Chapter 10

Chinese attack on India — October 1962

Historical aspects of the Chinese betrayal of the Panch Sheel agreement, signed with India in 1954 with so much fanfare, or their overrunning of Tibet resulting in the escape of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to seek refuge in India in early 1959, are not being covered in this purely personal
narrative. But a little background to the Chinese attack on India and my being taken a prisoner of war (PW) would not be out of place. After the Dalai Lama's flight to India and the highly provocative Chinese statements against the political asylum given to him in India, it should have become apparent that India's Northern borders needed urgent attention. There was a report prepared many years earlier (in 1951?) by the late Lt Gen Kalwant Singh on the defence of our Northern borders but it had obviously just been filed and forgotten. Towards the end of August 1959, an Assam Rifles post at Longju in the Subansiri subdivision of NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) and another one in Ladakh were overrun by the Chinese in an obvious show of force to convey a message to India. This set in motion the process of giving some attention at last to the border defence against the Chinese threat, even though it was more in theory than in substance.

Around the same time, there was also some confusion due to the resignation in early September 1959 of the then Chief of the Army Staff, the late Gen K. S. Thimayya on account of his differences with the then Defence Minister, Shri Krishna Menon. The very next day, the Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru announced in the Parliament that the Army Chief had withdrawn his resignation. The inside story of this withdrawal of resignation never got known but everyone in the Army was shaken by this event. Of course Gen Thimayya, who was highly respected in the army, did not stay on as the Chief long after that. Upon his retirement, Gen P. N. Thapar came in as the new Chief, leaving the average officer in the army bewildered and unhappy to see Gen `Thimmy' go.

Gen Thimayya was loved by the troops because of his intensely warm and spontaneous approach, full of fun towards all he met, irrespective of their ranks; besides the fact that he had distinguished himself so well in Burma as a battalion commander, later as a formation commander in various actual battles including Jammu and Kashmir, and also as the Chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission in Korea after that war.
He visited Lucknow once in 1958 as the Chief. I was then a Lt Col on the Signals staff of the late Lt Gen S. P. P. Thorat, GOC in C, Eastern Command. Talking to the officers in the mess informally, Gen Thimayya remarked that one of the things a soldier prided himself on was having some colourful operational medal ribbons on his chest in uniform. He added that he had told the Government that, with the present policy of non-violence and appeasement for the sake of peace, most of the soldiers would retire with 'naked chests.' He announced that he was trying to get the Government to institute medals for certain non-operational duties and long service. The way he related all this thrilled all of us present. Besides being loved, he was admired as the real man's man.

The tribute paid to him, after his death, by another very famous general of the Indian Army, the late Lt Gen P. S. Bhagat who won the Victoria Cross in North Africa in World War II, is worth quoting. It was published in the New Delhi edition of The Statesman dated 19 December 1965 under the title, "General Thimayya-An Appreciation." He wrote, "No General could have had a more loyal army, no army a more loyal General. The likes of him there will seldom be-a soldier General, a man's man, the army his soul, his soul the army."

There was the well-known incident when a plane carrying some very senior officers crash-landed in a river-bed while returning to Delhi. The occupants included, among others, the then Army Chief, the late Gen Shrinagesh as well as Lt Gen Thimayya, Lt Gen S. P. P. Thorat and others. Everyone was badly shaken, though fortunately there were no serious injuries. They had landed in the middle of virtually nowhere and had to commandeer a bullock cart to travel to the nearest telephone.

While the others sat in the bullock cart, Gen Thimayya walked alongside. And he remarked laughingly that he knew he would not die in this crash. The Army Chief who was a very reserved and a serious person asked him how he could make that statement. With his typical self composed manner, he supposedly remarked that it was written in his horoscope that he would die in the arms of a woman. Those who knew the late Gen
Shrinagesh can imagine the look on his face when he heard that remark, but it certainly shows the calibre of man in Gen Thimayya.

HQ Eastern Command at Lucknow had been given the operational responsibility for the defence of Northern borders of UP, Sikkim and the whole of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The Eastern Command of those days was later split into two separate commands which endure to this day-Central Command with HQ at Lucknow and Eastern Command with HQ at Calcutta. As a first reaction to the Chinese threat to our borders, 4 Infantry Division located at Ambala (Haryana) was ordered to move to Assam. With its HQ at Tezpur, it was given the responsibility of our borders with Tibet from Sikkim eastwards, including the whole of Arunachal Pradesh.

Earlier, after the Longju incident in the Subansiri Division of NEFA, I had proposed to my boss, the Chief Signal Officer (CSO) that a study of the communication problems in NEFA should be done and had offered to do it myself. But this was not considered necessary. However, soon after 4 Infantry Division moved to Assam, I was posted as its Commander Signals in place of Lt Col N. S. Mathur, who took my place in Lucknow.

This Division had, for the past year or so, been involved in the construction of accommodation for troops in Ambala area and as a result had hardly done any tactical or technical training in that period. This construction project called Operation Amar was the brain child of the then Divisional Commander, the late Maj Gen (later Lt Gen) B. M. Kaul, who was known to be very close to the Defence Minister. The project had raised a controversy about keeping the Army away from its primary role of training for war but it had gone ahead despite all objections.

It has rightly been said that the army is always training for war and that the only time this training is ever interrupted is by war and immediately after the war is over, training starts again for the next war. Brig Dalvi has aptly narrated, in his book "The Himalayan Blunder," the story of a keen Defence Ministry official questioning the proposal for funds for training the army by asking whether the army was still untrained after all these years.
But the hierarchy in the country was lulled into such indifference to its defence needs and requirements and to any understanding of defence matters, that all norms were neglected.

4th (Red Eagle) Division had built up glorious traditions during its participation in World War II in North Africa and Italy. It was trained and equipped for fighting in the plains. With its training having been interrupted for over a year the Division was far from fit for war. As an `Infantry' division it was organised, equipped and trained for fighting in the plains; but now it had suddenly been committed to and deployed to guard the high mountain areas in Sikkim and NEFA. A new divisional commander had also been posted because Lt Gen Kaul, on promotion, had been appointed as the QMG at Army HQ.

One of the responsibilities of the Quarter Master General (QMG) at Army HQ was accommodation for troops. As should have been expected, the Division had not yet taken over its operational responsibilities for defence of this vast border with Tibet, when orders for the execution of Operation Amar 2 were received from Army HQ. This project was for the construction of temporary *basha* accommodation for the division. We were told that there was no available accommodation in Assam for the troops.

With no experience or guidelines on mountain warfare to help, one could not even do anything about reorganisation, training and re-equipping, when this project for construction of accommodation was thrust upon us. And for Signals under my charge, besides the fact that my regiment had to provide communications for the Division in an entirely new and undeveloped area, I was faced with two of the most difficult challenges of my life.

A normal division occupies an area frontage of 30 to 40 km in defence in the plains for which it is equipped but here we were given with more than 1800 kilometers of front in a highly mountainous and under-developed terrain! And this area was also one of the most backward from the point of view of access of existing civil telecommunications. The second
challenge was that the inauguration of Amar 2 project by the Prime Minister of India was to take place in my regimental lines by mid-April 1960. So, immediately after arrival in Tezpur, the Regiment got involved in the mad rush to build bashas against a tight schedule. The only redeeming factor on which one could rely was the amazing resilience of the Indian soldier and his capacity to put up with exceptional hardship and unusual challenges.

My first four months in command were a real nightmare. No representations were accepted or even heard and construction schedules, worked out somewhere away from the scene of action by a staff officer out to please his boss, just had to be fulfilled at all costs, labouring late into the night. All this was perforce at the expense of developing our non-existent operational telecommunications. Maintenance of costly electronic equipment was neglected. Available vehicles were flogged real hard. This included some specialist vehicles from which the equipment was off-loaded to convert them into load carriers for construction work. Such were the orders which could not be questioned. Even when one represented something, one was curtly told to carry out the orders and not to reason why.

We would have preferred to rough it out in tents and spend the time developing a reasonable communications set-up, getting our equipment properly checked and maintained and getting the men used to working with the available equipment in the mountains. Even the equipment we had was antiquated and unsuitable for mountainous terrain and the excessive ranges. It was also in short supply with major deficiencies at that. Besides that, on what was available, there were hardly any spares for repairs and in any case the repair workshops in the Division were fully engaged in building bashas.

It must be stated here that a Signal Regiment is a functional unit in war or peace for all twenty four hours to cater to the various types of communications for the formation it serves. It has no cushions of spare manpower or transport in its strictly tailored establishment. And here we
were, deployed for an unusually extended operational role for the defence of India's borders, in an entirely unfamiliar area of operations, in high altitude mountains with absolutely no experience or familiarity or training in mountain warfare. On top of that we were saddled with a back-breaking additional project of Op Amar 2, thrown at us to execute without a whimper about any difficulties.

It was on the morning of 14 April 1960 that Project Amar 2 was inaugurated by the Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the Signal Regiment lines located next to the Tezpur airfield. Just a day or so before, a question arose regarding the inauguration plaque/stone to be unveiled by the PM. Lt Gen Kaul was there. With his quick and decisive voice he ruled that in keeping with the *bashā* type of temporary accommodation, a tree trunk cut at an angle with the writing inscribed on it by a carpenter, would serve as the inauguration plaque. Someone remarked that tree trunks can sprout again. How quickly and sharply came the decisive reply, "Then bury the trunk upside down." And that was how it was done. When I went up to Tezpur a few years later, there were no signs of this plaque: white ants apparently had no respect for this symbol of inauguration, even if it was performed by the Prime Minister of India.

My regiment was also given the task of organising the collective singing of a specially composed 4 Division song by all the divisional troops including my own (almost 2,000 men) at the inauguration. It went off well because the men were really relieved to have finished this back-breaking job. The song was also Lt Gen Kaul’s idea.

One of my junior officers then, who had been specially selected to be my Adjutant, remarked to me in later years when he had become a Brigadier, "Sir, you really drove us hard in those days but you drove yourself five times harder." It is gratifying to note that almost all the promising officers who had been picked to be my adjutants and to be groomed for advancement, have done well in service. They have reached the ranks of brigadier or major general, just as I had been groomed by my first Indian CO, Col Tarun Mukerji, to whom a reference has been made earlier.
It was a personal relief when the inauguration was over. Only then did we turn any serious attention and effort towards our operational responsibilities. There were hardly any roads existing in any of the five frontier divisions (FDs) of Arunachal Pradesh. The road into Kameng FD (considered to be most vulnerable) finished at the Foothills just beyond Misamari. So one of the first tasks for the Engineers was to build motorable roads up the hills. A Border Roads Organisation was raised in January 1960 which undertook, most commendably, the gradual task of extending the existing road network from the plains towards the borders to the North. The formation of this Border Roads Organisation, which exists to this day was one of the most important and historic decisions taken by our Defence Ministry since independence.

Kameng FD, the one through which the Dalai Lama travelled on his way to India in 1959 was considered to be the most vulnerable. 7 Infantry Brigade, initially located at Misamari, was made responsible for its defence. The Brigade HQ first moved to Bomdila and then on to Towang as the road was built up. I had travelled on foot with the earliest troops to move up, from a little beyond the Foothills all the way to Towang, a distance of almost 200 miles up and down the hills, as we developed the line of communications up to Towang.

One of the British tea planters in the area who had served in World War II on the Burma front, told me that there were certain shopkeepers in North East Assam in places like Tinsukhia and Jairampur, who had bought up large stocks of defence equipment by weight when it was auctioned off at the end of the war in 1946. I made a trip to that area and found hermetically sealed cartons of some man pack wireless sets which we had used in the last war along with other expensive and useful testing equipment, oscilloscopes, etc. We bought some of these in 1960 and used then to good advantage when the supply of our entitlements was not forthcoming from the Ordnance.

We were faced with shortages of every kind including clothing, rations and equipment. It was during these early days in NEFA that one of the
COs of an infantry battalion sent a regular return written on a chapatti (a flattened bread loaf). When asked for an explanation, he gave a classic reply, "Regret unorthodox stationary but atta (wheat flour) is the only commodity available for fighting, for feeding and for futile correspondence."

Another incident on the lighter side of life of those days comes to mind also. I was accompanying the General on one of his visits to an infantry battalion of the Sikh Regiment near Bomdila. He saw that this unit had taken their RCL (Recoilless) rifles up the hills also. So he asked one of the NCOs in Punjabi as to why they had hauled these rifles up when there was no tank threat at all. Back came the quick reply, in rustic Punjabi, "Sahibji, this is very good. When the enemy comes we shall turn it towards our own side and fire. The back blast would be as good as a flame thrower against the enemy."

The Signal Regiment was put in top gear for the care and maintenance of equipment and transport. At the first conference of the officers in the Regiment in early 1960, while giving out the priorities of work, we laid down what we then called the Panch Sheel (five principles) of our Regiment, as follows-(a) Operational Communications, (b) Maintenance of Equipment and Vehicles, (c) Discipline and turnout, (d) MT Discipline and (e) Loyalty and Devotion to Duty. We did try our level best to enforce these but it was a constant battle because of other priority jobs and changes in plans imposed on us.

We tried to enforce some of the known ones and develop some new customs and traditions in the Regiment to inculcate a sense of pride, an esprit de corps and discipline. A special book was started in which all these points were recorded. It was given the name `Lest We Forget' inscribed in silver letters on the cover. Many years after my retirement, I was deeply touched' when a typed copy of the writings in this book was sent to me by one of the then commanding officers to confirm that the traditions were being kept up.
In the preamble of this book it was written "It takes no time to break traditions though it takes years to build them. They are built through good regimental spirit, good comradeship and high morale. In turn, these very qualities are fostered by the established customs and traditions." The first point recorded was the Panch Sheel of the Regiment mentioned earlier. The second one is also worth quoting, as it is the words of Field Marshal Chetwode inscribed in the main hall named after him at the IMA, the premier officer training establishment of the Indian Army at Dehradun, as follows:

"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 comfort and safety come last, always and every time."

Our jawans who had been working as ordinary labourers, first in Ambala and then in Assam, had numerous personal problems, which in that mad rush of Project Amar 2, were pushed into the background. The CO's job of trying to keep the men under disciplined control was unenviable in those days. I had tried out a new kind of experiment for prevention and detection of indiscipline among the men.

An Honour Committee of 5 or 6 men, specially selected for their good discipline and behaviour, was formed for a tenure of 2 to 3 months at a time, to advise the CO on action to be taken against difficult cases of indiscipline. This proved to be invaluable in getting the men themselves to share the responsibility of discipline and behaviour within the regiment and to build up a regimental spirit.

The case of a habitual offender in the Regiment is worth quoting in this context. Almost all the officers and JCOs had recommended that he should be got rid of from service as an undesirable. He was a tall and handsome man but he had a 'kink' in his character, that of defying authority. He was or had become a rebel. So after taking the Honour Committee into confidence, an experiment was tried on him—much against the advice of the Subedar Major, the senior JCO of the Regiment. He was
appointed as the stick orderly for the CO. A stick orderly would normally be the smartest, best turned out and most disciplined and steady soldier to be selected for a week at a time to sit outside the CO’s office while he was present inside. He would accompany the CO when he went out for an inspection round in the unit.

For three successive days after he had been appointed, he was sent back to the lines on my orders because he was not considered well dressed or smart enough to be my stick orderly. I would see the look in the eyes of my Senior JCO indicating `I told you so' but I persisted. Thereafter, with a pep talk thrown in between, he started improving. Gradually he made good in the Regiment.

It gave me great happiness and a sense of pride when, 4 or 5 years later, he came to our house in Delhi. He had got transferred to the Corps of Military Police. With his impressive red band turban on top of his smart figure, he gave a real smart salute and asked, "Have you not recognised me, Sir? I have come to thank you for all that you did for me." It certainly confirmed my conviction that almost anyone can be corrected in life if handled with care and understanding. Odd behaviour by some is at times only a kind of inner revolt against a possible latent factor which can be overcome.

Side by side with trying out some ideas on man-management which had been a pet subject throughout my service, one had to deal severely in some cases so as not to compromise on basic military discipline. Within three months of taking over command of the Regiment, I carried out two Summary Courts Martial (SCM). This disciplinary power given to a CO is a unique feature of the Indian Army, which has been retained from the British days and rightly so. There have been voices raised against this so called Draconian law but I believe it is good for discipline, if used correctly and judiciously. In a SCM, the CO acts as the judge, prosecutor, and defence, all rolled into one. The accused is allowed a `friend of the accused' as he is called but this `friend' is not allowed to take part in the proceedings of the court martial.
Both the men in the above mentioned SCsM were dismissed from service with varying terms of rigorous imprisonment. This had a very salutary effect on the men. In the second one, when the judgment was about to be pronounced, the accused sought permission to recite a poem he had written. It was a fairly nice poem, complimenting my sense of justice and asking for a pardon. One felt sorry for him but discipline had to be maintained. Such punishments were ordered only after giving adequate chances to the person to mend his ways. We maintained a good record of discipline in the Signal Regiment inspite of all the stresses and strains. A case of two men brought in on a charge by one of the Company Commanders comes to mind. Both had been found to be quarrelling in the regimental lines and were charged under Section 63 of the Army Act, an ‘act prejudicial to good order and military discipline.’ With a feeling that the case should not have come to me and that the company commander himself should have dealt with it, both the accused were ordered to be given boxing gloves and made to box before the whole company. They were told that if any one of them did not box properly, then the well known ‘killer’ boxer of the Regiment would be sent for to show him how boxing had to be done practically. This incident certainly had a good reaction in the unit because the men are always impressed by any measure which is out of the normal but yet does not compromise on discipline.

Recorded in my diary is mention of a talk given to the officers entreating them to handle men properly. For this the guiding principles laid down were as follows: first, Instruction (by talks, demonstration, personal example and proper supervision); second, Correction (over a period of time); and third, Punishment (if he does not make good), in that order. All three stages must be observed honestly and meticulously to have the right impact, they were told.

The Regiment was located next to the airfield in Tezpur and we maintained excellent relations with the Air Force. Besides normal training trials for communications between ground and air, I had occasion to fly
with the Air Force Station Commander in a `Vampire' fighter aircraft along the McMahan Line bordering Tibet. One could look deep into Tibet through a pair of binoculars from the aircraft. Little did I realise then that one day, I would be walking over that territory as a PW.

I was to leave for Calcutta one day by the afternoon Indian Airlines (IAC) Fokker Friendship flight. Air Force Station Commander and some of his officers were having lunch with us in the Signals Mess. In that relaxed atmosphere, the lunch was delayed even though the guests were reminded more than once I could not afford to miss my flight. As anticipated, we heard the roar of aircraft engines and found out that it was the IAC aircraft just taking off. True to their word that they would see to it that I did not miss the flight, the Air Force Commander telephoned and ordered two Vampire fighters to `scramble'. My box was ready and as soon as we reached the airfield, I was strapped into one aircraft and my box into another and we took off within minutes.

The IAC plane had not yet landed when these two fighter pilots asked for an emergency landing at Gauhati (now called Guwahati) airfield. The IAC flight was asked to circle while we landed. By the time the IAC plane landed and taxied up, one of the Air Force pilots had already sorted out my boarding formalities and I was seen off into the IAC flight as promised.

It was such a pity that during the Chinese attack on India in October 1962, our Government had decided not to use the Air Force. It is my conviction, knowing the fine calibre of our pilots in Tezpur, that they would have made a great deal of difference to the situation during that war against the Chinese.

Sometimes in early 1962, orders came from Army HQ for Operation Onkar, which directed all Assam Rifles posts to move forward, right upto the border. They were to be backed, of course, by the army. The idea was to establish the right of possession on our territory and to deter the Chinese from moving forward and occupying it, as was claimed by them. This order was certainly not backed by resources and it was not a move
forward of which India could be proud. Details are not necessary. A few
eamples of the kind of things we witnessed can be given, just before the
worst debacle took place, to soil the otherwise glorious record of the
Indian Army.
As should have been expected, the Chinese reacted. The first serious
action took place on 8 Sept. 1962 when they surrounded an Assam Rifles
post at Dhola on the Namka Chu river in the North west corner of Kameng
FD. This set the inevitable ball in motion.
Our Division had done almost three years non-family station service in
Assam/NEFA/Sikkim and some of the units were already on their way out
on turnover. Suddenly all moves out of the area were cancelled and
orders reversed. One unit had already boarded the train at Misamari but
they were taken off the train and ordered to move post haste back to
Towang and beyond.
HQ 7 Infantry Brigade was at Towang. Its Commander, the late Brig John
Dalvi was on his way home on a well earned leave but he was told to rush
back at once. He was ordered to move his HQ on a man/mule pack basis
to Namka Chu River area. An ad hoc Brigade HQ was created for Towang
sector overnight under the Commander Artillery of the division with
hardly any Signal resources. Defensive positions prepared by 7 Infantry
Brigade were handed over to others who did not yet know the ground in
this important and vital sector of Towang.
At that time, I was the only field officer of Lt Col or higher rank who had
the longest tenure at not only the divisional HQ but among all the
divisional troops. All the staff and commanders of my rank and above had
changed once or more. I should have been posted out after a two year
tenure in that non-family station. In light of this fact coupled with
problems at home concerning the children's education and others, I was a
pretty harassed person. There was also a sort of premonition, as recorded
in my diary in those days, that a severe test was in the offing for me to
assess my faith in the Divine. I certainly had no idea of what was about to
happen—that as the Commander Signals of a division, I would be taken a prisoner of war.
I have often wondered how we survived the pressure and strain of those days. With the moves of units being ordered, counter-ordered and frequent changes in destinations, Signals not only had to keep track of the locations of units but also to provide them communications. Problems were compounded by the feelings of rivalry among the paramilitary forces (Assam Rifles and others), intelligence and political agencies against the regular army. These paramilitary forces were not under the Army nor even under the Ministry of Defence control. Assam Rifles were under the Ministry of External Affairs, intelligence agencies under the Home Ministry and the inter-ministry rivalries were also reflected on the ground, adding much to our functional difficulties in providing communications.
My repeated requests for coordination of scarcely available communication facilities in use by various agencies, all belonging to the same government in Delhi, fell on deaf ears every time. We had no control over the communication facilities of other agencies with the aim of better coordination and effect. Even after the flap at Dhola, communications to and from this post continued to be via its Assam Rifles Battalion HQ near Tezpur, although the operational control was with the regular army. And yet these very disparate elements would come running to us for help whenever they needed something, like spares for their equipment or repairs and replacement.
A divisional signal regiment is almost an integral part of its HQ. Any pulls and tension between the various staff officers at that HQ (as was witnessed between the General Staff ‘G’ and Adjutant and Quarter Master General ‘AQ’ staff at the time) creates avoidable difficulties for a functional unit like Signals. When things are not going according to plan, there is a tendency to put the blame on the lack or failure of communications. One faced any number of such charges which had to be disproved each time. However, one incident is worth mentioning.
After 8th of Sept. 1962, when the Dhola post manned by a sub unit of Assam Rifles was encircled by the Chinese, all the senior commanders from the Army Commander downwards had assembled at Tezpur. A relief party from one of the regular army battalions had been ordered to relieve the besieged Dhola post. This linkup was expected by nightfall on the 14th of September: That evening everyone was tensely waiting for the news of the link-up. Naturally all eyes were on me; as the communications `chief', to bring them the message. But there was no news until late in the evening.

Everyone knew that the relief column did not have a portable radio set which could be operated while on the move and that the message would have to come from the Dhola post itself after the link-up. And this message would have to come through more than one stage of transmission: from the post to the battalion HQ, then to Brigade HQ and then back to us. These intermediate HQ were themselves on the move and none of them had portable radio sets powerful enough to work on the move over the long distances involved.

At about 9 p.m. that evening, news of the link-up was brought in by the Inspector General of Assam Rifles (IGAR). He announced very dramatically that he had received information through `his' boys that the link-up had taken place. He certainly scored a point at the expense of the regular Army Signals under my command.

The whole episode was investigated afterwards to find out what had happened in actual fact. The message was given by the link-up column commander of the regular Army to the Dhola Post commander (who was from the Assam Rifles) to be transmitted to his own (column commander's) battalion. Instead of that, it was passed to the Assam Rifles battalion HQ near Tezpur. Then, instead of passing it on to the divisional HQ in Tezpur itself, it was passed on to the HQ IGAR at Shillong. It was picked up on this link by the rover set with the IGAR. Information had been knowingly withheld at the intermediate levels in the
prevailing spirit of exclusiveness and the tendency to score points against the Army.

Events were taking place fast. A number of books have been written on the subject by certain military commanders, political officers of the NEFA administration, intelligence officials and others. We shall therefore confine this account to only the personal problems faced by me as the Commander Signals for that area of operations.

The one quality necessary for a Signal officer in those days was to be able to work ‘miracles.’ It can be asserted that we did manage to cope with a variety of challenges. This may not have earned us bouquets but there was no justification for brickbats being thrown at us by some people, including the staff officers at our own divisional HQ.

It has to be noted from records that this vilification was not done by any of the commanders at the various levels, but only by the staff officers as well as the para-military and intelligence agencies mentioned earlier, perhaps to cover their own guilt complexes and weaknesses. I have carried a very poor opinion of the staff at HQ 4 Division of those days. There was a constant tug of war between the ‘G and the AQ staff, with both trying to outdo each other as to their own importance. All this was to the detriment of operational preparedness and execution of plans.

In early October 1962, a new Corps HQ was suddenly created to take charge of operations in NEFA. Lt Gen Kaul, who has been mentioned earlier as the QMG in 1960, had by then become the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) at Army HQ, directly responsible for operations. He was now appointed as the new Corps Commander. He arrived in a special aircraft at Tezpur in the late afternoon of 4 October with two or three staff officers from Army HQ.

From the airfield Lt Gen Kaul drove straight to the conference at HQ 4 Division where we, the staff and heads of Arms and Services of the division with our GOC were present. Tea and dinner were served in the conference room. At about 10 pm, Lt Gen Kaul announced in his typical flamboyant style that he had taken over command of all troops in NEFA.
It was all so dramatic. The Army Commander from HQ Eastern Command at Lucknow who was also in Tezpur with his Tactical HQ, went back to Lucknow early the next morning. So also the other Corps Commander who had been in control of operations until then, returned to his HQ at Shillong the next morning.

Here was a new situation. 4th Infantry Divisional Signal Regiment had been catering to all the extended communication requirements of the division, for the Tactical HQ of Eastern Command as well as for the Tactical HQ of the Corps HQ (at Shillong), which was then in operational control with little additional resources upto that time. Now it was also saddled with the entire communication requirements of a new Corps HQ. Normally a Corps HQ in those days would be served by a corps signal regiment and another communication zone signal regiment. These had yet to be raised. Even now, after a lapse of so many years, my heart wells up with pride and admiration when I remember the back-breaking load which the Signals boys had to cope with in those days. Some of the operators (radio and ciphers in particular) could only snatch two or three hours of sleep in between continuous duties day after day.

A signal message is supposed to be written in abbreviated telegraphic language. But all messages from the new Corps Commander ran into a couple of typed sheets in prose language and were all marked Top Secret and Flash. They were not addressed to the next higher HQ, namely HQ Eastern Command but directly to Army HQ with only copies for information to the Command HQ.

Available channels of communication from Tezpur were only to Command HQ at Lucknow and not directly to Delhi. These messages had to be encrypted in special ciphers. FLASH is a precedence in the Army, as mentioned before, to be used only in case of real national emergencies. Signals are required to stop all other traffic to clear FLASH messages first. Representations about overloading of ciphers and other communication channels were ignored. It was a strange atmosphere which none who has not experienced it personally can visualise, let alone believe.
Troops who were being pushed forward post haste to engage the Chinese did not even have the basic wherewithal in clothing, weapons and other equipment and rations. The general impression held even up to the time of the Dhola incident was that only one Chinese in three was armed with the Japanese rifles from World War II and with old defective ammunition which often misfired. Such was the state of preparedness.

The higher authorities had obviously assumed that it would be easy to beat the Chinese. Otherwise, one cannot imagine how such an order to engage the enemy could have been issued by the highest in the land to the ill-equipped, ill-clothed, ill-prepared, fatigued, disillusioned and disorganised troops of 4th Infantry Division to engage the enemy. They were just arriving in the Namka Chu river area after forced marches and were not even acclimatised as yet to the high altitudes, when they were ordered to throw the Chinese out of the Thagla ridge.

Yet, this was precisely what happened. HQ 7 Brigade under Brig Dalvi had fetched up at Namka Chu after many days of marching along narrow tracks. Movement on such tracks was perforce in single file. It was difficult to keep control over the porters carrying loads, especially when all of the soldiers were also fully loaded with their weapons, ammunition and personal kits. Radio sets with lead acid secondary batteries, charging engines, petrol and oil are all heavy loads.

One can imagine the mental state of the brigade signal officer when, on arrival after an exhausting journey, he discovered that the generating engine to charge the wireless batteries had not fetched up. A porter had dropped the charging engine in a deep khud on the way, from where it could not be retrieved. Perhaps it was dropped deliberately, because it is my belief that some of these civilian porters were also in the pay of the Chinese. Nor had the jerricans of petrol arrived. Anyway, when informed about this situation, we managed to persuade the Air Force and had another engine, petrol and oil para-dropped.

But we were all in for a still bigger shock when it was discovered that almost all the secondary batteries had arrived without any electrolyte.
What must have happened (perhaps done deliberately) was that a porter dropped a battery accidentally when its electrolyte leaked out. When he picked it up again he would have found it to be surprisingly light. Word must have spread among the other porters and they may all have decided to lighten their loads the same way by emptying out the electrolyte from all the remaining batteries.

How could communications be established on the radio when the batteries were dead and could not be recharged even after petrol had been air-dropped! Such a calamity was beyond anyone's imagination and I had to get the Brigade Signal officer to check and recheck that this was what had actually happened. One just could not believe it! How to get the electrolyte up? This time our persuasive powers did not work because the Air Force helicopter boys refused to carry electrolyte inspite of our good relations with them. And there was no question of dropping sulphuric acid by air.

What was I to do? Fate was also pushing me to my inevitable destiny. We filled up a jar of electrolyte (broken sulphuric acid), marked it prominently as `Rum for Troops' to hide the contents. In another kit bag the regimental Subedar Major packed a roasted pig (we had a big piggery in the Regiment) to take to our jawans in the forward area. They had not received any fresh supplies for many days. The irony of it all was that in high altitude areas, all the troops were entitled to get special scales of rations and they were not even getting the basics.

On 18th October, I flew from Tezpur in an Otter aircraft to Dirranga on the Bhutan border. There I changed into an MI 4 helicopter for the hop to Zimithang. My second in command, Major Ram Singh was already at Zimithang with the GOC, Maj Gen Niranjan Prasad at the divisional Tactical HQ. After meeting the GOC for his orders and giving instructions to Maj Ram Singh there, I flew in a two-seater Bell helicopter with just the pilot, with a `Rum' jar strapped onto my lap. We landed on the dropping zone at Tsang Dhar in the late afternoon and I marched down to
the bottom of the hill on the bank of the river Namka Chu to Brig Dalvi's brigade HQ.

It was an eye-opener, even for me who had been in the area for almost three years, to see the state of our troops deployed face to face with the Chinese. Eight days earlier, a serious action had taken place in that area during which a number of Chinese had been killed. This was when the new Corps Commander, Lt Gen Kaul was on a visit to the brigade. After that action, he had realised the gravity of the situation and had rushed off to Delhi to meet the PM and persuade him (so we were told) to review the earlier decisions, to which he had been a party as the CGS at Army HQ, of throwing the Chinese out of the Thagla Ridge overlooking the Namka Chu river. He had fallen ill during this trip and did not return until several weeks later.

The Chinese had shown a remarkable restraint during that action on 10 October. As one was to learn later from the brigade and battalion commanders concerned in the PW camp, verbal orders given then by Lt Gen Kaul before he left for Delhi, were that 7 Brigade should stay put right where it was. The commanders were also told that under no circumstances should the Chinese be provoked until he returned from Delhi. One unit commander had given very strict orders on the evening of 19 October that no subunit commander would open fire without his personal orders. The same unit commander, when informed that evening that his companies and platoons had primed their grenades, as they could see the Chinese opposite them openly concentrating for the attack, ordered them to unprime them at once. I could see the massing of the Chinese troops on the forward slopes of Thagla ridge quite clearly even as I arrived there on 18th October.

I had a severe headache due to the sudden change of altitude on arrival at the brigade HQ. It was my intention to walk back the next day and visit all the units on the way. I had therefore come in cotton clothes with a para jacket (smock denizen) on top. There was no time of course to think of one's physical headache with so many other massive 'headaches' of
operational responsibilities. The spirit of the jawans in the brigade signals under Capt (later a Brig) Lachman Singh and a very fine JCO, Naib Subedar (later Subedar Major) Dharam Singh was deeply touching. They had suffered much in the forced marches with all problems created by fatigue, extreme cold, orders, counter orders and porters not having fetched up with the essential loads like extra issue blankets and rations. They had really been flogged to the extreme limits.

Earlier when we were faced with the problem of no wireless communications for lack of charged batteries, I had arranged to have special cables (70 lb PVC and 150 lb PVC cadmium copper) air dropped in coils, both at Towang and at Lumpu. From Towang it was laid via Lumla and Shakti upto Lumpu and Zimithang and from there on to HQ 7 Brigade on the Namka Chu river via Hathungla-a total distance of 40 miles. This cable was specially procured because the distances involved were too great for the normal WD1 field cable held in a divisional signal regiment. It was laid with remarkable speed as a single line to work on earth return basis. The credit for this outstanding feat of laying the heavy cable over extremely difficult terrain on a main pack basis, was due to Lt (now a major general, Chief Signal officer of a Command) C. L. Anand. It was completed just in time before the Chinese attack.

It was found that in every unit in the front line in 7 Brigade there were numerous signals problems. So my stay was extended by a day in order to visit all the battalions, starting with the Gorkhas and the Rajputs and others on my march back. It was my intention also to meet my jawans of the radio detachments with these battalions and pat them on their backs for having done so well against tremendous odds.

On the 19th, before leaving for the Gorkhas in the afternoon, Brig Dalvi talked to the GOC at Zimithang on the telephone. He was pleading with the latter to let him move up to a tactically sound defensive position. He described the existing position along the river, where he had been ordered to stay by the Corps Commander before his departure for Delhi, as a `death trap'. Brig Dalvi was told not to flap but to obey orders and
stay put. He was visibly upset and was very abrupt on the telephone to his boss. He passed the telephone to me saying, "You won't believe me, Sir, but talk to your `bloody' Commander Signals and he will tell you what all he can see with his naked eyes in front."

I spoke to the GOC equally strongly saying that one could see the Chinese moving down the Thagla Ridge like ants and also see at least half a dozen mortars which were not even camouflaged. Camouflage had obviously been removed in preparation to open fire. I added that the Chinese could not be there for a picnic and Chinese attack on India-October 1962 that their attack was imminent on a massive scale. I was told to concentrate on my work and not to worry.

It is amazing how people in very responsible positions could give a totally false twist to an event. I am referring to the book "My Years with Nehru-The Chinese Betrayal" by Shri B. N. Mullik who was the Director of Intelligence Bureau of India at that time. This very incident had perhaps been referred to in his book when he says, "In fact, as mentioned by Dalvi in his book (The Himalayan Blunder), even on the 19th when the Chinese were poised for an attack, he was asking for permission to withdraw.."

"The obvious implication in this remark is that the army did not want to fight the Chinese but the actual truth is this: yes, he was asking for permission to withdraw to a tactically sound position from which he could successfully give a fight to the Chinese inspite of all the odds loaded against his troops and to get out of that suicide pit where he had been ordered to stay along the river line.

The deliberate lack of Chinese reaction after they suffered a number of casualties on 10th October, had effectively lulled us in India into a false sense of complacency about being able to beat the Chinese. It was repeated to us more than once, on the authority of the Government and the Army HQ, that the Chinese would not attack. Of course nobody in the higher echelons had appreciated that the Chinese would attack only when they were absolutely ready and were not going to be drawn into a full battle until then. This was their laid down training doctrine as recorded in
their `Bible' — Mao Tse Tung's Red Book, which I was to read later on in the PW camp.

Zimithang near the Thagha Ridge
I stayed on with the Gorkhas during the night of 19th October. My intention was to visit the Rajputs early on 20th morning before returning. But that was not to be. Henceforth I was subject to Chinese plans. The visit to the Rajputs did take place the next morning, but as a prisoner of war, under escort by the Chinese guards.

Early on the 20th morning, I was woken up from a deep sleep by the noise of an intense bombardment. There was utter confusion in the predawn darkness, shouting and yelling and running around in the midst of these exploding shells. Being a stranger there, one had hoped that someone would come and call me because I did not even know my way about very well. After waiting fruitlessly for a time, I came out of the bunker and somehow found my way to the Signals bunker where the two signalmen of my Regiment were manning the rear link radio set. The main concern at that time was to establish communications with the brigade and divisional HQ at the earliest.

The telephone lines were found to be cut. However, radio contact was established with the brigade HQ immediately. I was able to tell the Brigade HQ of the heavy shelling and was told that they were also being shelled. Then we flicked the frequency and talked to the divisional Tactical HQ at Zimithang to give them the picture with a promise to keep them informed. Of course, the Chinese were to prevent me from keeping this promise.

In order to get hold of one of the Gorkha jawans to contact their CO, Lt Col Balwant Ahluwalia, I looked out of the bunker. It was mystifying to see no visible movement outside. There was no one in sight. After a while the shelling stopped and there was a sudden silence—an ominous silence—that was when the Chinese barrage had lifted for the final assault to come in.
The Chinese had formed up overnight in front of all our positions across the river Namka Chu and had even come up opposite Tsang Dhar dropping zone across the river. We had seen all the massing of the Chinese the previous day and reported it too, as recorded earlier. The sudden ominous silence after heavy shelling made me peep out of the bunker again. Now we heard short bursts of small arms fire coming from the higher side of the hill and I saw a line of khaki clad soldiers with a prominent red star on their uniforms advancing down the hill towards our bunker, while firing short intermittent bursts from automatic weapons from their hips.

It was only then that the realization struck me that all the battalion HQ personnel had withdrawn leaving me (a guest in the unit) and the two radio operators behind. It was discovered later that even the Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) of the unit got left behind while he was attending to some of the wounded in the Regimental Aid Post (RAP).

I had never seen a Chinese soldier till then at such close range and my heart sank at this most unexpected situation. I quickly withdrew into the bunker and told the two signalmen in the bunker with me about our predicament and decided to lie low for a while. We saw this first wave go past. And just as we were thinking of making a dash out of the bunker towards the Brigade HQ, we heard and saw another wave of Chinese coming down, firing the short bursts of fire as before. But this wave was now systematically searching the bunkers on the way, looking perhaps for stragglers left behind. They were lobbing grenades into the bunkers to be sure of not leaving anyone alive behind them.

I used to carry a 9 mm Browning automatic pistol in those days with one loaded clip. The two radio operators were armed with the 1914 model bolt action rifles. It was obvious to us that the end had come. The thought immediately was that one's dead body should not be found with an unfired pistol; it must be used, however hopeless our situation. So, when a couple of Chinese soldiers approached our bunker, I let go the full clip at them. The first Chinese was hit above the left eye and he fell
backwards. He rolled down and must have been killed because he did not yell or make any other noise. The second was seen to be hit on the shoulder and he also fell. And suddenly hell was let loose with the Chinese yelling and firing and a number of them converging onto our bunker. I threw out my empty pistol when a hail of bullets came into the bunker. Both the operators were hit but nothing touched me though for quite some time I did not touch the left ear thinking that it had been blown off. One of the operators was riddled with bullets. The sight of blood spurting out of his body at many places like a tap under pressure, is still vivid in my memory. He must have died immediately. The other operator was also hit but was partially protected by the radio set. I never knew what happened to him because a couple of Chinese had jumped into the bunker, hit me with the butt of a rifle, pushed and kicked me out. I was then marched out a little distance and made to sit there.

Soon a Chinese officer arrived who could speak broken English. I was to discover later that he was a senior captain though he was not wearing any rank insignia at the time. He was very rude and taunted me most insultingly, having seen the rank on my shoulders. Lying close by was an unconscious Gorkha soldier who was badly wounded with all the intestines hanging out. He must have regained his consciousness for a few moments, looked at me and possibly recognised me as an Indian officer and said, "Sa-ab, pani," meaning—Sir, water. With a spontaneous reaction I jumped up to help him when this Captain hit me and yelled at me in his limited English, "You stupid Colonel, you sit down. You are a prisoner. Don't move till I tell you; otherwise I will shoot you." All pleadings that the Gorkha soldier was badly wounded and had asked for water were laughed at. He said, "You shut up. We know what to do. If you get up again, I will shoot you." The Gorkha soldier had fortunately lost consciousness again. For the next half an hour or so that we were made to sit at that spot, no attention was given to him. The RMO of this unit, Capt Sood was also brought there and made to sit near me. We could only silently look at each other and be comforted a bit
by our mutual company. We were forbidden to talk after the Chinese were told that Capt Sood was a doctor. He was not allowed to go near the wounded soldier who must have died soon afterwards for want of any medical attention.

There were two artificial gold teeth in my mouth in those days. Sitting there one wondered if a Chinese might suddenly get it into his head to take a couple of stones and knock the gold out of my mouth. The behaviour demonstrated by the Chinese officer was barbarous and callous enough till then. After sometime, we were taken downhill to the Dhola post where we saw many more wounded Indian soldiers lying around, also unattended.

After a brief halt we were marched along a narrow track across the Namka Chu river. We were made to carry a wounded soldier on a stretcher improvised out of a couple of bamboos and a blanket. Going downhill on what was virtually a goat track, we kept slipping and falling. The wounded soldier would also fall and scream in pain. And constantly the same Chinese captain was hurling insults and abuses at us saying, "You call yourselves officers, you cannot even carry a wounded soldier."

I had not actually seen the Namka chu river till we were taken across it as prisoners. And I did wonder why all this big `fuss' had been created by the higher ups about defending the river line at all the bridge sites. This had been talked about in numerous messages one had seen going to and from Tezpur in the Signal Centre. The river was fordable without difficulty where we were taken across between bridges 2 and 3.

For two nights we were kept in one place where some officers and jawans from the Rajputs also joined us. We slept fitfully in the open, feeling very cold and we huddled together for warmth. Lt Col M. S. Rikh, CO of the Rajputs was badly wounded and his soldiers displayed a remarkable spirit. They insisted on carrying him along with us on a stretcher when we left on 22 October to go across over the Thagla pass. We stayed at the top on the reverse side of the pass that night. The Chinese were being careful not to take us over the tracks/paths which were being used by their
troops; we were taken on what appeared to be just goat tracks most of the time.
The Rajputs had fought extremely well as we discovered from various accounts. In his book, 'Shri Mullik was very critical of the Indian Army's leadership, especially of the earlier hierarchy under General Thimayya as the Chief, but he had a word of praise for the Rajputs at least. He wrote, "...of individual gallantries there were many and the Rajputs, the first unit which received the shock of the Chinese attack, fought well enough according to the best traditions of the Indian Army but the rest of the brigade was easily folded up and disintegrated."
One of Rajput company commanders, the late Major Pant had really inspired his men and they had killed a number of Chinese. We were told by many of our men in the PW camp later that even after Pant was killed and his position overrun, the Chinese kept bayoneting his dead body repeatedly. They were perhaps angry because of the large number of casualties which Pant and his men inflicted on them. Otherwise who would expect a regular army soldier to go on bayoneting a dead body in battle! This was also confirmed by a Chinese officer when we were in the PW camp.
Maj Pant should certainly have been honoured and given a high gallantry award posthumously. But such was the state of wrong in the Indian Army hierarchy at the time, that not only did he go unrecognised but others who had run away the quickest with least regard for their command responsibilities, were given gallantry awards. One was to learn later on return to India that Lt Gen Kaul had ordered one Maha Vir Chakra (MVC) each to be given to an officer in all the battalions on a quota basis. I know that at least in one case this quota MVC was awarded to one of the most undeserving. Instead of being court martialed for dereliction of duty in face of the enemy, he got this award and subsequently got promoted to higher ranks too, perhaps on the basis of this undeserved MVC.
During the march upto the Thagla pass (about 15000 feet), I had luckily picked up an Indian blanket found on the way. It was with me throughout
my stay in PW camp and I brought it back to India as a memento. It was biting cold on top of Thagla pass that night but we survived the cold somehow huddled together under a tarpaulin cover which was open on all sides. I am sure it was the sheer will to survive which protected us from catching pneumonia.

We saw a number of Chinese women soldiers right up in the front line. Every single one of the Chinese soldiers including these women carried an automatic weapon-pistol, sten or rifle. All the Chinese soldiers looked fit and were ruddy cheeked and dressed up warmly in cotton padded clothes. This was the standard dress for winter for the whole nation may be. Some wore khaki and others dark blue but I never discovered what was the distinction between the khaki and blue clad soldiers because they were all armed with automatic weapons and were seen to be performing the same kind of duties.

One had seen some movies, documentaries and pictures of prisoners of war being marched under escort to the places of detention. And it was a peculiar feeling to find myself in that category, being stared at by other Chinese soldiers, being made fun of and also being photographed at various stages. At the same time one's mind was alert and active, thinking of all sorts of things-from thoughts of one's loved ones or the possibility of our Army's counter offensive and our own rescue to the possibilities of escape as well as our fear and apprehensions of what would come next.

We passed huge stocks of unfired mortar shells by the sides of all the mortar positions as we went up to the Thagla pass. On the Northern side, we saw parties of Chinese bringing up 120 mm mortars on a man pack basis with three teams of four men each on narrow tracks. Carrying those heavy loads uphill on narrow tracks was indeed a tremendous achievement. They had certainly prepared for the war, unlike the Indian Army.

We also had four mountain artillery guns para-dropped at Tsang Dhar but none of them fired a single shot on or before 20 October. Two of the very
fine young artillery officers (a captain and a lieutenant from the parachute field regiment) were taken prisoners with us. From Thagla we were marched to Le in Tibet first and then to Marmang. We had hardly anything to eat for the first three days and were given the first, what appeared to be an `excellent' meal at Le, of boiled salted rice and fried dry raddish.

From Marmang we were taken in covered vehicles at night and arrived in our PW camp destination after two days. During the first three days of our captivity we were subjected to a tremendous physical strain with little to eat. My own capacity to be able to sustain all that strain and extreme cold without nourishment surprises me even now. But we have such hidden reserves of strength which come to the surface along with one's will for survival.

In this context, a quote from Brig Dalvi's book where he had summed up this observation very aptly is worth reproducing: "The human body is indeed God's most amazing creation. The mind and the body had overcome the most grievous hardships and dangers; and made light of starvation, intense cold, lack of sleep and superhuman exertions at heights where it is difficult to even breathe under normal conditions. These physical hardships were accompanied by mental depression, humiliation and anger at the culprits, mingled with sorrow for all those who gave their lives." How true! He talks about the real `culprits' responsible for this debacle suffered by the Indian Army for the first time in its history.

Being marched back in the first few days and for some days afterwards, one was still too stunned and dazed at the most unexpected development of being taken a prisoner of war. The front line troops manning the borders would be mentally prepared for such an eventuality but my job was at the Divisional HQ and not to be involved in an infantry battle. I had written to my wife from Tezpur before leaving on the 18th of October not to expect any letters from me for a few days but I had not made any preparations for the eventuality which had overtaken me.
On being captured, I felt so concerned about the Regiment which I had been training and motivating for almost three years, the family members (wife and three small children) and I was so restless and deeply depressed at my helplessness to do something. I would often think of a remark I had once read in a book and would compare myself to the patient in that book who suffered for a good cause; to quote, 'Patients seriously wounded in combat have an easier time adjusting to their injuries than those with similar injuries sustained while fooling around in a basketball ground.' I could not possibly have prepared myself or even imagined being taken as a prisoner.

It is a sad commentary on the state of the Indian Army at the time. The Chinese would make fun of our army by such remarks as, "You do not even have cutting tools for felling trees. You use shovels to cut down trees." They had seen our troops prior to 20 October, preparing their defensive positions from across the Namka Chu river with such implements as were available to them. The Chinese had carried chain saws right up to the front line. There were other remarks such as, "You people have strange tactics. You sit right at the bottom of the valley to defend your territory instead of sitting on a high ground." All these remarks were made to the PWs during the so-called brain-washing sessions, obviously meant to shake their confidence in the higher command and the Government.

It was a pathetic sight to see our troops being marched back as PWs, in torn boots without laces or socks, OG cotton clothes with torn jersies on top, some with ill-fitting greatcoats minus buttons. Only about 5 or 6 per cent had parkha snow coats. One of the battalion commanders, who was also a PW, told me that leave alone the non-availability of snow clothing, only sixty per cent of his troops were issued with Extra Issue (EI) clothing which is issued to troops for the winter months in the plains and withdrawn at the end of winter, fifty per cent had two blankets each, the rest had one each and only ten per cent had sleeping bags. There were already a number of cases of frost-bite on the
feet and hands and later, on there were many more cases of frost-bite as well as pulmonary odoema. All the loads of EI clothing which had to be taken to the forward areas were being carried by the civilian porters beyond the road head at Towang in the rushed move forward of 7 Infantry Brigade. These had been dumped at Lumla, the first stage of the march beyond Towang because the civilian porters had refused to go on beyond Lumla. Most regrettably, they were backed in this action by our political officer's staff at Towang, who did not consider it safe for them to go beyond Lumla even before the battle had been joined. What could the troops do, faced with the choice of carrying their weapons, ammunition and rations? The 'luxury' of blankets for warmth had to be left behind. Even the subsequent promised air drop of these items did not materialise, such was the standard of staff work at HQ in Tezpur. Why was the air supply not planned for earlier? JAMAIR, a civilian air company, had been dropping supplies to the Assam Rifles posts regularly for years in all kinds of weather and I am confident that our Air Force would have risen to the occasion, whatever the odds. One had seen the performance of the Indian Air Force soon after independence in 1947, when troops and supplies had to be rushed to Srinagar to save Kashmir valley from being overrun by the so-called tribal invasion from Pakistan.

We were driven back in Tibet from Marmang to the PW camp in covered vehicles and mostly by night. We could not see where we were going and what was going on in Tibet. The Chinese were certainly meticulous about security and had made sure that we could not observe anything of their activities on the way. It was obvious to those of us sitting inside the vehicles, that the construction of roads could not have presented the Chinese with too much of a problem. There were hardly any steep gradients and the surface was not too rough. This was in sharp contrast to what the Border Roads organisation was faced with on the Indian side of the border. Our roads had to be built from the plains of Assam up steep gradients, by blasting and cutting. This work was constantly interrupted by heavy monsoon showers and land slides. As one knows, after any
blasting, the hill side becomes unstable and is prone to landslides in the rains for many years thereafter.

We arrived at the PW camp located at CHEN YE on 26 October and were accommodated in Lama houses which were all deserted although we could see some activity in the monastery above these houses on the side of a hill. The civilian Tibetan population lived in a small hamlet a few hundred yards below these houses. I was kept alone in a dark and dingy room for the first two days until the other lieutenant colonels joined up and then I was accommodated in a room along with Colonel Rikh, who was badly wounded.

For the next few days, parties of PWs kept arriving, some of them in captured Indian vehicles. These vehicles had obviously been driven out from Towang via Bumla. This road Bumla-Towang must have been got ready by the Chinese in record time. We spent over five months in this camp, located south west of Tse Tang, off the main highway to Lhasa.

There was an old monastery and a palace here. We were told that the palace had been built in honour of a Nepalese princess who had married one of the feudal lords in Tibet.

Incidentally this was also the place where His Holiness the Dalai Lama stayed for a night during his escape to India in 1959. There must have been some fighting here or maybe the place was ransacked by the Chinese subsequently as a possible reprisal for giving shelter to the Dalai Lama. The palace, the monastery and most of the lama houses were all damaged to a large degree.

In the PW camp, which was organised into four companies, the prisoners were segregated in accordance with Chinese logic. No. 1 Company was all officers, JCOs and NCOs. Field officers (majors and lieutenant colonels) were completely segregated from the JCOs and men. No. 2 and 3 Companies were jawans of various units. No. 4 Company, consisted only of Gorkhas and was given special privileges, for obvious political reasons. Each company had its own cookhouse where the Indian soldiers selected by the Chinese were made to cook for the company and then distribute
the food. We could not find out subsequently even, after we were able to talk to the jawans, about the basis of this selection of cooks by the Chinese. The so called breakfast was served from 7.00 to 7.30 a.m., lunch from 10.30 to 11.00 a.m. and dinner from 3.00 to 3.30 p.m. After everyone had arrived in the camp, we four lieutenant colonels (MS Rikh of the Rajputs, Balwant Singh Ahluwalia of the Gorkhas, Rattan Singh of 5 Assam Rifles and myself) and the majors were served our meals brought by a jawan. He was detailed by the Chinese in rotation, with strict instructions not to talk to us. Other junior officers had a little more freedom. They could meet the jawans but they were not allowed to meet us, the field officers. Initially even the JCOs and NCOs of Gorkhas were kept separate but this was changed later when there were some disciplinary problems in No. 4 Company.

We made repeated representations to the PW authorities that under the Geneva Convention on PWs, we as officers had the right to be with our men. We were told quite bluntly that all these were nothing but imperialist conventions.

The Lama houses in which we were lodged had the doors and windows missing in most cases—perhaps they had been used up as firewood by the Chinese. These houses were dark and dingy and very cold inside. For two days I was alone in a small room until Rikh was brought in on a stretcher wrapped up in an Indian parachute. He was quite badly wounded. Nursing him was engrossing work for me because otherwise there was nothing to do and we had the whole day to do it in, as they say. To be cooped up in a small room, feeling cold and miserable inside one's own self and outside, I would go round this room first clockwise then anti clockwise, thus exercising myself and also killing time. It reminded one of caged animals in a zoo.

I shivered through the first couple of nights but then had a brain wave. As we were brought in, we had noticed a pile of husk (rice or wheat). We asked the Chinese if we could have some of that. It was a childhood memory which made me ask for it. When we were small, my father had a
few cattle-cows for milk and two bullocks for running the Persian well in our house. For these animals a whole cart load of wheat husk used to be bought in one go and stored in a special room filled up almost to the top. As children we would play hide and seek and at times hide in this pile. I remembered that it used to be very warm inside where we lay hiding during the game. Luckily for us, the Chinese did not deny this request. We were given a whole pile of this stuff which we used as a mattress as well as a quilt for warmth.

We were not let out of the room for almost a month after our arrival. Each of these lama houses had its own latrine in one corner with an open but very effective system of night soil disposal. Unfortunately, by the time we arrived, the night soil `disposal squad' of pigs had itself been disposed off. The Chinese are particularly fond of pork meat.

It was in the first ten days or so in the camp that on three occasions, a person dressed in Tibetan clothes-would come furtively into our room just before night fall. He would make signs pointing towards South and whispering just one word, `Indo.' After his first visit, we were perhaps still too dazed ourselves with our condition and we did not respond. We discussed it later and felt, rightly or wrongly one could not be sure, that it was perhaps a trap by the Chinese to find out if we had any thoughts or plans for escaping. At that time, we had no knowledge about exactly where we were in Tibet and we knew from the long distance we had driven through the night that we were deep inside Tibet well away from the Indian borders.

It got dark very early in the camp. Dinner was given to us at about 3 p.m. and we would be in bed by 4.30 p.m. This was an ordeal-to be in bed from 4.30 p.m. till about 6 a.m. the next day, in the dark. One should not really complain because we had plenty of time to meditate and pray. Food in the early days was mostly grated fried radish with boiled rice. It appeared to us that this was what the Chinese were also eating among their rank and file. It started improving later. We were also given some cotton padded clothes to wear some weeks later. I just did not feel like
wearing them somehow inspite of the cold. I was also getting acclimatized to the cold.

We all felt very depressed on 8 November when the Chinese came and told us that Towang had been captured by them. We had no news till then as to how the war was going.

There was an English speaking Chinese officer, Lt Tong who was with us almost throughout our stay in the PW camp and later when we were taken around the mainland of China. He would come daily and talk to us individually or together. He tried to be friendly in the early days. Later, he started threatening us with disciplinary action when perhaps he felt that we were not getting brainwashed by his talk. He had obviously lived in America for a long time and talked with a typical accent and thought no end of himself.

One should not be surprised about Lt Tong's behaviour in his dealings with us because of what I read later in Mao Tse Tung's Red Book regarding the policy on prisoners. It says, "In dealing with captives from the enemy troops, we must adopt the policy of setting them free. We must win over as many as possible of such captives ... as to the rest, we should not insult them, search them for personal effects or exact confessions but treat them kindly...." Tong was obviously caught between these contradictory instructions. Perhaps his ego wanted to show results by 'converting' us and feeling impatient at not succeeding. It must be said for the Chinese that none of personal possessions like watches, money or rings on fingers were taken away from us.

The theme of their talks with the PWs was monotonously the same, i.e., they wanted to be friends and it was only the reactionary government of Nehru, who was a lackey of American imperialism that wanted to break this friendship. They were very fond of referring to what they termed as the two thousand year old friendship between India and China. The terms I have put in italics, among others would be used day after day.

Invariably it would bring a prompt response from the listeners, "Then why did you attack us on 20 October?" They would try to explain this too by
saying that India attacked first and the Chinese attacked only in self-defence. But this explanation did not cut ice with any of us.

Very recently, Mr Robert Ford, a British national, who was an official in the service of the Tibetan Government and was taken prisoner when the Chinese attacked and occupied Tibet in 1950, visited Auroville. He was held captive for nearly five years first in Tibet and then in China. He was subjected to long interrogations and brain-washing sessions over the years. He and I exchanged notes about the communist Chinese methods of interrogation of prisoners. It was so revealing to discover that their methods had undergone little change from the time he was a prisoner in 1950-55 upto 1962-63 when we were prisoners. He has written a very interesting book "Captured in Tibet."

We observed the behaviour of Lt Tong very carefully. He was obviously one, soaked in the Chinese communist doctrine for the interrogation and brainwashing of field officers. Later, we were to discover some facts about him from another Chinese officer. He would try to be extremely warm and friendly and play on our sentiments initially. To give just one example of my own case—he had found out from me that I was commissioned on the 4th of November in 1942. So on 4 November 1962, he arrived in the evening with a small bottle of wine to celebrate my 20 years of commissioned service. Then at other times, when, after trying to achieve his aim of turning us against our own political set up and senior commanders, he would find that we had not got converted to his views, then he would threaten us and warn us of dire consequences. At times even the standard of food served to us would deteriorate for the next few days.

This is the same kind of treatment Mr Ford also had received when they tried for five long years to make him confess to being a British spy and to admit that he was responsible for poisoning one of the Chinese officials. His is a vivid description of how a man's resistance can be broken down by continuous interrogation over a long period of time. Luckily we were not there for too long.
The Chinese also worked on the sentiments of our Indian soldiers by celebrating certain festivals with special food and showing them Indian films like ‘Do Bigha Zamin’.

On the subject of brainwashing, it is my belief that the Chinese failed almost completely with the Indian soldiers. Possibly with their tactic of keeping the men away from officers and segregating them into special batches with varying facilities offered to each, they may have succeeded in an odd case. This too would be from among the non-combatants like porters and pioneers who might have been persuaded to collaborate with them but not the regular soldiers.

There was a beautiful demonstration of the high calibre of the Indian soldier under adverse conditions. After we had been in the camp for about a month, we were taken out of our confinement for a walk. This was at our insistence on wanting to exercise ourselves and to get out of the dark and dingy rooms. We were thrilled to be out in the sun. Inspite of protests from Lt Tong not to do so, we sat down against a wall to sun ourselves. As luck would have it, though we could not see over the wall, we heard voices in Hindi from the other side. Fortunately, Lt Tong did not understand Hindi otherwise he would have forced us to get up and move away. What we heard from the other side made us feel very proud to belong to the Indian Army. It was a Hindi-speaking Chinese talking to some jawans, obviously from 9 Punjab judging from their manner of speaking. The talk was going in the usual way about how India had attacked first. A jawan told the Chinese that his company was sleeping when the Chinese attack came, so how could India have started the war? The Chinese tried to explain that he (the Indian soldier) was only thinking of his sub-unit but India had attacked elsewhere and the Chinese had to take action in self defence in his sector. The Indian jawan was obviously fearless and outspoken and said, "I do not know what you are talking about but the whole of my battalion and the `Burgerade', (as a Punjabi soldier would pronounce the word brigade) were sleeping when you attacked first." The Chinese tried to talk of other sectors but this jawan
was not taken in. So, the Chinese then said, "Your reactionary government of Nehru has made friends with America. Every day big American planes are landing in Tezpur bringing weapons including automatic rifles. So obviously your Nehru does not want to be friends with China. These Americans are nothing but paper tigers." The Chinese use of the term 'paper tiger' for the Americans was frequent.

Now, this was the first we had heard of American aid coming in and it was very heartening news. But the reply of this jawan is what moved us deeply with pride. He must have perhaps stood up and clapped his hands with joy when he said," This is lovely. Upto now we fought with you with the 1914 model rifles. Now we shall see what happens when we fight you next time with automatic rifles." How rightly did the American magazine, TIME, write at that time, "The Indian Army needs almost everything except courage." This unknown and unrecognised jawan was certainly a true representative of the Indian army. When we came back to India in May 1963, I requested the Director of Military Intelligence at Army HQ in my debriefing that this particular jawan in the above quoted incident should be located and then suitably honoured and rewarded. This was also represented to the then Army Chief, the late General J. N. Chaudhuri through my father-in-law, the late Maj Gen A. N. Sharma, ex Director of Medical Services at Army HQ. But all these pleadings fell on deaf ears.

The usual attitude at the time was that the Government did not wish to 'celebrate' the 1962 defeat by giving more awards (having given away the quota awards earlier without any proper verification).

This is one of the saddest parts of my memory of those days. Numerous cases of men who deserved to be honoured for their outstanding examples of devotion to duty in the face of enemy were ignored because of the confusion and failure in the higher directions and conduct of war.

Some cases have been mentioned earlier, like that of the late Maj Pant of the Rajputs.

The case of my own second in command, the late Major Ram Singh who gave his life along with the late Squadron Leader Vinod Sehgal when they
had tried to land at Tsang Dhar in a two seater Bell helicopter after the Chinese attack on 20 October, is one such. They came to find out what had happened after my last radio transmission that morning, when we suddenly went off the air after giving news of intense shelling. On my return, through persistent efforts to get some recognition for Maj Ram Singh and a few of my other officers, JCOs and men, the only thing I managed to get for some at least were a few `mentioned in despatches.'

There was a Chinese lady doctor in our camp who would come sometimes to examine Rikh. She was very gentle, soft spoken and very pretty. In fact, quite frankly, we had all fallen in love with her. Once, when she had not come for a few days, we thought of a way to meet her. Rikh told one of the guards that he was feeling very unwell. He added that if the doctor could not come then we could walk up ourselves to the medical aid post at the bottom of the hill. It worked. Lt Tong arrived and decided to escort us there. It must have been a divinely arranged trip because it produced a miraculous result. As a room-mate and a sort of nurse for Rikh, I also went along to give him support. The other two Lt Cols also said that they would like some attention. So all four of us were escorted, with Rikh and I behind a guard, followed by Tong and others.

On the way we had to go past houses which were occupied by our jawans. They enjoyed a little more freedom and most of them were sitting on top of their houses in the sun. They must have seen our marching column coming and more faces suddenly started appearing. As soon as we came near I shouted the greeting of Jai Hind to them. Lt Tong hit me from behind and yelled, "Who has given you permission to speak and what have you said?" The Indian soldiers saw all this-my being hit and shouted at for the greeting of Jai Hind to them. They saw Rikh being supported by me and this must have gone round the camp like an electric shock wave. They had been given a lot of propaganda talk against officers, as we were to discover later, by saying that we (officers) did not care for them. What they actually saw was the opposite. The Chinese never took us out again like this. All their brain-washing was nullified by their own under-
estimation of the discipline and loyalty of Indian jawans. Another incident also is worth relating. Towards the end of December 1962, Red Cross parcels were received from India for the PWs. There were two packets in each parcel, one containing warm clothes and the other food stuff. Whether the Chinese swiped some parcels I do not know but what they told us was that not enough parcels had been received for every PW. I do not believe that if the Chinese had reported the number of prisoners correctly, our Government would send a lesser number of parcels. The Chinese said they would not give them to us directly, as they anticipated fighting among the PWs. In spite of our telling them that they had no right to keep back parcels sent for us and that there would be no fighting, they decided to call a conference of all the representatives of different groups of PWs to discuss how to distribute them. I was called as the representative of field officers and escorted to a place where a number of other PWs were already assembled, consisting of captains and subalterns, JCOs, NCOs, Gorkhas, non-combatants, pioneers/porters and other unit representatives. As I came near I called out a loud greeting of Jai Hind and followed up quickly with a sentence in Hindi to say, "These people have called a meeting thinking that we shall fight over parcels sent for us. I have told them that there will be no fight and they should hand over the parcels to us without delay." Lt Tong shouted at me saying that I had not been permitted to speak. I answered him again loudly enough for all to hear, "You told me that there might be fighting among Indian soldiers over parcels and I have merely told them not to fight. That is what you wanted, is it not?" Anyway after a bit more of humming and hawing, they decided to carry on and ask everyone present to give his views. They also added their own propaganda about India not caring for the PWs otherwise they should have sent enough parcels for everyone. They asked the opinion of the junior most non-combatant first. I was deeply moved and could not hold back my tears when one by one, all 10 or 12 representatives repeated the same thing to the effect, "Our Colonel Sahib has told you there will be no fighting. You give us these parcels and we
shall decide how to divide them." I felt so proud of belonging to the Indian Army and to be given such regard and response. We were told by the Chinese that India had sent only five parcels for every eight prisoners. It would be of interest to recall what was contained in each Red Cross parcel. One packet had warm clothes—a German battle dress, a pair of long johns, warm vest, muffler, cap, jersey, warm shirt, boots and a towel. The second packet contained foodstuff including a bar of Sathe chocolate, tins of milk, jam, butter, fish, packets of sugar, atta (wheat flour), dal (pulses), dried peas, salt, tea, biscuits, condiments, cigarettes and vitamin pills. It certainly was a very well thought-out list of items. There was another similar demonstration of the calibre of our jawans. During the night of 31st December 1962, it was pitch dark when a voice saying, "Sa-ab, Sa-ab" (meaning—Sir, Sir) woke me up. One could not decide for a moment what to do. After keeping quiet for a short while as the 'voice' was approaching nearer, I said in a low voice in Hindi, "Who are you?." He said, "Signals Sa-ab? Kutty." He was one of my Signals jawans. Getting out of the warm bed, I said softly, "Why have you come here? They will shoot you if they find you here." He had been advancing slowly towards where I was and when we touched each other, he put a small packet in my hands and said, "This is for you, Sa-ab. I am going now." In the dark, I could not decide what the thing was. And he was gone as quietly as he had come.

I could not sleep that night—first for trying to listen for any shots that might be fired in case he was found out, and then out of apprehension of what the packet could be—a weapon or something to be hidden from the Chinese. But my apprehensions were completely unfounded. It was yet another amazing demonstration of the devotion and loyalty of an Indian soldier. First light showed that the packet contained two chocolate bars which had come in the Red Cross parcels. He and another one of my soldiers had given me their ration. One could not even repay this wonderful gesture. He must have brought our food one day and known where I was sleeping. I practised stitching while a PW. It was out of a
pressing need to protect myself from cold. This was well before the arrival of Red Cross parcels from India. After my room-mate, Rikh had recovered a bit from the heavy loss of blood, he asked me to take off his warm shirt which was `caked' with dried blood and was stuck to his body. There had been no change of clothing or wash for him since 20 October. With the help of the pretty lady doctor, we ripped the shirt off slowly and he was given something else to wear. Small pieces of warm cloth from this shirt which were not caked with blood were cut out with the doctor's scissors. The intention was to put these patches inside my para jacket to protect my chest and back from cold. A para jacket of those days was only a wind breaker and not warm. The next thing was to find a needle and thread. There was an Indian parachute in which Rikh was brought wrapped up on a stretcher. One of the Chinese guards had a needle but no thread. If only we could take out the strong thread from the parachute stitching! I remembered my childhood, watching my mother taking out thread from stitched cloth by removing a few stitches with a needle from one side and then the whole lot of thread would come out from the other side. It took me two days to work it out and then there was a whole lot of good strong thread. It gave me something else to do besides nursing Rikh. I would then attend to the stitching requirements of the other officers, after I had patched up my own jacket. I brought this para jacket back to India as a memento. It was on the 16th of November that we were allowed to write letters home. Four of us Lt Cols were also allowed to send telegrams home. With a blank sheet of writing paper and an envelope each, we were given another typed sheet of paper on which a few short sentences were written in English. Each of these sentences conveyed the Chinese expression of goodwill for the people of India and of us being looked after well. The Chinese told us that we might like to choose any of the expressions for inclusion in our letters. I told the others that we must include one or two of their given expressions in our letters, otherwise they might not send our letters. My assumption proved right because out of a
few letters we wrote subsequently, the ones without any of those given expressions, never reached India.

Talking of these select expressions—when we came back to India, it was discovered that one of my letters to Kamla had not been delivered in original but only a photo copy was sent to her. I found out later that the original had been retained by the Intelligence agencies, perhaps to be used as evidence against me for having been brain-washed. It was amusing that it was my four year old daughter Abha who, when told of the contents of that letter, had picked out the right essence. My letter had started by saying that the Chinese are treating us well (as per the typed Chinese paper) but then it had ended by asking for warm clothes and some food items to be sent to us through the Red Cross. Abha had told Kamla that (her) Daddy was feeling cold and hungry. This had obviously escaped the notice of the Chinese. It had also fooled our intelligence agencies and made them suspicious about my loyalties.

16 November was the date when they announced that Brig Dalvi had also been taken prisoner while trying to escape to India. He was kept alone in a separate camp at Tse Tang. On the same day they also announced to us that a total of 927 Indian soldiers had been taken prisoner till then. About the captured Indian prisoners, the figures kept going up in subsequent announcements and I would note them down in my `secret' diary. On 27 December, they announced that there were 2156 prisoners including 15 field officers. Another 453 prisoners were added on 24 January 1963 and 820 more added on 31 January. On 12 February they told us that they had a total of 3319 prisoners with 52 officers (23 field officers and 29 captains and subalterns).

They also kept telling us of some wounded and other prisoners being returned to India from time to time. For instance, on 6 December we were given the news of the return of 65 wounded, on 11 December we were told that 399 fit prisoners had been returned and on 19 December, 360 more wounded were returned. It was on 23 December that 106 prisoners (3 officers, 1 JCO and 102 jawans) left our camp for return and
we were told that they were handed over at JANG on 28 December. There were supposed to be 700 prisoners in our camp.

The Chinese would often play Indian music on the public address system in the camp. One of the songs which was played repeatedly was Lata Mangeshkar's "Aa Ja Re-Main to kab se Khari Is par..." The words of this song (‘Come, I have been waiting for so long’) from a beloved to her love are such that they would make us feel homesick. I would often be reminded of the famous song of the film 'Kabuliwala', with the words which were so deeply moving and somewhat applicable to us, "Aye mere pyare watan, tujh pe dil kurban..." (Oh, my dear Motherland, I sacrifice my heart for you), being away from our homes and dear ones.

The Chinese declared a unilateral cease-fire on 21 November 1962 suddenly but perhaps more unexpectedly than the attack on 20 October. After its announcement, they gave us long lectures on how they wanted to be friends. They said that even after the ceasefire, India had rejected their peace proposals. This kind of talk was certainly disturbing for us in the absence of any authentic news from India.

But Rattan, who had been a PW in World War II with the Japanese, would remind us of his days in the Japanese PW camps when he had to go through a terrible time. He had not joined the INA and had been subjected to an inhuman treatment for a period of more than four years.

On 5 December, we were given some books and magazines to read. This material consisted of volumes of Mao Tse Tung's Red Book, some literature on the India-China boundary question and a few Red Army journals. But whatever they were, they were most welcome for me at least. There was something to do at last to occupy the mind. I did study and take notes from the Red Book.

With my habit of writing a diary, I kept notes as a PW also. The only available paper to write on in the first week or so were some sheets of toilet paper in my para jacket pocket. The question was how to keep these papers from being discovered by the Chinese. We were never sure when they would search us or search the place where we were kept. So, I
hid the papers on my person and then asked one of the other colonels to see if he could find the papers on me. If he could not find them after being told they were there, one could be sure that the Chinese would not succeed. What I had done was to open the stitching on the `belt' part of the trousers and then slide the folded papers inside. This was how my diary notes on toilet paper could be brought out to India. A dear friend in the Engineers had, on my return, got these papers photographed and enlarged. They still have a sentimental value for me.

After we received the Red Cross parcels towards the end of December, a note book was improvised out of brown wrapping paper. In it, among other things, I started keeping notes from Mao Tse Tung's Red Book openly. I had also started learning some Chinese words. Rattan used to recite Urdu poetry and knew a lot of puzzles and anecdotes which I would record also—all this to while away the time and keep the mind actively away from depression.

We were given a book in Hindi which was available to us in English too. It was the usual Chinese propaganda material regarding the border dispute with India. So, in my note book, I copied out some of the difficult Hindi words to brush up my Hindi. They had used pure Hindi translation of the English book. I had also noted down the ranks in the Chinese Army and their pronunciation in Devnagri script as also the insignias worn by them. These are reproduced as recorded by me then. I would not vouch for their authenticity. I noted down what was given to me by one of the willing guards as a result of my `interrogation' of him.

Two more things were also recorded—one was some tips on the card game of bridge in which Rattan appeared to be an expert, and second, detailed planning done on a day-to-day basis for a holiday together on our return to India, particularly for a tour of Rajasthan by car. Again Rattan was a mine of information on the places of interest, distances and so on. It was a real surprise for us when one day a Chinese woman came and recited some of Bahadur Shah Zafar's poems, much to the delight of us all but particularly so of Rattan. This lady and Rattan did have an
exchange of couplets of Zafar's poems written while he was pining away
in Rangoon for his homeland after deportation by the British from his last
Mohgul kingdom in Delhi following the so-called mutiny of 1857. The
Chinese had certainly prepared for this war most diligently because they
had interpreters for every Indian language right in the front line. This
Urdu-speaking woman must have lived in Lucknow for a long time.
Mao's Red book amazed me and I was struck by the versatility of the
man. I do not believe we in India had bothered to study him adequately.
He had openly declared that political power grows out of the barrel of a
gun. He was apparently worshipped by most Chinese at that time. I
believe we were too involved in our idealistic pursuits of non-violence and
the like and became mesmerised by the slogan of "Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai."
I give a few examples of some quotes from Mao I noted in my book,
which are worth reproducing: "The Gods and Goddesses are indeed pitiful,
worshipped for hundreds of years, they have not knocked out a single
bully or bad gentry."
"To wound all ten fingers is not so effective as to chop one of them off."
"Reading books is learning. To learn warfare through warfare is our chief
method."
They certainly found out all about India's war potential through this war
and then immediately thereafter they declared a unilateral cease-fire.
"Desperadoism is a kind of military shortsightedness originating from the
fear of losing territory ...Partial loss of territory is the price we pay for
preservation of our domain ...Only desperados would keep on contesting
every piece of ground even though they are definitely unfavourable
positions; and as a result they not only lose territory but also fail to
preserve their forces."
"Fight no battle unprepared, fight no battle you are not sure of winning."
What apt and relevant advice for our military and political leaders of that
time, if only they had taken the trouble to study Mao's writings and
reflected a bit about the potential of what we were up against.
His ‘formula of 16 words’ is also worth reproducing:
"The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy halts, we harass the enemy; tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue."

He had defined what a good communist should be and with the kind of communist regime in which everyone is required to keep an eye on everyone else, most Chinese would perhaps rigidly follow them out of fear of exposure. To quote, "Should set an example in the army, of fighting valiantly, carrying out orders, observing discipline, performing political work and upholding political unity and solidarity-set an example in establishing friendly relations between various parties by keeping their promises and taking resolute action, by modestly and sincerely discussing problems and ...Those engaged in government work must be exemplary in being absolutely incorruptible, free from favouritism, in making appointments and doing much work and taking little reward. ...At no time and under no circumstances should he place personal interest first. Such things as selfishness, self interest, inactiveness and negligence in work, corruption, degeneration and vain glory are merely contemptible; while the spirit of impartiality, of action and hard work of self denial and complete absorption in arduous work, commands respect..."

Incidentally, the ‘mass line’ of Chinese communism is defined as "From the people, through the leadership, to the people." The following was copied from one of the books/journals given to us, and it throws a considerable light on the mentality of the Chinese leaders and how the masses of China were being prepared at that time for the 'struggle': "Short of war destroying the human race on the planet, a possibility in which the Chinese do not believe, what major harm can be done to a nation whose great central irrigation dams are supplemented by millions of small reservoirs in every township, whose central steel plants are reinforced by local iron and steel works in every country, whose citizens are organised to the end of the land as mobile warriors with every small unit able to raise food, make clothing and steel and govern itself on a township basis. The strategic invulnerability which the commune gives to
China as well as the great economic potential possibly accounts for the virulence of the foreign attack."
I am quoting from the notes I kept as a prisoner in 1962-1963. All this has now to be related to the present day ground realities of 1995 as sweeping changes are overtaking the world, particularly the rejection of communism in the erstwhile Soviet Bloc and disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Talking about the pretty Chinese lady doctor. She certainly was the most pleasant experience of our stay in that PW camp or of the Chinese system of medicine. One day, for severe constipation I was given some tablets to swallow by another doctor through Lt Tong, acting as the interpreter for the doctor. After taking those tablets, I had developed a serious trouble of bleeding piles. When this fresh complaint was made it was found that they had wrongly given me medicine for diarrhea. This was confirmed to us by another Chinese officer. The lady doctor showed a lot of concern when she found out about my new trouble. She had come to know that my wife Kamla was also a doctor like her and perhaps wanted to demonstrate how good and kind a doctor she was.

We also saw the Chinese needle treatment (called Chen Chu in Chinese) being administered to Rikh for his severe migraine problem. He certainly was cured once and for all. Even on return to India some two years later, I asked him about it and he had confirmed that he never again had migraine trouble. Now, whether it was the magic charm of the lady doctor or the needles that did it, is anyone's guess.

One other episode of our stay in the PW camp is worth recording. After we were allowed to sit on top of our house in the sun, we would often see an old lama in the monastery above and if he caught our eye, he would take out his hand from under his robes for a split second and make a sign of blessings, as it were. After a few times we felt convinced that he was conveying good will to us. So, we would also make a quick sign of salutation with folded hands in return. He would never stay long in our sight.
One day, towards the end of our stay, at our request we were taken to see the palace and the monastery. It was a shock to see the palace with all the beautiful Buddha statues of all sizes and fabulous scrolls (tankhas) lying broken, defiled and torn and trampled on the ground. In the monastery, a couple of lamas were still staying including the one we `knew' by sight. When we were walking through the usual dark corridors on the conducted tour, this lama was just ahead of me with a guard in front. He sought my hand in the darkness and pressed it. I quickly responded with both my hands. This episode is mentioned just to illustrate the true feelings of Tibetans towards us Indians.

After the declaration of the unilateral cease-fire, the attitude of the Chinese towards us softened. The only exception was Lt Tong, who used to vacillate between extreme friendliness and rudeness. Some of the festivals like Guru Nanak's birthday, Christmas and Guru Govind Singh's birthday, were `celebrated' by organising special meals and playing music. On New Year's day 1963, a few of the jawans were allowed to come and greet us. They came in groups of four or five and each of them brought something they had cooked in their kitchens for us to eat. It was all so deeply moving and every time the Chinese were certainly shocked to see the devotion, loyalty and regard of our jawans for us, in spite of their propaganda and brain-washing.

On 25 December, we, the seven field officers were taken in one of the captured Indian Nissan One ton trucks to spend the Christmas morning with Brig John Dalvi at Tse Tang. He was kept all alone and was comfortably accommodated. We had breakfast and lunch with him and were shown a movie. Dalvi had suffered a great deal mentally-being all by himself and reflecting and brooding over the momentous events which had overtaken him in command of 7 Infantry Brigade. He has recorded all that he went through very lucidly in his appropriately titled book ‘The Himalayan Blunder’.

On 28 December, the Chinese very gleefully announced to us that their Government had signed a boundary accord with Pakistan in the Jammu
and Kashmir area, adding that it was only the reactionary government of Nehru which was ignoring the Chinese extended hand of friendship.

On 26 January 1963, there was a problem in the PW camp when some jawans refused to eat the food served to them as a special meal to celebrate India's Republic Day. Lt Tong tried to implicate Colonel Rikh for having incited the jawans to strike through one of the Rajput jawans who had brought the food for us the previous day. There was quite a commotion when Tong was extremely rude and insisted that Rikh should confess. But what was there to confess, we told him. Tong kept at Rikh for a long time even after the 26th and then suddenly gave up when Rikh refused to be cowed down by him. I was reminded of this incident when I read Mr. Ford's book 'Captured in Tibet,' wherein he describes so well how for long period of his captivity, the Chinese kept asking him to confess to something he had not done.

The first letters we received from home came in the third week of February 1963. Some of us including myself received parcels of sweets too. Balwant Ahluwalia, who had an uncle in the Indian Red Cross was the only one who received replies to the telegrams we had sent in November. He received one telegram on 6th and another on the 8th of December. He had received letters and parcels earlier in January before any of us.

On 12 February, the Commandant of the PW camp, a Colonel WU came to see us field officers and told us of the six points of the Colombo Conference to resolve the conflict between India and China. We were asked to comment on them but we kept quiet in spite of prodding by Tong. We said we were out of touch with the news from home and therefore could not comment.

There was another episode which caused a great deal of excitement when Captain Talwar (of Parachute Field Regiment) came to see us on 19 February with his plans for escape which the younger officers had made. We cautioned him against it quite frankly because as we explained, the odds of weather, distance from the borders, lack of knowledge of our exact location, the local language and terrain were all loaded against the
venture. We thought it was not worth the risk with hardly any equipment. There had also been talk of the early return of PWs. But I certainly admired the guts of the young officers and I am happy to know that Talwar is now a General officer.

On 25 March, Lt Tong brought the news that Major Gurdial Singh of the Rajputs who was one of the three majors with us in the camp, had been awarded the Maha Vir Chakra by India. It was a surprise for us all but a pleasant one because of all the `quota' awards given at the time on the basis of one per infantry battalion, Gurdial's was certainly a well deserved one.

It snowed in our camp for the first time on 29 January when it became bitterly cold and this cold wave continued till the middle of March with intermittent snow fall.

On 26 March 1963, the Commandant of the camp, called us to tell us that we were going to be returned to India via the mainland at Hong-kong. This was later changed and we were told that all field officers would first be taken for a tour of the mainland of China before return. Some of us had protested against going to China, though others did not mind it. We were given a farewell party on 27 March where we were able to meet the junior officers and the jawans and we talked to them to keep their spirits up.

Before leaving the PW camp, we asked the Chinese to take us to the graves of our soldiers who had died in our camp. There were seven of them including Subedar Joginder Singh, who had been awarded the highest gallantry award of PVC. We were told by the Chinese that he had refused to have his toes, which were affected by frost-bite, amputated. According to the Chinese, he had told them that his chances of promotion to Subedar Major would be adversely effected if his toes were amputated. He died of gangrene, we were told. The second PW, who was given the award of PVC was Maj Dhan Singh Thapa, captured in Ladakh, who was to join us later for the tour of the mainland.
Orders for us to be conducted around the mainland must have come from the highest authority because suddenly we became VIPs, though still held as prisoners. We were given various comforts and given new clothes and shoes. On 28 March we left the camp, in an Indian vehicle (a Nissan One ton) and were driven to Tse Tang to pick up Brig John Dalvi. We were also joined here by three other lieutenant colonels and five majors from another camp, from the Walong sector. On 29th March, we were all driven in a bus to Lhasa. We left Tse Tang at 7.10 a.m. and reached Lhasa at 3 p.m. and crossed Tsang Po (known as the Brahmaputra river in India) enroute.

30 March was a wonderful day, as I recorded, because not only did we have comfortable accommodation but we could have a nice shower bath too. Due to the lack of shaving facilities in the PW camp, I had grown a beard. This beard was shaved off here in Lhasa. The entry in my diary is worth reproducing fully, "Good food, wonderful clean feeling, nice beds/rooms but awful latrines."

We stayed four days in Lhasa and were taken round various places including the Norbulingka and Potala. We were shown what the Chinese said were the private chambers of the Dalai Lama and repeatedly told how he lived like an absolute despot in great comfort with no feelings for his suffering subjects. We were shown a dark and deep type of dungeon full of big scorpions where we were told that the condemned used to be thrown on orders of the Dalai Lama.

Lhasa was full of Chinese and I made a note that for every Tibetan, we saw three Chinese. I gave this information to our Intelligence people upon our return. There is little doubt in my mind that the number of Chinese in Tibet must have multiplied many times now to gradually overwhelm the Tibetan population. I mentioned this fact to the Dalai Lama when a few of us from Auroville called on him at Dharamsala in late 1989. The Chinese population on the mainland has already crossed the billion mark and for them to spare a few million for Tibet would be no problem. Mao Tse Tung was known to have stated that he wanted ten million Chinese to be
settled in Tibet within the foreseeable future. This fact is mentioned in his book by Shri B. N. Mullik, who was Director of Intelligence Bureau at the time.

On 3 April, we were driven by bus from Lhasa to its airfield, a journey which took six and a half hours. From there we were flown in two IL 14 aircrafts on 5 April to Sining. On the way we touched Chowthang (Tsai Dam), the place where they are supposed to have all the salt. They told us that the layer of salt there is 52 feet thick spread over 40 square miles, with 26,000 million tons of salt, enough to meet all the household needs of the world for 8000 years. This is a Chinese statement which is recorded in my notes; one cannot say how accurate it is. Having left Lhasa at 5.30 a.m., we reached Sining at 3 p.m. The main places we visited before we arrived in Peking (now called Beijing) on 26 April were Sian, Wuhan (their steel city), Nanking, Shanghai, Hushe and Hangchow. We were conducted around these cities and important places of interest and entertained with variety shows, operas and music and presented small souvenirs. Accommodated in good hotels, we were well looked after. We learnt something about the Chinese place names, their composition and selection. 'King' in Chinese means capital or kingdom and points of compass are 'Peh' as north, 'Nan' as south, 'Si' as west and 'Tung' as east. Hence, the names like Peking and Nanking. 'Ho' means Yellow river. Therefore Honan is the province south of the river and Hopei to the north. 'Hu' means lake, therefore Hupeh is the province north and Hunan to the south of the lake. 'Shan' means mountain, hence the names Shantung and Shansi. 'Chou' or 'Chow' means a small or peripheral town; hence the name Hangchow. Again, we learnt that the emblem of China with one big and four small stars signified 'Hans' for majority as the big star, and the four small stars as Maw (Manchuria), Mong (Mongolia), Hui (Moslems) and Chang (Tibet). It is of interest to list and describe briefly the various places we visited on the mainland. I am reproducing exactly what is recorded in my diary notes of that time, and have not made any changes based on my subsequent study or
knowledge: Sining is 7000 feet high and a very big place. We stayed in a posh hotel with attached bathrooms. I noted, "Good to be in civilisation particularly for bathrooms." We were held up here for a day as the planes could not take off due to bad weather. On 7 April, we took off in a civil plane, IL 16 with two air hostesses, all sweet and smiles, at 5.20 a.m. and arrived at Sian at 7.20 a.m. We were given an excellent breakfast in a good hotel, took off again at 9.05 a.m. and landed at Wuhan at 11.05 a.m. where we stayed in the Victory Hotel. Wuhan is the Chinese steel city like our Jamshedpur in Bihar. At Wuhan, we were joined by ten other Indian officers of field ranks (two lieutenant colonels and eight majors) who were captured in Ladakh. Among them was Major Dhan Singh Thapa who had been awarded the PVC. We were really comfortable and were received by the Chinese Red Cross officials, who took charge of us thereafter. Here we were allowed to listen to the radio freely and we were thrilled to hear All India Radio, Delhi and the B.B.C. We were also allowed to send telegrams home and write letters here.

On 10 April, we were taken around to see the Iron and Steel Factory and I recorded, "Not very impressed-saw tools lying around in dust-not a sign of efficiency." We were taken for a motor boat ride on the Yangtse river, given a good picnic lunch at East Lake and taken again for a sightseeing tour by motor boat. We saw hundreds of children in a park who clapped and cheered by way of greeting us, all of them wanted to shake hands with each of us. This certainly was a spontaneous gesture which warmed our hearts and made us feel homesick. All the children were healthy and rosy cheeked without exception.

On 11 April, we were taken to a meat processing factory with huge underground deep freeze storage with thousands and thousands of pig carcasses. We were also given some small souvenirs of Chinese craft. Then we were shown the Heavy Machine Tools Factory which was ‘disappointing’ as recorded by me.

We left the hotel at 5 a.m. on 12 April for the airfield, took off at 6:55 a.m. and landed at Nanking at 8.25 a.m. We were driven in a comfortable
SKODA bus to the Purple Mountain Hotel, which was not as good as the one at Wuhan. In the afternoon we were taken to the Husuan Wu (I am not sure of the spelling) lake and the zoo where again we saw lots of children. The sight of children of China wherever we went is something which left a deep impression on my mind—all of them healthy, smiling and happy.

At night we were taken to see the Peking Opera, which was for me, "Two and a half hours of pain in the neck." On 13 April, we were taken by boat to a Chemical Works Factory and given lunch there. In the evening, the Chinese had laid on a Baisakhi (Indian festival) feast for us, excellent food and some drinks too. `I over-ate,' I recorded. We also visited Dr Sun Yat Sen's mausoleum and the Ming tombs.

We left Nanking on 15 April by air at 6.30 a.m. and landed at Shanghai at 8.25 a.m. Rikh and Balwant Ahluwalia were left behind in Nanking as they were not well and we were told that they would go directly to Peking and join us after their check-up. We stayed in Shanghai Hotel, a posh hotel and a relic of the old international settlement opposite the British Charge d'Affaires' office/residence. In the afternoon we were taken to the Handicrafts and Arts Research Centre. We saw a number of remarkable masters of Chinese art and artisans in action and it was a truly impressive show. We were presented small paper cuts and dolls made in front of us as souvenirs. The hotel had a television set also but we were told that programmes are only broadcast twice a week.

The next morning, 16th April we were taken to visit a Department Store. It was a huge place five or six storey high with escalators. There were plenty of consumer articles on display too, but as I wrote in my diary that night, `I do not see any purchasing capacity among the common people.' It was interesting to watch our guards looking at all that was displayed with open mouths and wide eyes. In any case there were hardly any shoppers.

We also saw an exhibition in the Sino-Soviet Friendship Building with products of all kinds including electronic goods, which they told us were
designed and manufactured in China. I wrote, `We were not fooled by their claims'. In the evening we were taken to another long and boring opera regarding a woman general.

I fell ill in Shanghai with fever and an acute attack of piles. I was taken to a hospital for a thorough check-up and was visited in my room a number of times by a doctor. How I missed the pretty lady doctor of the PW camp! They made a lot of fuss over me for some unknown reason. I was told that my problem was aggravated due to an increase in white blood corpuscles, obviously due to some infection. I was laid up in bed for two days in Shanghai and missed all the places visited by the others.

We left for Hushe by train on the afternoon of 19 April. There were hardly any passengers on the large railway station other than our party, the guards accompanying us and a few porters. It was a two-hour run and we sat through it in the dining car itself and were served refreshments. At Hushe we stayed in the Thai Lake Hotel. I got into bed again as I still had fever. On the 20th night, we were taken to a song and dance show which we enjoyed very much. We were able to listen to the broadcast of a programme titled `India and the Dragon' on the All India Radio from Delhi. We all liked this programme.

On 22 April, we left in the afternoon for Hangchow by train. We changed trains at Shanghai and reached our destination at 8.50 p.m. with dinner being served on the train itself. Here we stayed in Lake Side Hotel but as I was still not well, I did not see anything. Rattan was taken ill here suddenly and was evacuated to hospital. On 26 April, we left at 5.55 a.m. by air and arrived in Peking at 9.25 a.m. We drove a long distance from the airfield to reach the Hotel of Minorities where we were lodged for the next few days. Rikh and Balwant were already there when we reached. I read later after our return to India that President Nixon of the United States and his entourage were also put up in the same hotel when they visited China as a result of the Secretary of State Kissinger's efforts. That night we were taken to see the Swan Lake Ballet which was really enjoyable even though it lasted three hours. We were told in the meeting
with the Red Cross officials on 27 April that we shall be handed over to India at Kunming on 4 May. We were allowed to send telegrams home with this news. Another night we were taken to a circus where we saw some of the excellent gymnastics for which China is so famous. I could not attend all the arranged visits in Peking as I was still not feeling well. One day a couple of us even had a walk from the hotel to the Tien An Mein Square, which was in the news recently due to the student unrest in China. On 30th April, we were taken to the Great Wall of China which is supposedly the only man-made structure in the world visible from the moon. Built in 300 B.C. by the Chou Dynasty, it is 3,000 miles long (1,700 miles of it in the plains and the rest in the mountainous area), it took 300,000 men ten years to complete it, used enough material to build a wall 8 feet high and 3 feet thick around the world, has an average height of 28 feet 8 inches with a base width of 24 feet and a top width of 18 feet. We were also shown the famous Ming tombs.

On 1st May, we saw the fire-works from the roof of the hotel to celebrate May Day. On 2nd May evening we were entertained to tea at the Indian Embassy and a warm reception by Dr. Bannerjee, who embraced each one of us at the entrance. The Chinese guards, of course, were left outside and it was a lovely feeling to step into the `little India' in Peking. However, all the time our thoughts were on our return to our homeland. It was on 3 May that we left Peking for our journey home. On our last night in Peking, we were taken to a musical show nut on by an oriental troupe who performed Indian, Pakistani and Ceylonese dances and songs. It was an enjoyable treat. We had to be up early for the 45 mile drive to the airport and after a lot of photographs, we took off at 5.20 a.m. from Peking in two IL 14 aircraft. We landed at Sian for refuelling at 8.45 a.m., were given, surprisingly enough, a very poor breakfast after all the excellent service we had been given till then and took off again at 10.20 a.m. We had another brief landing at Chengtu at 12.45 to pick up Rattan who had been left behind earlier due to his illness, took off at 13.25 and landed at Kunming at 15.45. There was very bad weather enroute.
We stayed the last night in China in a guest house which was not very good and were given a farewell dinner. Our thoughts about our return to India kept us awake till late into the night chatting and exchanging notes among ourselves. We were all tense and were thrilled to see the Indian Air Force Super Constellation plane arrive at Kunming on the 4th morning. We were given breakfast at 6.15 a.m. and a formal farewell and more photographs were taken by the Chinese. The handing over ceremony to the Indian Red Cross officials took place in our presence but we kept our fingers crossed till we were airborne. It was indeed a great and momentous day for all of us.

At the handing over ceremony we witnessed a surprise performance by the Chinese even as we were leaving. Throughout our tour of China, an immaculately dressed Chinese had accompanied us. He was not dressed in cotton padded clothes like all the others. He commanded a lot of respect from the other Chinese. We used to refer to him as the ‘General’. He had a chap trailing around behind him always, helping him with things, offering a chair, a cup of tea, etc. We used to refer to that fellow as the orderly to the General. At the handing over ceremony, however, the person who sat down and signed on behalf of China was the `orderly’ and the one who stood behind to pass him the pen to sign was the `general’!

There was a little restraint on the part of Red Cross personnel, led by Mr. Ahluwalia, who had come to take us over, while we were all still at Kunming. I expect they were mostly from our Intelligence services. Perhaps they were feeling a little self-conscious in the Red Cross role. They talked to us properly only when we were airborne. Then we were offered some Indian sweets also. We took off at 9.10 a.m. from Kunming and were scheduled to land at Calcutta at 1.20 p.m. We flew over Mandalay and Akyab, the pilot announced it but, frankly we all had ‘one-track minds' by that time and just wanted to get back on Indian soil as fast as possible.

We found ourselves circling over Calcutta for a long time. The pilot announced that there was some problem with the under carriage not
opening and that we might have to crash land. Our destination was the Air Force base at Barrackpore. But we landed ultimately at 2.30 p.m. at Dum Dum with all the fire tenders lined up. The thought did cross the minds of more than one of us in the aircraft as we circled over Dum Dum that it would be such an irony of fate if we were now to get killed in a crash landing in India, after all the time spent in captivity in hoping and waiting.

At Dum Dum, as soon as we disembarked, we were whisked into two waiting Dakota aircrafts on the tarmac itself to arrive at Barrackpore soon afterwards to a very cold reception by an Air Vice Marshal and a Brigadier. There a further shock awaited us. We were segregated like ‘untouchables’ and not allowed to meet any friends or relatives whom we could see waiting near the tarmac. Some of us were taken to the Air Force mess and others to the Brigade mess for lunch which was served at 5.30 p.m. At the mess, an Air Force officer had ‘sneaked’ in a lady. She approached me to ask about Sqn Ldr Vinod Sehgal. Vinod was the Bell helicopter pilot who had flown me to Tsang Dhar on 18th October with that jar of electrolyte in my lap. This lady was his sister. When I told her that Vinod was not with us, she said that she had a picture from a newspaper in which he was supposed to be standing next to me. She showed me the faded picture and of course, it was not my picture nor Vinod’s. We had also been told already by the Chinese in the PW camp that a Bell helicopter had been shot down at Tsang Dhar on 20th October and its pilot killed together with another occupant. That second occupant was my second in command, Maj Ram Singh. When I told her that it was not my picture, she broke down and cried bitterly. It was so sad and upsetting. In the happiness of our home coming we had forgotten even if temporarily, the pain of others who had lost their dear ones. We were not otherwise allowed to talk to anyone. In fact, all the mess staff also were forbidden to talk to us.

We left by a special train from Barrackpore for Ranchi at 11.30 p.m. that night. No beddings were provided for us in the train. There were a lot of
mosquitoes also and our first night in India was certainly memorable from the point of view of extreme discomfort. We reached Ranchi on the 5th evening, not stopping at any stations but only in sidings enroute. A special camp had been set up for us. Three days were taken up for debriefing, meant perhaps, to de-brainwash us so that we could not ‘contaminate' others. These few days were a worse kind of mental strain but fortunately this suspense was not prolonged too much. We were also given a thorough medical check-up. My elder brother and his family did meet me in Ranchi after a day. I could even talk to my wife in Delhi on the telephone by the courtesy of the local Signals.

I flew to Delhi by the evening flight of IAC on 9 May to be reunited with my family at 11 p.m. I had been away to a non-family station and then to China for a total of three and a half years. It was certainly a record of long non-family stay among all the officers of 4 Division. This was the second record I had set for longest service in one formation. In World War II also the oldest members of 25 Division, when it came back to India for disbandment in 1946, were perhaps the late Major Som Nath Sharma and myself.

Soon after our return, Lt Col Rikh was promoted to the brigadier's rank and commanded a brigade in Punjab in the 1965 war against Pakistan. He is no more now. I was touched by the letter he wrote to me, which has been kept as a precious souvenir along with a lovely memento he sent me. I quote from this letter, "I would like to tell you, though I am not very much of a sentimental or demonstrative type that I have a very deep personal affection and regard for you. Your true worth I know from all that you did and went through, during our period of adversity together. I shall never forget all that you did for Balwant and myself. As far as I am concerned, I do not think I could have gone through that period and ended up sane, if you had not been there..."

Lt Col Balwant Ahluwalia, who later became a major general and commanded a division, had his shoulder dislocated when he was captured. The Chinese had put his whole arm in plaster at a most
awkward angle. I was able to nurse him also in the PW camp till his plaster was removed. He had also been very kind in presenting me a special `kukri' duly inscribed, as a memento of our stay together as PWs.