till 9 AM; hoping that as she lifted her eyes, Kamal would walk out of the photo frame into her open embrace. This prayerful hope over the last 32 years of her life ceased only when she breathed her last.

Lieutenant Colonel O P Bakshi had superannuated from the Punjab Regimental Centre at Ramgarh (Jharkhand), in the mid 1960s and set up permanent home in a cottage on the outskirts of McCluskieganj (Ganj), purchased from a fellow officer who was resettling in Australia. It was truly the place of their desires, a life in quietude after more than two decades in close proximity of large bodies of soldiers and connected bustle.

Their preferred link to the world outside was a two hour train journey to Barkakana and another thirty minutes in an army vehicle to Ramgarh cantonment for stocking essentials once a month; or on rare occasions, when in need of medical aid. An enterprising newspaper vendor of the cantonment had arranged for a copy of The Statesman delivered to the Ganj Railway Station, daily! And the Colonel would enjoy his daily six kilometres to and fro ride on pony, returning to the shade of Sal trees in his compound to read the newspaper, end to end.

In the course of duty, I had visited Army establishments at Ramgarh where I chanced to meet the veteran, in 1990. It was a convivial meeting as we too had a cottage in



McCluskieganj Railway Station

Ganj. The veteran needed to consult an endocrinologist at the Command Hospital, Calcutta for which I promised him full support. Realising his advancing years I mentioned that a few days earlier, the Army's first Old Age Home had been inaugurated on the outskirts of Calcutta (Barrackpore) where Colonel & Mrs Bakshi could walk in on permanent basis, right away.

The Colonel smiled and said "thank you General Saab but our son who was declared "Missing in Action" in 1971 War at Chhamb is believed to be alive in an undisclosed jail in Pakistan. And if he manages to escape to India, he is sure to head home". So we will wait for him at McCluskieGanj, the only home he knows, "for as long as it takes." I was at a loss for words.

For the world around, the veteran couple lived a contented existence, never uttered a word of remorse or regret about what had come to pass. As their loss was so personal and exclusive, I refrained from initiating any conversation that I too had been at Chhamb and not too far from where Kamal, their son was last seen alive on 06 December 1971. Their two daughters and grand children visited them once a year and for that duration, the cottage resounded with laughter.

Late in his eighties, the veteran passed away in his sleep in mid 1998 and Mrs Bakshi, calm and controlled called around 6 AM saying simply "General Saab, Bakshi Ji gujaar gaya". I walked up to the home of the village "Mukhia" and arranged for a quiet, dignified cremation. Mrs Bakshi chose a spot, by the bank of a stream about a kilometre away where to the chanting of Shlokas by the village priest, she lit the pyre.



Lt Col And Mrs OP Bakshi

Just as the flames picked up into a cone skyward, a train thundered past blowing a loud whistle as though in a farewell salute to the veteran. I conveyed the news to Punjab Regimental Centre and they sent the Subedar Major and few soldiers in full dress uniform together with a priest for a ceremony at the cottage which Mrs Bakshi had desired. One of her daughters and sons-in-law tried persuading her to move in with them but Mrs Bakshi wouldn't budge. A few years later, unable to manage her household she moved to the Gandhi Ashram within McCluskieGanj, where she breathed her last, intoning undoubtedly,

"O! Blow ye winds over the ocean
And bring back my Bonnie to me, to me"



Lt Gen Baljit Singh, *AVSM, VSM (Retd) was commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery in 1956. He superannuated from service in 1992 after a distinguished career spanning 36 years. He was invited to the Board of Trustees of World Wildlife India in 1990 and served two terms therein.*



AN HONOURABLE CAREER

Many young persons have a high opinion of the Armed Forces, but not many consider the Forces as a suitable career option due to diverse reasons. But there are several boys and girls who would not mind giving a Forces career a look, they possibly miss this career opportunity due to lack of awareness. This article is primarily aimed at informing youngsters about the various entry options to join the Armed Forces and give the youth an idea about the selection process. This article is a broad overview, and we plan to cover different facets of joining the Armed Forces in our subsequent issues too.

As Indian Society evolves in tune with global changes, professions are also becoming more diverse. Several professions give a young person satisfaction, but not many professions give you honour and respect. Teachers and doctors are considered as respectable professions, but of late these careers have been linked to unethical practices. An Armed Forces career is one such profession which has consistently won respect, admiration and trust of our countrymen. It is indeed an honourable profession, is a lifelong bond, provides varied experiences, thrill, adventure and nurtures dedication and national ethos among the men in uniform. So, young men and women of India, come join us on this roller-coaster ride in the Armed Forces.

So how does one step into the portals of this splendid organisation? How to join the Armed Forces as officers remains a question mark in the minds of several aspirants, this gets aggravated by misinformation on social media and on some websites. The aspirants should rely on the official websites which provide a plethora of information and facilitate online applications.

The selection system to become an officer in most cases passes through three stages, with a written examination as the first stage. The shortlisted candidates have to then attend a rigorous four to five day Services Selection Board (SSB) interview, wherein he takes part in a battery of tests and activities. Those who clear this stage are then put through a medical fitness evaluation. In the case of some entries, the written examination is waived off and replaced by some other qualification criteria.

10 + 2 Level – The First Entry Stage

The National Defence Academy (NDA) / Indian Naval Academy (INA) Examination is the first opportunity for a twelfth class appearing boy to join the defence forces (either Army, Navy or Air Force) as an officer and serve the nation as a gallant young man. A boy after passing 11th class examination when he is promoted to 12th class can apply for the NDA/Naval Academy written examination which is conducted twice a year by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) for entry into NDA, Pune or the INA, Ezhimala. The picturesque INA is Asia's biggest academy, while NDA is the oldest tri service institution which is ranked 8th in the world in terms of education, training and infrastructure. The online applications can be filled in June and January on the UPSC website. The notification of the examination published by UPSC is very comprehensive and gives details of examination pattern, syllabus, medical, age and physical criteria and hence must be read carefully by parents and aspirants. Though there is no pass percentage laid down, but selection for the next stage is based on the merit ranking and candidates with low percentages rarely get selected. An NDA candidate can also apply for Air Force Ground Duties Branch.

During the three years of training at NDA the cadet's training routine includes Physical Training, Drill, games, horseriding, outdoor activities, Academic education, leadership camps and military subjects. The cadets have to learn a foreign language too. Air Force and Naval cadets curricula is B Tech while Army cadets attend B.Sc./ B.A. After three years of training, the Army cadets move to Indian Military Academy (IMA), while the Air Force cadets join Air Force Academy (AFA) and Navy Cadets report to INA for one year after which they get commissioned as officers. Parents do not have to pay any fees or hostel and mess charges during the training at the Academies.



Indian Naval Academy, Ezhimala



Photo Courtesy : Group Captain Abhijit Tokekar *National Defence Academy, Pune*

Besides NDA or Naval Academy Entrance Examination, a twelfth pass boy can also apply for Army Technical Entry Scheme or Navy's B. Tech Entry Scheme wherein he undergoes similar four years of training at different Cadet Training Wings in the Army or at the Naval Academy. Earlier the aspirants were shortlisted for Navy B Tech Entry Scheme based on Physics-Chemistry-Mathematics (PCM) percentages in twelfth class and joined INA after clearing Services Selection Board (SSB) interview and medicals. Since last two years the short listing is based on JEE (Mains) for B Tech only subject to getting above 70 % in PCM in twelfth examination. The notification and online application can be accessed on www.joinindiannavy.nic.in . In the third year of training the cadets get a stipend of Rs.56,100/ per month and in the fourth year they get the complete salary and finally pass out from INA as Sub Lieutenant in the Navy. Entry to Navy's Education Branch is also feasible through the Navy B. Tech. Entry Scheme.

For Army Technical Entry Scheme the dates of online application are similar and the website on which a boy can apply is www.joinindianarmy.nic.in. For date of birth and medical criteria the aspirant must read the official notification only published by the Army HQ. From June 2021 the short listing for this scheme will be based on JEE (Mains) for B Tech only score subject to above 70 % in PCM in twelfth. At present the basic military training of one year is conducted in Officers Training Academy (OTA) in Gaya, Bihar but is likely to be shifted to IMA, Dehradun. After one year of basic military training the cadet moves to pursue B Tech programme at Military College of Tele Communication Engineering, Mhow, or at College of Military Engineering, Pune or at Military College of Electrical and Mechanical

Many aspirants devote more time to running and other physical fitness activities, whereas they should prepare equally for all the tests

Engineering in Secunderabad. During the 3rd year of B Tech the cadets get the same stipend of Rs.56,100/ per month and in 4th year he is awarded the rank of Lieutenant in the Army. These officers may get posted to any regiment of the Indian Army.

Graduate Level Options

Combined Defence Services (CDS) Examination. There are several options available to join the Armed Forces after graduation. The CDS Examination conducted by UPSC is a popular entry option, the online application is available on the UPSC website in August and November. Only male candidates of B Tech stream can apply for Navy, while male candidates with PCM in 12th only can apply for Air Force and any graduate irrespective of 12th standard subjects can apply for the Army training at IMA and OTA, Chennai. Girls can apply for OTA only. The CDS notification gives all details of medical and physical criteria but doesn't cover the syllabus. For IMA, INA and AFA the papers of English, Mathematics and General Awareness of 100 marks each have to be cleared but for OTA, Mathematics paper is exempted.

Air Force Common Admission Test (AFCAT). AFCAT is conducted by the Air HQ and is a common admission test for all branches of Air Force such as Flying, Technical, Administration, Education, Logistics and even Law Branch. Girls can apply for all these branches. For Flying Branch PCM in 12th standard is compulsory whereas BE / B Tech in specified streams is the requirement for the Technical Branch. LLB is the eligibility norm for the Law Branch. A candidate with non PCM background in 12th standard and any degree can apply for Administration and Logistics Branches. For Education Branch post graduate appearing or passed only can apply. The AFCAT notification and how to apply instructions are covered comprehensively at www.afcat.cdac.in The two hours examination is conducted online and is of 300 marks covering Intelligence Quotient (IQ), General Knowledge(GK) and Current Affairs. The passing cut off is as low as 145/300 but candidates must never aim to merely score the cut off. In addition, the Air Force asks for applications for Meteorological Branch from those who are pursuing post graduation in specified subjects, without putting such applicants through AFCAT.

Indian Navy Entrance Test (INET). INET (Officers) was introduced by the Navy in 2019 as an online examination for all branches of the Navy to include Flying, Technical, Education and Law. The Navy intake is only for technical graduates, except for Education Branch where post graduation in specified subjects is the requirement and LLB is the basic qualification for Law Branch. The test includes IQ, Mathematics, GK and Current Affairs.

Technical Graduate Course (TGC) and Short Service Commission (Technical) Course. TGC and Short Service Commission (Technical) Course (SS Tech) are the options for technical graduates wherein they can apply for joining as Army officers after their 7th semester of Engineering Degree. While only boys can apply for TGC but boys and girls both can apply for SS Tech Course. The branches or streams and vacancies for each is specified in the notification published by Army HQ. Selected candidates of TGC undergo training at IMA Dehradun and SS Tech cadets are trained at OTA Chennai.

NCC Special Entry. Boys and girls who have completed NCC C certificate of all three wings that is Army , Navy and Air Wing and have above 50 % in graduation can apply for NCC Special Entry direct SSB interview in August and February. On selection, they join the Short Service Commission Course and undergo training at OTA, Chennai. Boys and girls who have completed NCC C certificate from Air Wing with PCM in 12th standard and have above 50 % in graduation in BSc/ BCA/ BTech can apply for NCC Special Entry direct SSB interview for AFA in June and December. If selected, they are absorbed in Flying Branch after successful completion of training.

Besides the above major entry options there are some specialist entry schemes for Veer Naris, and for entry to the Territorial Army and for Coast Guard too. Their details can be accessed on the official websites.

Some Prevailing Myths

Physical Tests Are The Most Important. The physical tests during SSB interview are the individual obstacles which are of only three minutes. Many aspirants devote more time to running and other physical fitness activities, whereas they should prepare equally for all the tests.

Reservation. There is no reservation for the defence examinations for officers, which includes NDA, CDS, AFCAT and INET. The SC and ST candidates are exempted from paying the examination fees only. There is reservation in Indian Coast Guard in which only age relaxation is given to the SC and ST candidates.

Seats for Students of Military and Sainik Schools. There is no quota for such students but more students from such schools get selected mainly because they are groomed for the examination and

Examination	Application	Examination Date
NDA/Naval Academy	June January	September April
Tech Entry Scheme (Army/Navy)	May-June November-December	-
CDS	August November	November February
AFCAT	June December	September-October February- March
INET (Officers)	May November	September March
TGC	June December	-
SS Tech	August February	-

SSB interview from a very young age. So it is advisable for other students to also prepare well in time for the examinations and SSB interview.

Defence Personnel Children Selection. There is no special stipulated advantage for wards of defence personnel, and several children with a civilian background get selected for the Armed Forces. The wards of Defence personnel get selected if they are as good as the others in the open merit, they possibly have an advantage as they know more about the Forces having lived in that environment.

Girls can apply for NDA. Girls cannot apply for NDA but can apply for CDS, AFCAT, INET and various other options depending on their graduation subjects and percentages.

Benefit of NCC in NDA exam. NCC C certificate has a few benefits in graduation level entries but not for NDA, as you would earn C Certificate only in Senior Division NCC. If a boy has joined Junior Division NCC before tenth class then he gets a brief exposure to Defence Services.

Flying Branch. Normally parents and boys think that Flying Branch is only in Air Force, while Army and Navy too have Flying Branches, in fact the pilots in Navy are amongst the best in the world because they have to land and take off the aircraft from moving ships.

Defence Selections are Easy. Ease or difficulty of any competitive career oriented examination depends on the number of applicants and the number of vacancies. For example, approximately six lakh boys apply for NDA/Naval Academy Examination, while the UPSC shortlists approximately 8,500 as per the merit scores, and after the SSB interview and medicals only 413 join NDA every six months. The candidates who get selected in SSB are mostly excellent in studies, good sportsmen and have very good personality and character traits.

I have broadly highlighted the various avenues for entry into the Armed Forces as officers. Some changes do occur in these schemes from time to time, hence aspirants must visit the official websites highlighted in the text above, for latest details. Just as all the students prepare for JEE or NEET or CLAT, etc it is necessary to prepare for the Armed Forces Selection Tests too. In the subsequent issues of this magazine, further details about the SSB Tests would be covered. I have summarized the important dates for some of these entry schemes in the chart given alongside. I am sanguine that this article will be a suitable ready reckoner for young boys and girls.



Lieutenant Colonel Nikhil Dewanji *is a graduate from Holkar Science College, Indore and then joined 3 Mechanised infantry (1/8 GR). A DSSC qualified officer, he has been a part of the National Security Guard, and also served in Somalia, as a part of the UN Peacekeeping Operation. After 24 years in the Army, he took premature retirement and was initially heading the Human Resources departments of some companies in Indore. He launched Niks Academy as a unique institution which motivates, guides, mentors and trains young boys and girls to join the adventurous, challenging and honourable life as an Armed Forces Officer. In recognition of the sacrifice of martyrs, training in Niks Academy is free for Veer Naris and children of Battle Casualties, and Physical Casualties.*



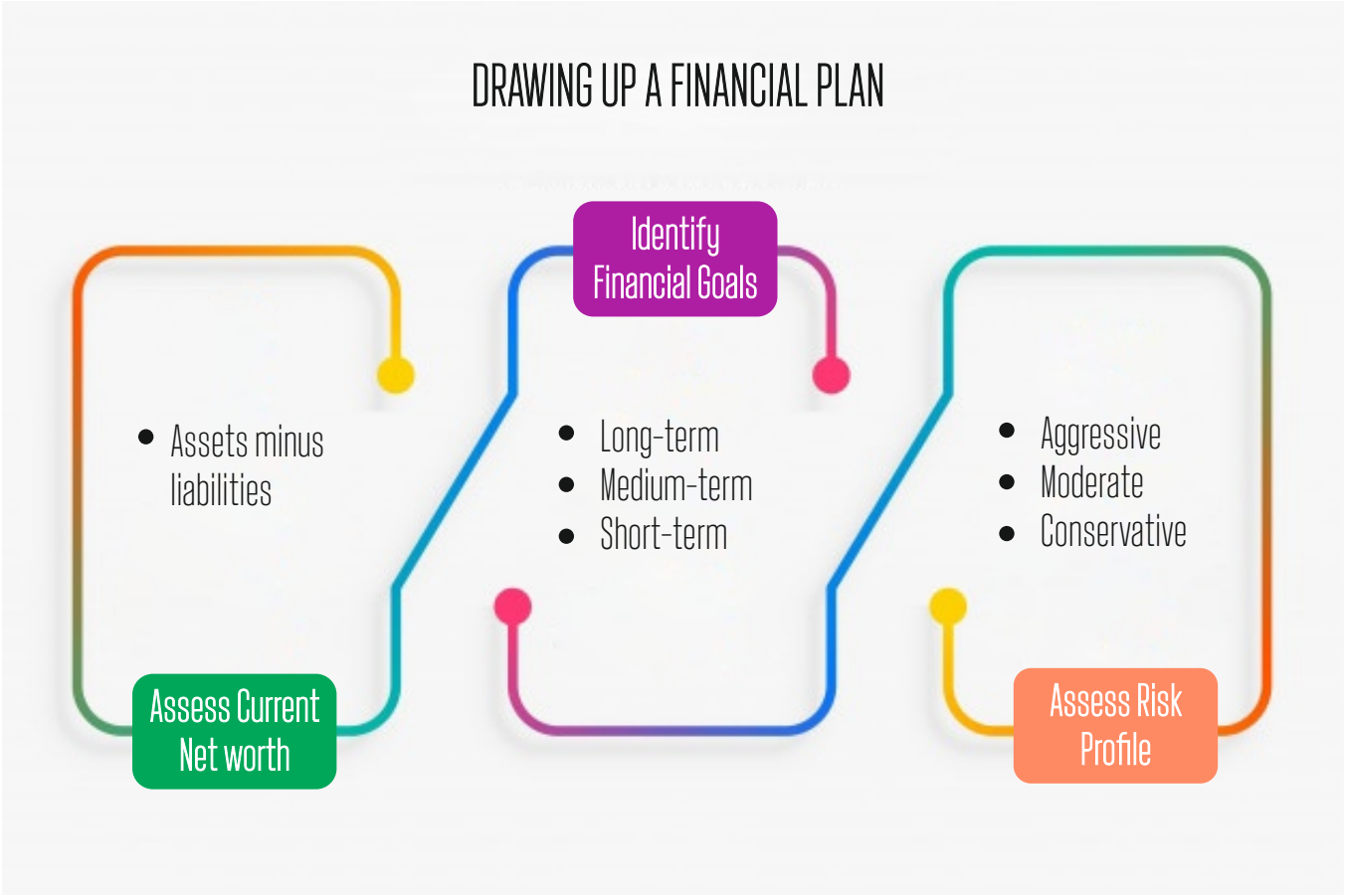
PERSONAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT IMPERATIVES

Money matters are extremely important to the salaried class, who have to plan to run the household and manage expenses, while also investing to meet future requirements. Continuing the series on financial management, the author gives us tips on investment planning.

"Put time on your side. Start saving early and save regularly."
— Burton G. Malkiel (US Economist)

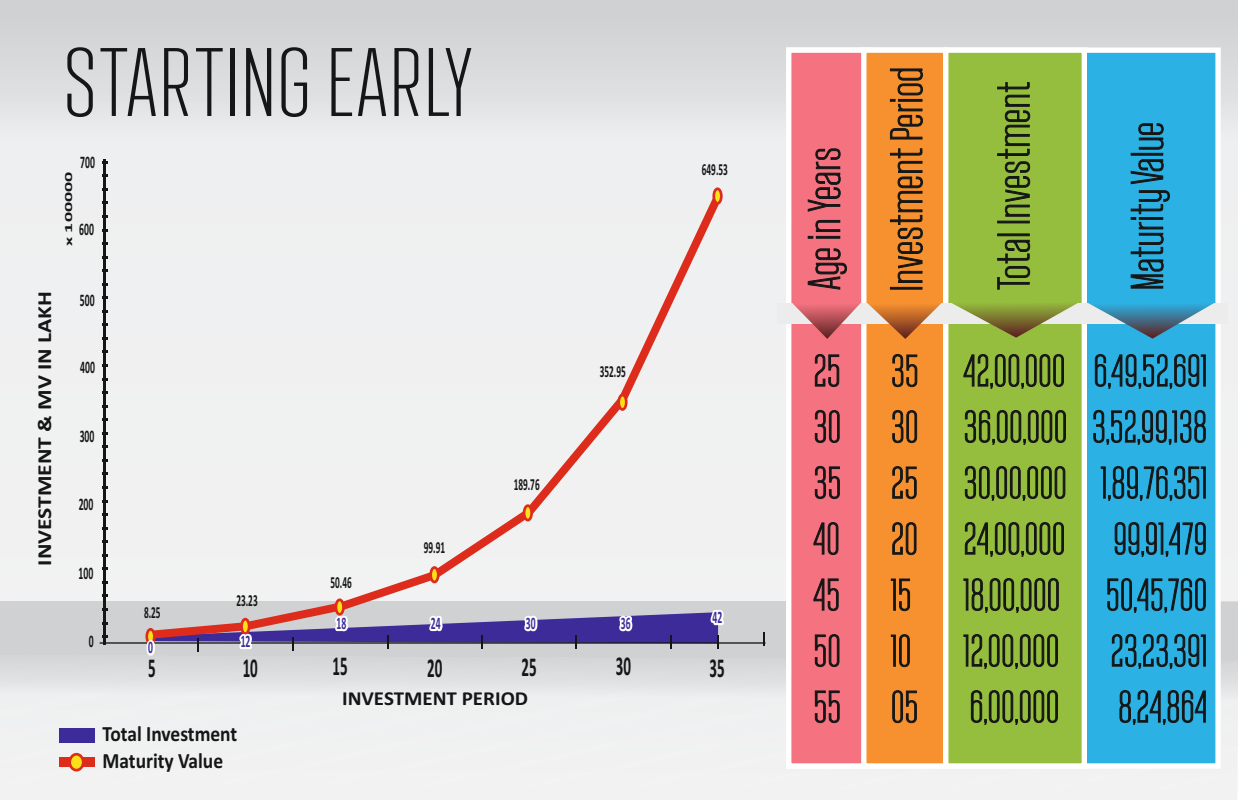
Fundamentally, there are two main strategies to profit from financial market participation, viz. trading and investing. Investment is the act of laying out money or capital in an enterprise with the expectation of profit in future. Besides money, it may also concern some other asset outlay like time or effort in hope of a greater payoff. Investors take a long-term 'buy and hold' approach for capital appreciation that may extend to years or decades while keeping themselves aligned to the laid down financial goals. Whereas, traders take advantage of rising and falling markets and have a short-term outlook (daily, monthly, or quarterly) to maximise their returns. This implies that an investor must meticulously evolve a financial plan before proceeding to invest. He may do this in three steps by calculating his current net worth, identifying his financial goals, and working out his risk profile. Having done these, he will then be able to correctly identify the various asset classes (equity, debt, gold, real estate, fixed income and so on) into which he must invest his money. Thereafter, he must start his investments as early in his career as possible, invest regularly and systematically, and increase his investments with time during his career.

Drawing up a Financial Plan – the most important aspect of personal financial management is to evolve a credible financial plan. An individual can do this in three easy steps. Firstly, he must assess his current net worth by deducting his liabilities from his assets. To calculate the assets, he must total his existing cash assets (in hand and in bank accounts) and the investment value of his existing investments, both movable and immovable, to include fixed deposits, bonds, securities, property, and automobiles. Then he must deduct his liabilities that include loans, mortgages, and credit card balances from the assets to arrive at his net worth. Positive net worth means that assets exceed liabilities, while negative net worth results when liabilities exceed assets. Secondly, he must identify his financial goals. The logical way to do this is to list them out,



classify them as short-term, medium-term, and long-term, then quantify each of them as per the present value of money. Thereafter, calculate their future value by adding the inflationary burden over the number of years that the goal will take to fructify. One can calculate it easily in Microsoft Excel or by using the formula FV = PV x [1+(i / n)](n x t), where FV is the future value of money, PV is the present value of money, i is the rate of inflation, n is the number of compounding periods per year, and t is the number of years. Short-term goals are immediate financial needs of the individual that he must meet in the next couple of years. The most important short-term goal is to set aside money (emergency fund) to meet unforeseen circumstances or unexpected expenses. Other short-term goals may include purchase of personal conveyance or consumer electronics for the household, pay child's admission/annual fees, domestic/foreign vacation, or simply meet a family commitment like sibling's wedding. Medium-term goals will include events or financial requirements that may arise within three to ten years from now. This may include down payment to purchase a house, an exotic family vacation or dream trip, starting a family or birth of second child, paying off loans, opting for a second career, or starting a business. Long-term goals are financial requirements that will come up after 10 years from now. These may include building a retirement corpus, children's higher education and their wedding, or purchase of a second house. Thirdly, he must assess his risk profile, which is an evaluation of his willingness and ability to take risks. He can either do this himself or through a financial advisor. For beginners, hiring a financial advisor is the rational way since he possesses the expertise and experience to profile him. Nevertheless, if someone wants to do it himself then most investment houses and banks offer online risk profiling services that involves answering a questionnaire. The individual should truthfully and carefully answer the questions to arrive at his correct risk profile – conservative, moderate, or aggressive.

Starting Early – the key to wealth creation is to start the investment as early in your career as possible. Firstly, this gives you more time to invest and accumulate. Secondly, it enables you to take maximum advantage of the power of compounding, which Einstein described as "the eighth wonder of the world". Let me explain this with the help of an example where an individual starts a monthly investment of ₹ 10,000 at the age of 25. If he retires at 60, then his investment period is 35 years. The chart and table show his total investment and its maturity value, when he is 60-year old,



Age in Years	Investment Period	Total Investment	Maturity Value
25	35	42,00,000	6,49,52,691
30	30	36,00,000	3,52,99,138
35	25	30,00,000	1,89,76,351
40	20	24,00,000	99,91,479
45	15	18,00,000	50,45,760
50	10	12,00,000	23,23,391
55	05	6,00,000	8,24,864

assuming that his expected rate of return on investment is 12%. It tabulates the same at 5-year age intervals to draw a comprehensible comparison. The power of compounding is evident from the chart, which also depicts that it requires a long-term approach for it to set in and for the investments to grow cumulatively. Therefore, if you start investing early then you give yourself the requisite time to capitalise on the power of compounding. Thirdly, it affords more time to take risks because age is in your favour. Risk includes the possibility of losing some or all the investment. Two factors that influence risk assessment and management are liquidity of the asset and time horizon of the investor. Young investors have longer time horizons for their retirement and may invest in high-risk assets like equity. As the investor ages, his risk appetite reduces. Accordingly, older investors who are closer to their retirement will invest in less risky and liquid assets like fixed income deposits or bonds. Therefore, the young investor, by giving more time to his investments to grow, accumulates wealth due to his ability to invest in high-risk assets that have higher potential returns and by using the power of compounding. Lastly, it helps you to avoid taxation by investing in financial instruments that provide tax benefits. Our government offers lot of income tax deductions and exemptions. Catering for various strata of the society and age groups, government offers these deductions/exemptions on market-driven equity based financial instruments and sovereign guarantee based fixed income schemes and bonds. However, most of them come with lock-in periods that young investors can easily afford and thus legally reduce their tax burden or avoid it altogether.

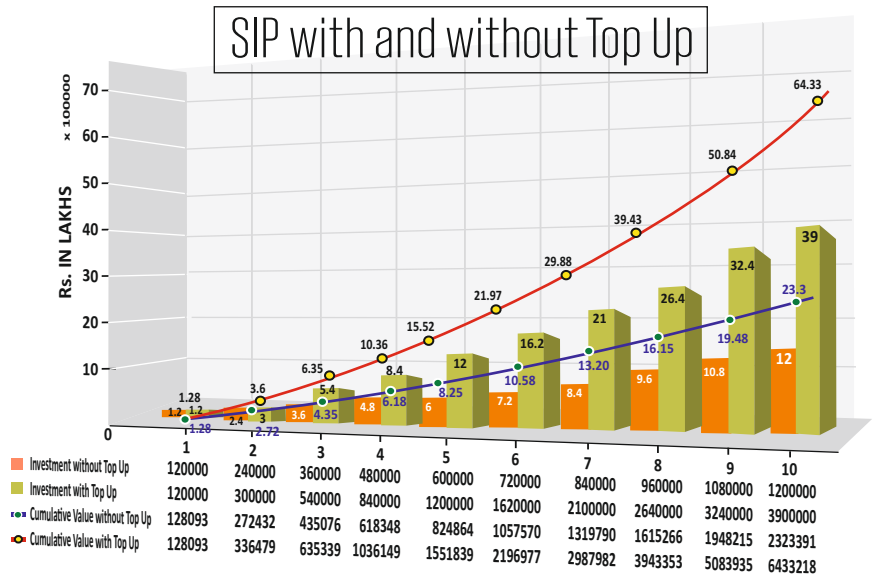
Invest Regularly – financial discipline is the hallmark of a good investor. An effective way to inculcate this is to invest systematically. This means that after quantifying his target amount to meet his financial goal, the investor invests a pre-determined sum of money every week/month/quarter to achieve the target. However, this is based on assumed potential returns of the financial instrument, which vary due to market fluctuations. An investor can invest systematically and directly in company shares through a systematic equity plan (SEP) where he can buy a fixed number of shares at regular intervals. Alternatively, he can use the systematic investment plan (SIP) to invest a pre-determined amount at regular intervals in mutual funds, which in turn invest in company shares at their fund manager's discretion. Besides, inculcating financial discipline this technique of investment helps the investor to achieve rupee cost averaging, which is an investment strategy in which an investor divides up the total amount to be invested across periodic purchases of a target asset in an effort to reduce the impact of volatility on the overall purchase[1] .

1. Dollar Cost Averaging as defined at https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/dollarcostaveraging.asp

The table below elucidates this strategy by showing that an investor buys more units when the NAV is low and fewer units when the NAV is high. A monthly SIP of ₹ 10,000 gets him 77.7 units when the NAV is ₹ 128.70, but gets him 101.833 units when the NAV is ₹ 98.20. The average cost for buying total 943.340 units over 10 months would be ₹ 1,00,000/943.340 units i.e. ₹ 106.01

NAV	98.20	80.79	116.50	128.70	121.60	110.29	103.60	98.30	103.70	113.10	TOTAL UNITS PURCHASED	AVG COST PER UNIT
UNITS	101.833	123.784	85.837	77.700	82.237	90.673	96.432	101.729	96.432	88.417	943.340	106.01

Incremental Investment – incremental means an increase or addition, especially one of a series on a fixed scale. In financial investment terms it implies that the investor increases his systematic investment at pre-defined intervals by a fixed amount. This enhances the flexibility of the investor to invest higher



amounts during the tenure of the SIP. He can do this based on the increment in his salary or income from other sources, annual bonus, cutting down wasteful expenditure, or following strict household budgetary norms. We call this technique of investment as Top-up SIP that helps him to reach his financial goals faster and helps him to stay in line with inflation. To exemplify this strategy of investment, let us assume that an investor starts his monthly SIP in the growth option of an equity mutual fund with ₹ 10,000 and decides to top it up annually with an increment of ₹ 5,000. Let us also assume that this fund gives him a 12% monthly compounding rate of return. Then, his total investment after 10 years is ₹ 39 lakh and the value of his investment is ₹ 64.3 lakh. In case he had not increased his SIP annually and decided to continue the monthly SIP with ₹ 10,000 for 10 years, then his investment would have been ₹ 12 lakh whose value would have been ₹ 23.2 lakh. The chart shows the power of compounding in the Top-up SIP wherein the fund value after 2 years increased by a mere 24%, however after 10 years it increased by a phenomenal 177%.

Diversification – this is a risk management scheme wherein the investor does not put all his eggs in one basket, but mixes different asset classes in his portfolio. Although this reduces the portfolio risk, offers higher long-term returns, however, it is time consuming to manage and limits short-term gains. The investor can diversify his portfolio across various asset classes like equity, debt, real estate, or gold. He could further diversify within each of these asset classes, e.g. in equity he could invest in large, mid, or small cap. Similarly, for debt he could invest in government or corporate bonds, treasury bills, certificates of deposit (CD) or money market vehicles. Simultaneously, he may resort to geographic diversification by investing in domestic and foreign markets. But, he should be wary of over diversification that may dilute his portfolio and hamper efficient portfolio management. His risk profile and financial goals will help him to determine the share percentage of investment in various asset classes. In turn, he can calculate the amount of investment to make in each of his diversified assets. In case age is with him and he has started early in his career then he can invest up to 65 to 75% in equity. This investment in equity must gradually reduce to 15 to 20% when he retires. Quite inversely, he must invest about 15 to 20% in debt and fixed income during the early part of his career. He must then increase it gradually as he nears his retirement to invest 65 to 75% in debt and fixed income instruments at the time of his retirement. Ideally, he must use gold to hedge his equity investment and it should make up 5 to 10 % of his overall portfolio. .



Colonel Raj Rakesh *is a 1980 batch ex-NDA officer who commanded an armoured regiment and converted it to state-of-the-art T-90 tanks. He served as a Brigade Major of an independent armoured brigade and as Colonel General Staff of an infantry division. Post retirement, he is a consultant with an investment advisor at Jaipur and edits their monthly investment magazine. The officer has also contributed to DLAV annual magazine 'SAMMAAN' and number of web portals.*

New Beginnings – A Transition to the US of A



Many officers choose to opt out from Armed Forces Service after few years due to diverse reasons, and decide to take a plunge in a different profession. Some second innings stories succeed, some don't. In this first person account, the author highlights the pitfalls, the need to invest in self-development to attain a higher leadership position.

ARMY BEGINNINGS

All sons want to make their fathers proud, and perhaps more importantly, one-up them in this game of life. Being the son of an Army father, I was no exception. At the age of 10, I joined Military School, followed by NDA, then IMA, and after a decade plus of schooling and training, I was commissioned into 1 JAT (Light Infantry). I was pleased with the path I was on, and climbing the army ladder was my priority. But life's paths change, funny how that seems to happen to even the best laid out plans. While I was finishing up my training to become a young officer, my mother and sisters moved to the United States and requested me to join them. For the first few years, I was able to pend the decision, but eventually, I had to deal with it. At the age of 28, I had to make the most



With Lt. Avnish Gupta & Lt. NS Shekhawat



With the Legendary Sub Darbara Singh in NDA



Chhappans based in the US

significant decision of my life – choosing between career and family.

While I felt a duty to my country and the Army, I had to reconcile this with my familial obligations. My father had died from lung cancer shortly after I joined Military School, which left my widowed mother to pick up the slack. The personal sacrifices she had to make for my benefit were etched in my mind as a child and constantly resurfaced while I wrestled with this dilemma.

My service friends and mentors counseled me and unanimously argued that I had nothing to gain by going to the United States. I had a career I was excited about, a lifestyle I enjoyed, and the prestige of being an officer in the Indian Army. If I moved to the United States, I would be just another poor immigrant. With all these conflicting thoughts running through my head, and after much reflection, I realized that my family's home had already become the United States, and despite the risks associated with building a new life in a foreign land, I knew it was my turn to be the support to my mother and sisters in USA.

But for decades after I was eligible to be a US citizen, I held on to my Indian passport – the last link to my past identity. I would only reluctantly give it up after 9/11, when there really was no other choice.

Higher Education -The Ticket to a New Life

Once in the US, I started working in the family business – an auto repair franchise and soon realized that it was not my calling. A friend suggested that I should learn some necessary computer skills. I splurged on a 286 Personal Computer and a dot matrix printer for $5,000, which was considered frivolous by my family. It was the '80s, and having a personal computer was still a rarity. In hindsight, it was one of my best investments as I became conversant with word processing and spreadsheets, skills that would be invaluable for me in the coming years at school and at work.

The late '80s and early '90s were the golden years for new immigrants to pursue higher education in the US. Several public universities had graduate programs that also offered research or teaching assistant positions. While the salaries were minimal, tuition, which was the most significant expense, was free. One of the Indians coming to the US to pursue this option was a young lady from my home-state of Tamilnadu who came to my house in New York while flying en-route to join the University of Mississippi. A year later, she became my wife, and life was never the same.

At my wife's suggestion, I decided to go back to school. One of the requirements was that my degree's original transcripts had to be mailed directly from NDA to the college, which was unlikely to happen. Furthermore, American Universities did not recognize the three-year degree program from an Indian University to be equal to their four-year Bachelor's degree. Despite all this, I was fortunate - a professor from the graduate program in City & Regional Planning at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York was willing to take a chance on me with the understanding that she would review my status based on my grades at the end of the semester. Six months later - the grades were fine and she suggested that I take some engineering courses at a public university where the tuition costs were lower.

Armed with the grades of my first semester at Pratt Institute, I applied for and was granted admission to the College of Engineering at the City University of New York. For the next 18-months, I pursued courses in three different colleges as I tried to wrap up my degrees in planning and engineering. Meanwhile, my wife transferred from the University of Mississippi to the New Jersey Institute of Technology and we were able to start life living together.

The Kindness of Strangers

In 1992, a note on the bulletin board at City College led me to drive in my beat-up car, a yellow taxi cab with over 100,000 miles in its previous life and now painted blue to my first job interview at Meadowlink – a non-profit organization based in the Meadowlands in New Jersey. Its mission was to implement transportation programs and services to enhance regional mobility, reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and enhance economic opportunity for both business and people – easier said than done.

Meadowlink was a public-private

The first few years were a challenge as I learned that reporting to 25 stakeholders is not the same as reporting to one person.

partnership with major state agencies like the New Jersey Department of Transportation, New Jersey Transit, New Jersey Turnpike Authority, Port Authority of New York & New Jersey, New Jersey Sports & Exposition Authority, as well as businesses like Panasonic, Verizon, Edwards & Kelcey, Federal Reserve Bank, Bank of New York, and Hartz Mountain Industries on its board.

The Executive Director – Joe Carragher, an Irishman, did not attend college but was one of the smartest people I have met. He had served as the Bureau Chief of the Star-Ledger newspaper, Executive Director of the Garden State Parkway, and Secretary of the State of New Jersey –the third-highest elected position in the state. The interview was brief, and I had a job. Years later, I learned that I got the job because he had never interviewed a candidate with two master's degrees and near-perfect grades. Joe was a great boss - very astute, and I owe a lot to him, including most of my writing skills.

Public grants funded Meadowlink, and a year after I joined the company, we lost our primary contract that accounted for almost 90 percent of our revenue. We tried to drum up business, and, after several months, we were able to work with a major corporation to provide transportation planning services. Business boomed as other large corporations followed suit, and we more than doubled revenues from prior years. The following year - 1995, Joe retired, and I was his replacement. My son – Vishnu, was born the same year.

The first few years were a challenge as I learned that reporting to 25 stakeholders is not the same as reporting to one person.

Everything changed in 1998 with the arrival of a new Chairman - Perry Frenzel, an engineer and a senior vice president with Hartz Mountain Industries – a privately held real estate company. Given his responsibilities at Hartz, I was unsure if he would commit sufficient time to the organization. He proved me wrong by coming to my office once a week and schooling me, and still serves as the Chairman to date.

It's Not Always about the Money

As the company continued to grow, I felt that I could refine my business skills by going back to school. In 2002, I enrolled in Columbia University's MBA program. The board agreed not only to pay for my college but also provided me with the flexibility I needed to attend classes and kept me on their payroll. Typically, most people complete an MBA to improve their job prospects and switch jobs on completion. So, the practice of golden handcuffs is common – the company subsidizes the cost of the program and in return the employee is obliged to serve the company for a specific time. I had no such constraints and was free to leave if I chose to do so.

Like all business graduates, I met with the career counselor at Columbia to explore my future job options. I spent several hours with him discussing my plans for the company – introducing a Carsharing program in the Meadowlands, a Bikeshare program in the City of Newark, and the introduction of a shuttle program to serve major train stations in northern New Jersey. At the end of the session he concluded that my heart, head, and future were with Meadowlink.

I was not convinced and later that night discussed the situation with my wife who worked in New York and spent at least two hours commuting to work each day. She put in perspective the benefits I enjoyed – a short 10-minute commute to work, never missing my son's basketball game, coming home for lunch and spending time with my mother, enjoying long runs every day, a great boss, opportunity to try new things, making a real difference in the lives of people, and an established track record.

The decision was made – I would remain at Meadowlink. The following year, I ran the New York marathon in four hours and 11 minutes – not too bad.

The Search for Talent – I win the Jackpot

As the company continued to grow, it was clear that I needed serious help to implement our ambitious plans. Great talent is hard to come by and we were competing with a limited budget which made it even more difficult.

It was pure luck that I met a brother officer who had also served with me in my unit back in the '80s. Avnish Gupta was also a Captain when he resigned from the Army to go to law school at Delhi University where he was a gold medalist and then to Georgetown University in Washington DC to earn his LLM. He was working for a law firm in Harrisburg in Pennsylvania and was thinking about taking up a new job in California. Over lunch at his house, I broached the idea of joining me at Meadowlink. He agreed and the rest is history. While we had a lot in common, Avnish brought complementary skills in law, personnel, and operations. He joined Meadowlink as the COO and General Counsel.

We tried and launched several new initiatives – the carshare and bikeshare programs I had been thinking about while at Columbia, about a dozen different shuttle programs, a transportation



Four generations of the clan

program for people with disabilities, and another for older adults using volunteer drivers. Not everything worked, but as a result of our efforts, in 2008, Meadowlink was presented with the Outstanding Transportation Management Association (TMA) Award by the Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT). The award is presented to an organization that best uses its public/private partnerships to achieve local or regional transportation goals.

The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) followed, in recognizing Meadowlink as the 2013 Urban Community Transportation System of the Year. The award recognized excellence where an urban transportation system best serves the needs of people in their communities. Meadowlink was selected for "innovative and creative collaborations throughout its service area which included most of New Jersey´s most populous counties." The transportation programs that serve seniors and individuals with special needs were highlighted as being especially innovative.

We even received kudos from former President Barack Obama in his budget speech when he applauded one of our shuttle programs that picked up about 400 riders every night from their homes to take them to the train station and their jobs between the hours of 1 am and 5 am.

Marching On

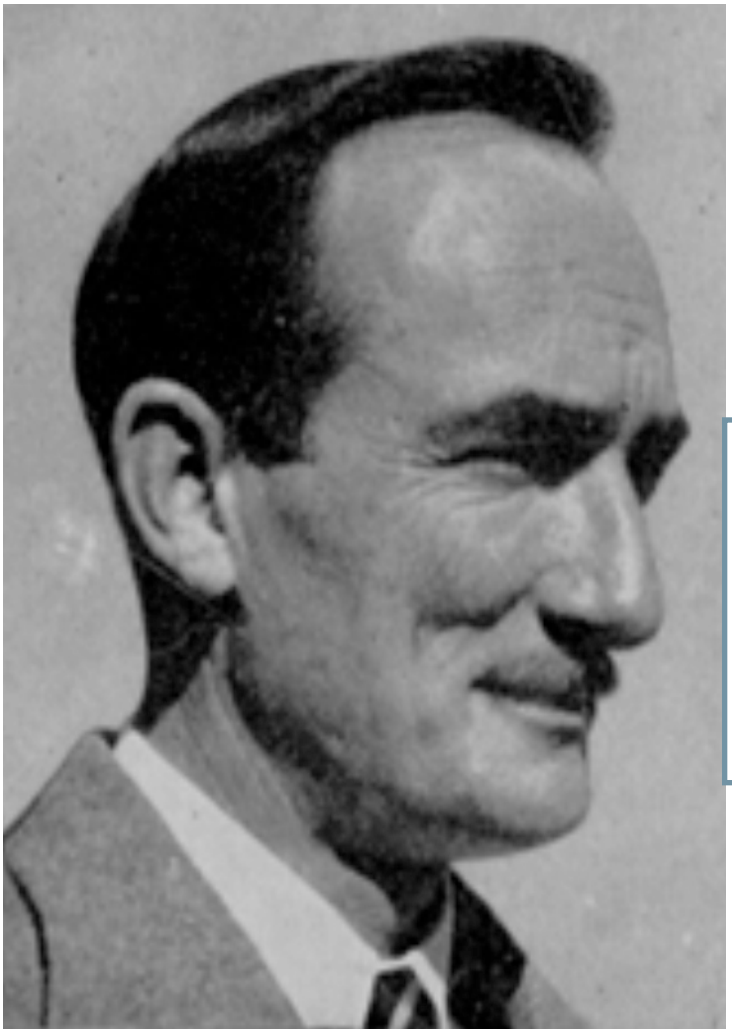
Forty years later, the words "Do not fight the pinks" continue to ring in my ears. Those words were often used by the Directing Staff (DS) at the sand model exercises at NDA, IMA, and other training institutions to remind participants to accept the hypothetical constraints of the battlefield in planning our response. They carry the most important lesson that I have learned in life: accepting the conditions in any situation as constraints and working with what you have to get the job done – no excuses.

Of course, the newest constraint that all of us are dealing with today is COVID-19. The pandemic has taken a toll on all transportation providers and in some cases ridership has declined by 90 percent or more. We were no exception and sadly had to make the painful decision to let go of more than a 100 of our employees. Yet, it also offered us a once in a lifetime opportunity to rebuild for the next wave of changes in the transportation arena - fleet electrification and automation. We are planning to introduce our first batch of all-electric shuttle buses, charging stations, and maintenance bays in 2021 with the goal of having an all-electric fleet by 2025.

While I am excited to see what happens in the future of my personal life and Meadowlink's, when I take a step back, it's hard not to see that this life has already been a great adventure. It was only made so by the people I had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know. I am blessed to still be able to often talk and sometimes meet with my NDA course mates. We often reminisce about days past and the odds of meeting 7,000 miles away from our home.



Krishna Murthy *was commissioned into the JAT Regiment in 1980 and joined 1 JAT (LI) that later became 2 MECH INF. He was an excellent basketballer and represented IMA. Persistent shoulder dislocations however compelled him to take a break from Basketball. He currently serves as the President and CEO of the Meadowlands Transportation Brokerage Corporation (Meadowlink) a non-profit, public-private partnership that provides transportation services in New Jersey.*



John Masters



Gorkhas Gup Shup:
John Masters Revisited

In the Armed Forces, there are many personnel whose elders have also been a part of the Armed Forces. The uniform has been donned by two or more generations, and Army Brats are privy to interesting tales and Regimental lore. Rohit Deshpande narrates humourous tidbits and stories about the hardy and valiant Gorkhas, picked up from his father and others he met while growing up in the company of Gorkha troops.

John Masters or Masta Sahab as he was popularly known amongst the troops is singularly responsible for sending three generations of my family to serve in the Gorkhas. Lieutenant Colonel John Masters, DSO, OBE (26 Oct 1914 – 7 May 1983) was a British novelist and a regular officer of the British Indian Army. After mandatory service in a British Regiment, he joined the Second Battalion of the Prince of Wales own Fourth Gorkha Rifles. His books, Bugles and Tigers and Road Past Mandalay describe his life amongst the Gorkhas and service in Burma with the Chindits. These books written in 1956 and 1961 respectively have lucid descriptions of the Gorkha soldiers who are the actual heroes of both biographies.

Masters was in awe of the Gorkhas, he literally worshipped them. He describes a rustic, simple, honest people who are fiercely loyal and irrationally brave in war to the point of being fearless but the most gentle, docile and loving in peace. Of short stocky built and mongoloid features, these beautiful people emerge like mythical cherubs, God's own people, angelic in demeanour; immortal in behaviour. Anyone who reads these books would inevitably fall in love with them and so did my grandfather who coincidentally was born the same day as John Masters. He joined John Masters' Battalion on commissioning from The Officers Training Academy, Chennai (First Course) in 1966 and went on to serve for ten years with them.

I never saw my grandfather unfortunately as he died a year before I was born but realised his presence in my life much later when my father was posted as an Assistant Military Attaché in Kathmandu, Nepal. One evening, my father while returning home found an old wrinkled man wearing a grey shirt which had seen better days, worn grey trousers and a Dhaka topi sitting outside our Bungalow. On enquiry he asked my father if he was Capt Suresh Deshpande's son and when my father a little taken aback, replied in the affirmative, he introduced himself. "Honorary Naib Subedar Purna Bahadur Gurung", he smiled and replied "your father's Company Havildar Major (CHM)" (term denoting a Non-Commissioned Officer responsible for all the happenings in an infantry company within a battalion). He then narrated several stories about my grandfather putting him on a pedestal, and his respect for my grandfather was profound. My father had tears in his eyes that evening, it took me a long time to understand why.

My father always says that there is a kind of a free-flowing energy something like the 'Chi' in Chinese in a Gorkha Battalion. There are no formal orders, no rigid discipline is enforced, the environment is easy and relaxed but the outcomes however are superlative. It is like watching Sehwag play in full flow, completely at ease but devastating in effect. The officer-men relationship is fantastic especially because all officers learn the Nepali language within the first few months and also visit Nepal for trekking through the traditional recruiting areas for a month on their first annual leave. He recalls an incident during training at the Counter Insurgency Jungle Warfare School where the whole battalion was training before induction in the North East. Apparently, the training was being conducted in a tropical rainforest and was on slippery hill trails where the Commanding Officer (CO) had the honour of seeing both his legs turn





skywards and then sliding down the hill on his softer parts. In ordinary infantry battalions this would have been a catastrophe but not in the Third Battalion of the Fourth Gorkha Rifles which my father had joined (Interestingly, John Masters had commanded the Third Battalion so the connection continued). There was a moment's silence followed by roars of laughter all around the spirit so infectious that everyone doubled up with a few curling up in mirth. The chief honcho had no option but to join in the laughter and holler up to the nearest man to help him get up on his feet.

I will never forget the day in Siliguri when I was bowling to my father in the lawns and he got a fast one in his vitals where people normally wear a guard. He was doubled up in pain on the lawn and me and my brother doubled up in laughter on the lawn when we saw his Gorkha buddy rush out with a Moov spray in his hand. My father gave him the look of his life and he is still wondering what was wrong with that.

In Marathi literature one of the most famous character sketches ever done is 'Vyakti and Valli', roughly translated as 'People and Characters'. The book has excellent humorous and heart-rending character sketches of various personalities. The Gorkhas similarly can never be grouped as people and each one is a character of his own with distinct traits. Havildar Lal Bahadur Pun was one such character. Before describing him, one has to understand Puns of Mid-Western Nepal. Puns are an offshoot of the Magar tribe and are of Mongoloid origins. The Puns are known to be of a robust and diligent stock with strong necks and upper bodies. The popular legend goes that a Pun soldier will serve on the last day with the same zeal as his first. Inevitably one would find the Puns occupying positions which required a sincere and reliable person in the battalion. Lal Bahadur the epitome of the Pun character and therefore obviously chosen as the CO's buddy. Lalle as he was popularly known had a unique relationship with the CO. Lalle would interrupt an important



operational conference with the CO's lunch and shoo the rest of the officers away for fifteen minutes. He would do it with such affection and authority that no one grudged him that intervention, in fact some looked forward to it. The most endearing tale is of Lalle complaining of stomach pain on an air-maintained post after completing a three-day outing on foot with the CO on a visit to various remote companies in Manipur. The doctor suspected appendicitis and asked for an air-evacuation. The surgeons in Dimapur were shocked to find a burst appendix and suspected medical negligence. They carried out an enquiry on the delay by the doctor to evacuate him and found out there was none. Apparently, they had underestimated the Puns. Lalle had marched for three days with the CO through hills and vales with a bursting appendix and only mentioned it on completion of the task. When asked why he didn't report sick earlier, he gave a curt reply "then who would have looked after the old man on the march?" Lalle survived that operation and served with dignity for many years before superannuation.

As the reader would have realised there's never a dull moment in the Gorkhas. The sangfroid with which they deal with life is infectious. They look at life for what it is without any baggage whatsoever. The Nepalese maybe poor in resources but they are rich at heart. My father once met an old acquaintance of the battalion in one of the pension camps. How's it going he enquired for the gentleman had opened a roadside eatery near the camp. Well he said, "I fund it through my pension". "I would rather die than take money from my soldier colleagues and I have no customers but ex-servicemen" My father shifted from the Fourth Gorkhas to the Ninth Gorkhas and that was a cultural shift of sorts from the short, Mongoloid and happy go lucky Gurungs and Magars , we moved on to the tall, Aryan looking, rather stoic soldiers of the Thakuri and Chettri clans. All apprehensions however were put to rest when one realised that but for the outwardly appearances everything else was more or less the same.

I would have ended up with the Gorkhas but for a quirk of fate which saw me breaking a couple of ligaments days before passing out when I was trying to show off my skills to a bunch of freshers. I am now in civvy street, part of the corporate world but I carry the Gorkhas with me everywhere. As Purna Bahadur Gurung told my father, "your father was like a child, he was full of life and mischief, restless and always up to something. He had a short temper but he never carried anything to heart, forgiving the most heinous misdemeanours after the initial salvo. He was more loyal to his troops than we ever were to him. He was a true Gorkha". I make an attempt to follow in his footsteps.



Rohit Deshpande *is an ex Gentlemen Cadet of the Indian Military Academy and National Defence Academy who was medically boarded out due to an unfortunate accident. He is presently pursuing his MBA in Strategic Communication and Marketing from MICA, Ahmedabad and loves to write in his free time. His grandfather and father have served in the Gorkha Rifles Regiment of the Indian Army.*



LONG RANGE PATROLS (LRP)

Many of us officers and men have seen operational service along our Northern and Eastern Borders. To maintain vigil along these vast, rugged mountainous borders, we have trudged along on LRPs, carrying a rucksack full of provisions and spare clothing. These LRPs ranged from seven days to 20 plus days, at times for upto a month. Notwithstanding the rigours and hardships, the LRPs gave us vivid memories of walking through dense bamboo jungles, and tackling the blood sucking leeches. Lit cigarette butts and salt were the prized weapons to tackle these silent parasites. While walking through these forests, we sometimes spotted a leech stuck on the neck of the comrade in front of us, and the quick anti – leech drill took care of the menace. At times, we were caught in downpours, and had to slog on with the heavy rain drenching us, while leeches fell down on our burly frames along with twigs and slush. To add to the happy situation, the tracks would turn slippery, with water channels running along the tracks, as we waded through them. After a hard day's walk on one such LRP, our 'band of brothers' halted for the night – as I removed my soggy jungle boots, I found myself gazing at 'red socks'. A couple of leeches had been at work, and the cigarette butt was immediately lit. Fortunately, the blood loss was not too serious, and I could continue on the LRP. As I look back at those times, we were never disheartened or distressed, in fact our young minds considered these as challenges, and we were filled with a sense of accomplishment after an LRP. We saw new areas, new meadows, new pastures and nature at its pristine best along the slopes of the Himalayas. There was cool mountain breeze to fill our lungs with sheer joy, and at times icy cold winds made our teeth chatter. At times, we trudged across snowclad slopes. Our hill troops were masters in 'living off the land', and fresh bamboo shoots were expertly cooked - an exceptionally delicious vegetable to rejuvenate tired limbs. All in all, the Indian soldier takes such perils in his stride. I recall a famous credo in the Commando Wing at Belagavi, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going". **An apt description for the Men Of Steel of the Indian Army.** *- The Editor*



DON'T ENVY A MAN HIS MEDALS

Don't envy a man his medals
All those ribbons on his chest
He did not try to get them
They're not there at his request

They were earned in stinking hell holes
Where no man would like to go
Or in cold and wintry places
Where there's only ice and snow

He did not know he earned them
Till they were awarded at parade
And they were bright when he first got them
But in time the colors fade

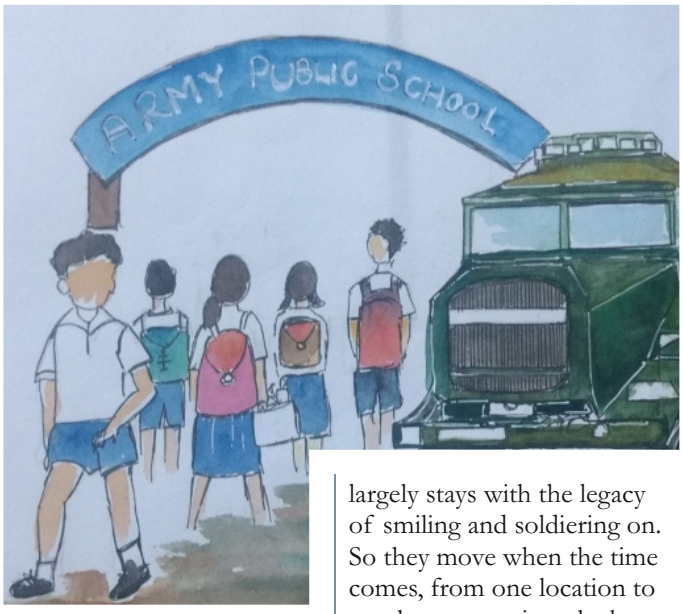
He was told he had to wear them
And to wear them all with pride
But when the memories come to haunt him
Those same medals make him hide

Cause those medals will not bring back
All those guys he left behind
And he would trade them all forever
For a little peace of mind

So don't envy a man his medals
You don't want to take his place
Thinking back to long gone battles
And meeting dead friends face to face

-Anonymous





UNTAPPED TALENT

The author highlights that Armed Forces spouses are a reservoir of professional skills and capabilities which can be harnessed in the new age 'work from home' environment. The organization should also be more open to the idea of professionally employed spouses and should be supportive. Interesting observations, read on!!

These are good, honorable men. They don't save a lady's number on their phone without her permission. They honor age and vulnerability and customs. They obey orders and carry a limitless liability on their pips-laden shoulders. Their medals and ribbons signify that their nation comes foremost. And while their stories unfold on the very visible platform of their community, there is a parallel tale humming in the shadows of all that brass. It is their wives, supportive and celebratory on the surface but a bit on the edge inside, not knowing when the call to move might crash land and keenly aware that their place in the organization is defined by the husband's status. There are the privately spoken uncertainties of promotions, courses, deputations but the force largely stays with the legacy of smiling and soldiering on. So they move when the time comes, from one location to another on postings, lock, stock, barrel and emotions. In many, softer cultures of the world, these serial displacements would count for trauma but there is an infrastructure and system to assist the moves, there are the strong Academy, Squadron and social bonds, there is a predictable protocol and the expectations are summarily managed.

The wife's alignment with the Armed Forces way of life is presumed, she blends in. Any fanciful notion of personal growth recedes against the notes of the esprit-de-corps. And thus it happens that close to thirty odd years go by before the dusty demon rears its head again. It will probably find its first mention during the last official farewell from the service when a retiring officer will traditionally acknowledge the pillar his wife has been to him. There may be a graceful admission of how she gave up on her career to fulfill her role at his side.

It is not considered a big deal really. She leads a comfortable life and enjoys the privilege of her husband's



Illustrations : Mrs Sonika Matroja

place in the force. But the thing is that her relevance gets more dilute with the social shifts in motivations and compulsions technology brings today. It used to be enough to remain the perfect foil to the gentleman. It then became acceptable to be a supportive spouse but strong in her own way. There was a time when the line began to blur between a benevolent involvement and an appropriation of the husband's authority.

It is expected of a woman, therefore, to have her own identity. There are other factors at work like inflation, aspirations and the desire to facilitate the children. She then steps out to prepare for the teaching jobs. But for some, particularly the degree-educated professionals, the hunger remains for a chance to validate the self. The good news is that the moment is ripe for presenting a stage to these hitherto guest artists. There has never been a better time to tap this huge pool of waiting talent. Things can change drastically with a mere shift in thinking. And it is not particularly complicated, all it takes is an acceptance that Armed Forces spouses are a resource that businesses need to engage with.

Is there a recruiting enterprise out there that can help the spouses find a job or start a business of their own?

Consider the facts. The entire world is crying for diversity today. I am a professional speaker on generational diversity and all I hear from companies and sponsors is, "Give us diversity". Women speakers are the flavor. This is one sector only; there are numerous other technical and transferable skills that employees are missing out on. Thanks to the Covid 19, remote working is here to stay. In an increasingly flexible and mobile business environment, is it really acceptable that so many of these individuals are not able to utilize the skills they have for their own professional benefit and that of an organization's?

The military spouses are a class apart. They are used to a structured discipline. There is a learned flair for presentation. The culture of spit and polish translates into a higher performance bar in their consciousness. Not only are they experienced in moving from one place to another, they are adept at coping with living and working in new cultures. All they need is flexibility and that is increasingly becoming the template across the board.

However, it is not as simple as it sounds. When I joined my husband in 1986, I had worked in an advertizing agency for two years, but I had no way of finding a job at my first home on an air force base.

There followed the babies and my husband's postings. The situation now demanded another pivot. With babies at home, it would have to be a 9 am to 12 noon job and that would entail a new qualification. I was back in school for a Nursery Teacher's certificate which was quickly followed up with a B. Ed. on the advice of the Flight Commander's wife. "Some folks may discourage you, don't listen to any of that," she told me, "Just do it!"

We were moving soon thereafter again. But everywhere I went those days, the question asked would be, "How long do you expect to be here?" And the tone of the interviewer would invariably be, "This person is bad return on investment." Armed Forces spouses are mostly extremely hardworking, motivated, and intelligent and with a great work ethic but they get the treatment of short term employee, an ill-fitting piece, fundamentally unsuitable. The spouses become apologetic and defensive with prospective employers. It tastes sour.

In retrospect now, I wonder how it would have been if the airwaves had been softened up and informed and predisposed to the availability of this emotionally agile, highly adaptable and people-friendly skill set. Eager to show what they can bring to the business, this is a sleeping tiger unaware of its own bite. Support for this untapped talent is sure to be a win-win situation all around.
These are very interesting times. While companies are embracing the benefits of flexible employment, they are also making the effort to make the employees feel part of the team and have access to colleagues at all times. There is no dearth of feedback, inputs and tips from any number of sources. All it needs is a piece of digital real estate! And fanning some air to the ember.



A professional speaker on the "Generation Gap" Neerja Singh helps turn cross-generational differences into dividends with her peppy talks based on extensive research that speak to the ear and heart and come packed with insights. She also brings 37 years of work experience in education, media and writing to help maximise generational diversity. She can be reached at neerja@neerjasingh.com



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FOOTBALL FRENZY IN YONGPHULA

Sports events have been an integral part of life in the Armed Forces. The men in uniform have consistently provided international level sportsmen to represent India in sports competitions. Sports and games are indeed great developers of team spirit, espirit-de-corps and bonding amongst the troops. This is a vital battle- winning factor. The author has narrated an extremely energetic rivalry which played out at Yongphula in Bhutan in 1982.

Yongphula

Yongphula is a picturesque village strung along a forested ridge in the midst of verdant valleys and mountains in eastern Bhutan. The ridge has a prominent black-topped landing ground, and a Wing of the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) was based at Yongphula in the 1980s. The Indian and Bhutanese Armies would carry out joint training at Yongphula during the summer months. A major event in that remote region was the annual Yongphula Football Association (YFA) Season Shield Tournament, played as knockout games. The matches would be witnessed by hundreds of spectators, which would arouse football frenzy amongst the residents.

My battalion reached Yongphula on 28th July 1982 for joint training. We set up camp along the lush meadows on the Eastern slopes of the ridge. Training commenced in right earnest with our worthy brethren from the RBA. Gorkhas are great sportsmen too, so the battalion teams also got down to their intense practices. Soccer is a favourite sport in Gorkha units, and it was decided to field two teams in the upcoming YFA Season Shield Tournament. Gorkha Whites comprised the younger players, whereas Gorkha Greens had the 'more senior' players, the 'Gurujis'.

The Tournament Begins

The opening match kicked off on 8th September, and was an apt 'hosts vs guests' game – RBA Wing Team playing against the Gorkha Whites. It was a rough and rugged game, and the energetic Gorkha Whites got the better of the hosts, with a slender 2-1 margin. The jubilation and enthusiasm in the unit went up a notch. The other teams in the tournament included Tashigang District Sports Association XI, Khaling School, and two teams were fielded by Sherubtse College, largely known as Kanglung College. After the initial games, the semi-final line-up emerged as Gorkha Greens vs Kanglung College 'A', and Gorkha Whites vs Kanglung College 'B' Team.

On 11th September, the first semi-final commenced. It was an exhilarating game, and we were pleasantly surprised to see several girls from Kanglung College rooting for our stalwarts on the field. Student Dynamics!! Our cheering parties were energized, and we often saw some of our boys break into the 'Jhamre' dance steps to acknowledge an excellent


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move. The match stretched into extra time, Kanglung College went ahead in the first half of the 15 minutes extra time. Gorkha Greens fought back intensely, and equalized in the last minute. The tie-breaker too remained a draw at 3-3 each. Since it was getting dark, the organisers decided to have a replay.

In the next semi-final on 13th September, the Gorkha Whites easily got the better of Kanglung College 'B' Team, winning convincingly 4-0. All eyes were now on the Gorkha Greens – Sherubtse College (Kanglung College) 'A' team contest.

The Contest Continues

On 14th September, the two keenly matched teams faced off again. The spectators had a gala time, as the weather played spoilsport. Due to low clouds, the ball would at times disappear in a floating cloud, and emerge out of the cloud further ahead. There were several interruptions as clouds wafted across the football ground, bringing visibility down. At one stage, Rajendra kicked towards the Kanglung goal, which was hidden in a cloud. The ball entered the goalpost, but since the Kanglung goalkeeper too was unable to see the football in the cloud, it was not granted – a correct decision. When play was halted due to the weather, the Kanglung boys, girls and Gorkha troops enthralled us with their drumbeats, and spontaneous dance jigs.

Kanglung College again opened the score, and Rifleman Dhan Bahadur Pradhan of the Gorkhas headed in a Jas Bahadur cross from a corner to draw level. In the first session of extra time, the Kanglung boys again went a goal ahead, only to find the Gorkha Greens again equalizing in the second session of extra time. Bad light interrupted the keen battle of nerves, and play was called off. Another replay would be required.

The Princess Arrives

The replay between Gorkha Greens and the Sherubtse boys again commenced after a well needed break on 17th September. While the match was in progress, we were pleasantly surprised to see Her Royal Highness Ashi Kezyang, the sister of His Majesty the King of Bhutan enter the spectator stands. She had been visiting Eastern Bhutan, and heard about this exciting soccer match between evenly matched rivals. She didn't want to miss the tense tussle, and so she joined in alongwith her ladies-in-waiting. The game gained more intensity as the crowd joined in the excitement. The Kanglung girls had recognized our players by now, and we saw them cheering Rajen, Jas Bahadur, Gyamchho, Hom Bahadur, Jeson and others by name. This further pepped up our players and their fatigue ebbed. The stamina of the Gorkha troops was a crucial advantage, as fatigue took its toll on the Kanglung team. Havildar Vinod Kumar Rana headed in the ball from a corner, to give the lead to the Gorkha Greens, and we held on to this slender lead. All said and done, this soccer contest played over three days was indeed a great game!! Ashi Kezyang too was thrilled to witness the match.

The Mahamuni At The Final

The YFA Season Shield Finals in 1982 was thus played as an all Gorkha Final, between Gorkha Greens and Gorkha Whites on 28th September. The semifinal game had been so dramatic that the Mahamuni of Bhutan, a royal Buddhist monk of great stature based in Yongphula, decided to witness the finals. During the game, his aide continually briefed the wise monk about the game. The Mahamuni too had an interesting experience. The Gorkha Whites won the final game, 2-1 was the final score.

Soccer is indeed a riveting game, and the YFA Season Shield Tournament further strengthened the bonds between our troops and the Bhutanese folks in Eastern Bhutan. I, for one, remember this game as one of the finest contests that I have watched.



Lt Gen J S Sandhu, *PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) was commissioned into 6/5 GR (FF) in June 1980. He has vast operational experience having commanded his unit and formations in Jammu & Kashmir including the Srinagar Corps. He has also been an instructor in institutions of the defence services and retired as Military Secretary in Army Headquarters in 2019. He was a leader of great repute within the army. He is now the Editor of this magazine.*



COMBATING COVID-19

In these Covid times, there is plethora of medical advice on social media, but much of it lacks scientific validation. It is hence best to consult professionals. Dr. Renuka David hence answers some queries related to the pandemic.

What unusual symptoms of COVID-19 should I watch out for?

Colds, cough, fever and respiratory issues are spoken about, but there are other lesser common symptoms that could be indicative of COVID-19. According to an article in the New York Times, some patients who tested positive have complained of painful headaches, feeling dizzy or lightheaded, facial drooping and numbness and garbled speech. Besides these, some skin problems are also associated with COVID-19. These include strange rashes ranging from bumpy to smooth, itchy to innocuous. In some rare cases, the virus is even known to inflame joints and damage muscles, causing severe pain across the body.

Researchers at the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Harvard Medical School (HMS), in collaboration with the American Academy of Dermatology and International League of Dermatologic Societies have created an international registry for describing and cataloguing the broad spectrum of dermatologic manifestations associated with coronavirus infections. They found that among all lab-confirmed patients, the most common skin sign was a measles-like (morbilliform) rash in 22 percent of patients that was generally seen in patients with moderate infections, followed by so-called 'COVID toes' (pernio-like reaction) consisting of red or purple itchy or tender bumps on the toes, heels or fingers, typically seen when skin is exposed to cold air or surfaces. This reaction was seen in 18 percent of patients in the registry, and was generally associated with mild infections.

Is vitamin C required to boost immunity against COVID-19?

It is interesting to note that vitamin C is the only vitamin that the body cannot produce. Neither can it be stored within the body, so one needs to ensure a constant intake. It is a good idea to stock up on vitamin C, so that your body builds immunity. Vitamin C also helps make collagen, a substance that aids cellular health. It is a strong antioxidant, which combats the damage caused by pollutants and free radicals. It is known to lower blood uric acid, blood pressure and heart disease risk factors, including high blood levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglycerides. Vitamin C can improve the absorption of iron that is poorly absorbed, such as iron from meat-free sources. Low vitamin C levels have been linked to an increased risk of memory and thinking disorders like dementia. While vitamin C appears to reduce the severity of colds and recovery time by 8 percent in adults and 14 percent in children, it does not prevent them. A handful of studies have linked vitamin C intake to a lower risk of several cancers. While fruits and vegetables like oranges, grapefruit, berries, Brussels sprouts and broccoli are touted for their vitamin C benefits, locally-grown and affordable foods are no lesser potent. Simple things like nimbu paani(lime juice), amla (Indian gooseberry) juice, eating local produce like guavas, watermelon, tomatoes, cabbage, capsicum, spinach and even potatoes can spike your vitamin C levels naturally. Also, consume a vitamin C supplement every day if you can, based on your body's requirements. A healthy adult male usually needs about 90mg, while a healthy adult female could do with 75mg. Consult your doctor before consuming excessive amounts of vitamin C, so that you aren't in danger of overdosing.

What are some simple measures to cut down the risk?

While none of these are sure-fire preventive methods, there are some things that can help you cut down the risk of COVID-19. Firstly, if you've just come from outside, other than immediately having a shower and changing your clothes, use a mouthwash. The COVID-19 virus is an 'enveloped' one with a fatty layer, which can be killed by chemicals present in handwash and sanitiser. Mouthwash also has certain chemicals with the same impact, so if the virus hasn't yet made its way down your respiratory tract, gargling with mouthwash could potentially be a preventive – studies are still going on about this though. Gargling in saline water twice a day and sipping on hot water does not kill the virus, but it can boost your immunity against coughs and colds, which could be just as stressful to deal with during this time. Drinking alkaline water and eating alkaline foods can also help your immune system. To give you an idea, alkaline foods are those with a pH level of over 7.0, while acidic foods contain pH levels under 7.0. Some foods to consider including are lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, tofu, legumes, nuts and seeds.

How important is exercise?

Exercise is a very important tool in making certain that your immunity levels are at their optimum. Even if you do test positive for COVID-19, it could ensure that your symptoms and the impact on

your body will be mild or negligible. Firstly, a daily dose of exercise boosts the respiratory system, enhances lung capacity, and eliminates the need for any kind of respiratory support. The other great benefit of exercising is that it greatly improves muscle, bone and joint strength. With muscle and joint pains being another side effect of the virus, this is a key advantage. Try working out for at least 45-60 minutes every day, mixing cardio, strength training and yoga. It is also a good idea to incorporate some breathing exercises into your regimen for 10 minutes every morning.

What precautions should I follow while exercising?

The COVID-19 virus is new, and there is a lot of information that is constantly being unearthed. We have discovered a lot, but there is still a lot left to discover, so it is better to err on the side of caution. When it comes to swimming, while water transmission is not considered to be a way for this virus to infect people, there is still the issue of bodily fluids being secreted into the pool. Hence, I would advice against swimming in a public pool for the time-being. Other forms of cardio, as well as yoga, weights and strength-building exercises are perfectly alright, but it is important to work out without your mask. The World Health Organization released guidance on June 16, 2020, that people shouldn't wear face masks while exercising because it could reduce the ability to breathe comfortably, noting that the most important factor in preventing disease spread is distancing yourself from others.Hence I would encourage you to exercise in the outdoors, as apart from inhaling fresh air, the requirement to maintain social distance during your workouts is possible. If you're working out in a group, the ideal thing to do is maintain a distance of at least 6-10 feet between yourself and the next person.

What precautions should I take, and which health supplies should I keep on hand at home, in case I fall ill?

A lot of people with COVID-19 symptoms that are mild or negligible choose to treat themselves at home, so as to not clog up the already overwhelmed healthcare system, and also to reduce the risk of infecting others. While this is commendable, it is always a good idea to consult a doctor over a video call so that they can ascertain whether you need medical supervision or not. That said, taking rest and drinking lots of fluids can speed up your recovery. Invest in an air purifier if you can afford it, to enhance the air quality you breathe. In your medicine kit, keep a fully functional thermometer, a pulse oxymeter, a good saline or betadine gargle, vitamin C chewable supplements, paracetamol (tablets and syrup), cough syrup, throat lozenges, adequate gloves, hand sanitizer, and a mild antibiotic. For anything stronger, like ibuprofen, get a doctor's recommendation and prescription.

What food precautions should I take?

Cook and eat at home as much as possible. Wash your fresh fruits and vegetables well in a bowl of vinegar water, dry them and leave them over your kitchen counter for at least 2 hours before storing them. Sanitise the packets that your dry rations come in. Boil and cook your food well. If you're ordering food from out, stick to hot meals that can be transferred to your own bowl and reheated at home after discarding the original packaging in a biohazard-safe bag. Avoid ordering cold foods like salads, juices and cut fruits.

While spending long hours away from home in a field posting, uncertainties over COVID-19 take over and one tends to worry about family. How does one stay mentally strong? Advice your family on what precautions to take, but beyond that, nothing is in your control. Keep yourself busy through the day to stay mentally strong and focussed. Spread your work throughout the day, so that you always have something to do. Inculcate a hobby, if you find time hanging on your hands. It could be simple – learning a sport or even just starting a diary of your memoirs. The key is to lead a life filled with activity and purpose, so that you don't let negative thoughts overcome you. Keep this twelve-point guide handy:

1. Have the courage to dream.
2. Pursue your dream with passion.
3. Spend quality time with a hobby or a passion that keeps you happy and fulfilled. Surround yourself with positivity.
4. Make it your purpose by educating and preparing meticulously with dedication, pure intention, commitment, discipline and intelligent hard work.
5. Remember, the world comes around to help you.
6. Have realistic expectations.
7. Nurture self-love and self-confidence.
8. It is perfectly alright not to be okay on certain days and with certain situations.
9. There is a force greater then you, which will guide you.
10. Keep a pristine place in your heart, where no one else can enter.
11. Your circumstances may not be in your control, but your choices are. Remember that when you choose.
12. Be the master of your mind.



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REFLECTIONS



Lt Gen Mohinder Puri (Retd)

a former Military Secretary and Deputy Chief Of Army Staff is renowned for his leadership during the Kargil Operations.

Leadership forms a very important aspect of military life and how one nurtures this crucial trait can ultimately lead to defeat or victory in battle. There is enough material available in our libraries, in our teachings in Schools of Instruction and at the practical level on leadership training. However, while class room education during Courses of Instruction and in peacetime sets the ground work, it is in combat where the real test of leadership at all levels comes to the fore.

Since Independence, the Indian Armed Forces have fought four wars against Pakistan and one against China. In addition, the army has been heavily committed in counter insurgency operations in the North East, in Jammu and Kashmir and in 1987-88 in providing assistance to Sri Lanka in their war against LTTE. Leadership in combat has been the hallmark of our Army, a widely recognized fact. While in some cases, our military leadership may not have come up to the desired mark, however, in the combat zone it has, without exception stood the test of time and brought victory and glory to the nation.

I was commanding 8 Mountain Division in the Valley in 1999 when Pakistan's perfidious actions in the Kargil Sector brought the country to the brink of an all out war. The situation in mid May 1999 demanded an urgent response to the enemy's intrusion in the Mushkoh-Dras-Kargil-Batalik sectors and my Division was ordered to move across Zoji La to assume operational responsibility of the Mushkoh-Dras sector by 01 June. Since the Division was operating in a counter insurgency environment, a quick transition to conventional operations was the need of the hour. The immediate challenge was to transform the Division into a conventional configuration in equipment, battle procedures and drills, and most importantly a change in their psyche and mind set. We had a very small window to transit to the new role, and it is to the credit of commanders at all levels who speedily responded to the necessary changes in a short span of time.

With every passing day, the gravity of the intrusion was becoming apparent. The task of restoring the sanctity of the LC to status quo ante, was going to be an onerous one. In such situations, commanders at all levels are subjected to various pressures, which are inevitable, and they have to manage the environment right from the battlefield and up to the national level. Under such intense circumstances, subordinates must be allowed to operate in a tension free environment. The buck must stop at your doorstep. I had laid down two ground rules for myself which I think I did follow to the best of my ability; firstly, I would not breathe down the neck of subordinate commanders and secondly I will give them adequate time for recce, preparation and planning for their respective tasks up to the upper limit of a time frame I had set for myself.

I feel as a senior commander in the combat zone, one should generate confidence in one's command, free them from unwarranted pressures and provide them with the wherewithal to successfully accomplish their task. Mistakes will be made due to judgemental errors, which at times may result in upsetting your schedule of operations, but these mistakes must be speedily analysed and corrections made to ensure smooth conduct of future operations. Wars are a rare occurrence and thank God for that. Every unit's effort should be to give a good account of itself, lest it is condemned till the next war to redeem its name and honour. A unit basically fights to uphold the age old tradition of naam, namak and nishan. Any failure in an operation must not be condemned and the unit must be given a fair opportunity to redeem its name and honour. I can recall three such units who were given a second chance and without exception all three came out with flying colours, winning the coveted Unit Citation and many gallantry awards.

Howsoever good a plan may be, its success is fully dependent on its execution. Attacks in mountains are executed at the platoon and company level, the young leader separated from his commanding officer in time and distance has to often decide on the course of action in an adverse situation. In all attacks, without exception, the platoon and company commanders led from the front by giving a simple two word command -"follow me". The large number of young lives lost speaks volumes of the commitment and devotion of these leaders in accomplishment of their tasks. We as a nation should be proud of our Bravehearts, the young officers and men who resolutely fought against heavy odds to bring us victory. Junior leadership was remarkably visible as the young officers showed courage, initiative and bravery even beyond the call of military duty. The June 2020 incident at Galwan reinforces the image of our leadership in combat. The Commanding Officer who gallantly led his men against the Chinese intrusion is an example of the commitment of the leaders in resolutely pursuing challenging tasks with pride and elan. Our regimental system and the camaraderie within the unit, builds up strong bonds in which the leaders exhibit high qualities of leadership and ensure success in assigned missions irrespective of the costs.

Lastly, it is an honour for me to pen down my Reflections for Medals & Ribbons, wishing the Editorial Team and readers the very best and happy reading.



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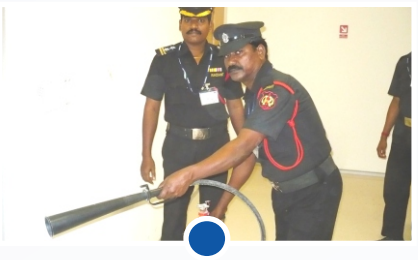

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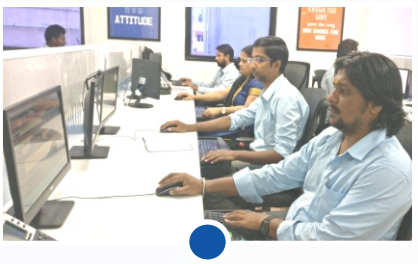

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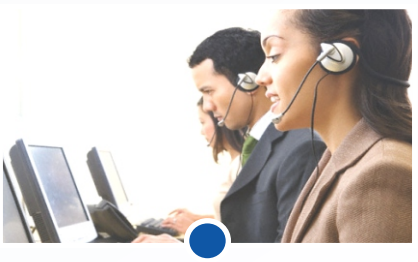

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