

The background of the cover is a photograph of a mountainous landscape. A stone staircase path, constructed from large, flat, greyish-brown stones, leads up a steep, grassy hillside. The path is flanked by green vegetation and shrubs. In the distance, more mountain peaks are visible under a sky filled with large, white, fluffy clouds. The overall scene conveys a sense of journey and discovery.

A Soldier's Voyage Of Self Discovery

Maj Gen K.K. Tewari (Retd.)
P.V.S.M., A.V.S.M.

A SOLDIER'S VOYAGE OF
SELF DISCOVERY

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AUROVILLE

**Dedicated to
the
Indian Army Jawan**

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Preface to the New Edition

This book was first published in 1995 at the All India Press in Pondicherry for a limited distribution mainly among earlier war time friends. There was no attempt made to publicize it. But the demand for it never stopped and I found a new and younger generation that was quite responsive to these stories about wars in an age gone by. The book had to be reprinted innumerable times – the last and seventh edition in 2012. It has been out of print for almost a year.

It appears that there is still a reading public interested to know about the wars that independent India has been subjected to especially from the point of view of an old soldier, who took part of them.

A number of dear friends in Auroville have offered to update the book to the digital age and also reprint it for a limited distribution and this time to do it from an Auroville printing unit – Auroville Press publishers.

The main point that came to my mind when the idea was first proposed was that I should re-view my life's earlier challenges and battle experiences in relation to the new and unique experience of being for more than three decades in this 'living laboratory', with a new and international family consisting of persons from fifty countries of the world.

Upon re-reading I have concluded that I will leave the contents unchanged and as they were first recorded but the text I wrote in 1995 about Auroville (which appears as Appendix 3 in the book) requires updating, for much has grown and changed, and as Auroville approaches its 50th year of existence it demonstrates a complexity and maturity that is very unlike the experiment I had joined upon retirement in 1976.

July 2015

Prologue

Many friends and relatives have urged me to write about my life's experiences with particular reference to three topics—namely, experiences as a prisoner of war with the Chinese; experiences in different wars starting with World War II in Burma and Malaya; and the Bangladesh War of 1971 which made me turn to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and later decide to leave all my moorings in the North and after retirement from the Army settle down in Auroville in South India.

Soon after we moved to Auroville in 1976, I was introduced to an American publisher here on a visit by Admiral Rutledge Tompkins (Retired) of the United States Navy, himself a devotee. He pressed me to write. Sensing my reluctance, he even offered to walk around with me with a tape recorder while I worked on the farm which I had started in Auroville. He pleaded that all I would have to do was to answer his questions and he would do the rest. He had already written a few pages in long hand based on our earlier talks and presented them to me as an introduction to a biographical account he wished to compile under the proposed title of *The Warrior's Call*. The last three pages of handwritten notes of his meeting with me are reproduced in Appendix 1. This suggestion did not fructify as I was too involved in other things in Auroville at the time.

Another devotee in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, Huta, who had been very close to the Mother, pressed me on the subject too and proposed the title of the book as "The Truth Wins". A few pages were written at her insistence but again, because of my involvement in Auroville work, there was no further progress.

Then, one day in 1991, I took out my old diaries, kept since 1938, in order to destroy them. I started going through them. In the process I started taking notes of some interesting past events. This process was like 're-living' the old days. It was motivated more by an urge towards self discovery through a study of the years past – to find my real self working behind the scenes. The account that follows is the result of that discovery.

Introduction

In early 1957, I was posted in Indo-China as the Commander Signals for the three International Commissions for Supervision and Control in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. My wife, Dr. Kamla had joined me for a month. We were having dinner in a Chinese restaurant in Saigon¹. There were three officers of the Indian delegation besides us and one of them was very good in palmistry. Not that I believe much in astrology or palmistry, but in that relaxed and jovial atmosphere, Mr. Iyengar (he was nicknamed ‘Tiny’ affectionately for his height of more than six feet and his bulky figure) first read my wife’s hand and what he said was recorded by me. He made a few rather interesting comments. That prompted me to agree to have my hand read next. This reading was recorded too. Both these papers are still preserved. Two of the statements made by Tiny, among others, not only have come true but have had a deep impact on my life. Firstly, he said that in the 41st year of my life I would travel to the Far-East (I was then 35 years old) and secondly, that in the 50th year of my life I would turn to spirituality which would affect my life in a major way.

I responded with delight to the first prediction and said, “Bless you, Tiny. I have always wanted to go to Japan”. This country had been admired by me even though we had fought against it in World War II. He had immediately remarked, “Chum, you may not like it.” How very true! It was in 1963, at the age of forty and a half, that I travelled near enough to Japan. As prisoners of war, we were taken to a number of major cities of China including Shanghai and Peking (now called Beijing) before we were returned to India.

The second prediction also came true except that the year was not quite so accurate. At forty-nine years of age I was introduced to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and met the Mother in person in Pondicherry. I decided then and there to settle down in Pondicherry and Auroville after retirement.

1. Renamed Ho Chi Minh City after the communist takeover of South Vietnam.

Yet another factor worth mentioning is a visit by my wife, Kamla, accompanied by my father to *Bhrigu Sangta*¹ centre in Hoshiarpur, Punjab in November, 1962. At that time I was reported as 'missing in action'. This is the official Defence Ministry notification which is normally issued in a war. After the sudden Chinese attack on India on 20 October 1962, there had been no news of my whereabouts for more than a month. The only information which my family received was the official message quoted above.

At Hoshiarpur, the readings of the *patra*² which was found after much searching were written down by Kamla as it was translated from the original Sanskrit text by the person in charge. This reading makes a fantastic and accurate record not only of my whereabouts at that time but of my future and other details. A rational mind, which does not believe in these things, would be hard put to accept the accuracy of these recorded 'predictions'. Yet they are there as noted then on paper and subsequently confirmed by my own experience as true.

It shows, if not proves, that there are certain matters and powers not understood by man because they are not under his control. Upon my return from Tibet and China, I was astounded to read this record. It made me inquisitive to know more about all this, though I was undecided where to start. I have been a God-fearing person all my life, though not very religious in outlook. I could say mine was a secular outlook. I did not believe in any kind of ritual or religious custom. My spiritual outlook, as opposed to religious, is recorded in diaries of my earlier years by remarks such as 'a prayer for spiritual steadfastness' or 'How can I hope to follow the correct path of spiritualism?' or 'Thinking how best to achieve some spiritual maturity' or 'Gave a talk to men on spiritual brotherhood of officers and men'.

It would also not be out of place to mention a misconception in the minds of some about an average soldier's approach to religion and spirituality. An average Indian soldier is deeply religious while his whole training and life in the armed forces is based on truly secular

1. Bhrigu was an ancient Rishi who had taken up a challenge to predict the lives of people in subsequent *yugas* (periods) including the present Kali Yuga. These predictions have been preserved on ancient *patras* (parchment) and stored by a group of people called Bhrigu Sangta at certain places in India.

2. Parchment in Hindi

concepts. And those who have seen actual battle and observed the senseless death and destruction in wars, learn genuinely to believe in higher powers which control our destinies. While some soldiers get killed, others escape miraculously in a battlefield. Who or what controls all this? One may give it the name of any religion but a soldier accepts the Divine Power and learns to rely on it.

Joining the Army

The Tewaris do not belong to what the British used to refer to as a martial class family. In so far as it has been possible to verify, none of my ancestors had served in the armed forces, at least certainly not for the past four or five generations. My elder brother, two years my senior and I had both decided to join the Indian State Railways while we were studying in the Forman Christian College at Lahore. One of my maternal uncles was in the Railways and was the first Indian to rise to a high rank. He was a great source of inspiration, besides being a favourite uncle. My brother and I took the Indian State Railways entrance examination together in 1940 but neither of us made it. One can see in hindsight that we were going against the Divine's plan for us.

While we were preparing for the entrance examination, a British Army officer, Lt Col Kilroy, who was posted in the cantonment of my home town of Jalandhar, had told my father that the Indian Army needed young Indian officers (World War II having started in 1939). He suggested that my father send the two eldest of his five sons to join the Army in support of the war cause.

He had arranged for both of us to be attached to a Dogra battalion located at Jalandhar Cantonment during our college vacations, for a bit of military training with special emphasis on physical aspects. As soon as the Railways results were out, both of us applied for commissions in the then British Indian Army. We were called up for interviews and were selected for training. I will never be sure but I have sometimes wondered whether Col Kilroy, who was obviously a very influential man, had something to do with our being rejected in the Railways interview after we had both qualified in the written test!

We were ordered to join the Officers' Training School (OTS) at Bangalore in early February, 1942. Grant of regular commissions had been suspended then due to the period of training having

been reduced to five months and only emergency commissions were being granted. Officers' training was imparted at three places — the Indian Military Academy (IMA) at Dehradun, and the two OTSs at Mhow and Bangalore. We brothers, strangely enough, were allotted the same company, same platoon and same section at the OTS.

Training was tough and concentrated with a no-nonsense approach. A majority of the instructors, both officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs), were British. NCO instructors in drill and physical training were sergeants and were a class by themselves — highly motivated and efficient. As we were officer cadets they would address us as 'Sir' but that did not prevent them from using the kind of language that particular class of soldiers is so good at. One of the politer versions often used was, "You are a bloody fool, (pause) Sir".

The Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) was a very strict character. He was only 5 feet 6 inches tall and well rounded. He was as tough as a bull and as hard to please. Some of us cadets would be so tense that we often made absurd mistakes. During drill instruction when ordered to 'quick march' with the left foot forward, one should automatically swing out the right arm. But the rapid and sharp words of command being yelled out would make some so nervous that the left arm would swing out with the left foot. The RSM with his thunderous voice would chase us to perfection. He would yell, "Come on, wake up, you there Sir, third man in the second row. You might have broken your mother's heart — you are not going to break mine. Come on. Move your ruddy right hand: left-right-left ..."

Our physical training instructor was another unforgettable character. Boxing was compulsory for us but we had not learnt it earlier in college. Draws were taken for novices boxing after initial instruction. As luck would have it, my opponent turned out to be a thin six-footer, to match my five feet six inches. For each bout two sergeants would act as the seconds. My sergeant was determined not to let me use my lack of height as an excuse. "You see that man opposite?" he said. "You do not have a hope in hell to match his reach..., Sir." (That took the wind out of me but he continued

after a pause) “But ...” (I was all ears by then) “... you forget that six feet of person in front of you. Just concentrate on that space of ten-inches square just above his belt. Do not look anywhere else. As soon as the bell goes, you have only one thing to do. Put your head down a bit and charge into that ten-inch space which is at the right level for your punch and punch away non-stop as hard and as fast as you can with both the left and the right, irrespective of what he does to you — he won’t be standing up long... Sir.”

What lovely advice! I achieved a knock-out in the first round. It was a great morale booster. One learnt one of the most important lessons of life in the Army — that even if one was the boss, one should always consult and listen to the advice of junior commission officers (JCOs — in those days they were called VCOs — Viceroy’s Commission Officers) and NCOs, who had seen more service and had a lot more practical experience, before making one’s own decision. Humour in the physical training class was often raw in the extreme, unquotable in a book like this, but how we revelled in it!

Our training at Bangalore was really hard and there were a number of relegations and withdrawals, mainly on the grounds of physical fitness. The final obstacle course and endurance test eliminated a number of fellow cadets but we brothers made it. It was partly due to the training we had been given with the Dogra battalion in Jalandhar Cantonment under Havildar Pirthi Singh as per the arrangements made by Col Kilroy. All of us were given three choices as to the Arm or Service we wished to join. My brother got Armoured Corps which he had asked for and went to the Probyn’s Horse (later allotted to Pakistan at the time of partition in 1947) and then to the Scinde Horse. I was allotted Signals, even though my first and second choices were Artillery and Infantry. There is a story behind this which is worth recounting.

We used to have flag and lamp signalling as part of our training and we were given a test at the end of the training. For this test we would be paired off. The one to be tested would face the far side of the field to read the signals. The other cadet would sit facing away and write what was ‘read’ and called out by the first one. My companion was very good and with his head bent down at an angle

to write, he was also watching the far side through the corner of his eye and writing the correct version of the signal even when what was called out by me was wrong. The result was that I scored 100 per cent marks in this test. At the final interview with the Deputy Commandant (one-eyed Col Gordon, a veteran of World War I with a chest full of medals), I was congratulated for doing well in signalling and allotted Signals, my appeal regarding the choices given by me notwithstanding.

From the OTS I went for Signals training to the Signal Training Centre (STC-B — the 'B' stood for British. The 'Indian' STC was at Jabalpur for Indian Other Ranks (IORs), while STC-B at Mhow catered for the training of officers and British Other Ranks (BORs).

After completion of training at Mhow, I was posted to 25 Divisional Signals and given a movement order to report to Rawalpindi (now in Pakistan) in early November 1942. So, after a few days of leave rejoicing with the family at Jalandhar, en route with a shining 'pip' on each shoulder, I arrived at Rawalpindi one afternoon to get a shock. The Movement Control staff at the railway station told me that my unit had already moved out to an undisclosed field area for war. The Station HQ then gave me a movement order to proceed post haste to the Southern end of India to Salem, in the Madras Presidency State (which at that time consisted of the present-day Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, excluding Mysore State).

It certainly dampened my spirits a bit but there was also a kind of undefined excitement that one was going to war. After their attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, the Japanese had advanced pretty fast and overrun most of South East Asia and were nearing the Indian borders through Burma. Even the southern parts of the Indian peninsula were threatened by attacks from the sea.

A disgruntled British captain from the unit received me at the Salem railway station. He obviously did not like being detailed for this job late in the night. There were three other Indian officers in 25 Divisional Signals at the time, all subalterns. 2/Lt (later Colonel) Ranjit Singh Tiwana gave me the 'low down' on life in the unit. The Commanding Officer (CO), Lt Col Whistler (later the

Signal Officer-in-Chief — SO-in-C — in the British Army) was a strict disciplinarian whom I got to like in the course of time.

But the one officer none of us liked was the company commander, a sour man who did not hide his anti-Indian feelings. What we, as Indian youngsters who were all volunteers for the army, did not appreciate till much later was the fact that with conscription in England, people had been picked up from all walks of life to join the armed forces, whether they liked it or not. Some of them certainly did not take to army life easily like this company commander. They took out their pent up feelings and anger somehow and we as the newly commissioned junior officers were a soft and easy target.

Training for War

There were two newly raised infantry divisions (one the 25th and the other the 19th) in South India at the time, training and getting ready for induction into active operations. We had no idea in which direction — east to Burma or west to North Africa — we would be sent. This became clear only later when we started jungle training. Even then our destination was not known to us.

Every army formation like a division has its own distinctive sign which all ranks wear on the left sleeve below the shoulder. We started off with a black triangle on a green background. I never found out its significance. But in early 1943, the sign was changed by the General-Officer-Commanding (GOC), Maj Gen ‘Taffy’ Davies, to a black Ace of Spades on the same green background. The reasons for this change were made known to all ranks — namely, that the Division had to be tops in the Army just as an Ace of Spades was the highest card in the deck. The sign of our ‘rival’ 19th Division was a ‘dagger held in the forearm’.

During various training exercises both these divisions were invariably pitched against each other and there was a healthy competitive spirit to do one better. It was a period of intense training with little time for anything else. Even though I had never visited South India before, there was no time to see any place of interest, even such renowned places like the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry or Sri Ramana Maharishi Ashram at Tiruvannamalai to have the darshan of the then living two great saints.

I was given command of B Section (cable laying) of No.1 Company with about 7 or 8 men only at the time and one VCO. We had two vehicles and one motorcycle. The jawans were all what the British called as per their recruitment policy ‘MM’s, standing for Mixed Madrassis, recruited from all over South India. All of them were excellent, very hard working and obedient.

The usual routine during exercises was that we would lay the



Author and elder brother as cadets.

My elder brother, Krishen Swarup Tewari retired as a Colonel in the Research and Development Organisation of the Ministry of Defence as an armament expert and passed away in early 1980

cable lines for telephone and telegraph communications and the 'enemy', represented by umpires (or the other opposing force in a two-sided exercise) as infiltrators or enemy 'shelling', would cut the cable at odd hours and disrupt the communications. We had to be on our toes all the time, 24 hours of the day, during those exercises.

In one exercise lasting four days, I could hardly have slept more than two to three hours a night and came to the Officers Mess for dinner on the last night of the exercise, absolutely exhausted. Before I could even sit down and have a glass of water the company commander, to whom a reference has been made earlier, asked me to get someone on the phone in one of the brigades. The line was found to be 'dis' (term used for disrupted or disconnected). When so told, he shouted at me, "Then what the hell are you doing in the mess. Go on, get the bloody line repaired first before you come back to the mess." So, out one had to go. I was so fed up that I skipped dinner that night.

But one learnt a lot because of this 'chasing', by observing other senior officers and by working closely with the jawans with one's own hands. After two months of this command, I was called up by the CO and given a very affectionate pep talk and told not to be too sensitive about criticism and rebuke in service but just to concentrate on learning and mastering the job in hand. As a 'reward' for my hard work, I was told I was being posted as a second in command to a brigade signal section. The CO added that the best place for a junior Signal officer to learn is in a brigade signals.

It is my belief, after having served for nearly 34 years in Signals that the above statement of my first CO was remarkably true. In a brigade signals, not only was one in command of more than a hundred men which in those days consisted of a mixture of British and Indian ranks, but one was also an advisor on signal communications and signal security to a formation commander of brigadier's rank. One also dealt intimately with General staff (G) as well as Adjutant and Quarter Master General staff (A and Q) and other Arms and Services. It gave an excellent grounding for future dealings with staff and commanders and knowledge of the functioning of various Arms and Services.

Needless to say, I enjoyed my service in the brigade signals. The Officer Commanding (OC) was an excellent Scottish officer named 'Jock' Foresyth who became a personal friend. He was subsequently replaced by Capt Parker and then Capt Miller who also became a personal friend.¹ The jawans were all Punjabi Musalmans (PMs). Out of a little over 100 men in brigade signals, 10 or 12 British consisted of a section sergeant, mechanics (mainly radio mechanics at that time) and cipher operators. No Indian jawans handled ciphers at that time. They were inducted into this trade later although we as officers had access to and had learnt to operate the cipher documents. About 90 were Indian other ranks with one JCO (then called VCO) and two havildars.

Two men used to be attached from each of the three infantry battalions in the brigade to the Signals to act as runners for the distribution of messages within the HQ. Every infantry brigade had one British and two Indian battalions at that time. The two men from the British battalion were not normally used as runners but were invariably trained as exchange operators, to great advantage because of their knowledge of the English language.

It was easy for me to communicate with the PMs and they were also happy to have a Punjabi speaking officer with them. They included some from the old North West Frontier province and some, referred to as the 'Cambelpurias', who wore their hair long, down to the neck at the back. This was officially allowed for them; otherwise, as one knows, the army has only crew cut hair style. There were the usual petty jealousies and intrigues which one had to deal with, particularly with the two havildars having their favourites.

I can never forget a particular NCO, a Naik (with two stripes) who was in charge of mechanical transport (MT). He had a peculiar habit of using the Punjabi term *Badshao*² in his conversation with everyone. As a newly commissioned officer I was somehow sensitive and allergic to this term which sounded

1. It was such a pleasure to meet Max Miller again after a lapse of nearly 49 years, when my wife and I visited Britain in late 1992 on our way to the United States.

2. A form of address to a superior in Punjabi

not only disrespectful but showed a kind of familiarity. He did not mean to be disrespectful, of course. He was asked many times not to use this term when talking to me, but it had become such a habit with him that every time he was told off, he would say, *Achha Badshao, phir nahin hoga*, meaning “Right, Sir, it will not happen again.”

One day for my inspection, there was to be a check of all the MT tools. As a drill for such inspections the tools were laid out on a ground sheet in front of every vehicle as per a standard layout for a quick check. It was found that almost all the vehicles were deficient in some tools. When asked what he had to say about such a large number of deficiencies, he was not one bit rattled. Coming smartly to attention, he said, “Don’t worry about these deficiencies—they can be made up in no time, *Badshao!*” He was warned that he would have to sign a loss statement for all the missing tools if they were not produced for inspection again the next day. Without batting an eyelid, he said, “It is all right, *Badshao.*” All this talk was in Punjabi.

Next morning he reported that everything was ready for inspection. I was a little taken aback to find that not only were the set of tools in front of each vehicle complete but, with his typical sense of humour, by the side of every few vehicles he had placed some spare tools as well. When asked where he had got all the tools from, he said, “Please, do not ask these things, *Badshao.* You wanted a complete set of tools for all the vehicles and they are there with a few spares in case we lose some.”

This mystery was too much to be ignored. After much insistence, he reluctantly admitted that because he had been given orders for all tool sets to be complete, he had to carry out the orders. He had gone the previous afternoon to the workshops and when everyone had gone for lunch, he had collected all the tools he wanted from other units’ vehicles. He said this quite innocently as if there was nothing wrong in it at all. When I got angry and said that he would have to go back and return them, he ‘advised’ me not to worry. His simple explanation was that others had pinched the tools the same way from our vehicles and that there was nothing wrong if we took theirs. I had no choice but to close the case. I noticed, however,

that he used the term *Badshao* less often after this episode.

We had all to undergo a ‘battle inoculation’. It was a simulation of battle conditions under heavy enemy fire—both small arms and shelling. We were made to crawl, in full battle order with equipment and rifles, under a concentrated barrage of machine gun fire on fixed lines while gun cotton slabs were being let off all round, making a terrible noise with their loud bangs. Everyone was nervous because we were told that this had to be as realistic as possible and that the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Delhi was prepared to accept a percentage of casualties in the process.

All went well and safely but nervousness does strange things to some people. One officer with us was a bit on the obese side; he reacted to a loud bang close-by while trying to manage his equipment, rifle and his own bulk. He must have stuck his bottom up, because a bullet went clean through both his ‘cheeks’. Fortunately no bones or other vital parts were affected and he did recover from his wound quite fast. Not only he, through his embarrassing and painful experience, but all of us in that batch learnt the lesson of controlling our reactions to sudden shelling and firing.

A lot of emphasis was given in those days to digging trenches and other dugouts for vital installations and organising overhead cover. We considered it so crazy to have to dig down for a day or a couple of days exercise and then fill up the holes again as per the orders. One was too raw then to appreciate the wisdom of this “dig or die” policy, in actual operations.

We were also taken for intensive jungle training in thick and almost virgin jungles near Gudalur in the western ghats of South India. Transported by MT up to a certain point, we had then to carry all our belongings, equipment and weapons by mule or man pack deep into the forest. At a clearing we were told to make ourselves comfortable and to protect ourselves from the elements including rain and wild animals and reptiles, all of which were found there in abundance. We had to build our own accommodation—referred to as *bashas*.¹ There were a lot of bamboos, *ballies*² and thick grass

1. A temporary shelter

2. Tree trunks

and some hemp-like material for making ropes. Thick bamboo was flattened out to make walls, tables and benches and within a week or so we were nice and comfortable.

We were told of anti-snake measures because there were a lot of poisonous snakes in the area, as well as wild animals including elephants, tigers, and wild boars, to name a few. I had two encounters with tigers and once a wild elephant charged me. It was all very novel and exciting and there was never a dull moment to brood or to feel homesick. One of the technical problems we had to work on from a Signals communication angle was the setting of our wireless sets to overcome screening by certain types of forests.

With such officers as my OC, Capt Foresyth, Major (later a general officer in Pakistan) Mohd Yusuf as the Brigade Major and Brig Irwin (later a general officer who became the Commandant of the pre-partition Indian Defence Services Staff College at Quetta), life was busy and satisfying with all the new things being introduced to us. There were other officers in Brigade HQ, particularly the liaison officers from each of the three battalions in the brigade, Capt Harry Potts from the York and Lancasters; Capt Jafar Ali Khan from the 2/2 Punjab with his perpetual grin and ready advice (he went to Pakistan); he was replaced by Capt (later Colonel) Manohar Lal with his typical police mannerisms but a lovable personality and Capt Vyas (later a Colonel) of 4/18 Garhwal Rifles.

At that time the Japanese invasion of India was considered imminent. There were exercises almost every week or month lasting from two to fourteen days at different levels from Brigade to Corps. We were kept frightfully busy and constantly on the move. One was learning all the time from those more senior and from some of the veterans among the rank and file. A few points recorded in my diary towards the middle of 1943 are worth reproducing, to indicate my approach in those days:—

- (a) An officer has got to be smart and alert all the time.
- (b) An officer should constantly be thinking of his responsibilities.
- (c) Self confidence is most essential, not only for peace of

mind but also to inspire confidence in one's subordinates.

(d) One must not feel proud or disappointed at ups and downs.

I cannot forget a particular exercise named 'Fog' for two reasons. Firstly, in spite of a mild attack of jaundice and against the doctor's advice, I carried on with my duties. We had to do a lot of marching too. Of course, no one sympathised with me for my 'devotion' to duty and I felt hurt at this lack of sympathy then.

Secondly, there was a small incident during the exercise, when I was put under arrest by the Brigade Commander. We were moving into a new area and the convoy in charge was the Brigade Orderly Officer (BOO), Lt Stevens. I had gone out to lay telephone lines to units. One of the Signals vehicles broke down at the entrance to the new area and blocked a couple of vehicles behind it when, as luck (my bad luck though) would have it, the Brigade Commander and the Umpire arrived at the HQ to find the road blocked. In the resulting blow up, the scapegoat turned out to be me because my OC had not yet arrived. When the Brigade Major announced this bombshell to me I could hardly believe it. It was not until dinner time that Lt Stevens mustered up enough courage and admitted to the Commander that it was he who was in charge and not me. I was then 'released'.

Move into Active Operations in Burma

Our move to Burma was a unique experience. Numerous deception measures were adopted to conceal our departure from South India. Neither the direction of our move nor our destination was known to any of us at the junior level. There was also a sudden reshuffle of some officers in our HQ including the Commander. A few left because they were promoted, some were removed and others pulled strings successfully to avoid going to war. We had a new Commander, Brig Coldstream. A new Brigade Major, Maj Tull came. He was referred to by all of us junior officers as Maj 'Tool' because of his appearance.

We left South India by a very zig-zag route, driving almost 150 to 200 miles a day. We covered the total distance of over 1700 miles to Calcutta in 12 days. The last part of the journey, crossing the River Mahanadi, was made by train along with our vehicles. There was no road bridge at the time. We embarked from the New Horse Jetty docks in a ship named ISLAMI which was an old pilgrimage ship converted to the role of troop ship. It was raining heavily on the day we embarked and the atmosphere was tense.

The ship was absolutely packed. Indian Other Ranks were accommodated on the lowermost deck. The British Other Ranks were on the next deck. After that came the second class cabins accommodating the VCOs' and British Warrant Officers; and finally the upper deck housed all of us officers in first class cabins. We had a number of air and submarine attack drills aboard the ship off and on and there was a fighter escort cover overhead. A number of men fell sick. This was due more to the overcrowding in the lower decks than to the roughness of the sea.

We disembarked at Chittagong and after a day or so at the famous River Ghat Reinforcement camp, we pushed on to Chirangha Transit camp to 'marry-up' up with our MT and other men who had come by different ships. All our surplus kit was left

in dumps at this camp. I remember the utter chaos here, because apparently a lot of pilferage of the personal kits left behind by those who had gone before us was systematically going on. Indian officers were not so badly affected but some of the British officers, coming straight out from England with their heavy baggage, must have lost most of their belongings in this notorious camp.

We stayed here for two days and on the second day two of us officers were walking around the place just to while away the time. We came across an unattended ammunition dump with hundreds of full and partially opened boxes. We were armed with .38 revolvers and Tommy guns in those days and we must have fired off literally thousands of rounds each into a little *nullah*¹ embankment without anyone taking the least notice.

Our 25 Division relieved another division in the twin-tunnels area on the main Maungdaw-Buthidaung road. In an article titled “L of C” (Lines of Communication) in the South East Asia Command (SEAC) daily newspaper, there was an interesting account given by an Army observer of the L of C from the supply bases to the front line in Arakan in the Maungdaw-Buthidaung area. To quote, “The line of communication I travelled on started in Calcutta and finished at the Tunnels on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road. And, with slight variations, the point to remember is that I might have been anything that the Army needs — a round of .303 (rifle), a tin of bully beef, ten Woodbines, or a cake of soap.... even Army form blank. Somehow or other all this, thousands of tons of it, gets to where it is wanted along this line of communication. I saw the line of communication at its worst. The monsoon is on. Road use is difficult and restricted. Arakan’s L of C is more like a chain than a line—a linked chain with each link of different metal which once forged has to be joined, and once joined has to be kept from breaking. I travelled in every form of transport—rail, river streamer, coastal ship, truck and jeep. On part of the road pitted by monsoon rain we achieved in a truck the maximum speed of about six miles in the hour...”

I will never forget our first night in operations. The Japanese

1. A small stream

must have come to know that the troops facing them had been replaced by fresh and raw troops. So they sent in a few men as 'jitter' parties armed perhaps with only a few crackers, to the 4/18 Royal Garhwal Rifles position on the first tunnel. It was a pitch dark night and firing on fixed lines in defence started from a lone section post but quickly spread to other sections, platoons, companies of this unit.

We in the Brigade HQ were next to this unit and were woken up by the heavy firing. Artillery Defensive Fire (DF) was asked for and was soon coming down from the affiliated artillery regiment in front of our positions at the places where the enemy was most likely to form up for an attack. It must have been due to the general nervousness that our brigade HQ defence platoon also opened fire on their fixed lines. For a good hour or so there was intense firing which then spread to the neighbouring battalion. The divisional artillery had also come into action.

None of us slept that night expecting the Japanese assault to come any time. Most of the time I was operating the telephone exchange because there were a number of emergency calls from our Brigade Commander to the Garhwali CO and to/from the Divisional Commander and the Commander Royal Artillery. Firing died out only when everyone had expended almost their entire first line ammunition.

The next morning at first light, one can imagine our disappointment when the patrols sent out to count the enemy dead did not find a single body or even any trace of blood. And there was a mighty flap on because the front line troops were without ammunition. The GOC came personally to see to the quick replenishment of ammunition. There were no more flaps like that later. Troops learned to hold their fire until they were sure of live targets.

For the first month or so, I was busy mostly with running the signal office and laying and maintaining telephone cables to units and in some cases to sub-units. The conventional way of laying telephone lines along roads or tracks was found to be unsatisfactory because the Japanese would invariably creep up at night, cut the lines and then ambush, snipe or shell our linemen

when they went out to repair them. This was particularly evident in the area between the two tunnels.

Overlooking this portion of the road for almost its entire length was the famous Hill 551, which had up to then eluded capture inspite of repeated attempts by the division there before us. In the first few days we lost three or four vehicles on this stretch of road due to direct hits and there were a number of casualties. Hill 551 ran almost parallel to the road for a good stretch and had sheer precipice on the side facing the road. It had an excellent Observation Post (OP) for the Japanese only about 800 to 1000 yards from the road.

I was lucky to watch the final successful assault to capture this hill from a nearby high ground. It was an awe inspiring sight with the Gorkhas using only bared kukries (a curved Nepalese knife) for the assault, rifles slung across their shoulders at the back and bags full of grenades, shouting their war cry of *Ayo Gorkhali* which could be heard clearly. The sight itself is etched into my memory. It was one of those inspired attacks not only on account of its ferocity but for its ultimate success after numerous other attempts had failed. This is one of the two so called 'bayonet charges' by the infantry for a final assault on an objective which I have seen at close range. The second one was by Maratha troops with their battle cry of *Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Ki Jai*.

We went up Hill 551 soon after it was captured, to lay a telephone line to the company there. On the road side of the hill which was a sheer vertical cliff, the 'stink' of rotting undisposed dead bodies of soldiers killed in the earlier attacks since many months perhaps, was almost unbearable and I wondered how the Japanese who occupied it till then could stand that constant stink.

Within a fortnight of its capture, the Japanese put in a determined counter-attack on Hill 551, when two companies of Punjabis were changing over at night. Both these companies were thrown back in considerable confusion. I was woken up at about 11 p.m. by the exchange operator with the news. It caused a great deal of concern and reaction right up to the Divisional Commander level who was also informed of the setback without delay. I took over operating the exchange for the night and sent the operator off to rest. By 4.45

a.m. next morning the Punjabis had mounted an attack to recapture the hill and by 7 a.m. all lost ground had been regained.

After a sleepless night, I rushed out at first light to look after the telephone lines in this area and saw the effects of ferocious fighting which had taken place just a while earlier. We counted fifty dead Japanese and an equal number were estimated to have been wounded, while we lost five men killed and had nineteen wounded. Such incidents infused us with a great spirit of self-confidence and a feeling of superiority over the Japanese. Until that time the Japanese had been regarded as invincible.

I also received my first live battle inoculation on Hill 551. This feature consisted of two hillocks connected by a narrow ridge about 75 yards long with almost vertical sides. This portion was fully within sight of another Japanese OP on a nearby hill. Accompanied by the section Sergeant and two linemen we were crossing this narrow stretch with the cable, when the Japanese decided to let us have it. We had to make a dash for it but luckily the fire of mortars and guns was indirect and most of the shells either went over our heads or fell short. The scream of a shell whizzing close by is quite nerve racking.

I got off lightly with torn clothes, a sprained finger and minor bruises. We had to dive down frequently, every time we heard the scream of an oncoming shell. On the first dive, the sergeant fell almost on top of me which made me yell at him. But it was soon clear to me why he had done that. He was a veteran of earlier wars and had spontaneously 'protected' me with his body, because the scream of the shell appeared to be very close. Our luck held. But there was an unfortunate result to this shelling: an infantryman was coming behind us and a shell landed very close to him and he was blown up and died instantaneously.

Our Division got bloodied in battle very fast and it brought on a great spirit of pride and confidence. We had become war veterans. I had a number of scrapes and narrow escapes but one learned to take all that in one's stride. Our section was asked to lay a cable route for a forthcoming action by another brigade of which the signal officer was my old friend, Ranjit Tiwana. Due to very frequent interference in our lines by the Japanese, we had

introduced in our brigade a new method of laying cable lines away from existing roads and tracks and entirely cross-country through virgin jungle. Two sections of infantry for escort and jungle clearing work were given to me for this job. We had to literally hack our way through the jungle by making a sort of tunnel through the thick undergrowth, where we laid two pairs of telephone cables.

This cable line route was officially named the 'Tewari route'. During the laying process a couple of Japanese snipers held us up one day for about three hours from the tree tops where they were neatly concealed. It took time to spot them, first by drawing their fire and then by shooting them down. I used to carry a rifle in those days like the other jawans so as not to be picked out as an officer. Unfortunately the opportunity to use my rifle to kill an enemy was denied me because the leading infantry escort was far too quick in disposing of both these snipers. My chance to kill a live enemy in battle came many years later, on the 20th of October 1962, when the Chinese attacked India. In Burma, besides my Signals work, I would often go out on fighting patrols with the infantry. It was fun and I never hesitated to volunteer for such adventurous outings with live enemy in front.

On another occasion, while laying a line on the side of a hill (all on a man pack basis), the cable drum slipped from the lineman's hands and rolled down into a *nullah*. We used to carry ropes and hooks for such eventualities and with their help I went down to where the drum was. There, a sinister looking thing, partially covered with dry leaves, had obviously been disturbed by the falling drum and I spotted it as I approached. Suspecting a booby trap of which the Japanese were very fond, I tried to discover what it was, by throwing a stone at it from behind a rock. My luck held because I managed to uncover a little more, just enough to reveal the unexploded mortar bomb beneath. There was also a wire coming out of it, leading on both sides further into the *nullah*.

Fortunately better sense prevailed and after connecting a telephone on the line I called the Brigade HQ and gave the necessary information. We were advised to 'freeze' where we were until an Engineer party came out, following our cable route. What they found was a series of interconnected booby traps. That

night I was congratulated by everyone in the Mess for my narrow escape.

Leave was kept open for us during operations and I got 28 days leave ex Chittagong within four months of our move to Burma. The monsoon set in early that year. One has to experience the monsoon in those areas to appreciate its intensity. It rained 48 inches in the month of July alone. As a result, there was a lull in operational activities and it forced us to start living above ground instead of in underground shelters. In spite of a liberal supply of tarpaulins, there was seldom a time when we wore completely dry clothes. Our brigade received a prominent write-up in the SEAC daily for refusing to be relieved throughout the monsoons.

Leeches were the most unforgettable feature of all our outdoor work. They would grow three inches or more in length before they were discovered on the body (through blood drawn by accidental scratching). It was a job taking them off. You could not pull them off fully because their mouths would remain stuck on the skin and fill up again. Various remedies like a burning cigarette, salt or tobacco applied at the mouth of a leech were different ways found of getting rid of them.

Malaria was very prevalent in Burma and the army suffered more casualties through malaria than in actual combat in the earlier days. As a result, a very strict routine was introduced for the daily administration of preventive tablets besides other anti-mosquito precautions including mosquito nets, head gear, etc. Yellow mepacrine tablets had the effect of making everyone look yellowish as if one had jaundice. A story went around at the time that mepacrine makes a man impotent and soldiers would avoid taking it. Orders were then issued for us junior officers to see that each man put a tablet in his mouth and swallowed it with a gulp of water. One of our British battalions suffered almost fifty per cent malaria cases and had to be sent back to India.

Wearing wet clothes introduced a number of skin diseases as well, most common being the 'dhobi itch' around the groin and foot-rot, later called Burma-foot. The then Corps Commander, Lt Gen Christinson visited our brigade HQ once in the tunnels area and ordered a hundred per cent FFI (Free From Infection)

inspection for all ranks with a promise that there would be no punishments. Even though he might have been warned by his medical adviser to expect this, he would have received a shock when it was discovered that there was not a single man free from infection, down from the Brigade Commander on.

The monsoon was not over yet when probing attacks started from both sides. There was an incident in which three men of the Indian National Army (INA) and two Japanese attacked one of our Gorkha positions shouting the Gorkha battle cry. They succeeded in deceiving our men initially and caused a number of casualties before they were all disposed off. In the British Indian army of those days, INA was referred to as JIFs (Japanese Inspired Forces). The next day, one of my wireless sets being carried up the hill on a mule received a direct hit from enemy shelling. The set was completely blown up and the mule badly wounded. I had to shoot the mule to relieve its suffering and then just have it pushed off into the ditch to clear the track. Luckily, my two jawans received only minor injuries in this shelling.

The higher authorities must have felt that our brigade required a breather since we had spent the entire monsoon on the front line. Thus, a month or so after the close of the monsoons, we were pulled out to Kwala Binga near Maungdaw, in place of another brigade. We were grateful to them for leaving us ready-made *bashas* in a nice shady area. The food also improved and the perpetual supply of *shakarpara*¹, bully beef in tins, cheese and M and V (meat and vegetable) in tins were substituted with bread, fish, eggs, meat (all fresh) and even chicken occasionally.

It was a wonderfully comfortable and relaxed life for barely four days. Very early one morning, a Signals cook, having failed to light the fire quickly thought he would pour in some kerosene. But the tin he picked up contained petrol and the entire cook-house *basha* was ablaze in no time. As ill luck would have it, a strong breeze was blowing at the time and the fire started spreading very quickly. I woke up and rushed to the cook-house area in the dark and bumped into the Brigade Commander in his night pyjamas,

1. A kind of cookie (biscuit); 'Dog biscuits' as the troops called them.

already directing fire fighting operations. He was very sweet and calm in spite of the fact that the fire was already approaching his own *basha*. He had ordered all vehicles to be driven out and the remaining *bashas* to be pulled down.

I ran back to the Signal Office to save our telephone exchange and the telephone cable lines. We had not yet completed the overhead cover for the Signal Office as the tin sheets on top had not been covered with earth. There was only a thatch covering. Cables were immediately pulled down from the overhead poles and covered with earth. Before the thatch from the top of the exchange dug-out could be removed, a spark landed on it and set it ablaze. However, we were determined to prevent a break in communications. Calls were coming in on the telephone exchange which I was manning because all the other local telephones were unattended with the officers busy trying to control the fire along with the men. Units all round could see the blaze and were calling in with offers of help. Tin sheets of the dug-out started getting heated up and we two, the operator and myself were getting mildly roasted inside.

The Brigade Commander had authorised the disconnection of the exchange to save it but I wanted to avoid a break in communications. And we did hold out till a water truck with a hose-pipe was brought up close enough to the blaze to pour water on our dug-out. There was no break in communications. It was perhaps only because of this that nothing further was said about the Signals having started the fire. We moved out to another location the same day but this time under canvas.

By now plans for the advance to capture the port of Akyab had been finalised. Two brigades, ours and one more were to advance on either side of the Mayu range in Arakan while the third brigade was to advance along the ridge in a mopping up role. Our brigade was to advance along the Kalapanzin river. We had started training for this advance on a completely man/mule pack and sampan basis. Sampans are small Burmese boats which had been commandeered on a large scale for this operation.

We were given special watermanship training for handling these boats, swimming with full equipment, animal management

and riding. All this happened in a brief period of a few weeks but it was great fun. There was only one drowning accident during our training. We experimented with mule loads, loading of assault boats and sampans and ferrying of mules across water obstacles.

All officers as well as men were put on to special Field Service (FS) scales of clothing and equipment. Steel helmets which nobody liked in any case were left behind. The awkward World War I type of steel helmet was still in use at the time. Our dress was jungle hat, woolen shirt, trousers, underclothes, boots, socks, anklets. In web equipment the small haversack was left out. In the large pack we carried a cut-down mosquito net, jersey, towel, soap and shaving kit, mess tin, a spare pair of socks, cap comforter, spare boot laces, shorts, rations, ground sheet and one blanket. Each person apart from the pack, in pouches or otherwise also carried the personal weapon, water bottle, *dah* or *kukri*, entrenching tool, ammunition (18 rounds for pistol or 98 rounds for stengun gun or 50 rounds for rifle), field dressing, emergency rations, one small tin of water sterilising tablets, toggle rope, water *chagal*¹ and anti-mosquito cream. In addition to all this, for each person there was allowed an 'occasional' load with spare shirt and trousers, towel, under clothes, socks and a second blanket which was carried on a central basis.

It was a novel experience working with mules with all their well known mulish habits. We got used to them pretty fast. There was time for recreation also in the form of boat races with and without outboard motors. There were no pamphlets in those days to guide us on loads for mules and boats but by trial and error, things were worked out to our satisfaction. Just like there are specialist vehicles in the army for certain roles, we had fitted up sampans wireless, sampans battery charging, sampans cable laying and sampans general purpose. Two carpenters had been given to the Brigade Signals and they worked full time with an absolutely free hand on what we decided and how we fitted up everything.

There were 13 mules for Signals, ten general service (GS)² and

1. A kind of canvas water container

2. If I remember correctly, they used to be called E1 mules for some reason.

three mountain artillery (MA). The latter was a bigger mule which could carry heavier loads than the GS type. Signals had seven sampans and two assault boats. Outboard motors were fitted on two sampans and the rowing device on others was modified to use conventional two oars. Normally these sampans were rowed (by locals) by pushing the oars forward of the body but this was not found to be suitable by us.

Training was organised for the Brigade to float down the river in boats/ sampans with men marching along the banks, crossing the side *chaungs*¹ (Burmese term for streams) en route by swimming across them. Because of the wireless silence, boat-to-boat phone communications had been organised by us. Cable had to be kept taut to prevent it from sinking to the bottom and getting entangled with the underwater growth.

For watermanship training, all the ranks had to swim across a 200-yard stretch of water with full kit. Two men's kits were tied up in ground sheets with rifles inside. And while the swimmers pushed this load across, the not so strong swimmers (like me) were allowed to rest one of their hands for support on these ground sheet bundles.

The medical authorities had been working on troops during this period to root out skin and other diseases. Bad cases were evacuated. One day, everyone was dewormed at Brigade HQ. The medicine they used obviously had a strong alcoholic content judging from the way some of the men reacted after taking it. It certainly affected me because apparently I took out my pistol and told the Brigade Major to put his hands up. There was an order passed in the HQ as a result to say that Tewari was not to be dewormed again. Hundred per cent fresh latrines had been dug up for this deworming which proved to be fully justified. Apparently the worms prospered on shakarpara biscuits.

There was a tragic accident in one of the battalions about this time. Evidently a patrol had picked up a Japanese officer's haversack and brought it to their CO. It was opened in his presence and turned out to be a booby trap. The CO and three

1. Burmese term for streams

ORs were killed instantly and a company commander and sixteen others were seriously wounded. It was a careless thing to do. This same battalion met with another misfortune in Malaya after the war had ended, when one of its officers was blown up by another booby trap inside a building in Kuala Lumpur. This was after the Japanese surrender and no one could have known about this booby trap. Having seen the discipline of the Japanese soldiers after the surrender, I am sure that this booby trap could not have been deliberately installed.

In preparation for the coming operations, deep offensive patrols were being sent out to gather information about the enemy. In one such patrol our division got the first Victoria Cross, the highest gallantry award for the British-Indian Army then, for Sepoy (later Subedar) Bhandari Ram of the Baluch Battalion. Our division also captured its first live prisoner of war (PoW). He was not even wounded — a very rare event. This PoW belonged to a party which had been surrounded and was going to commit ‘harakari’ by blowing themselves up rather than be taken alive. Unfortunately his grenade did not go off. Until then very few Japanese had been taken PoW. Surprisingly enough, this prisoner did quite a bit of talking. He came out with a very amusing remark while describing the presence of INA (JIFs) in Arakan; he said that there were many bearded Indians who wore their hair like women.

Advance down the Mayu Range as part of Operation Romulus, started on 14 December 1944. Within three or four days of the D-day, while advancing along the Kalapanzin river, our brigade suffered a number of losses due to the sinking of sampans, dropping of loads by mules and their slipping and kicking. The best part of this operation was the air supply. Damaged or faulty equipment was replaced in no time through air drops. We got good fresh rations too, more than we could ever have hoped for.

At Christmas, special hampers, each containing wine and rum bottles, roast chicken and turkey, cakes, Kashmir apples, chocolates, cheese and what have you were air dropped for our British battalion. It was quite obvious that for that day, ration strength of this battalion had gone up. And to guard against the possibility of some parachutes failing to open, a percentage of

extra hampers were dropped as a matter of course. A major portion of these extra hampers were consumed by the Brigade HQ staff.

There was a tragic accident during one of these air drops. A certain area (called dropping zone or DZ) would be cleared, for air dropping supplies and panels laid out for the guidance of pilots. Most of the stuff was dropped with parachutes while some items like *atta*¹ (wheat flour), rice, clothing etc. were put in special bags and free dropped. The drill was that the DZ would be cleared of air dropped supplies as fast as possible by a collection party because sometimes the Japanese would start shelling the area. The collection party would wait in trenches after putting out the panels, and after each sortie, it would dash out and collect all the stuff. One of our Gorkha pioneers must have been still in the zone when another aircraft approached for free drops. Normally he should have run back but he appeared to have got mesmerized by the sight of the approaching aircraft. Even when he saw free drop bags coming down, he failed to move. A bag of *atta* landed on his chest and he was crushed into a horrible mess.

There was also an air accident which took place about the same time. Our Brigade HQ was near a place called Suminbaya along the river. A particularly vicious looking hill feature was holding up our advance and defying ground attacks. Air support was requested. There was a squadron of Hurricane fighters in support. This squadron had a few Indian pilots including the famous 'Baba' Mehar Singh who later distinguished himself as an Air Marshal in Kashmir.

To prevent the Japanese from crawling to safety through tunnels from one side of the hill to the other during an aerial attack and then coming back again when the attack was over, this Squadron devised a novel method of using two aircraft to strafe from both sides at the same time. During one of these runs, two fighters touched wings in mid-air. One crash-landed in the river while the other flew away to safety. A special patrol was organised immediately and the pilot of the crashed plane recovered, only slightly wounded but badly shaken. A day or so later even the

1. Wheat flour in Hindi.

wreckage of the aircraft was recovered by a special Air Force recovery party helped by our men.

Advance south along the Kalapanzin river with West African (82nd) Division on our left took us through Kwazon, Prinshe to Rathedaung, the next biggest town between Buthidaung and Akyab. Once or twice, for this advance, we floated down the river at night under the cover of darkness. During such sneak moves at night, complete wireless silence was maintained.

We had our first contact with the African troops. Extremely tough, well built with an amazing load carrying capacity, they could really live 'off and 'in' jungles well. I saw a party carrying heavy assault boats once near Buthidaung. They were moving along a narrow track through thick jungle with a stream on one side, in groups with their heavy loads, singing, cursing and joking when suddenly there was a commotion. One party threw their boat down and amidst wild shouting attacked one of their British NCOs. One could not make out what exactly had happened, but from their reaction, the British NCOs seemed accustomed to this sort of thing. There were some harsh words of command and use of sticks by an officer and some NCOs and soon afterwards the 'convoy' moved on. I did not think it wise to stay on the scene and had moved out pretty fast.

Kudaung and Rathedaung were taken almost simultaneously. The latter was completely destroyed by shelling and there were hardly any civilian inhabitants to be seen. Japanese Divisional HQ had vacated it only four days before it was occupied. It was here that I had a reunion with another old Signal officer from our unit who had joined the 'V' Force operating behind Japanese lines — then Capt¹ S.N. Antia, PVSM. He had just returned from behind enemy lines. He was the one and only Indian Signal officer who had joined the 'V' Force.

By now it was obvious from various reports that Akyab might be vacated by the Japanese without a fight. One of our battalions was therefore ordered to carry out an opportunity landing on the northern tip of Akyab Island. I accompanied the Brigade

1. Retired as a General Officer Commanding of a Division

Commander in a motor launch to watch this landing operation. An unopposed landing took place at 04:00 hours on January 3 as we watched. At first light, I was given permission to go ashore to visit this unit. Unfortunately naval advice was taken literally and I went ashore barefoot and without a hat. On return, perhaps because of my being a little delayed, the motor launch had left and I was truly stranded and had to hitch-hike back to Rathedaung with no hat or shoes, much to the amusement of everyone in the Brigade HQ.

Our brigade's plans thereafter were subject to very frequent changes and the Signals had their hands full, establishing new HQ sites ever so often, only to find that plans had changed. We did a few days of 'garrison' duty in Akyab. The men were pretty quick and carried out some snap barter trade with civilians who were short of food and other essentials. For two packets of biscuits or a packet of cigarettes one could get a chicken. It is possible that some of our more adventurous soldiers struck similar trades for their amorous escapades also.

The Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in South East Asia Command (SEAC), Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten visited Akyab during our stay. He addressed the troops in his immaculately white and smart naval uniform (what a contrast with the state we were in) standing in his characteristic style on top of an empty packing case. Everyone was so thrilled and impressed by his short, crisp and inspiring address.

After Akyab began a series of amphibious operations, with troops landing along the coastline to the south to trap the retreating Japanese — first at Myebon, then Kangaw and Ruywa and Ramree islands. The British commandos had joined our brigade by then, coming straight out from Europe. They were specially trained and really tough soldiers who would lead the initial assault, establish a bridgehead on the beaches and let other troops pass through inland. They were trained to be always on the offensive and would not get involved in any defensive battles, whatever the cost to lives. There was no question of their ever digging in after the initial assault as it was regarded as a defensive action.

In one of these battles, after their assault landing, the Japanese reacted very sharply indeed. The follow up troops had got delayed

and the Commandos were left on the beaches exposed to heavy Japanese shelling a little longer than planned and many were killed. It was here that I heard a Commando say, as I dashed past him, and he lay in the open near his dead comrade, in the midst of heavy shelling, "If this be life, roll on death." I have never forgotten that poignant sight and his words.

We had not received any special training till then for these amphibious combined operations with the Navy. It was after our Ace of Spades division had come out of Burma that we were given intensive formal training in combined operations. That was before the launching of Operation Zipper for the assault on Malaya in 1945. Combined operations require special type of communications for coordination with the naval vessels, both in the initial and assault stages. Assault troops would be carried in landing craft assault (LCA) with follow up troops coming in landing craft infantry (LCI). LCA is a specially built vessel fitted with a powerful motor and has a ramp at the front end which can be dropped down as the craft hits the beach and the assault troops come rushing out.

A large number of sloops, destroyers and mine sweepers, some of them from the Royal Indian Navy, were in support for the assault landings. There were numerous gun boats mounted with quadruple machine guns which were a most inspiring and assuring sight. Air cover was available overhead constantly.

Assault amphibious landing on Ruywa, 75 miles south of Akyab, in a small *chaung* was unopposed and a complete success. The Japanese reaction was slow in coming. A Dakota aircraft on a supply dropping mission was shot down that day by our own mortar fire, it appeared. In an opportunity ambush, a Japanese officer (a captain) was captured. Signals linemen were involved in this ambush and there was a great sense of achievement. This captain was very smartly dressed and spoke English well. He insisted that he could not be tied up, which we wanted to do, to prevent him from committing harakiri. Other members of his party were killed and two or three escaped. The booty included three Samurai officers' swords. Later even our unarmed pioneers captured a prisoner — such was the spirit in our Division then.

Next day there was an intensive Japanese bombardment which was nerve racking. It was also annoying because it interrupted our normal work. In reply to the Japanese shelling, there would be prompt counter-bombardment by our guns. This would cheer up everyone. In one month of operations, our Division had accounted for 1,129 dead Japanese and 12 prisoners. Our own divisional casualties had been comparatively light with 70 dead and 450 wounded. In our brigade in one year, the total casualties had been 23 killed, 45 wounded and 19 drowned.

I was called up on the wireless early one morning by my CO ordering me to report to another brigade at once. The Brigade Commander promptly sent a message to the CO saying, "Agree Tewari posting providing it is step up." This was confirmed immediately and I was 'dined out' in the Officers Mess that night with a profuse display of affection and good wishes. I was the oldest member of Brigade HQ at that time. Early next morning, with a grand farewell from all other ranks (British and Indian), I was flown out to Akyab in an L5 aircraft specially laid on for me. I felt so elated not only for the promotion to Capt but for the special aircraft they sent to fly me out.

The pilot was an American sergeant who was chewing away furiously at a chewing gum. He was surprisingly courteous for an American, I was told. Soon after take-off, he saw some gun flashes in the distance to our right and asked if I minded flying over the area to see some fun. Not very keen myself (a Dakota aircraft had been seen being hit and crashing the previous day) still I could not show lack of courage. He flew dangerously low and of course, the L5 is such a slow aircraft. It was the battle of Tamandu we flew over. We certainly saw plenty of gun and mortar flashes and occasionally shells whizzed past us in the air. It was a scary experience which has never been regretted.

On arrival over Akyab, there was another exciting experience. Not getting immediate clearance to land, we had to circle over the airfield a number of times. What a fantastic sight it was down below. There had never been such a concentration of aircraft of all types including the latest. There were the large American Super Fortresses and British Lancaster bombers and various types of

fighters. Particularly impressive were the Lightning fighters with their silver coloured twin fuselage. A number of them were up in the air at the time.

I had now joined the famous All Indian Brigade, the Fighting Fifty-First as it prided in calling itself, to take over as the OC Signals from a British officer, Capt Hall. This section was all MMs (South Indians) and the second in command was another Indian officer, Lt (retired as a Brigadier) Ajit Singh ‘Bubby’ Ahluwalia. Extremely popular with all ranks, British and Indian alike, Ajit was always upto some mischief or pranks. He was the ‘baby’ of our Brigade HQ, not only on account of his mischievousness, but also because of his looks. There were still no signs of a beard on his chin as yet.

The spirit in this Brigade was truly fantastic. It was the first brigade during the war in which all three battalions were Indian, unlike the two Indian and one British battalions of a normal brigade till then. All three battalions were commanded by Indian officers, who made great names for themselves then and later on in life — Lt Col¹ K.S. Thimayya in command of 8/19 Hyderabad Regiment; Lt Col, later Lt Gen S.P.P. Thorat, who retired as the General Officer Commanding in Chief, Eastern Command, in command of 2/2 Punjab Regiment; and Lt Col, later Lt Gen L.P. Sen, who retired as the General Officer Commanding in Chief, also Eastern Command, in command of 16/10 Baluch.

This brigade distinguished itself in the Kangaw battle for which all three battalion commanders were awarded the DSOs (Distinguished Service Orders) and the Brigade Commander, Brig, later Lt Gen R.A. Hutton got a bar to his DSO (which means his second DSO), the Brigade Major got the MC (Military Cross), and most of the other officers got awards also. The three battalion signal officers were also Indians, Capt (later Major) Som Nath Sharma, the first winner of India’s highest award for gallantry, the Param Vir Chakra, given posthumously in 1947 during the Kashmir war, of 8/19 Hyderabad; Capt (later Lt Gen) Z.C. Bakshi of 16/10 Baluch; and Lt (later Maj Gen) Shabeg Singh Bhangu

1. Later General and Chief of the Army Staff

of 2/2 Punjab. The last named was killed, after retirement, during Operation Blue Star in Amritsar.

Jemadar Nullaswamy was the section VCO, a young but very mature and seasoned soldier who could really be depended upon for any job. He was tactful and popular with all ranks and there were never any British/Indian problems in this unit. The section clerk, Hav Pylee was one of the most devoted, conscientious and hard working persons. He had to be literally ordered off his work to take rest.

Having won laurels in Burma, our Division was moved to South India for rest, re-equipping and training for the next phase of operations. This was to introduce us to formal combined operations training for a major operation. After landing in Madras, where we were given a rousing reception organised by the late well known social worker of Madras, Mrs Mary Clubwala, we were taken by train to Coimbatore and then by MT to Pollachi. As the first signal officer from our Division to arrive there I was met by a signal officer and other staff from the local static formation. They gave me piles of papers to study. Having done hardly any paperwork throughout our stay in Burma for so long, it was difficult to persuade myself to read all the 'Bumph' given to me but fortunately I was none the worse for not having done so.

Bashas in Pollachi were comfortable enough except for the large number of lizards. They had an awful habit of hiding themselves in the most unexpected places. One night I had blown out the hurricane lamp, got under the mosquito net and slid my hand under the pillow to put my wrist watch when I felt something soft and slimy. I really got the shivers and dived out of the bed, thinking it was a snake. My *basha* mate put on his torch and we discovered two nice fat lizards sleeping cozily under my pillow.

Almost the entire Division went on annual leave at the same time. But before the middle of the year everyone was back in harness and things got going with a bang. There was no time to waste as our next operation was not far off, it was said. We moved to Coconada on the east coast for combined operations training where there were a series of lectures and demonstrations by experts. They had come from Europe after Operation Overlord



**Brigade and three battalion Commanders of the All Indian 51
Infantry Brigade in Burma.**

***Left to Right: Lt Col S.P.P. Thorat, 2/2 Punjab, Lt Col L.P. Sen,
16/10 Baluch, Brig R.A. Hutton, Commander 51 Bde, Lt Col K.S.
Thimayya, 8/19 Hyderabad.***

which had resulted in the defeat of Nazi Germany and Italy.

The Division had to refit, prepare fresh load tables and make up all its deficiencies. Indents for making up deficiencies were a mere eyewash as everything came virtually without asking. Indents were put in only to regularise. There was no shortage of any kind. Waterproofing of vehicles and equipment was entirely new. But there was a confident and relaxed mood with the feeling of victory in the air, after the final defeat of Germany and Italy, two of the three Axis powers which had taken on the rest of the world in the Second World War.



Maj Som Nath Sharma, India's first PVC. Author's friend and brother in arms. Eldest brother of Maj (Dr.) Kamla Tewari, author's wife

Operation Zipper – Assault on Malaya

Suddenly one day, the Brigade Commander, Brigade Major, MLO (Military Landing Officer, a new addition in the HQ), Officers Commanding, Artillery Regiment, Engineers Company and the Machine Gun Battalion and myself were whisked off to Bombay. We were put up in Darbhanga house amidst the tightest possible security and given a series of lectures on security. The nearby office building was heavily guarded and looked like a concentration camp for dangerous criminals. To enter that building special passes were issued to us and these were checked by three sets of security staff before admission. The last check was by the Security Officer himself. We thought all this to be a waste of time but were soon to realise the importance of it when we came to know why we were there.

It was on the third day after our arrival that three of us-brigade signal officers (Ranjit Tiwana, Sushil Roy and myself, all captains) were taken to a briefing room by the Commander Signals of our Division, Lt Col J.N. Barker. Very deliberately the dark blue blinds on the windows were drawn (so that no one could see anything in the room from the numerous high rise buildings all round). Lights were then switched on and the cover pulled off a large scale map of Malaya. My heart missed a few beats. We knew after our training at Coconada that we were earmarked for an amphibious operation but we had no idea where. And now right in front of us was the Top Secret information with an arrow pointing to a spot about halfway down the Western coastline of Malaya.

I could almost hear my heart thump when the CO announced, “Now Tewari, your brigade will be the one making the initial assault on Morib beaches here.” The CO explained outlines of the Corps and Divisional plans and said that these plans may be changed, based on last-minute aerial photographs and ground reconnaissance of the beaches (by special agents).

Thereafter we became engrossed in the details of our respective brigade plans. Every day there would be conferences which included, in addition to the brigade staff, the MLO, beach unit officer, two naval officers and a staff officer from the divisional HQ. There were serious discussions but there were lighter moments too.

During a discussion on the brigade plan of assault, the Brigade Commander, pointing to a hill feature on the aerial mosaic photograph (blown up in size), remarked to the Naval Commander that he was not happy with a feature overlooking the proposed assault landing site. It could contain a nest of machine guns, the Commander said. The Naval officer, who had been relaxing quietly in his chair alternating between his pipe and a steaming hot cup of cocoa, chimed in calmly to say, “Well, Reggie old boy, you don’t have to worry about that. I shall put a couple of two ton ‘tessies’ on it and the hill won’t be there anymore.”

Two battleships, HMS Nelson and Richelieu were supposed to support our landing with their 15 and 16-inch guns. Each shell of these guns weighed two tons and hence the pet name. Not that these guns could hope to hit a pin-point target like that small hill but the way this naval officer spoke, it produced laughter and the matter was dropped.

Planning at Bombay being over, we returned to our units for testing and waterproofing of vehicles. Besides other things it meant fitting a special type of snorkel to the exhaust pipe above the roof of the vehicle. Those were hectic days indeed with so many things happening at the same time. There were exercises almost every day before we moved to concentration areas for embarking on Operation Zipper for the recapture of Malaya.

In the middle of this rushed schedule, a number of us Indian officers got calls from Selection Boards for the grant of regular commissions. Those of us in the ‘Ace of Spades’ Division were given a special priority for interviews before embarkation; we were called up in batches and rushed to Bangalore and back. Three days of this selection process by the Board, presided over by Maj Gen More, were a pleasant change and amusing too especially because of the psychiatrist’s interview. He was referred to as the

'trick cyclist' and invariably started his interview with a question seeking intimate details regarding one's sexual experiences.

Before embarking, while camping just outside Madras city, Maj Som Nath Sharma, another officer from his battalion and I made a bet at the Connemara Hotel in Madras. The bet was quite crazy — to see who could eat the maximum number of ice creams. All three of us had a great weakness for ice cream. The idea was that whoever gave up first would have to foot the bill. The slabs of ice cream served in those days were much bigger than what one gets nowadays. We each had six slabs apiece when I backed out and paid for eighteen ice creams. The other two carried on. They both had twenty four slabs each and then by mutual consent agreed to change over to something salty. They ordered chicken sandwiches. They ate twenty-six sandwiches each and then Som ate the twenty-seventh and won the bet. Our third friend had a fat bill of thirty-six ice creams and five dozen sandwiches, much to the amusement of a number of hotel staff. Money was of no concern for us war veterans with a row of medals on our chests. It was good to be young and carefree and have an appetite like that.

Embarkation took place from different ports on different dates. Sea convoys were scheduled to meet somewhere in the Bay of Bengal to form up into the final assault formation. The Brigade Commander, CO of the affiliated Artillery regiment, Company Commander of the Engineers, the intelligence officer, MLO, a liaison officer, beach parties, myself as the OC Signals and some naval officers travelled in a landing ship HQ called LSH Nith. It was a special ship fitted with wireless sets for all the communication requirements of the Army, the Navy and the contact with the Air Force.

For a combined operation of a triphibious nature, communications were more than duplicated, with a Commander being provided his normal communications from HQ ship on naval wireless while afloat. After the beach landings, communications were initially provided by the beach signal unit. It was only later, when troops had moved inland that normal army communications provided by the brigade signals, were established.

A major part of the Brigade as well as Beach Signals were

preloaded in DUKWs (amphibious three ton lorries) so that they could drive straight out of the landing ships to the shore. Two DUKWs each were allotted to the two Signal units. Beach Signals also were placed under my command during the landing. We had six battalions under command in our Brigade for the assault instead of the normal three. From this one can estimate the tremendous responsibility which one held as a captain signal officer only.

LSH Nith was hardly a 'ship' but rather a large boat of 800 tons specially fitted out with various facilities for command and control. We sailed from Madras at 1230 hours on 3 September 1945, having embarked at 1600 hours on the day before. I was seasick soon afterwards as the sea was really rough on account of the northwest monsoon. It was not until we entered the smoother waters of the straits of Malacca that I felt better. I could hardly eat anything during the voyage and the sight of others lapping up popular dishes made me feel even more sick.

There was, fortunately, no work to be done on board. We were on complete wireless silence and it was quite an anticlimax after months of feverish activity and preparation. We were on the high seas when the Americans dropped the two atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki and news of the Japanese surrender was received. Orders, however, were that the assault landing would proceed as scheduled but without the pre-assault bombardment. D-day was 8 September 1945 and H-hour, 06:45.

Our landing was absolutely unopposed but two things went wrong. First of all, the beaches at Morib were discovered to be soft and marshy below the apparently firm sandy surface on top. This resulted in a number of DUKWs getting bogged down in shallow waters. They would have been sitting ducks for the Japanese if they had not already surrendered. Secondly, rubber plantations immediately inland acted as virtual screens for the wireless communications to the assault units when they went ashore. Both these factors would have been calamitous if the Japanese had fought back, but our luck was in.

The Brigade Commander's party, of which I was a member, went in almost two hours late because of the lack of information from the forward units. And then, the DUKW which was to take

the party ashore also got stuck like some others. So we had to jump off and wade ashore. The water was pretty deep because when the Brigade Commander, who was about as tall as I am, jumped overboard, he disappeared out of sight underwater. He was quite composed when he surfaced. There was no time to worry about getting wet.

Behind us was a most impressive naval armada, including the battleships Nelson and Richelieu on the horizon and scores of machine gunboats with their quadruple gun mountings speeding up and down the beaches. On landing, the vehicles had to be de-waterproofed. This took just a few minutes but when the Commander's party arrived on the beach soaked to the skin, the only vehicle which was ready (after de-waterproofing) was my Signals jeep. So the Commander, in his typically calm and very warm style turned to me and said, "Aren't you going to drive me in your jeep?"

I jumped to it. We had to rush forward to get in touch with the assault battalions, which had moved inland and were out of wireless touch due to the rubber plantations. So off we went, with me at the wheel and a grinning Commander in wet clothes sitting next to me. The two leading battalions, 8/19 Hyderabad and 2/2 Punjab had moved pretty fast inland towards Klang and Port Swettenham.

As we drove on, all along this route large crowds greeted us and they would repeatedly mob the jeep. I felt concerned about the Commander's safety, but he was not bothered one bit. Every now and then he would tell me to stop so that he could acknowledge the greetings properly, and in the process get kissed by the girls. En route, we passed large bodies of fully armed Japanese soldiers, standing to attention and saluting the Commander in a most disciplined manner. It certainly was very exciting to see the erstwhile fully armed 'enemy' in large numbers. It was a great day indeed and I was happy that the Commander's jeep had 'drowned' while landing. To have this unique experience was a godsend. And did I envy him for getting kissed by the girls! He must have seen it on my face because at one stage he told me that he would drive but it was politely suggested that the victorious Commander must

be driven.

Our Brigade HQ moved into Kuala Lumpur on 12 September and set up in the famous Selangor Club. Riots had broken out in the city and large-scale looting was reported. September 13 was the day the surrender was signed formally, with a big ceremonial parade. The following day a full scale physical surrender took place and the Japanese officers were made to surrender their heirloom Samurai swords one by one. It was a moving sight and one could not but feel pity for the defeated Japanese. Some of them were crying while laying down their swords in surrender.

A number of them approached us beseechingly to accept their personal possessions of sentimental value. They were perhaps keen to see that these went to officers and not to the rank and file.

Some of them may have been under the impression that after their surrender they would be summarily shot. We had very strict orders prohibiting fraternisation.

Soon afterwards, we visited some of the Allied prisoners of war camps. It was shocking to see the appalling conditions under which the Japanese had kept our prisoners.

Our stay thereafter in Malaya, as occupation troops, was very comfortable. We had opportunities to visit other places, and were provided various kinds of amenities. Brigade HQ moved to Kuala Lipis soon afterwards. Divisional HQ was at Taiping and another brigade at Alor Star, with Ranjit Tiwana as its signal officer.

One of our battalions was at Kuantan on the eastern coast. Going to visit them one day, we were confronted by a wild elephant standing right in the middle of the road. It appeared to be in a nasty mood and we had to fire a whole magazine of rounds from a light machine-gun. Fortunately it collapsed a little off the road and did not block our passage. It had no ivory tusks. We carried on, and thought of returning the next morning with a party of men and recover the 'feet' of that elephant, to make bar stools for our officers' mess. But we were in for a surprise. Overnight all the flesh and meat had been taken away, and only the bare skeleton remained. We were told that the Chinese relish elephant meat also.

I remember visiting the famous Batu caves one day. Huge and deep, they were full of treasures collected by the Japanese.

A remarkable aspect of the Japanese character was demonstrated time and again by the disciplined and honest way they accepted and obeyed the surrender orders of their Emperor. All these treasures were stored neatly with up to date lists for handing over to the victorious army.

As was to be expected, the Army had started normal training programmes of drill, physical training, education, upgrading in trades, lectures on hygiene and venereal diseases and so on. But everyone was in a relaxed mood. Release from the army had also started and there were a series of lectures on release and resettlement. These problems were receiving major attention at all levels, almost on a war footing.

Then there was the question of reducing the size of the army, and some formations had to be disbanded, in spite of their distinguished war service. Our Ace of Spades Division fell into this category and we came back to Ranchi area in Bihar in the first quarter of 1946 for disbandment. A rousing formal reception was given to us on arrival at Calcutta.

So ended my association with this division; I had been with it right from the start of my service, and I was proud of it. Recognition of services had been given to me by the award of two 'Mentioned in Despatches' by His Majesty the King of England. I would serve once more with the Ace of Spades division when it was raised again in Jammu and Kashmir, after India's independence.

In early 1946, when our division had been ordered to return to India from Malaya, my unit was inspected by the Brigade Commander in what is recorded formally as an annual inspection. I had preserved this report because it was said to be an unusually complimentary report in the Division. In addition to the remarks of the inspecting officer in which we had been given a real big pat on the back, the remarks of the Divisional Commander, Maj Gen Sam Wood in his red ink were, "An excellent unit. It has invariably done very well in action, particularly in the Kangaw battle, when the communications (wireless only) never failed. Under peace conditions, a happy well organised unit. I congratulate the commanding officer." It was nice and gratifying to have the hard and devoted work recognised in such a befitting manner.

Unforgettable Days of Hope and Victory

During the Arakan operations in Burma, our brigade was entirely dependent on air supply for more than a month. The air drop of Christmas hampers in 1944 meant for all the British troops has been mentioned earlier. There was also an abundance of Ordnance and other stores in the front line. We used to have British warrant officers in those days in place of the existing commissioned officers in a brigade HQ. One was called BOWO (Brigade Ordnance Warrant Officer) and other TOWO (Technical OWO). Demands for air supply would be sent by an 'Immediate' signal message, and there would be an air drop of required supplies within 48 hours. These demands were coordinated by the BOWO.

One day the BOWO came to me with my demand for two watches (meant for radio operators) and said, "Sir, you need five watches, not two." When told that the deficiency was only two for the ones we had lost in the previous action, he said pleadingly, "Sir, but surely who knows how many you lost in action. Big boss will have one, I shall have one and surely you should have one too, Sir." The advice was taken, and on the third morning in the first drop came five watches. Such was the liberal supply position for all our needs. One never heard of the term 'NA' (not available) to which one got so accustomed later on after independence.

We learned later that when the war ended, large numbers of watches, compasses and other such instruments were spread out on an airfield in Assam and steam rolled to destroy them. The sole purpose was perhaps to keep the war industry going till it could be diverted to produce other items. One also heard that about a thousand new jeeps were dumped in the sea off Rangoon in Burma after the war, as they were brought in a ship.

One cannot also forget the *Shakarpara* 'dog' biscuits of the earlier Burma days. This was when the Fourteenth Army in Burma was referred to as the 'forgotten army'. The major effort then was

concentrated on the war in Europe. Air supply had not swung into action in our theater. We were issued mainly tinned food supplies. Meat was 'bully beef' in tins, meant for British troops. Later we started getting 'bully mutton' to cater to those who did not take beef.

With the typical British attitude of keeping differences among Hindus and Moslems alive, bully mutton would be issued in tins with two types of wrappers — one marked *Halal* for *Moslems* and other *Jhatka*¹ for Hindus and Sikhs. I remember watching a British sergeant issuing bully mutton tins from a box in which any number of wrappers had come off the tins. He was merrily picking up any wrapper of *halal* or *jhatka* and issuing it with any tin as Hindu and Moslem rations. And the best part was that the Indian soldiers were accepting all this and perhaps enjoying the 'fun' of any wrapper with any tin. There was absolutely no difference in contents or taste in any case, which I know from personal verification.

The 'dog' biscuits were very good nutritionally but were really hard and provided an excellent exercise for our jaws. Before tinned bully mutton came to be issued, I remember living on just dog biscuits, cheese and tea for almost two months. Of course, the cheese issued to us then was the excellent Kraft cheese from Australia. Later we were issued egg powder and then started getting American K rations which came in three sealed cartons — one each for breakfast, lunch and supper. They were particularly popular with some of us for the chocolate bars in one of them. Later we got self-heating tins of excellent soups and cocoa.

Learning to be good officers and commanders was not a skill one acquired from books. I recall an episode regarding a report written by me on one of my juniors. The report had obviously gone up to my Brigade Commander. He sent for me one day and said, "My son, when you want to say a chap is good, say he is very very good; but, when you want to say a chap is bad, don't say he is bad, say he is not so good." I remembered this advice throughout the later 32 years of my service and acted on it diligently.

1. Way of slaughtering an animal in one stroke.

Major Som Nath Sharma and I were often involved in escapades together. He was the Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General (a big designation DAA & QMG, normally referred to as DQ) in our brigade HQ when we were in Kuala Lipis in Malaya. His father, Maj Gen (then a Colonel) A.N. Sharma had earlier been the Assistant Director of Medical Services (ADMS) of our Division before we moved into Burma. He had been posted out to a peace station because of his prolonged field service earlier. Now he was on his way back to active duty in Java (Indonesia) from his last station in Karachi (Pakistan). One late evening we got a message that his plane would be refuelling at Kuala Lumpur in the early hours of the following morning.

Som and I got permission from our Brigade Commander and we drove through the night from Kuala Lipis to Kuala Lumpur. As usual I was at the wheel. We arrived about four o'clock in the morning, just before Som's father left, for less than half an hour's meeting — quite crazy. But it was worth it, particularly to get news first hand of all at home. We drove straight back thereafter.

A villa had been allotted for residence in Kuala Lipis for five Indian officers of the HQ — Maj Som, Capt Dildar Singh (who left the Army as a major), Capt Quereshi (who went to Pakistan and was killed in Kashmir fighting against the Indian Army), my second in command, Lt Ajit Singh and myself. Quereshi was affectionately called 'Tubby' because of his huge girth. One of the popular punishments whenever the youngest of our group, 'Bubby' Ajit, was guilty of some youthful misdemeanour (which was quite often), was to make Quereshi sit on Ajit.

We were all genuinely sad when we came to know of Tubby's death in Jhangar sector in Kashmir in 1948. This was also the place where Brigadier Mohd Usman, one of the veterans of our Burma 25 Division, was killed. Brig Usman had commanded the 14/10 Baluch Battalion in our Division in Burma. Actually he was earlier the second in command of the 16/10 Baluch (then under Lt Col L.P. Sen) and was officiating as the commanding officer when Sepoy Bhandari Ram won the first Victoria Cross of our Division.

A memorable order of an Allied Commander of the Australian



With the Sharmas. Standing: author with eldest daughter, Uma; Dr Kamla; V.N. Sharma, later COAS; Kumudini (sister-in-law), S.N. Sharma, later Engineer-in-Chief. Seated: Manorama (sister-in-law); Lilavati (mother-in-law); Swami Seva Das, Maj Gen (Dr.) A.N. Sharma (father-in-law)

Expeditionary Force in New Britain to the Japanese after the surrender, is worth recalling. It read, "It is the fortunes of war that one side wins and the other side loses, yet we do not cease to be honourable foes. Your treatment of our PoWs has been anything but honourable; therefore, we refuse to treat you as honourable foes. Hereafter, all your ranks will salute all our ranks and we shall show our contempt by not returning a soldier's salute."

A communication sent by the Japanese General to the Allied Commander in Burma after the surrender deserves to be quoted: "I beg to inform Your Excellency that I have this day passed the order to cease fire to all Japanese armies in Burma except for certain units. If Your Excellency would inform me of the whereabouts of the remainder of my forces, I will try to pass the order to them also."

Swami Seva Das (Sukhchain Nath Chopra) was a close and highly respected friend of my wife's family. He was in Malaya

during the Japanese invasion. He told us some stories about the occupation days. One which deserves quoting is about the Japanese army method, of what he referred to as their 'spiritual training.' He said this training was done in three stages. First, melting of the heart by telling stories of how the motherland was in danger, and giving examples of potential threats. Second, developing the urge to die; this came when the heart was melted and the man was then prepared for any sacrifice. Third, the urge to live: as a soldier of a superior race, love to do great things and greater service. Obviously a very effective method from the end products we had seen in Burma.

Incidentally, Swamiji who passed away a few years back, was the Principal of an English medium college in Malaya when the Japanese captured Malaya. He joined the INA along with others when they heard of the suppression of liberties, and of the atrocities committed in India by the British, following the 'Quit India' movement of August 1942. He became the Commandant of



Author with wife Dr. Kamla and her parents, Maj Gen (Dr.) A.N. Sharma, first DMS of Independent India and his wife Lilavati



Tewari family. Standing: K.S. Tewari (eldest brother), D.D. Vasudeva (brother-in-law); author.

Seated: K.K. Tewari (brother); Krishna Vasudeva (sister); Dr. C.D. Tewari (father), Devaki (mother); M.K. Tewari (brother).

On the ground, A.K. Tiwari (brother)

the INA Staff College. Swamiji with three or four others landed in India in a Japanese submarine for fight against the British rule. On landing, they found that conditions were not as bad as they had been made to believe and Swamiji decided to renounce life and became a sadhu.

He was betrayed by someone and arrested by the British. After he had been questioned under torture, he was sentenced to be hanged following a secret trial in the infamous Lahore jail. He refused to divulge his family's address. No one in his family even knew that he was in India. However, a chance information through one of the jailors reached Kamla's father, then Colonel (later Major General) A.N. Sharma, to whom he was very close. General Sharma moved heaven and earth and got his hanging stayed through the British Governor of Punjab. Later, when the interim Indian government under Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru took office in 1946, Swamiji was released from the condemned cell where he had been lodged for many months. A great soul indeed and I consider myself very lucky to have known him and to have been very close to him. We used to have long discussions on world affairs, military and spiritual subjects and it was so enriching to hear his views on any of these subjects.

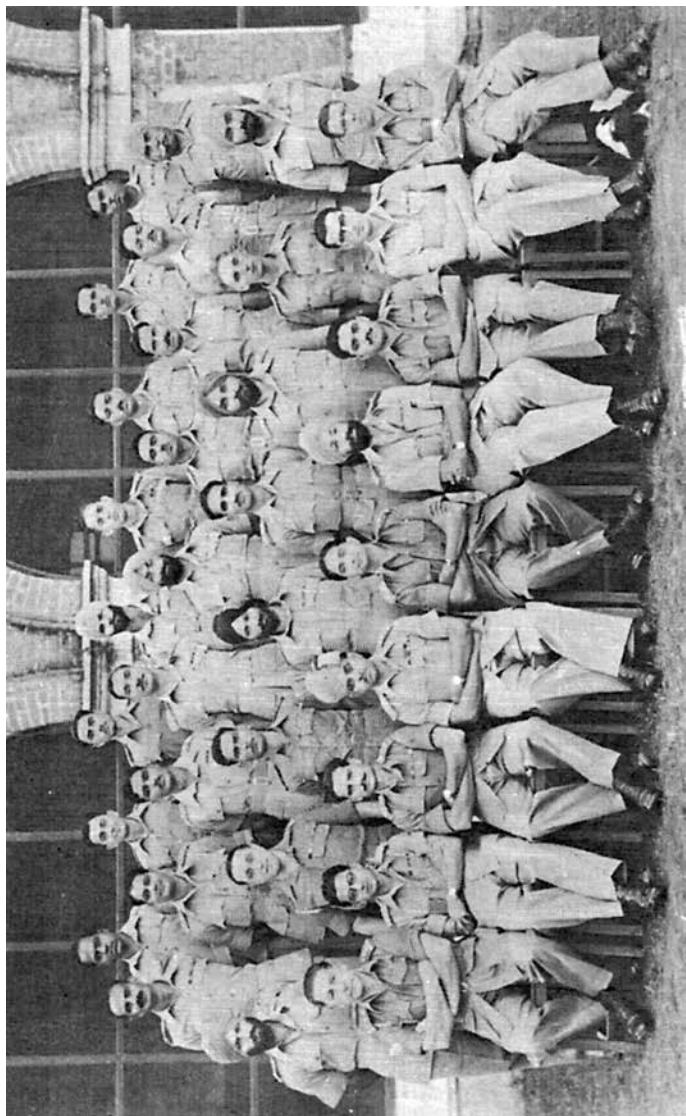
For Operation Zipper, we were given a number of special items — water bottles with false bottoms, special metal buttons for shirts and trousers, special cloth maps, American Pacific rations in metal containers (different from the earlier American K rations in cardboard cartons) and so on. The false bottom of the water bottle contained a number of items such as a small silk piece of cloth (with an appeal written in many languages to say that the holder was an allied soldier, and if he was helped, suitable rewards would be given at the end of the war), special concentrated food tablets, (which one had to chew really hard for one tablet to give adequate nourishment for 24 hours), water sterilising tablets, a silk cloth map of Malaya, a small compass, a morphine injection, bandages etc. The buttons were in pairs and one could be balanced on the other to become a compass, the small white point on the top one denoting the North.

First Posting to a Peace Station

On return to India from active service in Malaya, our Division moved to Ranchi for disbandment. All of us got posting orders to proceed to our new stations in different parts of India while a majority of the British officers got repatriated to England for release. A permanent regular commission had been granted to me as a result of the interview at Bangalore just before we set sail for Malaya. I was posted as the Adjutant, No.2 Signal Training Battalion in the Signal Training Centre at Jubbulpore in Central India.

There had been a so-called ‘mutiny’ in early 1946 at this Centre and almost all the key British officers of this particular battalion had been replaced by selected Indian officers. The newly appointed CO was Lt Col Tarun Mukerji (retired prematurely as a Colonel to join one of the Tata’s concerns). He was the first and the only Indian officer to command a divisional signals in World War II in Burma. He was also an instructor at the STC (B) in Mhow when I was commissioned and was later an instructor at the Defence Services Staff College at Wellington when I did the course in 1952-53. There were a number of other Indian officers, some of whom went to Pakistan later, who joined the unit about the same time as me. I was there for less than a year but it was a rewarding tenure and I learnt a lot.

As part of my normal duties as Adjutant, I had to regularly visit the so-called ‘mutineers’ from our unit, who were held as prisoners in the Quarter Guard of an Infantry unit on the Jubbulpore ridge. They would speak to me often in a most spirited way about the unfair treatment meted out to them by the British officers and NCOs in that peace area of which I had had no taste till then. They were a determined and a mixed lot of Hindus, Sikhs and Moslems whose fiery spirit for India’s independence had not dimmed one bit in spite of their arrests. They knew that they were going to be



Officers and VCOs – No. 2 Signal Training Battalion in Jabalpur after the so-called 'mutiny'
Seated from Left to Right: Capt Snow, Capt B.J. Shahaney, Capt T. Barreto, Sub Maj Sardar Khan, Lt Col T.K. Mukerji, Maj Jaswant Singh, Author, Capt Boyd, Capt Minchinton.

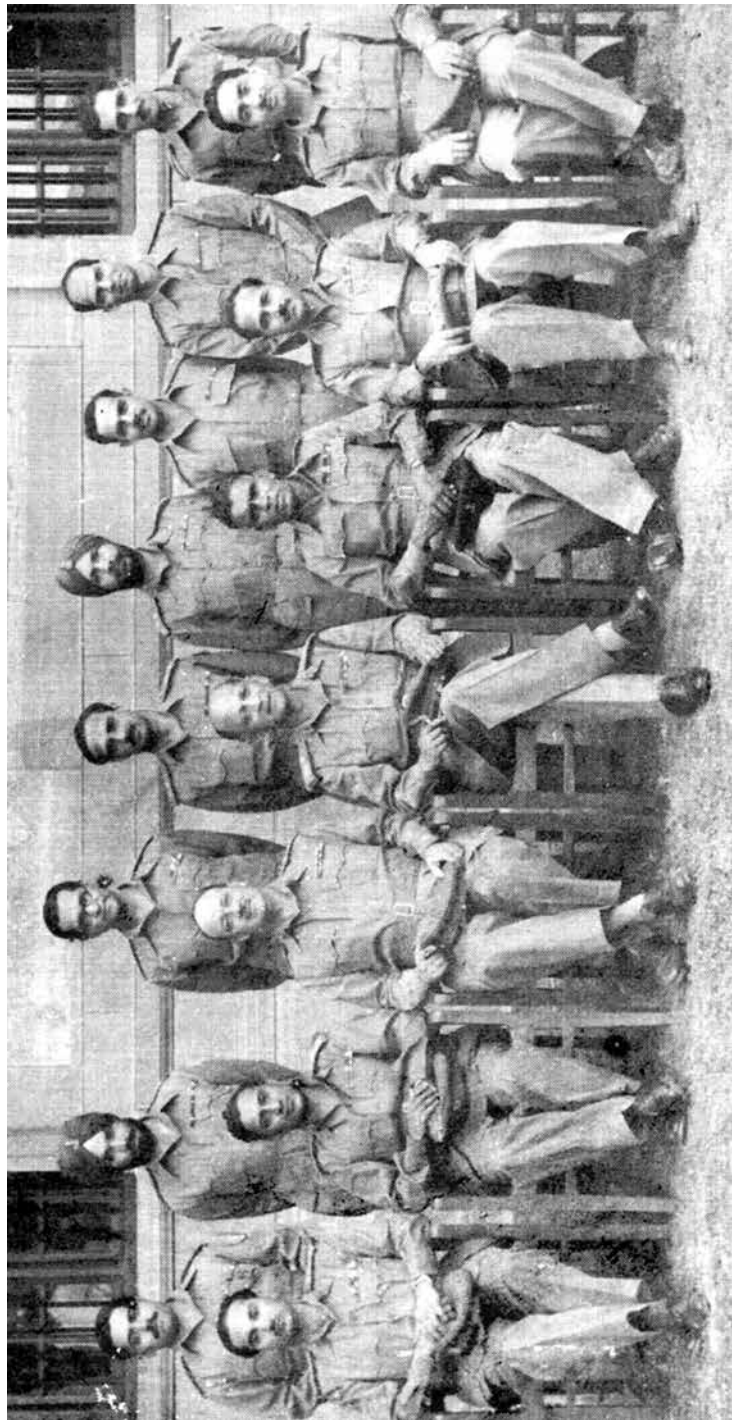
court martialled and that the punishment for their offence could be death. I would admire their spirit and the courage of their convictions inwardly. Having been on active duty for all four years of my service till then, I had been completely out of touch with the conditions in India and did not realise the depth of feelings in peace locations among the rank and file, who were in daily touch with the civilian public.

There had been one other 'mutiny' among the naval personnel in Bombay. I do not know what ultimately happened to these so-called mutineers but I do believe that almost all of them were released later that year when the Interim Indian Government under Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru took over in late 1946.

To serve under a CO of Col Mukerji's calibre was by itself a great privilege. One of the most important things he did was to restore the *Izzat* (sense of pride) and confidence among the rank and file in the unit. This was important because fingers were being pointed at the unit for the so-called mutiny. The pride of place in any unit is the Quarter Guard where all the weapons and ammunition are stored. After the 'mutiny', the Quarter Guard of this unit had been handed over to another non-signal unit. Col Mukerji, in spite of the warnings from the Sub Area and Area Commanders of the risks involved, insisted that his unit Quarter Guard must be manned by the jawans of his own unit. This was granted most reluctantly by the higher authorities. And overnight, the morale of us all and faith in the CO and love for him was built on an unshakeable foundation.

Working hard with a single-minded purpose earned me a remark in my annual confidential report, for the first time, but which later on in my service was to be repeated by one or two other reporting officers: 'He is married to his work'. Besides the CO, our unit Subedar Major Sardar Khan was particularly popular. He later went to Pakistan. One developed a deep regard for his maturity, firmness, tact and the respect that he commanded from all ranks. My own reputation as the Adjutant was one of a strict disciplinarian and a no-nonsense man.

One or two special things done as the Adjutant (with my CO, Col Mukerji's backing, of course) were not to the liking of the



First Signals Committee after Independence

Seated from L. to R.:

Brig B.S. Bhagat, Brig A.C.
Iyappa, Brig CHI. Akhurst,
Gen K.M. Cariappa, Sub Maj
Swamy, Brig B.D. Kapur, Brig
R.N. Batra.

Standing from L to R:

Author, Maj K.S. Garewal, Lt
Col 'Bimbo' Bhatia, Lt Col Pran
Luthra, Col Apar Singh, Maj
S.K. Batra, Maj J.V. Pinto, Capt
P.C. Naidu (ADC).

British Commandant of the Signal Training Centre and his staff. Although nothing was done to reverse the actions taken by us, the resentment was conveyed to us anyhow. This was discovered at the time of the final interview with the Commandant just before my departure on posting to the GHQ at Delhi, when he pointed out the need to be more tactful in changing established ways of working.

The 'established ways' he referred to were the humiliating colonial customs that obviously caused resentment among the Indian soldiers. For instance, it was discovered that the Indian jawans were being made to clean the weapons of the British other ranks as a normal routine. This had been stopped. The jawans were also being used to provide fatigue parties to handle the drawal and carriage of rations for British Sergeants' and other ranks' messes. This had also been stopped. It was apparent that these were some of the things going on in the Signal Training Centre which had provoked the jawans to 'mutiny.'

In early 1947, I was posted to Delhi as a Staff Captain in the Adjutant General's Branch (Organisation Directorate - Org 11) of GHQ. Just before independence, this GHQ became the Supreme HQ, under Field Marshal Auckinleck and I became a part of it. Org 11 dealt with the postings of Signal officers as well as all personnel matters concerning Signals. It was my privilege to sit in that chair to 'divide' and 'distribute', the files and all personnel records between the Indian Signal Corps and the new Pakistan Signal Corps.

Later I was appointed a General Staff Officer Grade 2 (GSO 2), as a major in the Signals Directorate at Army HQ of free India. I also became the first Secretary of the Indian Signal Corps Committee after independence. Signals were the first Corps/Regiment in the Indian Army after independence to appoint an Indian Colonel Commandant to replace the British incumbent. We chose (and fortunately for us he accepted) the senior-most serving Indian officer, then Lt Gen K.M. Cariappa and who later took over as the first Indian Commander in Chief¹. He replaced the British

1. As this book was going for its first print, he passed away after he had been made a Field Marshal

Colonel Commandant of the undivided Signal Corps, Gen Sir Douglas Gracey, who had gone to Pakistan as their Commander in Chief.

It is worth mentioning a follow up of Field Marshal Cariappa's appointment as our Colonel Commandant. Upto the time of independence, all officers in Gorkha battalions were British. As a part of the Indianisation scheme, Indian officers were asked to volunteer for transfer to the Gorkhas to replace the British. I had also applied for transfer and the file had gone up to the Colonel Commandant of Signals, who happened also to be the Chief then, for his final orders. The file came back to my office with the remarks of the Chief in red ink to the effect, "My Corps (Signals) is very short of officers. Major Tewari cannot be spared for transfer to Gorkhas." That was the end of my ambition to transfer to Infantry. My earlier attempt at the OTS in 1942 to join the Infantry had been foiled due to my being 'very good at flag signalling' as already recounted.

The motto of the Indian Signal Corps upto the end of the war was the same as that of the Royal Corps of Signals, namely, *Certa Cito* (Latin for 'swift and sure'). Soon after the war ended, as a part of the Indianisation scheme, this motto was changed to a Hindustani version — *Tez-O-Sahih* meaning Swift and Correct. However, immediately after partition, the two Signal Corps in both India and Pakistan, perhaps simultaneously, thought that they could not have the same motto. So, while we in India changed to a Sanskrit motto by adopting *Teevra Chaukas*, meaning Swift, Sure and Secure, Pakistan changed to *Tez-O-Yaqini*, meaning Swift and Sure as in the Latin motto.

I had a lot to do in the choice of our new motto as the Secretary of the Corps Committee. A number of trips had to be made by me to the Parliament House in Delhi to consult the experts in Hindi and Sanskrit. We in India made our motto more comprehensive by incorporating the Ciphers and Security aspect of Signals work also.

An amusing episode comes to mind from those days when personnel records were being divided for the two Corps. There were three senior Moslem Signal officers who were going to

Pakistan, all majors at the time. Each one perhaps thought that he was most likely to become the Pakistan Army's Signal Officer in Chief. They came to me one by one. They were all old friends. Confidentially, each one asked me for details of personnel assets available for Pakistan Signals.

Each of them was asked in an innocent way about the purpose even though one could guess the reason. Each one considered himself to be the most qualified and was confident of being selected for the top post and did not wish to be caught unprepared. Needless to say, all three were obliged equally. Only one of them became the Signal Officer in Chief of the Pakistan Army but after waiting for a few years. He was not the senior-most but he certainly was the best of the three in my opinion.

Even as a major in those days, one shouldered heavy responsibilities with a great deal of confidence and trust. This confidence was the result of having participated in active operations and having worked with the British officers. Signals Directorate in those days had only one Brigadier at the head. He had a dual designation of the Director of Signals and the Signal Officer in Chief. He was a very fine British officer — Brig C.H.I. Akehurst. In addition, there was one Colonel as the Deputy Director, one Lt Col as GSO Grade 1, five majors as GSOs 2 and four Captains as GSOs 3. A comparison of these numbers with the present strength is quite revealing. Of course, the size of our Army and its responsibilities have expanded considerably. But even making allowance for the above, it is my feeling that there has been too much dilution of ranks. The result is a lack of opportunities for at least the majors and lieutenant colonels to be able to develop and display initiative and enthusiasm to bear responsibilities at their levels.

Talking of initiatives, on 15 August 1947, in spite of a lack of enthusiasm and support from some other senior Indian officers, a few of us, all of majors ranks, decided to hoist the Indian Tricolour over the Queen Victoria Road Officers Mess where we were staying. This building between the present Shastri Bhavan and the National Archives has since been demolished. We ignored the 'frowns' from a few British officers in the mess and had five young



**Girls singing the National song at the flag hoisting of Tricolour
in the Officers Mess on 15 August 1947
Dr. Kamla third from left**

girl friends of my wife, Kamla then studying in the Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi, come over and sing the national song with a great deal of gusto, after hoisting the flag.

Soon after Independence, a major event took place in India which could not have been foreseen by our leaders. Not the large scale migration and exchange of population with all the consequent misery and atrocities of unimaginable nature but the so-called tribal invasion of Jammu and Kashmir (J & K) with the connivance and covert backing of the regular Pakistani Army. The J & K question is still festering relations between India and Pakistan even almost half a century after of that event in September 1947, and it was to affect my personal life in a particular way.

Maj Som Nath Sharma was one of first few casualties of the 15 month war in J & K between October 1947 until the cease-fire arranged by the United Nations Security Council on 1st January 1949. He was my closest friend and though a few months senior to me in service, he and I had been on active service together in Burma and Malaya until our return to India. We were posted to separate

peace stations for a few months after our return to India from Malaya. During the riots preceding partition and independence on 15 August 1947, Som's battalion was moved to Delhi where I was already posted. He had a pretty hectic schedule on internal security duties and in a short period of time had already endeared himself to many among civilian public because of his deeply humane and affectionate personality.

His younger sister, Kamla was at that time studying medicine in Lady Hardinge Medical College. Whenever he was free in the evenings, we would both visit her in her hostel. Their father, then a Major General in the Indian Medical Services was posted at Rawalpindi and was transferred to Ranchi after partition, as the Deputy Director of Medical Services in Eastern Command.

Som had broken his left arm in sports and was in plaster from the wrist upto and including the elbow. That did not prevent him from all the normal internal security duties in aid to civil power in command of his company in Delhi. But then this overwhelming calamity overtook the sub-continent. The sudden so-called tribal invasion of J & K, planned and organised by Pakistan, had caught India and the Indian Army by surprise. Both the Indian and Pakistani armies were still headed by the British Commanders in Chief. While the Indian Army had Gen Sir Roy Bucher, the Pakistani Army had Gen Sir Douglas Gracey as already mentioned. It would be difficult to venture a guess as to their roles in the attack on J & K. Of course, in India the Governor General, Lord Louis Mountbatten was also British, while in Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah became the Governor General.

The so-called tribals had advanced fast and their plan was obviously to occupy Srinagar and its airfield and thus secure the Kashmir Valley with its predominantly Moslem population before India could react. But looting on the way and the 'rape' of Baramula held them up and gave India just the margin of time it needed to fly troops into the valley at its one and only airfield. To get there by road over the Pir Panjal range through the Banihal Pass would have taken a minimum of four to five days.

The only transport planes then available with the Indian Air Force were the wartime Dakotas with a very limited carrying

capacity. Speed was of essence to India's plans once the invasion became known, and the Maharaja of J and K acceded to India and asked for help. Consequently, the nearest available troops were flown in. Som's battalion handling internal security duties in Delhi was ordered to move almost overnight to defend the Srinagar airfield. Normally a person with one arm incapacitated due to plaster, would be unfit for operational duties, but Som insisted that he must move with his company.

He spent his last night in Delhi with me in the Queen Victoria Road bachelor Officers' Mess before emplaning early the next morning. We went on chatting late into the night. He remarked that he was going to war again but alone this time (meaning without me). I told him not to worry, I would also join him soon. He said he would like to take a memento from me with him. All my possessions were in that room and I told him he could take just what he liked. He immediately opened my cupboard and took out my automatic pistol, a German Luger. I was sensitive about this pistol and told him he could take anything else but not the Luger. Som insisted and reminded me to honour my word. I had to give in but under protest. I did not go to see him off at Safdarjang (then called Willingdon) airport the next morning.

There was a reason for my not wanting to let Som take this pistol. When the Japanese surrender took place in Kuala Lumpur in September 1945, we were unofficially given some personal weapons by the Japanese officers in addition to their Samurai swords, which were officially allotted one each to all the officers. When we returned to India from Malaya, the British Military Police came aboard at Calcutta dockyards to check for contraband. Som would never willingly tell a lie and he had immediately thrown his unauthorised pistol into the sea through a porthole.

I would have also done it but another Indian officer with us in the cabin stopped me just in time and told me to let him handle the matter. True to his confident manner, he was very tactful and clever. Posing to be a veteran of many wars, he told the military police of various battles in which we had taken part and collected mementos and trophies which were all there in boxes for them to see — like Samurai swords (for which he flashed the written

authority), a couple of pistols, Japanese rifle bayonets, American K ration chocolates which we had collected from so many cartons and the like. The result was that the policemen saluted us and left without even a cursory look.

I told Som that he had unnecessarily panicked that day on the ship when he threw away his pistol, and now he could not take mine. But he had his way. It is my conviction that he had some sort of a premonition that he would not survive. The memento was meant to be a source of strength to him. This sense of premonition was confirmed by others members of his family based on the odd remarks he had made just before he flew to Kashmir.

I got the worst shock of my life when only a few days after Som's departure from Delhi, I received a call on the morning of 5 November 1947 in the office personally by the Military Secretary at Army HQ and was given the news of Som's death in action. I was directed to break the news to his parents in Ranchi and to his other relatives including his sister Kamla at the Medical College in Delhi. It was a tragic and difficult assignment and I still remember the words of Som's father over the telephone when he said that his back was broken.

I decided, with my boss's permission, to fly to Srinagar the next morning to find out more details of Som's death and to recover his body. It speaks for the status and confidence one enjoyed as a major in those days that I managed to fly by the first flight on 6 November in spite of the mad rush of additional troops being flown into the Kashmir Valley.

The Brigade fighting in the valley at the time was commanded by Brig (later Lt Gen) L.P. Sen, who had been with us in Burma as one of the battalion commanders in the famous All Indian Brigade mentioned earlier. Som's body had not yet been recovered. Even though his troops had saved the airfield from being captured, it was at the cost of his life and that of the bulk of his Company. The position had been overrun when the remnants of the Company ran out of ammunition and had to withdraw.

I went to meet the few surviving jawans of Som's company and they all cried before me. Som and I were regarded as brothers by both his jawans and mine, who had been with us in Burma and

Malaya. There was also a resemblance in our looks as many would tell us. In fact, even today there is a picture of Som in my room and many Aurovilians, both Indian and foreigners often ask if that was me in my younger days.

When I questioned his men as to how they could come back without Som's body, they all volunteered to go with me on a fighting patrol to recover the body. The Brigade Commander's permission had to be obtained for this but he vetoed it categorically. Of course, he knew the operational situation and I was only being emotional. In the face of my insistence, he threatened to put me under arrest and ordered me to return to Delhi by the next flight. There was no choice but to obey.

It was three days later that Som's body was recovered. I had to receive a box of ashes afterwards at the Safdarjang airport. The cremation had been done on the spot itself, we were told, because his body was mutilated beyond recognition. It was identified by the pages of the Bhagwat Gita which Som always carried in his breast pocket. The empty leather holster of my pistol was also found on his body.

During our chit-chat the night before he flew to Kashmir, Som had made me promise that I would reinforce our close friendship by marrying his younger sister. I gave him the promise because Kamla and I had already got to know each other well after my posting to Delhi. We had more or less resolved to get married, with only one condition, imposed by Kamla, that she must graduate before our marriage. We actually got married on 24 November 1950, soon after she became a doctor.

Mention has been made of the resemblance between Som and me. Soon after our marriage, Kamla and I went to her old Medical College to distribute sweets to the staff she knew there. There was a Gorkha watchman in the girls' hostel who would see Som and me (and later me alone) coming to meet Kamla and would call her at once. When we presented him a box of sweets, he asked in his typical Gorkha simplicity as to what was the occasion. When we said that we had got married, he looked horrified and blurted out in Hindi, "What! Marriage of brother and sister?" He was genuinely under the impression that I was her brother. That accounts for

why he would immediately call Kamla whenever I went to see her alone, even after Som's death. He was quite a difficult character in other cases.

There were other incidents, some pleasant, others not so, that marked my tenure in Delhi. After the disbandment of our 25 Division of World War II, a 25 Division Reunion Dinner Club was set up so that we old veterans could meet periodically. We had a large membership of senior Indian officers: to name a few — General K.S. Thimayya, Lt Gen S.P.P. Thorat, Lt Gen L.P. Sen, Lt Gen Sant Singh, Lt Gen D. Prem Chand, Lt Gen N.C. Rawley, Lt Gen M.S. Dhillon, Maj Gen P.C. Gupta and many others. The Commander of the famous All Indian Brigade in Burma, Lt Gen R.A. Hutton, had been allotted to the Pakistan Army after partition, even though he was most reluctant to say goodbye to Gorkhas and go to Pakistan.

I was appointed as the Secretary of this Dinner Club and we had our first Reunion Dinner in early 1947. When we decided to have our second get-together in 1948, I rang up the General HQ in Pakistan to speak to Lt Gen Hutton personally to invite him. He was then Chief of the General Staff of the Pakistan Army. I was not aware that my call was being tape-recorded by our Intelligence agencies. They must have been disturbed by the very friendly, warm and intimate nature of my conversation with my old Commander, who addressed me by my family nickname too.

It came as a rude shock when one day my boss told me to go and see the Director of Military Intelligence in Army HQ, then Brig (later Lt Gen) Chand Narain Das. I had some difficulty in explaining my conduct of 'flirting with the enemy', when our recorded conversation was played back to me.

Like all young men, my great ambition was to possess a powerful and fast motorcycle. I bought one second-hand from a Police Sergeant of the Delhi Police. It was a 7.9 HP Harley Davidson with a windscreen and other fittings. We had these American Harley Davidson and Red Indian motorcycles authorised in Brigade HQ while we were training for war in South India in 1942/43 and I had ridden them before just for the thrill of their speed and power. Traffic on Delhi roads in early 1947 was a small fraction of what

it is today.

One day, a friend of Kamla, asked me for a ride on the bike to have the thrill of speed. With her on the pillion, we drove on almost full throttle from Rashtrapati Bhavan side towards the India Gate and we must have touched 90 miles per hour. On slowing down to look at her to see if she was frightened it was clear that she was made of sterner stuff. She taunted me asking if that was the maximum speed one could do. This taunt was too much and I drove straight to my room at the Officers' Mess on the Queen Victoria Road (next to the National Archives on the Janpath) and with the help of my Punjabi Musalman orderly, the wind screen and pannier bags were removed.

Then we went for another run. This time we must have touched 95 miles per hour. On my slowing down near the India Gate, she said that there was a police motorcycle following us. So, without delay I speeded up again, went up Curzon road (now called Kasturba Gandhi road), to Connaught Place, from the outer to the inner circles, parked the bike below Wenger's Restaurant and both of us ran upstairs and sat down calmly to have tea.

When we came down later (I was in uniform as a Major), there was the Police Sergeant standing next to my bike with his 10 HP Red Indian motorcycle. He saluted me and asked me if it was my bike there. I said, "Yes! Anything wrong, Sergeant?" He said, "Anything WRONG, Sir? I touched over 100 mph and could not catch up with you. You know the speed limits in Delhi?" So, spontaneously I said, "Sergeant, why don't you have a Harley Davidson motorcycle instead of a Red Indian?" He was perhaps proud and touchy about his bike and said, "Do you think Harley Davidson is a better bike?" I said, "Of course, you yourself have admitted that you could not catch up with me." He said, "Would you like to have a race, Sir?" The challenge was promptly accepted.

So, on the following Sunday morning we met at Shahdara Petrol pump on Meerut road. Both of us had brought 'seconds' to flag us off; I had Maj¹ Mayadas and he had brought another Sergeant. Needless to say he won and we shook hands warmly while the

1. Now retired as a Maj Gen

superiority of the Red Indian was gracefully acknowledged. The 'chalan' for speeding was forgotten in the process.

One day, the Commandant of Army HQ Signals, Col 'Bimbo' Bhatia came to my office in Signals Directorate and with his typical sense of humour urged me to get up quickly saying, "Come on KK, let's have a photograph taken; you on your bike with you hardly visible and me on my bike with the bike hardly visible." He had brought a paratrooper motorcycle from some- where which can be carried folded under one's armpit.

After dinner at one of my friend's place in Pataudi House one night, where Kamla and some of her friends had also been invited, we found that we could not get a taxi or a *tonga* to reach the girls back to their college hostel. So very gallantly I invited all four of them to ride with me on my bike which they did. A policeman in Connaught Place saw this 'apparition' with me and four girls on one bike and would have challenged us but was perhaps so shocked that he could not even blow his whistle to stop us.

In early August 1947, a farewell party was given by the Indian Army officers to brother officers going away to Pakistan held at the central banquet hall of the Delhi Gymkhana Club. Lord and Lady Louis Mountbatten were the chief guests. The British national anthem, 'God Save the King' was played by a military band as Their Excellencies came in with their daughter Pamela while everyone stood to attention. In the crowded hall, as they walked in, people kept parting to make way and, lo and behold, Lord Louis walked straight upto where I was and with his characteristic warm and captivating smile, extended his hand to me and said, "Oh, hullo, old boy. So nice to meet you again. Now, where did we last meet?" Luckily I did not fumble and said, "It was in Akyab, Sir." So he said (you could see the eyes of all the other officers around me opening wider and wider), "Oh yes, of course. How have you been?"

The whole truth dawned on me only later. He had seen the ribbons on my chest with the oak leaf of 'Mention in Despatches' and the Burma medal and hence the warmth of greeting. Of course he charmed all of us in the process. I had never been closer than 25 yards to him before, when he addressed us in Akyab. But I learnt

a great lesson which I have never forgotten, in service or even after retirement. This was to look at the ribbons on the chest of a soldier, firstly to see whether he was wearing them correctly and then to confirm from the particular battle ribbons worn by him if he had been where I had myself been and then to talk about that. This kind of talk never fails to touch a soldier's heart.

Posting to Jammu and Kashmir

After a very eventful and enriching tenure in Delhi, I was posted to Jammu and Kashmir and had the unique experience of raising a signal unit in the field at Rajauri — what is presently the Divisional Signal Regiment there. It was raised initially as V Signal Company and was an entirely new kind of experience as compared to the Burma war days. Here one was constantly faced with shortages of both men and materials. Along with the challenging responsibilities, there were also some amusing experiences with the eccentric personalities of certain senior commanders.

Sitting in the Officers' Mess in Rajauri one night, the GOC asked me to get him a call to Delhi. From Rajauri, we had to ring Jammu Military Exchange to get a connection to Delhi. The line to Delhi was found to be engaged. After a few minutes, the General asked me again for his call. When told that the line was already engaged, he told me to make his call FLASH. Now, FLASH is the highest priority in the Army, reserved for calls of real national emergency. On rechecking with Jammu, it was found that the line was already engaged by their GOC for a FLASH call. When so informed, my GOC without batting an eyelid, ordered me to make his call MOST FLASH. He was still thinking of the old priorities used by the army during the world war when the highest priority used to be MOST IMMEDIATE. One could not, of course, tell the boss in front of everyone in the mess that there was no such priority as MOST FLASH. As a Signal officer one had to face up to such situations and yet keep the boss happy.

My opposite number in Engineers, Lt Col Khetarpal, had a similar experience with the same GOC. He was ordered to produce a wooden horse for his polo practice. I was with the GOC one day, going through the radio telephony procedure with him in preparation for a conference he had to attend in Deolai, when the Commander Engineers came and announced that the wooden polo

pony was ready. So, all three of us walked up to the place to see it.

The carpenters of the Engineer unit had done a beautiful job, as one could see even from a distance.

But suddenly, when we were still about 10 yards away, the GOC stopped and shouted, "What monstrosity is that? I asked for a polo bloody pony!!" Both the Commander Engineers and I were shocked and could not understand the cause of that outburst. But the boss continued, "Have you ever seen a bloody pony without a ruddy tail?" This indeed was true, and he turned away and went back. And so that very day, a couple of hair must have been plucked from the tails of all the horses and mules in both the mountain artillery and animal transport regiments in Rajauri. Next morning the wooden pony for the GOC's polo practice had a nice fluffy tail.

After Rajauri, my next posting was to Jammu area to 2 Airborne Divisional Signal Regiment which was in the process of being reorganised as 26 Infantry Divisional Regiment. I had immediately volunteered for the paratroopers' course but my application was turned down. India had decided to retain only one brigade worth of para forces for which only one major as a signal officer would be required, and there were already a few majors para-qualified.

On leaving J and K, my next assignment was to command the Young Officers Basic Training Company at the School of Signals in Mhow. This company was meant to train officers coming straight from the IMA on commissioning for Signals. This was another enriching experience because, having seen the products of young officers coming after training in two units in J and K, one could contribute effectively to make their training more realistic. This also helped me in my later assignment when, after finishing my Defence Services Staff College course at Wellington, I was posted to the IMA at Dehradun as a Company Commander for the training of gentlemen cadets for commissioning as officers in the army.

That was indeed a prize posting. I was there for nearly three years. My tenure at the IMA was to help me in turn in my appointment, some years later in 1963, as a Lt Col, GSO 1 in the Military Training Directorate at Army HQ. In this post I was responsible for looking after all the officer training establishments

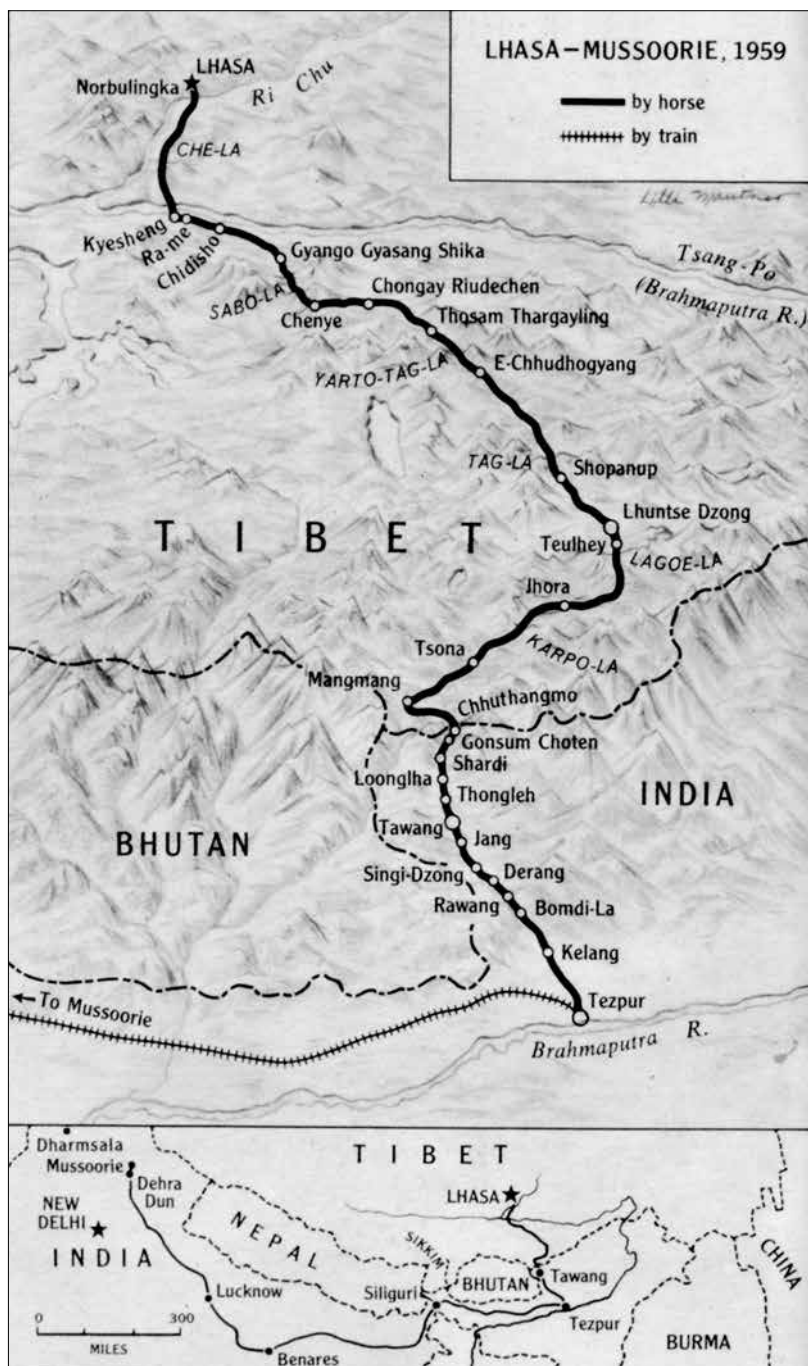
in the army like the IMA, Dehradun, the two OTSs at Poona and Madras, both started after the 1962 war with China, (The OTS at Poona was later closed down and the one at Madras is now renamed as the Officers Training Academy), National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla, Army Cadet College at Poona, the Rashtriya Indian Military College at Dehradun and the old King George's Royal Indian Military Schools for the sons of rank and file.

It is a strange coincidence that I was to hold a series of appointments for training of officers in the Army. I should mention my posting as a Company Commander at the IMA at Dehradun immediately after I had completed the Defence Services Staff College. This appointment had been one of the most rewarding in my whole career. It is gratifying to see that a number of my old company cadets are now three-star generals and one of them served as Chief of the Army Staff, while another was the Signal Officer in Chief.

An example often given to my junior officers, as also to the gentlemen cadets to illustrate the kind of officers they had to choose to become, is worth quoting. They would be told about two men who are given the job of building houses within specified limits of time and funds. One digs a deep trench, lays a good foundation and builds the house with great care. The other starts off on the surface without a foundation, finishes much quicker, spends more of the available time and money on painting and decorating. The latter beats the first one hollow in the eyes of the public and gets a lot of praise. But in a few years, problems arise with the second house which collapses in a heavy downpour while the first one weathers all the storms and stands firmly for scores of years.

It was entirely up to each one of them, they were told, to decide which of the two examples they wished to follow — to go in for praise alone, or to make a solid base for the service in the long run.

I remember one particular cadet of my company. He was very shy and timid. At the compulsory boxing for the novices, it was noticed that he would not face his opponent and box properly. So he was called out of the ring, given the usual pep talk and warned that if he did not box like a man, another trained boxer would be asked to bash him up properly. Something clicked in him and he



Route taken by the Dalai Lama during his escape to India in 1959

did box as well as he could and started doing better thereafter. A few years later, I heard with a sense of pride that he had done a remarkable job of fighting a fire in an ammunitions dump. For his sheer guts, bravery and leadership, he was given the coveted award of a Sena Medal.

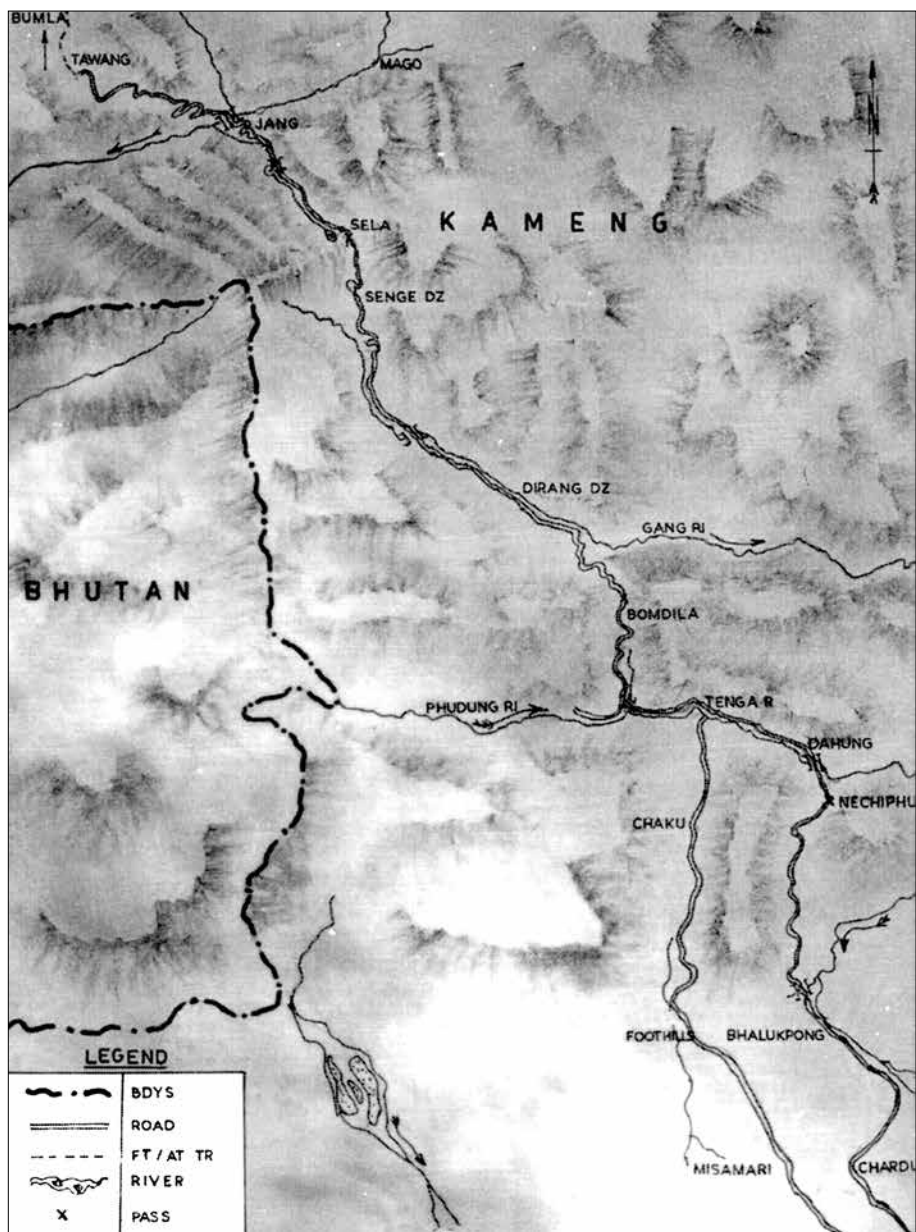
While posted at Mhow, I was operating the Amateur Radio one day (my 'handle' used to be VU2TK) when contact was established with another ham operator in England. When he found out that I was speaking from Mhow, he said that he had done his training for Signals in World War II in Mhow. When he learned that I was speaking from the same institution, he asked me if I knew of an Indian officer under whom he had served in the Burma war in 25 Divisional Signals. We exchanged our names. What a strange but very happy coincidence that we 'met' again on the ham radio after so many years! He was one of the Corporal mechanics in my section in Burma.

Chinese Attack on India – October 1962

Historical aspects of the Chinese betrayal of the Panchsheel 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 covered in this purely personal narrative. But a little background to the Chinese attack on India and my being taken a prisoner of war (PoW) 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 Lt Gen Kulwant 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 Frontier Division of the North East Frontier Agency (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 Chief of the Army Staff, General 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



Tezpur-Tawang Road in NEFA

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 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, 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, General 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 General Shrinagesh can imagine the look on his face when he heard that remark, but it certainly shows the calibre of man in General 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 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, 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 Quarter Master General (QMG) at Army HQ.

One of the responsibilities of the 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 an area with more than 1,800 kilometers of front in a highly



Lt Gen R.N. Batra, SO-in-C (centre) with Brig P.S. Gill, CSO, 4 Corps and author during an inspection in Tezpur in 1961



Author, Lt Gen R.N. Batra, SO-in-C and Maj Ram Singh, author's 2IC in Tezpur, c. 1961

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 offloaded 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 basha 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 (BRO) 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 Tawang 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 Tawang, a distance of almost 200 miles up and down the hills, as we developed the line of communications upto Tawang.

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 them 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



Author (centre) with officers of 4 Infantry Division Signal Regiment in Tezpur in 1961. Upper row: 2 Lt K.V. Ramdas, Maj Nasib Singh, Capt R.S. Trehan, Capt S.V.S. Chowdhary, Capt K.S. Man, Maj S.M.M. Jaffary, Center row: Capt Pinto, Maj Brij Lal, author, Capt A.S. Bawa, Capt Lakshman Singh Lower row: 2 Lt Mohan Lal, Maj S.S. Gupta, Lt V.K. Kapoor, 2 Lt Lal Singh, Lt G.L. Rajpal

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 of those days on the lighter side of life 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 Panchsheel¹ 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

1. The Five Principles

morale. In turn, these very qualities are fostered by the established customs and traditions.” The first point recorded was the Panchsheel 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, I 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 2 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 SCMs 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

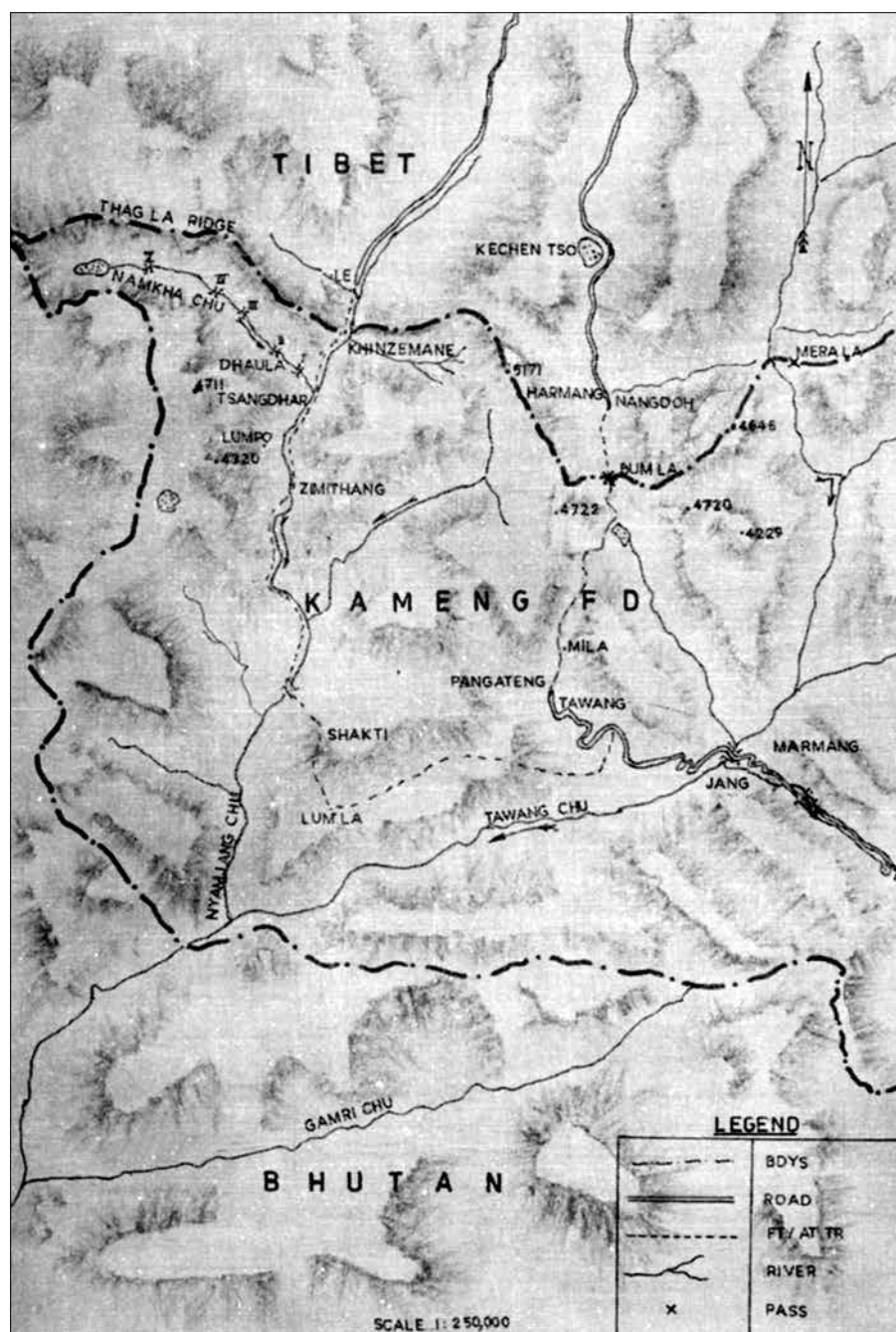
poem, complimenting my sense of justice and asking for a pardon. One felt sorry for him but discipline had to be maintained. Such punishments were ordered only after giving adequate chances to the person to mend his ways. We maintained a good record of discipline in the Signal Regiment inspite of all 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 McMahon 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 PoW.

I was to leave for Calcutta one day by the afternoon Indian



Sketch of Namkha Chu area

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 Gauhati¹ 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 examples 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

1. Now called Guwahati

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 Tawang and beyond.

HQ 7 Infantry Brigade was at Tawang. Its Commander, 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 Tawang 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 Tawang.

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. 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 link-up 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 no one 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 performed 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 and 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. I 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 in spite 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 Dirang 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 Tsangdhar 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 PoW 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

sub-unit 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) Lakshman 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 Tawang and at Lumpu. From Tawang 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 man 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



**Author and 2IC Maj Ram Singh with local girls,
somewhere near Dirang Dzong, c. 1962**

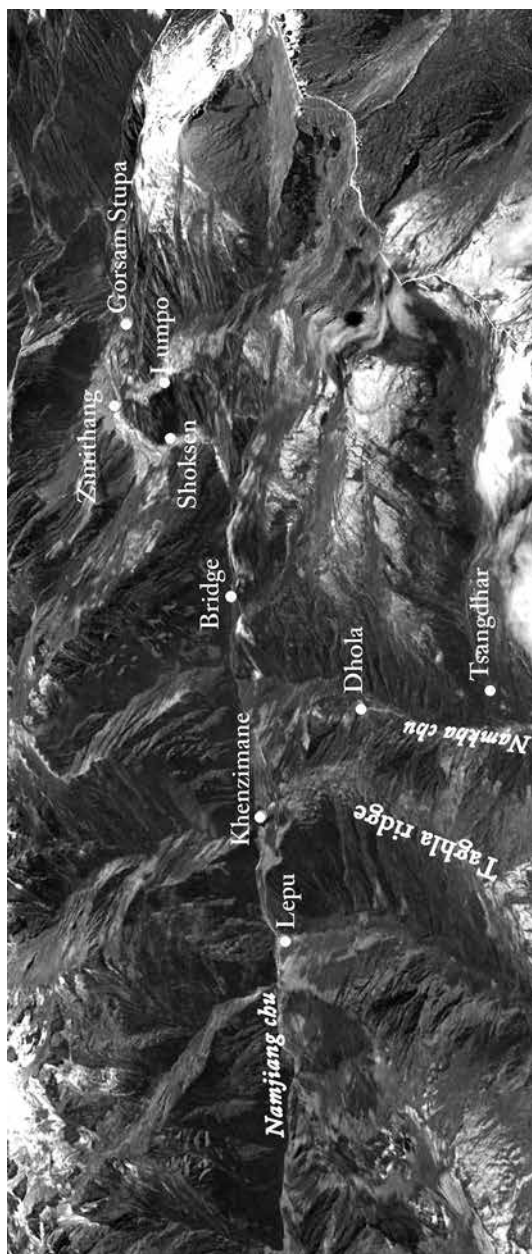
Gorkhas and the Rajputs and others on my march back. It was my intention also to meet my jawans of the radio detachments with these battalions and pat them on their backs for having done so well against tremendous odds.

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 that their attack was imminent on a massive scale. I was told to concentrate on my work and not to worry.

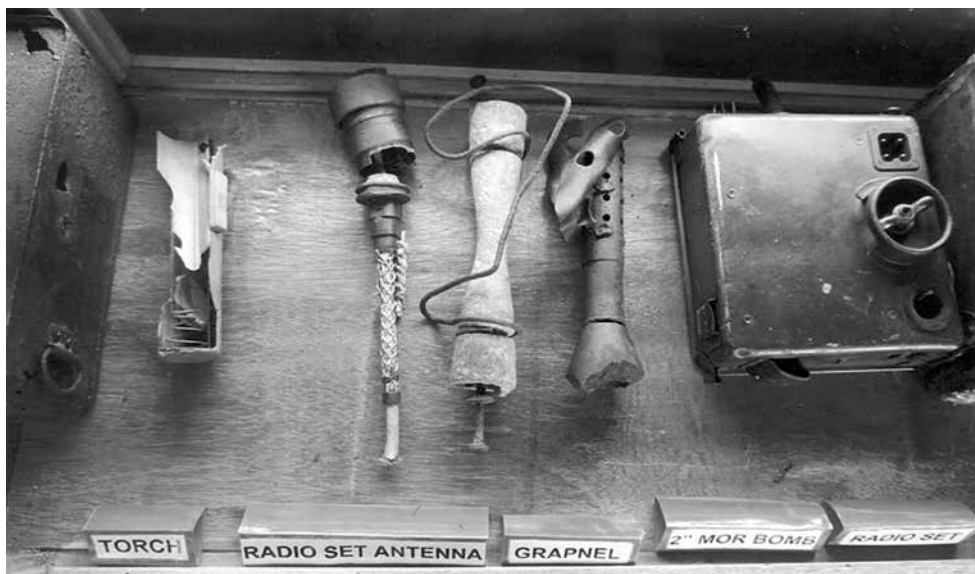
It is amazing how people in very responsible positions could give a totally false twist to an event. I am referring to the book *My Years with Nehru – The Chinese Betrayal* by B.N. Mullik who was the Director of Intelligence Bureau of India at that time. This very incident had perhaps been referred to 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



The Namkha Chu war theater

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 Zedong's *Red Book*, which I was to read later on in the PoW camp.



Unidentified Radio Set and Antenna exhibited at Lumpo War Memorial near Namkha Chu War Theater

As a Prisoner of War

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 pre-dawn darkness, shouting and yelling and running around in the midst of these exploding shells. Being a stranger there, I 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 in the dark 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 Singh 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 at their hips.

It was only then that the realization dawned 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 at such close range till then and my heart sank at this most unexpected situation. I quickly withdrew into the bunker, 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 my 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 on the head 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 on the head 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 I 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 in the open fitfully, 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,¹ B.N. Mullik was very critical of the Indian Army's leadership, especially of the earlier hierarchy under

1. My years with Nehru, op. cit.

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, 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 PoW 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 PoW 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 for each battalion 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-martialled 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 picked up luckily an Indian blanket found on the way. It was with me throughout my stay in PoW 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

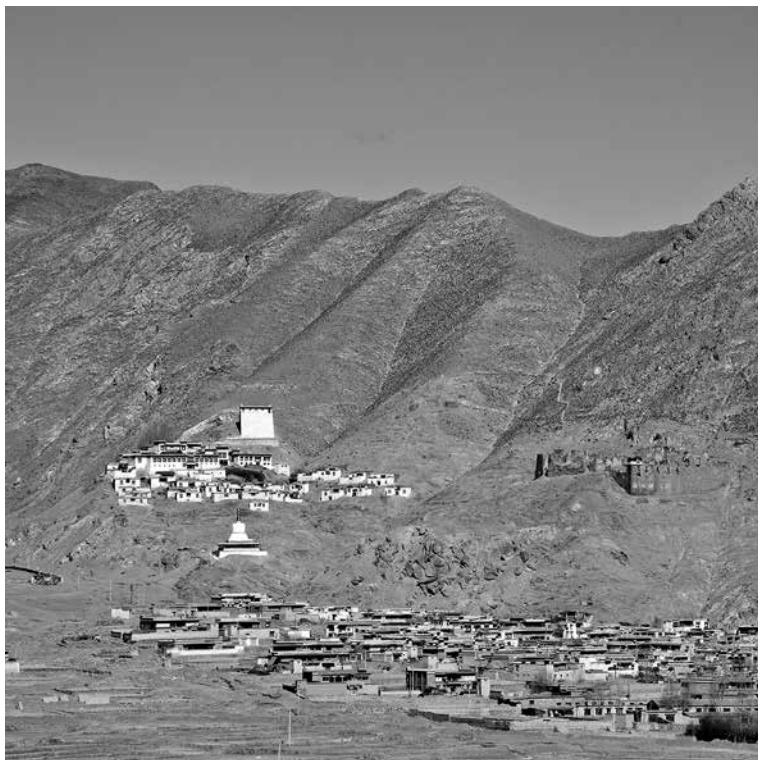
Chinese soldiers looked fit and were ruddy cheeked and dressed up warmly in cotton padded clothes. This was the standard dress for winter for the whole nation maybe. Some wore khaki and others dark blue but I never discovered what was the distinction between the khaki and blue clad soldiers because they were all armed with automatic weapons and were seen to be performing the same kind of duties.

I 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 my 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 had four mountain artillery guns paraded at Tsangdhar 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 village 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 radish.

From Marmang we were taken in covered vehicles at night and arrived in our PoW 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 humans have such hidden reserves



Chen-Ye (Chongye) in Tibet, where PoWs were kept

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 was 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, as also 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 PoWs 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 PoWs, in torn boots without laces or socks, OG cotton clothes

...work, displacement has led by participation. This has not been
...of steel that pts. ... 1945. ...
...as steel and say that ...
...the ... is ...
...to avoid great ...
...and gradually to ...
...of the ...

192 - ... are an ... in war but not to ...
... and ... that ... The ... of ... is ...
... of ... and ... power ...
... power ...

193 - ... activity is ... character ...
... in war ... Victory or defeat ... is ...
... of ... (...) ...
... then alone; ... only the possibility of ...
... and ... in themselves ...
... efforts ... efforts in ...
... activity in war.

194 - ... is the ... of ...; ...
... and ... is a ... action. ...
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195 - ... is the ... of ...

196 - ... the ... of ...
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197 - ... is ...
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198 - ... is ...
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199 - ... is ...
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200 - ... is ...

1247 - What a good Communist should be -

[illegible]













* To have contented satisfaction in regard to ourselves and
to have contented ingenueness in regard to others - Confidant

First to go back and then get a better view for a log.


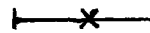

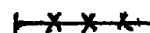
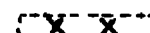
It is a fact that the most important point is a street depending for success on a high degree of interest in the subject. It is a fact that the most important point is a street depending for success on a high degree of interest in the subject.

Notes from Mao's *Red Book* kept on an improvised note book out of brown wrapping paper from the Red Cross parcels

CHINESE ARMY RANKS - OFFICERS

<u>Serial</u>	<u>Chinese rank</u>	<u>Hindi pronunciation</u>	<u>Badges of rank</u>	<u>Indian equivalent</u>
1	Sāoway	सौ ने		2/Lt
2	Chungway	चुंग ने		Lt
3	Sāngway	सांग ने		Capt
4	Tāway	ताने		Senior Capt
5	Saushow	सौ शौ		Major
6	Chungshow	चुंग शौ		Lt Col
7	Sāngshow	सांग शौ		Col
8	Tāshow	ता शौ		Senior Col (Brig)
9	Sāochiāng	सौ चियांग		Maj Gen
10	Chungchiāng	चुंग चियांग		Lt Gen
11	Sāngchiāng	सांग चियांग		Gen
12	Tāchiāng	ता चियांग		Senior Gen
13	Yuaisuai	युये सुये		Fd Marshal

OTHER RANKS

1.	Sapin	सपिन		Sepoy (One year service)
2	Shao	शास		L/NK
3	Chungas	चुंगस		Ork
4	Sao	सास		How
5	Sāngrāngpin	सांगरांगपिन		2 year service

Insignias of the People Liberation's Army

with torn jerseys 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 PoW, 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 frostbite as well as pulmonary oedema.

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 Tawang in the rushed move forward of 7 Infantry Brigade. These had been dumped at Lumla, the first stage of the march beyond Tawang 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 Tawang, 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 PoW 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 landslides. 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 PoW camp located at Chen Ye¹ 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 PoWs kept arriving, some of them in captured Indian vehicles. These vehicles had obviously been driven out from Tawang via Bumla. This road Bumla-Tawang 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.

1. Probably Chongye in Yarlung Valley (ed.)

In the PoW 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 (Maha Singh 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 PoW authorities that under the Geneva Convention on PoWs, 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 Col 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 me 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 with our condition ourselves 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 Tawang 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 PoW 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 Zedong'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 he felt impatient at not succeeding. It must be said for the Chinese that none of our personal possessions like watches, money or rings on fingers were taken away from us.

The theme of their talks with the PoWs was monotonously the same, ie., "*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, 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 had received also 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. In spite 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. Up to 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 Time, the American magazine, 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, General J.N. Chaudhri through my father-in-law, 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).

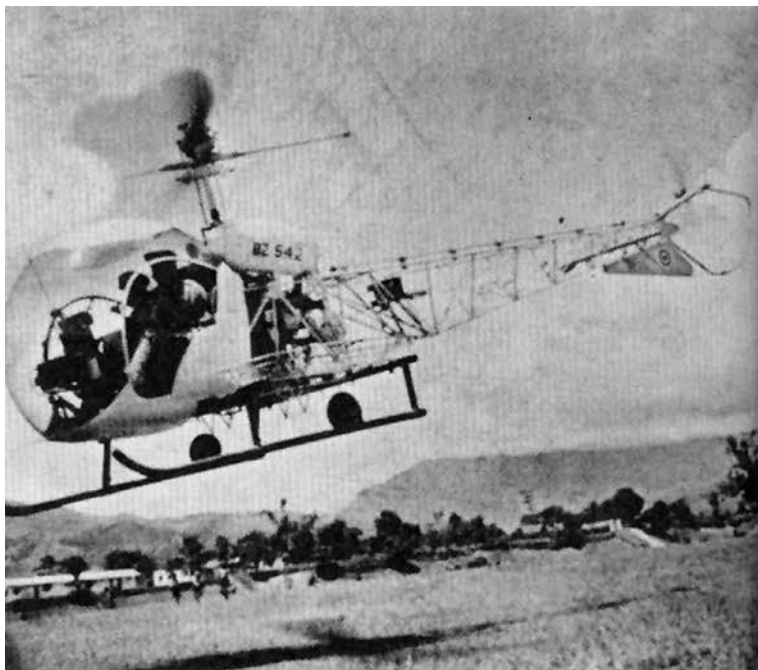
This is one of the saddest parts of my memory of those days. Numerous cases of men who deserved to be honoured for their outstanding examples of devotion to duty in the face of enemy were ignored because of the confusion and failure in the higher directions and conduct of war. Some cases have been mentioned earlier, like that of Maj Pant of the Rajputs.

The case of my own second in command, Major Ram Singh who gave his life along with Squadron Leader Vinod Sehgal when they had tried to land at Tsangdhar 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 and they were shot down. 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, 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.



Bell 47-G3 helicopter which brought author to the front (October 19, 1962). Sqn Ldr Vinod Sehgal and Maj Ram Singh were subsequently killed by the Chinese (surrounding the downed helicopter)

Another incident also is worth relating. Towards the end of December 1962, Red Cross parcels were received from India for the PoWs. 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 PoW. 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 PoWs. 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 PoWs 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 PoWs 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 PoWs 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” (‘Sir, Sir’) woke me up. I 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 PoW. 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 photocopy 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 Tsetang. 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



Author as PoW at Lhasa with 5 month old beard



Below the Potala in Lhasa

Left to Right: Col Rattan Singh, Lt Col B.S. Ahluwalia, Brig John Dalvi, Lt Col M.S. Rikh and author

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 PoW in World War II with the Japanese, would remind us of his days in the Japanese PoW 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 Zedong'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 PoW 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 Zedong'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 Mogul 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.



Indian PoW Officers on the roofs of Jokhang Cathedral in Lhasa (early April 1963) before being returned to India. Author is 3rd from right; Brig John Dalvi is 2nd from right; courtesy Col N.J.S. Pannu

“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 PoW camp or of the Chinese system of medicine. One day, I was given some tablets to swallow for severe constipation 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 PoW 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 goodwill 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 (thankas) 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 in spite of their propaganda and brain-washing, to see the devotion, loyalty and regard of our jawans for us.

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 Tsetang. 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 PoW 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 PoW 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 [H.S.] 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 PoWs. 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 as recommended by Gen Kaul 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 Hongkong. 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 PoW 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 affected if his toes were amputated. He died of gangrene, we were told. The second PoW, 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 Tsetang 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 Tsetang at 7.10 a.m. and reached Lhasa at 3 p.m. and crossed Tsang Po (known as the Brahmaputra river in India) en route.

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 PoW 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 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 Xining. On the way we touched Chowthang (Tsaidam), 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 Xining 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: Xining is 7,000 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 Yangtze 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 overate,' 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 storeys 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 PoW 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 at 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 Tiananmen 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 space. 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. P.K. Banerjee, 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 put 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 Chengdu 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 en route.

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 Flt Lt Sqn Ldr Vinod Sehgal. Vinod was the Bell helicopter pilot who had flown me to Tsangdhar on October 18 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 PoW camp that a Bell helicopter had been shot down at Tsangdhar 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

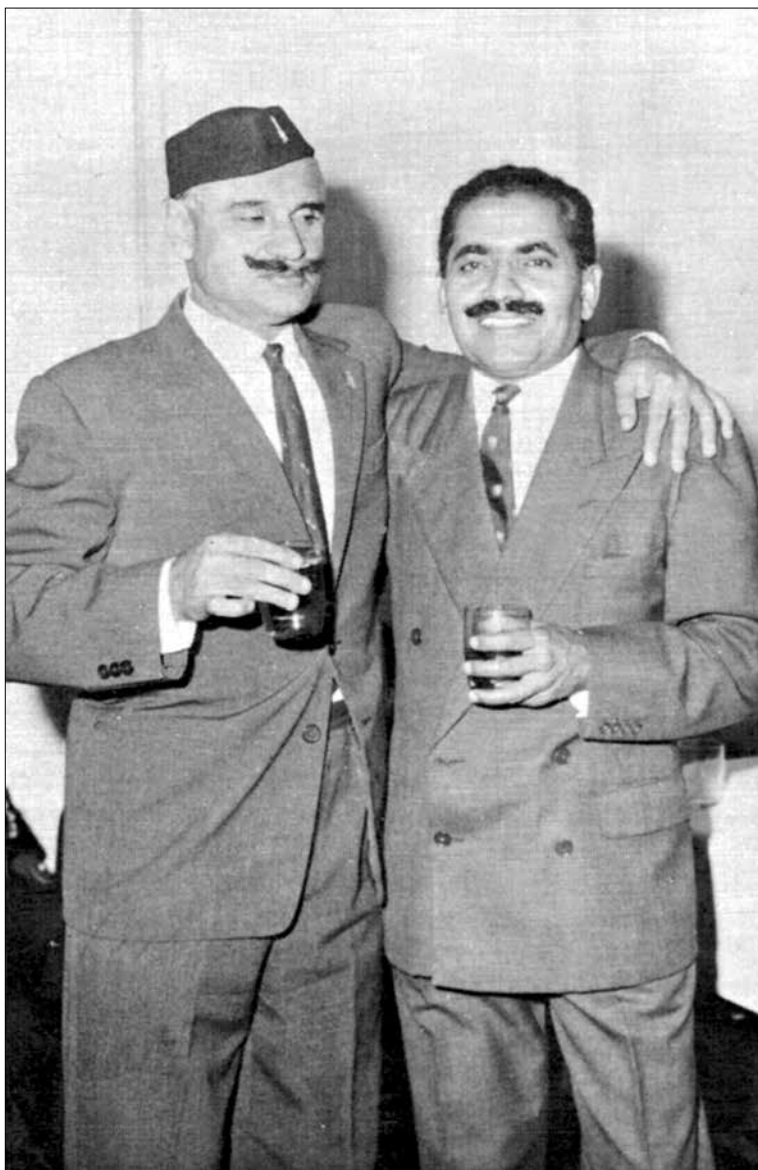
at any stations but only in sidings en route.

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 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 PoW 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 PoWs.



Brig M.S. Rikh and author in Calcutta (1972)

Reflections on the India-China War of 1962

It has been stated earlier that the Chinese attempts at brainwashing the Indian soldiers failed. One reason was their lie in saying that India attacked first and that they took action of attacking India on 20th October only in self-defence. Who among the PoWs captured at the very initial stages could be taken in by this outright falsehood, whatever their professions of the theme of *Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai*? However, there are many other possible reasons in my view. I list a few below:—

- the mistake the Chinese made in keeping officers and men separate.
- insulting officer prisoners in front of the jawans,
- giving special consideration to Gorkha soldiers with its obvious implications.
- continuously cursing Pandit Nehru. By and large Indians admired Pandit Nehru in spite of the army having been let down in preparation for this war.
- attempting to divide the Indian soldiers over the Red Cross parcels.
- the complete indifference of the Chinese to the suffering of wounded PoWs and not using our Indian doctors to attend to the wounded (there were two or three doctor PoWs).
- the destruction in such a crude way of the monastery and the palace at Chen Ye and the defilement of the statues of the Buddha which our troops actually saw.
- last and not the least, the calibre, loyalty and discipline of the Indian soldier.

These are just a few reasons which I believe contributed to the Chinese failure at brainwashing. On the other hand, it is no idle

boast that we managed to influence one of the Chinese officers. He was an Air Force officer, a soft spoken, cultured, friendly and gentle person in absolute contrast to Lt Tong. He spoke English well. After we had been PoWs for a couple of months, we told this officer, when he was alone with us, that he had asked us enough questions about our families, and that now he should tell us something about his family — what his parents did and where they were and so on? Suddenly he had tears in his eyes and slowly we discovered the story of his family. His father was the Head of Ancient Chinese Culture at Peking University. He had been arrested at the time of Mao's campaign of 'Let a hundred flowers bloom,' when a lot of intellectuals had spoken up against the Mao doctrine and they were all subsequently rounded up and perhaps sent to concentration camps or killed. He had no idea where his father was nor whether he was even alive and what happened to him.

We would talk to him often and nicely and tell him about the freedom of all kinds that we enjoyed in our country. He was the officer who had warned us against Lt Tong's mistake in translating my problem of constipation to the doctor. When we were handed over at Kunming to return to India, he was there to say goodbye to us and he wept. We had also been warm to him throughout our time there and had invited him to come to India. He had told us that Lt Tong was a member of the 'party' while he himself was not.

Having had the experience of brainwashing American soldiers in the Korean war, the Chinese must have been very disappointed at our lack of response to all their efforts to 'reform' us. That could be one of the reasons why they decided to spend a lot of money and effort in giving all of us field officers VIP treatment for a conducted tour of the mainland. Perhaps they thought they could remove some of our bitter feelings. Besides this, they wanted to show us the progress their country had made under the communist rule.

We in India have to be clear about the Chinese potential both as a friendly nation and as an adversary. We cannot afford to be emotional in our approach to this one nation. They have (I should

say they had, because I am not in touch with the affairs now except through newspaper reports) a highly motivated and disciplined army. Even though we in India have to continue to find ways and means to have a peaceful border in the North, I am convinced that we have to be extra careful not to be taken in by any *Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai* talk again. Any dialogue has to be from a position of strength. The Chinese have an amazing capacity to persist in the pursuance of their aims and objectives. Any soft talk in the initial stage of negotiations shall have to be weighed up with their practical concessions, which are not only declared in public in plain language, but are clearly visible on the ground. They have all the ground advantages militarily from the heights of Tibet. They must therefore prove their sincerity on the ground along the entire length of the border. Their talk can be full of riddles of which they are masters.

On my return from China in 1963, I wrote a paper "Reverses against the Chinese — an Analysis." It was more to record my own thoughts because I had discovered that the hierarchy in India at that time was in no mood to listen to one whom they 'suspected' of having been brainwashed. I reproduce here only the conclusion of that paper, which contains a frank analysis of the causes under different headings like Intelligence Services, Fighting Qualities, Tactics and Leadership, Training and Equipment, Administration, Organisations for Mountains, General and so on:

"The writer is a great optimist who not only believes in the past high traditions of the Indian Army but believes in its future potential. We are up against a first class enemy. It has been observed that China as a whole is in a constant state of preparedness for war. Prisoners taken around by air on the mainland observed that every single airfield where they landed is a combat airfield. China has a lot of weaknesses also; shortages of essential commodities like oil, hordes of internal problems of which Tibet appears to be the acutest. But this country is at present ruled by a party which is ruthless, experienced in war, confident and surprisingly free from corruption. It has united the country under one government after hundreds of years and is daily consolidating its position. We have to watch out! Can we therefore afford to take but the

boldest and sternest measures to cure our ailments so that we are ready to face them again soonest possible? Can we sacrifice our national interests for the sake of a few individuals and their fads? Answer has to be found by us. Suggestion is to promote free and frank discussions on the subject without reservations and form a study group consisting of experienced senior officers to formulate the lessons learnt in the recent past and make necessary recommendations.”

The above passage was written more than 29 years ago. With the present spurt of overtures at improving relations between the two countries, it would be worthwhile for the armchair politicians and officials to study ground realities in depth. It is also my conviction that the common people of China, like Indians, would like to be friends. But, in a totalitarian regime, the views of the common people are invariably twisted by power-hungry political leaders to suit their convenience.

Lt Tong used to boast to us every day about his knowledge. One day, we must have been in a difficult mood when I challenged him to say that he did not know anything. He was shocked at my ‘impertinence’ which was backed by Rikh and others. He was told that as Commander Signals for the entire NEFA area, how did he believe that I would be visiting the forward areas in Namka Chu sector if India had intended to attack or attacked first? After this, he must have run to his superior commissars to find out another approach to deal with us.

We had given three letter code names to all the Chinese in our camp. This was done on the basis of the three letter daily changing code signs used in the army for all units and formations to hide their identity. All these code-names, of course, ended with letter ‘B’, standing for bastard. We had a guard called PFB. He would never smile or show a reaction on his face and never opened his mouth to speak in front of us. In Hindi, Punjabi or English we would make fun of him or call him names (not all pleasant or polite) but we never succeeded in drawing out any reaction from him and we had given him the name of Poker Faced B. Imagine our surprise and shock when in the latter part of our journey through China, he opened up and spoke typical Punjabi one day. He had

been quietly listening to all our conversations. Lt Tong was LMB (Loud Mouth B). There was also one SFB. I will let this code name be guessed!

Another guard in the PoW camp had told us that he belonged to Shanghai. He had been away from his family for three years. He had a two-year-old son and his wife was expecting when he left for Tibet. After we arrived in Shanghai, we suddenly remembered this and told him that he was lucky and would be meeting his wife and two children soon. But he never left our side throughout. When we were saying our goodbyes at Kunming, one of us remarked to him that he would perhaps now be flying back to Shanghai to his family. He broke down and told us, "No. I am going back to Tibet tomorrow morning."

Well, that certainly indicated to us the type of ruthless regimentation and discipline and the lack of freedom there is in a communist regime. And this could not, in the long run possibly keep people happy except under extreme coercion. The process which has recently unfolded in the Soviet Union and in all the East European countries is revealing. So too the recent Tiananmen uprising in Beijing. Human nature will always press for independence and freedom in the ultimate analysis.

One of the things which was most striking during our tour of China was the healthy and cheerful appearance of all the children we saw. In fact the Chinese appeared to have solved the problem of *Roti* and *Kapra* (food and clothing) for their citizens as far as we could see. We could not be sure of the *Makan* (housing) aspect. In North China where it is very cold, all men and women wore cotton padded clothes, coats and trousers, making it difficult to tell a man from a woman by their figures. And Chinese men do not seem to grow much of a beard either, making it that much harder to guess the sex.

Another noticeable fact was the discipline of the people. Whether it was out of fear or spontaneous, one could not say. In Peking, the capital city, there were hardly any cars and very few buses. All the buses ran on gas with huge flexible gas-filled storage tanks on the roof. Most of the people used cycles or they walked. We got the impression that all unnecessary movement

was frowned upon by the authorities.

One marked point of similarity between India and China we noted was the differences in the people and their food habits between the north and the south. As in India, people in north China are not rice eaters basically but they eat wheat flour and those in the south eat rice. By and large, people in the north are bigger built and healthier than those in the south just like in India. Of course, it has a lot to do with climate.

Why did they declare a unilateral cease-fire on 21 November 1962? One possible reason has been hinted earlier, as per Mao's teaching of learning warfare through warfare and thus having got to know about India's war potential, there was no point in carrying on. Another possible reason was that their hopes of getting rid of the so-called reactionary government of Pandit Nehru were belied. On the contrary, in one month, the whole Indian nation had rallied together as never before, against the Chinese treachery.

In his book *India's Defence Problem*, S.S. Khera has made a number of comments about the situation leading to the Chinese attack on 20 October 1962. Some of his statements are factually incorrect but he has given a number of reasons for the Chinese unilateral declaration of cease fire and withdrawal on 21 November 1962, which appear credible.

After return from China, I had gone to meet the editor of the daily newspaper, *The Statesman* of New Delhi and asked if I could go through all the old copies to catch up with the happenings in the country during my absence. He was very kind and arranged a small room for me to sit. Going through the old newspapers undisturbed for a few days, I was amazed to read about the spirit which had been awakened in the country against the Chinese attack. Women had lined up to hand over their ornaments for the defence effort. This strong reaction must have upset the Chinese calculations. There was also a strong world reaction against the unwarranted Chinese aggression and a lot of help had come to India from outside. The Chinese could not perhaps afford to let India become further strengthened as a nation; it would not serve their purpose.

It has been said earlier that when something went wrong in

operations there was a tendency to put the blame on Signals for the lack of communications. I had had personal experience of this on many occasions before and after the 1962 operations. But in this particular case, although the staff did indulge in the same tactic, I am happy to note that the two commanders most intimately concerned with the battles in October have given a very balanced and correct picture about the signal communications in the books they wrote afterwards.

Reference can be made to the books written by the GOC 4 Infantry Division, Maj Gen Niranjana Prasad and the Commander, 7 Infantry Brigade, Brig John Dalvi. I am grateful to them for having put the record right for the sake of posterity and it would not be out of place in this narrative to quote from their books.

Maj Gen Niranjana Prasad in his book, *The Fall of Towang* has this to say:

“In order to ensure that I could influence the matters after battle has been engaged, it was imperative that I had good communications to all the sectors and posts concerned. In this, I had been served very well, both by my Chief Signals officer (Lt Col Tewari, even now on a visit to the Namka Chu area) and by his No.2, Maj Ram Singh, who was with me in Zimithang. My communication state, briefly, was as follows: —

To the Rear — both line and wireless link with Corps HQ and my Rear HQ at Tezpur.

To 7 Brigade Sector-Line and Wireless to all posts — but I could listen into all the wireless sets with units forward of Brigade — Tsangle, Tsangdhar, Bridge 3 & 4 and 1/9 Gorkhas.

To Centre Sector-Line and wireless to all posts — Bridge 1 & 2, Lumpo, Hathungla, Khenzamani, Chutangmu and Brokenthang.

To Tawang Sector — Line and wireless.

“My signals officers and personnel had ensured that the wireless sets and telephones worked well and I had no trouble in keeping touch with all the sectors and out posts. I was therefore confident of being able to help and guide my command once the attack had started... The signallers manned their sets or telephones and coolly handled incoming and outgoing signals traffic.”

That is from the Divisional Commander's book. As stated

earlier, I was talking on the wireless set of the Gorkhas, first to the brigade HQ and then to the Divisional Tactical HQ, when the post was vacated by our troops and the two signalmen and myself were left behind.

Now to quote from Brig Dalvi's book *The Himalayan Blunder*:

"On 11 September, I was constantly prodded to give the 'exact' location of the Assam Rifles and Punjab patrols which were moving post-haste to Dhola. My staff maintained round the clock vigil by the wireless set but could not establish contact. There were cynical and sarcastic remarks about the standard of 7 Brigade's wireless proficiency, as if the brigade signallers could redress the inadequacies of our antiquated equipment.

"On the evening of the 18th (October), Lt Col K.K. Tewari, Commander Signals of 4 Division arrived at my HQ... He was able to brief me on what was going on at the Divisional HQ... Col Tewari was a gentle God-fearing man in addition to being a first rate signaller. He had worked against tremendous odds throughout the operations and had overcome difficulties which would have taxed an Army Signals Regiment. He is due much credit for providing communications with obsolete equipment and the distances involved. Instead of praise they came in for criticism for not being able to work miracles with outdated sets and distances which were beyond the range of divisional signals.

"I was once asked to sack my Brigade Signals Officer but I refused and said I would prefer to be sacked myself. I was responsible for giving him tasks which were beyond his capability. Tewari was grateful for my intervention on behalf of an innocent young officer. I hope that young Lakshman Singh reads this small tribute from a grateful commander, for his untiring efforts to keep me in touch.

"There was a sad sequel to Tewari's visit. He asked my permission to visit 1/9 Gorkhas and I readily agreed. When the Gorkhas were attacked, Tewari found himself in the midst of an infantry battle. He was taken prisoner after the Chinese had overrun the position. Who has ever heard of a Commander Signals being sent to an infantry battalion on the night before a massive attack.

He would have been at Divisional HQ attending to Division's requirements. ”

There are many writers who have written books on the NEFA debacle. Some of them have made statements and comments which are incorrect and misinformed. They are certainly not based on personal knowledge. One such case is the book *Chinese Invasion of NEFA*, Major Sitaram Johri in which, while describing the relative strengths of Indian and Chinese troops in Dholathagla sector, he makes statements (on pages 62 and 80 of his book) regarding communications which are factually incorrect.

After our return from Tibet/China, on arrival in Delhi on 9 May 1963, I was invited by the then Signal Officer in Chief, Lt Gen R.N. Batra, PVSM, OBE along with Kamla for dinner and a quiet chat. We chatted till late into the night. There was obviously something at the back of his mind, because he asked, “Just as for an infantryman, his weapon is the most important thing with him to use and safeguard, how could your boys close down their sets and leave them behind?” Obviously he had been told stories by various people with guilt complexes while we were away in Tibet. I told him categorically and explicitly that communications were provided as long as the users were there to use them and longer; the problem lay elsewhere and not with Signals.

Another incident about Signals is worth a mention. It is about a very senior Signal officer who left the Army early as a Colonel and joined the civil service, P.N. (Pran) Luthra. He retired as a secretary to the Government of India. When he was the Advisor to the Governor of Assam for NEFA, he visited my Regiment in Tezpur sometime in 1961. He saw the way my Regiment was being flogged, deployed as it was over a vast area with no additional resources of manpower and equipment. He told me that the Corps of Signals should lay down the maximum permissible ranges of wireless sets and cable lines available and not accept any commitment beyond it. He gave the example of weapons like rifles, sten guns, mortars or artillery pieces, where their limits of ranges are an accepted and inviolable doctrine for all operational commitments. I had requested him that he should take this up at the highest level in the Corps and said that at my regimental

commander level, it had been tried many a time without success. He certainly had a point.

Mention has been made earlier about Lt Gen Kaul. He had taken over as the Corps Commander of the newly formed Corps at Tezpur in great style on 4 October 62. He went forward to Namka Chu to visit 7 Brigade and witnessed the action that took place on 10 October. He must have suffered from a great deal of guilty feeling about the 'Himalayan blunder' of committing the Indian Army in that suicide pit of Namka Chu and had gone off to Delhi to have the earlier orders changed, as already mentioned.

A couple of years later, after our return from China, I met him in Grindlays Bank in the Parliament Street in New Delhi. I walked upto him and wished him and asked if he remembered me. On his keeping quiet for a few moments, I told him that I was the Commander Signals in 4 Division when the Chinese attacked in October 1962. He looked at me hard and suddenly had tears in his eyes. This took me by surprise. Did he think that I had reminded him of those days perhaps to ridicule him? So I said to him, "I am so sorry, Sir. I did not mean to bring back any old memories but just wanted to wish you. I had tried to remind you where we had last met, just in case you did not remember me." He put his right arm around my shoulders and very feelingly said to me, "No, Tewari. It is not that. It is just that you are the first officer who has thought fit to recognise and greet me since a long time." It was sad to see him thus as compared to the old flamboyant person one had last seen in Tezpur in 1962.

The Chinese planning and execution for the attack on India could not be faulted. Their intelligence set up and collection/dissemination of information was far superior to ours. The way they must have recalled or collected individuals (men and women) speaking the different languages of India and having knowledge about habits, festivals and other data of different parts of India, shows a meticulous preparation. An average Chinese soldier, as we saw, was highly disciplined, tough (I did not see a single fat Chinese soldier inspite of my habit of spotting fat 'lumps' in my regimental command and later), his food habits and administrative needs are simple, his clothes and equipment proper and practical,

his training down to earth. Added on top of all this was the communist control through their commissars and their evening sessions of self-criticism and confessions.

In a lighter vein, it would not be out of place to mention some of the peculiarities of the Chinese. In the list that follows some points from my PoW notes and a few based on what one heard or read later have been included. Perhaps the Chinese take pride in doing things differently from the rest of the world.

- We distribute playing cards clockwise, from left to right, they do so anti-clockwise.
- We have soup at the beginning of a meal, they serve it at the end. After serving an excellent meal, they will invariably apologise for serving such awful food.
- We write Hindi and English from left to right, they write from right to left like Urdu but vertically.
- We write the date, month and year in that order, they write month, date and year.
- In the old days they would pay the doctor only when they were well. (In this, I must admit there certainly is strong logic).
- They would hang a piece of raw meat above them instead of using a mosquito net. (There is a logic in this too because why should a mosquito take the trouble of penetrating the thick skin to suck blood when it is already openly exposed?)
- In one of the provinces we saw people cleaning their teeth with the toothbrush held stationary while they moved their heads up, down and sideways. (Actually we had laughed when we saw this but we were 'told off' by the escort. He said cleaning of teeth involved a relative movement; during the day the hand got enough exercise doing all kinds of things but the neck did not get the same amount of exercise; so, why not exercise the neck while cleaning the teeth? Lot of logic and truth in this too).
- They say 'yes' when they mean 'No. I don't.'
- We have a bath after a shave, they do it the other way

around.

- We greet each other by shaking other's hand. They shake their own two hands when they meet someone. (A little awkward for someone who does not know this and puts his hand out to shake).
- We were told in the PoW camp that in the Chinese army, an officer collects five annual confidential reports, unlike in our army where an officer gets only one report from his superior officer. They have one by the superior officer, like ours, three by each of the three subordinate commanders and one by the commissar. (One can see the logic in this too because truly speaking, subordinate commanders are the best Judges of their commander's performance and the effectiveness of his command. Of course, the commissar's report is a specialty of a communist regime).

What amazed us was their callousness and indifference to pain and suffering. Instances of neglect of the badly wounded have been given earlier. Lt Tong told us the following story of a Chinese feast of yore most gleefully. A group of feasters would sit around a round table, each with a long handled spoon with boiling hot water nearby. In the centre of the table in a round hole would be clamped the head of a live monkey from below. All those present, while enjoying their drink, would go on pouring boiling hot water on the head of the screaming monkey, until the brain of the monkey had got 'cooked' inside the head. Then with a special knife, the top of the skull would be opened out to expose the brain, which would then be scooped out with long chop sticks and eaten as snacks with the drinks.

The Chinese are also known for their double talk. One example I read was regarding the verdict given in a case by the judge, either way — guilty or not guilty — to suit the authorities as follows:—

When not guilty – This is legally unpardonable but humanly forgivable.

When guilty – This is humanly forgivable but legally unpardonable.

And this one I read in the monthly cultural review *Mother*

India published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry about the rejection of a manuscript by a Chinese publisher in a note as follows: "We read your manuscript with boundless delight. We swear that we have never dipped into a book of such overwhelming mastery. If we were to publish this book it would be impossible in the future to issue any book of a lower standard. As it is unthinkable that within the next thousand years we shall find its equal, we are, to our great regret, compelled to return this divine work, and beg you a thousand times to forgive our action."

The Chinese seem to have a special kind of attachment to the figure of ten thousand. I heard of that nice expression which I often quote, "A ten thousand mile march starts with one step."

Their kind of talk could be compared to slapping your own face because it feels good when you stop.

I enjoyed this joke which I read in a book about Mao Zedong and the cat. Stalin's ghost discusses with Mao the different paths to communism. Mao asks, "What is the Russian way of making a cat lick its own behind?" Stalin says he would push the cat's head backwards. Mao takes a cat and sprinkles pepper liberally on the rump. Soon the cat is licking itself frantically. Mao says, "We Chinese never use force. We use persuasion."

We were also explained the procedure of Chinese diagnosis as — Look-Listen-Ask-Feel.

Having written all this about the Chinese, we have to coolly assess the potential of this nation of more than a billion people. It has made great strides in various fields including technology, if we take just the example of its nuclear capability and delivery systems. In pursuance of its aims, its leadership is indifferent to world opinion — be it in conducting nuclear tests or its occupation of Tibet or the Tiananmen Square uprising by the students. The nation is united for once even if it is at the expense of human rights violations. The common people have been provided with their basic necessities to enforce discipline and get work out of them.

The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram said in Her *Agenda* on 30 October 1962 soon after the Chinese attack on India that the Chinese are a Lunar race — their origin is the moon and they are cold-ice cold. How true!!

In Mao's *Red Book* which was given to us to read and which was regarded as their 'Bible' by the Chinese who dealt with us and from which I had taken notes, one thing that struck me was their absolute emphasis in planning on development of Transport and Power. These were described as the Advanced parties which clear the way for three big Marshalls — Grain, Steel, Machinery.

Sri Aurobindo, way back in 1908, wrote in the *Bande Matram*, "The awakening of Asia is the fact of the 20th century and in that awakening the lead has been given to the Mongolian races of the Far East. In the genius, the patriotic spirit, the quick imitative faculty of Japan, in the grand deliberation, the patient thoroughness, the irresistible organisation of China, Providence found the necessary material force which would meet the European with his own weapons and outdo him in that science, strength and ability which are his peculiar pride."

A word about the 'wonder' animal, the yak, used so extensively in the whole of the Himalayan region and in Tibet, would not be out of place because having heard/observed its performance, a tribute needs to be paid to it. It is used for transport, for its meat, skin for clothing and tents, milk, butter, its dung for compost and more. As Vikram Seth aptly writes in his book of travel in China, *From Heaven Lake*, "What a versatile machine this that can convert grass into clothing and butter and fuel and tent hide."

War for the Liberation of Bangladesh

Towards the end of 1970, I was posted as the CSO at HQ Eastern Command located at Calcutta, heading the telecommunication set up for the Eastern theatre. In the first quarter of that year, the Indian Army was entrusted by the Government of India with the responsibility of providing aid to the civil government to ensure fair and peaceful elections to the State Assembly in West Bengal. The then political situation in the State was disturbed due to a serious Naxalite movement. A large scale army deployment was ordered to guard and protect all the election booths and for the maintenance of law and order all over the State during the elections.

In my sphere of responsibility, it meant provision of telecommunication facilities for the entire deployment. With the unreliability of civil telecommunications due to frequent strikes and bandhs, we had to deploy over 1000 mobile radio detachments for 24-hour working. These radio detachments had to be pooled from all over India, from different units and formations without affecting their readiness for operational deployment at short notice. This was a most challenging assignment with a variety of radio sets both in the HF and VHF range, with resultant problems of frequency allocation to avoid mutual interference for more than one hundred radio nets. There was also the problem of familiarising men assembled from different parts of India with the peculiar situation and environment in West Bengal — what is called ‘marrying up’ in army terminology.

About the time of the elections in mid February 1971, the Annual Signals Conference of CSOs and Commandants was also held at Delhi presided over by the Signal Officer in Chief. The Chief of the Army Staff then, General (now Field Marshal) Maneckshaw addressed all of us. The remark he made while reviewing the situation in the country and with particular reference

to the Eastern Command, is worth quoting. He said, "I do not envy the job of the CSO, Eastern Army." He should have known only too well because he was the GOC in C of the Eastern Army before he became the Chief.

Fortunately all went well during the elections and the Army got a big write-up in the papers about the commendable job done. We had hardly heaved a sigh of relief, having successfully accomplished a most unusual and difficult task, when trouble erupted in (then) East Pakistan. General elections had been held earlier in the whole of Pakistan under the military dictatorship of General Yahya Khan. Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's party from East Pakistan had secured a majority of seats, entitling his party to form the national government in Pakistan. This was not acceptable to the rulers in Pakistan who were mostly from West Pakistan. The denial of their rights brought the people of East Pakistan into the streets in protest. So a ruthless military clamp-down was ordered. It was enforced most brutally in Dacca and other places, starting in the last week of March 1971.

The result was that tens of thousands of poor miserable refugees — men, women and children flooded into India to escape the oppression which broke all norms of decent human behaviour. We kept getting reports in Calcutta about the hell let loose by the military rulers in the whole of East Pakistan. The flood of refugees was unprecedented, nearly ten million ultimately had come into India in West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. They blocked all roads and caused serious problems for the already overcrowded state of West Bengal and others.

India could not possibly bear the burden of feeding and accommodating this massive influx. And with an unrelenting military regime in Pakistan, India's options were limited. It was obvious fairly soon that a military action might be inevitable. This possibility was a real nightmare. The monsoon, which broke in mid-1971, was a time when vast areas of Bengal got waterlogged. The only places which were free of water in the vast countryside other than some of the habitations were the roads and rail tracks and these were choked with refugees. How would the Army operate if it came to a military action?

It was also obvious that any military clash in East Pakistan would immediately involve a full scale war between India and Pakistan. Knowing also about the coming together of Pakistan and China clandestinely with covert United States support, there was the added worry about a military collusion between these two countries and the possibility of a Chinese military action simultaneously on our Northern borders. Moreover, it was to be expected that insurgent activity in the border states of Nagaland and Mizoram would also increase. This would tie down more troops in a counter-insurgency role, besides the two fronts against Pakistan and China.

After the failure of an adventurist war against India in 1965, Pakistan had been feverishly preparing for the next round with the ample aid of sophisticated military hardware from their friends among the military bloc of which Pakistan was a part. It was not unreasonable to assume that the Pakistani Army in East Pakistan would have received a share of this weaponry, though the main threat was expected from West Pakistan along the Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat borders.

World attention had been focused on the mass uprooting and migration of population from East Pakistan to India. A large number of foreign correspondents from various parts of the world had gathered in Calcutta. There were also a number of dignitaries flitting in and out of Calcutta — not only those from the United Nations concerned with relief and rehabilitation matters and the World Health Organisation, but others too.

For strategic reasons, until then India's defence planners had put the Eastern Command on a lower priority for allocation of resources, with the possible exception of its northern borders with Tibet. The disturbed law and order situation in our border states due to Naxalite and insurgent activities, as well as the almost insurmountable problems created for the local administration by ten million refugees, were potent additional factors to be taken into account in the operational planning at HQ Eastern Command. One cannot speak for other senior staff officers and heads of Arms and Services like me in our HQ, or for the GOC in C, Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Aurora. But thinking of all the problems before us then, I

personally used to feel deeply concerned.

I had been a serious minded soldier throughout my service, perhaps even over-conscientious and as has been stated, some of my annual reports said I was married to my work. During the elections, one had been pretty harassed in one's duties due to the immensity of the task and due to the frequent strikes and bandhs in West Bengal, especially by the Post and Telegraph (P & T) Department staff. So, after the situation about available resources and the state of communications had been assessed, I was a worried man.

The 29 years of my service then had been trouble free. There was also a justified sense of achievement in having done well till then with considerable operational experience in my field of work. The thought foremost in my mind was that if war were thrust upon us, there was no guarantee that we could deliver the goods; one would get the sack or 'get the bowler hat', as they say in the army.

Enough has been said by military writers about 'communications' being as vital for the success of any operation as are nerves for the human body. Here we were, dependent on the sparse, underdeveloped and indifferent P & T Department set-up for all our trunk communications in the widely spread out areas in Eastern Command with the daunting challenge of a full scale war on more than one front ahead of us.

I had asked the Army Commander, Lt Gen Aurora in one of my earlier briefing sessions with him to let me have two things; firstly, more resources of men and material and secondly, more time to prepare and develop the necessary minimum telecommunications set-up. With a typical but affectionately understanding glint in his eyes, Gen Aurora had responded immediately by saying, "Krishen, I can give you an answer to your two requests right now. First of all, as for more resources, the answer is NA (stands for 'not available', a term commonly used by the Ordnance Corps with which most army units were particularly familiar at that time). I have been told clearly by the Chief that we have to make do with whatever we have got. I am sorry this is not in my hands. And as for your second request, I suggest that the only thing to do is for

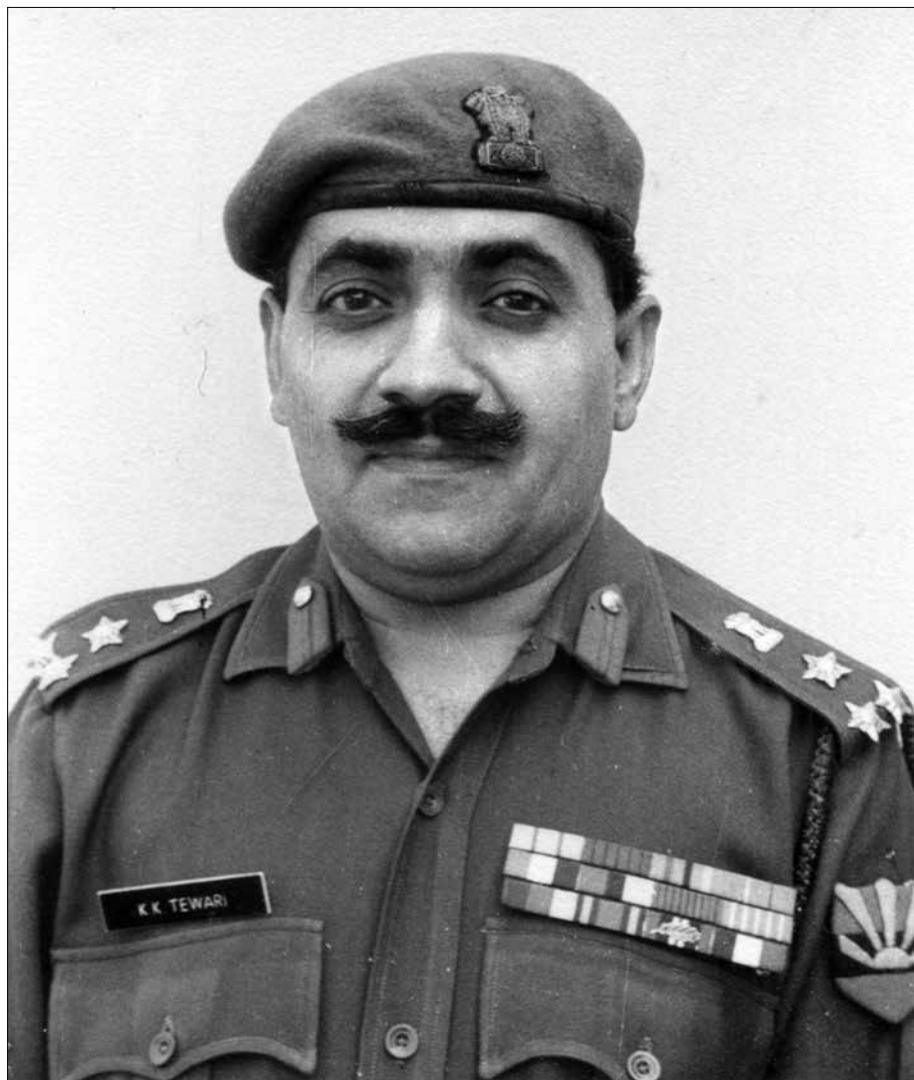
you to pray for it.”

Underdeveloped and inadequate were terms which were equally applicable to the road and rail communications in different sectors in which the army would be required to operate. One can visualise the problems geographically with the wedge of East Pakistan driven into the area of responsibility of Eastern Command in North Bengal. Just to give an idea of air travel: whereas the flight from Calcutta to Agartala in Tripura took 55 minutes in an Indian Air Lines Fokker Friendship, later on when we could not fly over East Pakistan, the same flight via North Bengal took almost 5 hours.

Similar to that of the Army Commander, was the response from my departmental head in Army HQ — the SO-in-C, Lt Gen E.G. Pettengell when I appealed to him for more resources or at least for retention of some of the resources which had been pooled from all over India in Eastern Command for the elections. His answer was, “Sorry, chum. I cannot give you anything, you have to tighten your belt yourself and redistribute the resources to meet your additional requirements.” This was the stage when all planning was hush-hush (Top Secret in Army language) and one could not even scream openly for more. In any case, in the Army, the hierarchy is not used to being questioned too much about their decisions, however unpalatable they may be to those below. “Yours not to reason (question) why!”

There were other problems to be faced besides the internal security aspects of Naxalite disturbances in West Bengal. As mentioned already, there were frequent strikes and bandhs by the P & T and other essential services during which the Army had to provide aid to civil power. We had to send telephone operators to man the civil exchanges and mechanics to take care of the equipment, which in many cases was deliberately faulted. And these personnel had to be escorted to and from places of work and guarded there too. In addition, there were frequent thefts of underground cables and overhead copper wires used for the static civilian telecommunications set-up on which the Army was dependent.

The Army had its own, exclusive field communications only in the forward areas, but for their rearward communications the



Author as CSO, Eastern Command, c. 1971

P & T provided the trunk set-up on which circuits, both speech and telegraph, were hired by the Army. Everything would get disrupted whenever there was a theft of copper on trunk routes. Even when the copper wires had been replaced by copper weld wire, after a short while the ingenious thieves, found an equally lucrative trade for copper weld wire, making coil springs out of it. It was suspected that some politicians were behind these organised gangs committing thefts. I used to be deeply concerned about the protection of the P & T's microwave towers and had to make special arrangements for that, particularly for the one on Tiger Hill in Darjeeling on which all our communications going to the North Eastern states depended. We did not have Tropo scatter equipment in the army at that time.

With the tremendous load of work and responsibilities on my jawans due to the shortages of manpower, we were suddenly faced, in the third quarter of 1971 in Calcutta, with a serious epidemic of conjunctivitis. Out of my five staff officers, three were down with this problem at one time. There was nothing one could do except to reduce further the hours of sleep for those not affected. This most acutely affected the cipher staff whose duties could not be performed by any other trade category.

This was then the scenario and backdrop to the operational situation in 1971. The third war between India and Pakistan since independence in 1947 was about to begin — the first in Jammu and Kashmir in 1947-48, the second in 1965. This narrative does not intend to cover the conduct of the actual operations for the liberation of Bangladesh. It would, however, be appropriate to reflect a bit on this war which split up Pakistan 25 years after its creation.

Reflections on the Bangladesh War

One would reflect on the Bangladesh war on a more personal note, particularly in the context of what follows in the next chapter titled *The Divine Intervention in Bangladesh* and my introduction to the Mother in Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

When one does not have adequate resources for various tasks, one is forced to make various contingency plans. What is amazing, on reflection now, is how I was able to push through some of these plans against all odds and resistance at the time.

The resistance was at times even in the form of accusations that I was being unrealistic and too ambitious in hoping that the plans would work out. We were preparing for operations which could start any day at short notice; yet, one could not put things/resources on the ground where they would actually be required in war, for security reasons. All planning was still shrouded in the utmost secrecy and preparations had to be made in a clandestine way or as part of an overall deception plan. While the date of operations was not known, planning had perforce to cater for sudden short-term contingencies, even though one could go on with preparations for long-term contingencies.

On my staff in the CSO's branch, among others I had a very bright and capable staff officer Grade 2, who was a great support and strength to me — Maj (retired as a Lt Col prematurely) A.J.S. Gill. One of my regrets in the service at that stage had been the failure of all my efforts to get his worth recognised through a suitable award. I had mentioned earlier that I could not get adequate awards for some of the really deserving cases in the 1962 war against China. However, more than five years after my retirement, when I was invited by the Commandant of the Military College of Telecommunication Engineering at Mhow to conduct a discussion with a Senior Signal Officers Course on the Bangladesh operations, I was able to partly repay my gratitude to this officer.

I insisted that Col Gill be invited from his retired life to assist me for the Senior Officers Study and thus relive those days together.

Just one example for the planning and development of telecommunications would be worth quoting. For the launching of operations from Tripura as the nearest route to Dacca, we had first to establish a static civil multi-channel telecommunication station in Tripura to link it to the national network on Microwave, which terminated at Shillong. Long arguments ensued on this crucial issue because of numerous technical and other objections. But we insisted that this had to be done and the P & T Department was persuaded to establish a VHF station at Teliamura in Tripura to give us multi-channel links from Calcutta via Shillong. After this proposal was approved, a bright P & T officer who had just returned from a course in the United States and who had been put in charge, stated categorically that this was not technically feasible.

There were three main objections raised by this officer which are worth listing. This has relevance to the question of executing projects in peace time without the overall emergency powers available during active war. One was, that this hook-up would not provide the reliable long-distance communications needed in spite of heavy expenditure. To counter this objection, we demonstrated its viability practically by using field type of portable army VHF radio relay equipment, proving that communications could be established satisfactorily from the height of Shillong, the long range notwithstanding.

The second objection was the non-availability of the required spare equipment in the country. We were told that orders for the new equipment from abroad would take many months to materialise. We could not wait. Therefore, we got a set of this equipment lifted from Nagaland area, which was under Eastern Command army control for counter-insurgency operations. We replaced that with our own army field type of radio relay equipment.

The third was the most serious objection from the security point of view. This link would be operating right across East Pakistan territory (Sylhet area) and would, therefore, be liable to interception by Pakistan. It was said that this might jeopardise operations due to premature leaks. This could not be answered easily. Our main

argument was that it was better to have communications which could be 'protected' by other means such as codes and ciphers, rather than no communications at all which would result in operations not taking off properly.

This was not the end of the story. After all the clearances had been obtained, the same P & T officer insisted that a proper building be provided for the installation of their equipment. This was also done by a crash programme through the courtesy of Army Engineers. But when it was all ready, our America trained friend came to 'inspect' the building. He summarily disapproved of it, saying that the roof of the building was not high enough for the racks to be fitted.

One can visualise the patience I needed at that time with so many other things happening at the same time. To cut a long story short, the Engineers were persuaded to raise the roof by two feet. Our troubles did not end there. We had to have the equipment moved from where it was, together with a 200-line switchboard. While all this was being moved in a ferry across a river, the boat capsized resulting in the switchboard getting 'drowned' and lost. But fortunately the other equipment was saved.

The entire incident has been described at length because it is just one example of the type of problems we faced in Eastern Command even when decisions had been painstakingly arrived at. The point is that whatever the difficulties were and however daunting they appeared at each stage, ultimately they got resolved and I do believe it was due to another 'force' which had come into play.

Immediately after the surrender of the Pakistani Army in Bangladesh in December 1971, a Military Study Team under a senior army officer (Lt Gen Eric Vaz, later an Army Commander) was appointed to study and record various aspects of the just concluded operations, for lessons. On the telecommunications aspects, I was asked to give one example each of the most important/momentous Decisions, Achievements and Mistakes in my sphere of responsibilities. My reply went as follows: Decision — the establishment of the VHF station by the P & T Department in Tripura before the launching of operations;

Achievement — the judicious distribution of available meagre communication resources (men and material) in spite of a great deal of opposition from different sources including some of the formation commanders; Mistake — not to have thumped the table hard enough for more resources which were deserved by us. Of the last, a live example can be quoted.

I had asked one of the staff officers who had served with me earlier as a captain and was at that time posted as the Staff Officer Grade I (Signals) at Lucknow, for some help with resources during those planning days. We were told categorically that there were none to spare. The same officer, as luck would have it, was posted on promotion as a Colonel as the CSO of one of the newly created Corps in our Command for Bangladesh operations. As soon as he took over, he screamed for more resources. When he was told that we had tried all possible sources and the answer had been the same, namely 'NA', he promptly said, "Sir, I will tell you where you can get them from. You ask the CSO at Lucknow. They can easily spare... (such and such) items, as they do not need them." He was reminded what he had replied earlier but then such is human nature. We did ultimately tap that source successfully.

Another source of equipment which we tapped successfully was the Ordnance Depot at Agra. As the Staff Officer Grade I (Signals) at Lucknow between the years 1957 and 1959, I had occasion to visit this Depot. It was found that a lot of World War II vintage signal equipment was lying unrecognised and unmarked in the huge sheds at this Depot. These sheds were given the name of 'LAN', standing for Local Agra Number, as they were not in the inventory of current equipment. In the middle of 1971, we had obtained permission from the Army HQ at Delhi to organise a team of technical personnel to go to the Central Ordnance Depot at Agra and recognise and pick out such equipment as could be of use to us, even though obsolete. This was done and some of this equipment proved to be of immense help during operations.

A strange peace and certitude had come to abide with me after my contact with the Mother in Pondicherry in the middle of 1971, which I will describe in the next chapter. Mention has also been made earlier about my conscientious approach to the work. In

the past, during war situations or other times, and it happened on numerous occasions that difficulties would arise, I would adopt an attitude of 'fatalism'. But this time, I had a strange but powerful experience of peace in the midst of extreme uncertainty, confusion and tension and many a time amidst frayed tempers and frustration. A marked determination and self-confidence had developed in me. It is difficult to describe it in words but it can be said that it was unlike my normal self. There was a feeling and a conviction that whatever was being done was all right and that my efforts and plans would not be wasted nor fail.

The pace of work was fast and whatever resistance there was at various levels to anything we wanted to do would crumble, and smooth solutions follow all the initial turbulence. For months, the schedule was more than 15 to 16 hours of work a day with no holidays and frequent disturbances even during the rest periods. This did not consist of just sitting at an office table in air-conditioned comfort, but of travelling almost constantly to see results after instructions had been issued and making modifications on the spot where necessary.

I have always practised a maxim learned early on in the service, namely, giving of orders is five per cent, seeing that the orders are carried out is the other ninety-five per cent. An unaccountable energy helped me to keep this frantic pace day after day without a break.

What had brought on this store of energy and determination to do certain things in spite of all the odds. There was little time to wonder. After the blessings of the Mother in Pondicherry had been obtained through a letter even though there had been no physical contact with Pondicherry as yet, deep inside me a flame appeared to have been lighted and it was kept alive and was growing, tended by the building up of faith as the problems were resolved progressively. I was not free from tensions mentally on the external plane but some foundation had been established and inner work on the 'construction' went on uninterrupted even if unseen.

After the Bangladesh war was over, the Army Commander, Lt Gen Aurora, while talking informally at the Corps of Signals birthday dinner party at which he was the Chief Guest on 15

February 1972, remarked as follows: "What has been achieved by Signals is really a miracle. But I do not believe miracles happen. It is the hard work and devotion to duty of all ranks. Resources were extremely meagre yet excellent results were produced..."

A photograph has been added of my younger brother who commanded 32 Infantry Brigade of 9 Infantry Division in Bangladesh war in 1971, which captured JESSORE and KHULNA, two important defensive strongholds held by Pakistan Army. His opponent at KHULNA was Brig Mohd Hayat who surrendered to him. They had both done their pre-commission training together at Bangalore before partition in 1947 and shared a room for 4 months. What is really worth noting is the fact that when they met at the time of surrender in 1971, Brig Hayat's first words in a typical Pathan way were "Hello, brother." The subtle meaning of these spontaneously spoken words is significant in my view.

The ‘Divine’ Intervention in 1971

It was in the third quarter of 1971, I must have been in a reflective mood one day in my office, when one of my officers, a Lt Col, who had received his training for Signals on commissioning under me, came to see me. He asked why I was so pensive and worried, which he said was unusual for me. By that time I had been told of Top Secret plans in outline. So I said to him, “Chum, one cannot share these things with you at present but if you had some of the problems I am facing with no solutions in sight, and when you have been given a definite no to your requests for help by all concerned, and yet you have responsibilities to discharge, you too would be more pensive.” He was very quick in his reply — he had obviously come prepared for this, being a long time devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He said, “Sir, you are my old instructor, so I should not be advising you. But I have an humble submission. Whatever your worries and problems, write to the Mother in Pondicherry and ask for Her blessings and all will be well.”

I did not accept the suggestion immediately. Sri Aurobindo, of course, was no more, and I ‘hesitated’ a little to ask for blessings from His French lady successor. But on deeper reflection, a brief letter was sent to the Mother seeking Her blessings for my (unspecified) work. In a few days a blessings packet was received from Her. Unknown to others, that same officer had gone around to almost all the top brass of HQ Eastern Command from the Army Commander on down to the other heads of staff and Arms and Services like me, and we had all received the Mother’s blessings. And it was amazing how the problems began to get resolved in a strange and inexplicable way. What appeared at first to be hurdles,

would clear up somehow.

In the third quarter of 1971 again, well before the war, a little printed booklet titled *Sri Aurobindo and Bangladesh*¹, written by a devotee was received by us in Calcutta. This was the time when Bangladesh existed only on paper in wishful resolutions and the West Pakistani dictatorship was firmly in control. This booklet had also set me thinking.

It is not my intention to write about the military operations — neither the plans nor their execution, but a few aspects need to be highlighted to illustrate my view that some unknown ‘force’ or ‘intervention’ was at work on the scene in Eastern Command. In hindsight, a lot of reasons could be advanced to explain the successes achieved. But to my mind, in 1971 a series of miracles took place that helped the Indian Army achieve a unique military distinction — to retrieve its ‘loss of face’ after the debacle against the Chinese in 1962.

For the first time in its long history, a regular, well organised and a much better equipped army laid down arms, in an unconditional surrender on 16 December 1971 in Dacca before the Indian Army. There were nearly 95,000 fully armed Pakistani soldiers under their Commander in Chief, Lt Gen Niazi who formally surrendered to Lt Gen Aurora. I believe it was an external latent ‘force’ which came into action for India’s help; I prefer to refer to it as the ‘Divine’ intervention.

I have mentioned the word ‘miracle’ earlier. What prevented the Chinese from exploiting the situation and activating the northern borders to help ease the pressure on the Pakistani army fighting against the Indian Army? It was not as if the Chinese had started making overtures to India for friendship. At that time, their attitude towards India was still quite belligerent.

The American Seventh Fleet with its nuclear powered ship USS Enterprise had steamed into the Bay of Bengal. There must have been some purpose in the show of force in support of their ally Pakistan, but why did they remain inactive and silent spectators after the initial, highly provocative act of sailing into the Bay of

1. Reproduced as an Appendix 2

Bengal? It required some strength of character and leadership from our Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi not to be intimidated by this provocation. She too was very close to the Mother and it is known that she was in touch with Her at the time.

Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the man who had been elected by East Pakistan to give it an independent status as Bangladesh, was in jail in West Pakistan. He was scheduled to be hanged and yet his life was spared. It was not as if the rulers there had suddenly become soft!

Lt Gen Niazi surrendered his well equipped army of nearly one lakh troops and in the process disobeyed his own President, General Yahya Khan; not that he had no means or manpower left to fight on. There were enough fully armed troops available with him, with ample stocks of ammunition and other supplies. But what made him give up so suddenly, after the initial few days of bitter fighting?

The start of the war had been delayed until 3rd December 1971. Pakistan started it all by making pre-emptive air attacks on all the air bases in India that day. We in India (I have already mentioned about my request to the Army Commander for more time and resources) actually did get more time to prepare and redeploy and reorganise the available meagre resources. Yet, we did not have to 'start' the war.

The Mukti Bahini Force, raised from among millions of refugees who had fled to India, had time to train, to organise themselves and to infiltrate into East Pakistan, to disrupt the communications and harass the Pakistani forces from behind while they were engaged in the front by the Indian Army.

These few facts are mentioned just to illustrate the point that, even allowing for the fact that it was the superior military genius of Field Marshal Manekshaw, India's Chief of the Army Staff, or of the Army Commander, Lt Gen Aurora and other senior Corps and divisional commanders in the field that won the war, yet on deeper reflection one would have to admit that there was some other 'force' at work too.

I was keen to explore what this other 'force' could be. In January 1972, a few weeks after the surrender and when reconstruction



Author's younger brother, Brig Krishna Kant "Minto" Tewari who commanded 32 Infantry Brigade in the Bangladesh War, with Brig Mohd Hayat of Pakistan Army after the latter's surrender at Khulna (autographed by Brig Hayat)

and rehabilitation work in the newly born Bangladesh had been put into full gear, I requested a few days leave for rest. We had been working under tremendous pressure in Eastern Command continuously for over a year, starting with the elections in West Bengal. My request was summarily rejected on the plea that I could not be spared. The Indian Army was still in Bangladesh and we had responsibilities towards the Civil Affairs organisation for restoring communications. Besides the strain of one year's concentrated work, I was frankly restless. There was a strong urge to visit Pondicherry to meet the Mother.

Yet another factor had come into play. The National Defence College course in Delhi had been terminated at the start of hostilities and all the senior officers on the course were attached to different branches and staff on the supernumary strength in HQ Eastern Command to help ease the pressure of work on all of us. Brigadier (later a Lt Gen and the SO-in-C) V.C. Khanna was attached to my office. So, after a discreet interval following my first request, in early February 1972 I caught Lt Gen Aurora in a relaxed mood in the presence of the Chief of Staff and again asked for a few days leave. This time the intention to go to Pondicherry to meet the Mother was mentioned. I added that Brig Khanna was there to look after my responsibilities. I am sure it was the Mother's name that did the trick. My leave was granted. But there was yet another hurdle.

My wife, Major Kamla Tewari was posted in the Command Hospital at Calcutta and was in charge of the ward where all the wounded Pakistani prisoners of war were kept. There was difficulty in obtaining leave because of her appointment. This hurdle was also crossed, through the goodwill of the medical authorities. So my wife and I, with our three younger daughters arrived in Pondicherry on the afternoon of 19 February 1972 for just three days. We had booked ourselves to leave Pondicherry on the afternoon of 22 February for return to Calcutta.

Now what goes beyond rational reasoning and understanding is that we got three days in Pondicherry which strangely enough coincided with two major events. 21 February happened to be the birthday of the Mother and the annual Darshan day when

She appeared on the balcony on the second floor to shower Her blessings on the thousands collected in the street below. And that very morning at dawn there was a bonfire and the foundation stone laying ceremony for the Matrimandir in the international city in the making called Auroville, which Kamla and I attended.

On the morning of 22 February all five of us were given a special audience by the Mother. Luckily, we were the first military representatives from the Eastern front after the birth of Bangladesh to meet the Mother. One by one, starting with myself, we sat at Her feet for what appeared to me at least to be the most blissful experience, while She looked deep into our eyes — perhaps pouring into us Her force through the medium of Her eyes, without a single spoken word. She put Her hand on each one of our heads and gave us each a rose.

Just before we had gone in, some people outside had told us that one should think of all the things one wanted in life when one met Her and they would be granted. When we came out and met the same people, I felt very self-conscious. My immediate thought was that the Mother must have considered me to be an absolute dunce because I had gone completely blank in Her presence. I had just no thoughts — literally the world had come to a standstill for me. There were no doubts, desires, worries or vacillations in my mind during those moments in Her presence.

This unusually powerful meeting had its impact on each one of us in its own differing manner but all of us who met Her are devotees now. On return to Calcutta, my mind was made up. Having completed the minimum service for pension for my rank, I made a request for premature retirement. Everybody laughed at me. The award of Ati Visisht Seva Medal had been conferred on me and the feeling was that one should not leave prematurely, particularly after this award.

But soon afterwards I got a telephone call in Calcutta from a senior sadhak in Pondicherry who told me that the Mother, when informed about my intention to leave the Army, had disapproved of the idea. In fact, it was conveyed to me that when so informed, She said it four times, “He is not to leave the Army. He must continue in service. He must not leave the Army. We shall decide when he

will leave the Army.” So promptly my application for retirement was withdrawn at the expense of being laughed at again.

It could not have been foreseen at the time that I would get promoted to the next rank of a major general. Those were the days before large scale upgradations in higher ranks in the Army had been approved by the Government.

This first visit to Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville has been described briefly. I met the Mother in person and was introduced to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. Both had an equally powerful impact on me. So much was crammed into those three days in Pondicherry including reading and listening to some friends and absorbing certain selected bits which appealed to my state of mind at that time.

As a soldier, I was brought up to think and act on secular lines and was never particularly attached to any one religion. I recall an interesting experiment that we tried out while I was commanding the Signal Regiment for the three International Commissions for Supervision and Control in Indo-China, in 1956. In my regiment of mixed troops, instead of having separate rooms for the regimental Mandir, Gurudwara, Mosque and Church for the troops, we had organised a single ‘prayer room’. This was done after taking the jawans into confidence on the plea of saving on available accommodation. Along each of the four walls of this room, we had put religious books (and pictures) of the four religions. On respective religious festivals, we would all sit facing the wall relevant to the occasion. The troops loved this arrangement because of its sheer novelty and it achieved a remarkable integration and understanding. It must be added here that this experiment was tried outside India where there was no danger of interference by religious teachers and other fanatics.

This little episode is mentioned because of what Sri Aurobindo wrote about religions and the need to rise above religions to true spirituality. This idea struck a deep chord in me because of my own inner convictions.

It is interesting to record a flashback from my childhood which occurred during this three-day visit to Pondicherry. Even though it was my first introduction to Sri Aurobindo, a very old memory

suddenly and vividly came back to me one evening during this visit. I must have been five or six years old when my father came home one day and told us that there was a great Rishi in French Pondicherry called Aurobindo and that, when he went into *samadhi*, his body rose up in the air by itself — what we refer to as levitation. This must have been soon after 24 November 1926, the day Sri Aurobindo attained *siddhi*. Thereafter Sri Aurobindo had retired completely to concentrate on *sadhana* and emerged only to give *darshans* along with the Mother on specified days.

After February 1972, my wife and I used to come to Pondicherry two or three times a year on annual or casual leave. It was in November 1976, after our retirement from service, that we shifted there permanently. Initially we stayed in Pondicherry and later on moved to Auroville after a place was found to stay. We built our own house in Auromodel in 1980.

My eldest daughter Uma, completed her 25 years of service in the Indian Army Medical Corps and retired as a Lt Colonel in 2000. She chose to join Auroville thereafter and is responsible today for the Auroville Health Centre. Her two sons, Rohan and Ruchir, finished their education from the Ashram Centre of Education and are busy pursuing their careers. Deepti, my second daughter had already come to Pondicherry in March 1975. She has been involved in education in Auroville for many decades now. Abha, my third daughter, also chose to settle in Auroville in 1978. In 1980, she started a handicraft unit, Shradhanjali, generating income for Auroville. Her daughter, Smiti, born and educated in Auroville, and in her mid-twenties now, is today the 3rd generation to be wholeheartedly involved in Auroville. Shubha, our youngest, was only 11 years old when we moved to Pondicherry. She completed her education from the Centre of Education in the Ashram and went on to do her PhD in Physics from UCLA in California. She teaches at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and has two teenage children, Achala and Kabir.

During our first trip to the Ashram, while seated on a bench on the boulevard that runs along the beach one evening gazing out to the sea, I had a strange and powerful experience which I recorded in my diary thus: “Moved to see the sea to appreciate its

vastness as compared to the smallness and insignificance of self. Such constant turbulences of the sea along the beach, yet what tremendous calm further away in the depths.” This was exactly my state in those days with unending problems one after another, yet I had been ‘granted’ a strange calm deep inside.

Another entry in the diary of those days in one of the moments of intense introspection while under heavy pressure of work and worries, was: “My thoughts are also increasingly with the troops deployed for operational duties. They are having to do night duty every second night and are not getting adequate sleep. My set-up is so extensive and vital and so far everything has worked well in spite of all the odds. My thoughts invariably turn to the Divine. He watches and guides.”

Then by a strange ‘coincidence’ as it were, (it is my firm belief that there are no coincidences and that all events are a part of the Divine Plan which proceeds steadily and surely for our progress step by step) just prior to the outbreak of hostilities with Pakistan on 3 December 1971, I was on one of my air dashes to Delhi for a meeting at Army HQ and the Ministry of Defence for certain sanctions. I was to return the same evening. At Calcutta airport, while waiting in the lounge after the security check, my eyes fell on a person with silver grey hair. The face was familiar and he looked at me too and our eyes met. Like me, he was also trying to work out who I was. My feeling was that he was perhaps the father of someone I had known a long time ago. He proved to be quicker than me. He read my name on my brief case and walked up to me. We had met after thirty years.

We had been in the same hostel (Ewing Hall) at the Forman Christian College in Lahore (now in Pakistan) from 1939 to 1941.

He was two years senior to me in college. We met after this long interval in this strange way but stranger still was the fact that the airlines had allotted us seats next to each other. It is my firm belief that our meeting was ‘arranged’ to reinforce my contact with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Prem Malik had left his good job with Hindustan Lever and had settled down permanently in Pondicherry 4 years or so earlier. We had an uninterrupted talk all

the way in the plane about the Grace of the Mother. This was to be the final step 'on the way' for me and I made up my mind to go to Pondicherry as soon as possible.

The first visit to Sri Aurobindo Ashram had opened up various avenues inside me and on return I had recorded, "There is a strong urge to spend more time in meditation/communion with the Divine. I appear to be constantly conscious of an urge to get closer to the Divine." This was in the midst of our daily hectic schedule.



**Author receives the Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM)
from Vice-President B.D. Jatti (1976)**



**Author with wife, Maj Kamla & daughter, Lt Uma at Udhampur
just before retirement**

Realizations during the ‘Voyage’

Going through my old diaries, I was reminded of a few episodes in my life which I had forgotten all these years. Some have shaken me again with the intensity of living and of the working circumstances at different stages of life — all of them were mostly beyond my own control and yet pointed towards a kind of future without my being conscious of it then. There were also recorded some other items of the old days, which I was surprised to discover afresh.

On return to peace stations in early 1946 at the end of World War II, first in Jubbulpore and later in Delhi, I found myself blank in memory about some of the earlier events of my life. For instance, I would meet friends of old college/school days but sometimes fail to connect or even recognise them. One of these who was a real inseparable buddy during college at Lahore, often reminds me now that he thought I was putting on airs in those days by not acknowledging old friends. But in fact in my case there had obviously been a black-out of sorts of my earlier days.

Gradually over the next ten or twelve years, my memory started coming back by itself. Then, even very very old flashbacks would come suddenly with clear and positive certainty. Had the retrieval mechanism of the memory in my brain gone faulty with some ‘nerves’ getting deadened, even if only temporarily? Could these have got repaired by themselves over a period of time? My wife who is a doctor confirms the possibility of a temporary loss of memory and attributes it to a long period of stress and strain during the war years.

From about 1948 onwards a trait started manifesting in my behaviour which was totally absent in earlier days. This was a growing impatience, intolerance and anger. Precisely what triggered it, I do not know. My parents would often tell me about my highly sensitive nature since my childhood. But suddenly there developed in me an aggressively intolerant nature. I would get

angry at things which I thought were wrong. All this, of course, was connected mainly with the official work. Side by side with being very strict and exacting in the execution of duties, I became avoidably rude towards those who would not 'deliver the goods' so to say. I became a person who could not suffer fools, as one of the senior reporting officers had put in my annual confidential report once.

Actually it was not so much a question of suffering 'fools' as it was of people who were not sincere enough in their work and duties or who were concerned about themselves at the expense of service interests. After retirement now that some cooling off has taken place, I have tried to analyse this tendency. Obviously, it had something to do with my basic character but the change appears to have started manifesting soon after India's independence.

In my childhood, I had observed my father in his service — he was a strict disciplinarian and dedicated to his work. As the Health Officer of our home town, when there would be epidemics of cholera and once or twice even of bubonic plague, when hundreds of people would die, he would go about his duties on a cycle to enforce necessary measures taking some of his reluctant sanitary inspectors with him. One can recollect all those sanitary inspectors vividly because they would come and report to my father every morning before he went out along with them. He would come back dog-tired and disinfect himself meticulously. This picture of dedication to duty daily in rain or sun was planted firmly in my mind.

After joining the army one was straightaway sent on operational service — first in South India undergoing intensive training for war and later in Burma and Malaya. All this was when the British were still ruling India. And in that life and death struggle of war for the British as a nation, the example set by them with their dedicated service was also imprinted on my young mind. Theirs was a no-nonsense approach to win the war. The calibre and strength of character displayed by some of the British officers I came in contact with had made a deep impression. A sense of commitment had taken possession of me and I had become totally dedicated to my work with few other interests.

Although my family had no martial tradition to go by, yet after joining the army and having experienced the thrills and excitement in war immediately after joining, the decision was taken to make Army a career for life. Upto that time we had been holding only emergency commissions for the duration of war, but then I was selected and granted a permanent regular commission. I had also been rewarded adequately in war in Burma and Malaya with two 'mentioned in despatches' for distinguished services, as the citation said. I was also privileged to have served with some outstanding officers, both Indian and British.

But then in a peace station I met some officers who had managed throughout the war to shift from one peace station to another. Perhaps their guilt complexes and lack of operational experience accounted for their eccentric behaviour. They would use seniority to throw their weight about. This factor became particularly noticeable when India attained independence. A majority of the British officers left, thus creating a vacuum in higher ranks. As a result, a number of Indian officers got promoted more than one rank in one go because of their seniority — without having gone through the mill, as they say.

These short cuts for promotion to higher ranks had their consequences. It has rightly been said that the only time you start at the top is when you are digging a hole. My disillusionment and its consequent reactions started then.

We had a large number of outstanding Indian officers who went up the ladder step by step. Regrettably, we also had an equal number, if not more, of the opposite variety. As a result of such rapid promotions of officers to higher ranks and also due to the anticlimax of peace-time routine after the intense years of war, a new kind of attitude developed in the routine functioning. These were disturbing trends. Fortunately they have disappeared to a large extent now after a lapse of time and after free India had fought a number of wars. What was most upsetting in those early days following independence was the lack of accountability in the work, seeking the patronage of higher-ups by means other than the performance of one's duties, and masking one's weaknesses behind a show of position and authority.

An incident at the IMA, Dehradun where I was posted as a major commanding Kohima Company, comes to mind. Training of gentlemen cadets was organised into two terms in a year and at the end of every term, a champion company was adjudged for its best all-round performance. This company (champions) and the runner-up company would then be allotted the two best blocks of accommodation in the following term. They were the two permanent blocks named Collins and Kingsley. My company had been twice runner-up and champions the third time consecutively. This fact was perhaps the cause of envy among others.

One winter night, while the senior term cadets were away for their final camp and the next junior third term cadets were holding the officiating cadet appointments, a senior officer of a different battalion made a report against my company. I was not told about it. I came to know of it only when I was called up by the Deputy Commandant of the Academy and shown the written report and asked for an explanation. The report started off something like this:

“Last night at about midnight, while returning from the cinema, I was witness to an inhuman and barbaric treatment being given to some cadets of Kohima Company in Collins block (champions)... If I had not checked it in time, one of the cadets would have broken his neck...” Some words to the above effect, as quoted.

Fortunately a report about this incident had already been given to me by the officiating Senior Under Officer gentleman cadet. He, incidentally, is now a three-star general holding an important post. He had punished two cadets on the spot for some offence at night by making them do front rolls. After reading the complaint against my company, I told the Deputy Commandant spontaneously that we should immediately cancel all physical training. The Deputy Commandant had a passion for physical fitness and he asked me what I meant by saying ‘cancel all physical training.’ I told him that the cadets were made to do front rolls and we should not be inhuman and barbaric and risk their necks being broken. The Deputy Commandant understood immediately and when he was told the details he laughed and told me to forget the matter.

While a Lt Col, I was called by my GOC (a King's Commission



**Author at his farewell party as CSO, Northern Command
(Udhampur, 1976)**

Indian officer) in Hanoi, Viet Nam one day and given a 'firing.' I was taken aback. When he had finished he was asked politely for reasons of the unexplained 'firing.' He let off more steam. Possibly impatience and disgust would have shown on my face and he might have thought that I would say something rude in return. He immediately changed his aggressive manner and smiled at me. I was not taken in by his smile. He asked me to sit down but I said I would prefer to stand if he did not mind. Then he said, pointing to his shoulders, "See here, I am a General. I have a right to tick off my junior officers when I want to. Now — don't worry about it." That apparently was my only 'offence.'

Another example from the time when I was a major in Rajaori, Kashmir is interesting. While in the Signal Centre one day, the sharp horn of the Divisional Commander's jeep was heard and the orderly announced that the General Sahib was there. I ran out grabbing my hat. The General himself was at the wheel with the empty front seat beside him and the driver sitting at the back. A curt order of 'Hop in' was given. I was hardly in when the jeep lurched forward. He used to drive really fast. We drove on towards Poonch on the old winding Bhimbergalli stretch of road at his normal 'breakneck' speed. Noticing a 3-ton lorry coming down in the distance, I mentioned to the boss that a vehicle was coming down ahead. Came the sharp reply, "I can see, thank you".

Upto now it had been a silent drive and I had no idea of the purpose of being asked to 'hop in.' This poor lorry driver must have seen the flag jeep with two stars coming up and heard the sharp horn. He had very rightly halted on the Khud side of the road when we whizzed past him. In the process, the jeep hit the back of the lorry lightly. The General jammed the brakes after we had gone a little distance and ordered me to go and get the particulars of the driver and his unit. Going up to the driver I told him to carry on and not to worry as it was not his fault.

On my return to the jeep, the General asked if the particulars of the driver had been taken. I could not resist saying, "But, Sir, it was not his fault, you hit him. He was stationary when you passed him." He looked at me hard and I thought he was going to tell me to walk back to Rajaori but he drove the jeep a little further, found

a slightly more open space and turned the jeep around, without saying a word. He closed up to the lorry going down-hill slowly and blew his horn again. The lorry driver halted his vehicle and came out and stood to attention trembling. Luckily he did not jump off the cliff! The General walked upto him and said in Hindi, "Do you know me? I am your General Officer Commanding. This Major Sahib tells me that I hit your vehicle when you had halted. So it is my fault. I want to tell you I am sorry. *Shabash!* Carry on!" The driver was too dazed to believe a word of this apology. We drove back, and I was dropped off near the Signal Centre without ever discovering the purpose of that outing.

Another incident of a slightly earlier period just after independence is worth quoting too. As GS02 in the Signals Directorate at Army HQ in Delhi, I used to come to the office early. One of our very senior officers with a big moustache and an impressive personality who had just become a brigadier met me in the corridor one morning. I did not know him but recognising an Indian brigadier, I put extra smartness into my salute and wished him a good morning in English. He halted suddenly, put his two hands on his hips and turned round to me to say in Hindi, "*Sahib ka bachcha!* Good morning, Sir. *Ram Ram nahin; Jai Ram Ji Nahin.* Good morning!"². I was dumbfounded at this unexpected outburst and did not know how to react. So, I blurted out in English again, "I am sorry, Sir". He let me have it again by saying, "*Phir angrezi* (again English), I am sorry!" (imitating me slowly). One felt like running away. He was then the newly appointed Commandant of the Kurukshetra Refugee camp and had come to the Signals Directorate to ask for a telephone. He rose to become an Army Commander later.

These few episodes from my life are penned not only because to some they may make amusing reading but more to illustrate the trend or way of functioning that appeared to have crept into our Army then. I found it difficult to reconcile myself to that atmosphere. In trying to analyse the reasons for my intolerance

1. Meaning 'well done'.

2. Meaning: "Son of a sahib, good morning, Sir. No Ram Ram, no Jai Ram".

and disillusionment, the above incidents may provide some clues.

One came across more and more examples of sycophancy at various levels and of people elbowing their way upwards with this kind of approach. This is not to say that there were no exceptions. There were many outstanding examples of officers of high professional competence and efficiency but one was not always lucky enough to be serving with or under them. On taking over command of a regiment, one had officers, who even though under my direct command, enjoyed the patronage of certain higher-ups. Naturally, they displayed least regard for their responsibilities in the Regiment or accountability to the Regiment because of their support in the higher echelons elsewhere.

The situation became worse after General Thimayya left the Army as the Chief. The so called Krishna Menon-Kaul era backed by the highest in the land had started. It was a period, even though temporary, of politicisation of the Army. Unfortunately, I was sufficiently senior by then to be affected by the fallout of this trend directly in my command. Loyalty to the service or to the Corps/Regiment, had given way to seeking the patronage of higher-ups who mattered, whether military or political. It was distressing to be a helpless witness to this rot in the disciplined army, especially so to see certain communal overtones too.

While commanding the Signal Regiment in Assam, I was informed by an intelligence officer once that one of my officers who was on an adverse report had spoken at a local religious place about bringing *jathas*¹ from his native place at his own expense against his CO.

On getting promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel and higher, I would often remind my officers and men that I was paid more than them to be able to shoulder more responsibilities and deal with any problems which they could not handle. They would repeatedly be encouraged to confide in me about their difficulties or problems without hesitation and that they should not wait for the problems to be discovered and then have to offer explanations. This in all sincerity appeared to me to be a simple advice loaded

1. Means a batch of people.

in their favour, if only they took it seriously.

There was a particular kind of atmosphere which had crept into the Army because some senior officers did not want to be bothered or confronted with problems. Therefore the tendency on the part of a number of officers was not to bother their superiors. Somehow, this would not work with me. As one of my Brigadiers remarked to me at the time of my retirement, that I would invariably 'smell out' the problem areas on the inspection visits to units and then demand to know why the facts had not been reported earlier.

In this context, I was reminded by an officer who served under me and retired as a major general, of an exact replica, as he put it, of a character like mine in a book called *Clang On The Anvil* by H.G. Danby. A quote from this book is reproduced: "(He) was a gruff man. Short tempered and impatient of stupidity, he refused to suffer fools gladly and sent any such packing, with little ceremony. He worked hard himself and saw no reason why his people should do otherwise. He had a remarkable memory for the faces and names and even characters of his people. Yet for all his prickly, unapproachable exterior, he was respected as a just man by every just man or boy who drew wages. And (he) knew it. He knew also that he was cursed by some for..."

Mention has been made earlier of being subjected to a tremendous physical strain after being taken prisoner. I could withstand the strain only because of physical fitness on which great stress was always laid in my service. In fact the fat and the overweight rank and file, who were referred to as 'lumps' would hide during my visits to units as they would be spotted from a distance. This would reflect on the efficiency of command of a unit in my inspection reports.

Another incident recorded for my diary notes by my second daughter, Deepti on 3 August 1970 is worth recounting. It is something to do with the previous life of our youngest daughter, Shubha (now in USA). She was a little over 5 years old. We had noted earlier that Shubha would get very upset watching any scenes of fighting or war in a movie, would cover her eyes to avoid looking and even start crying. The incident so recorded refers to a night when Shubha was very disturbed in her sleep, by what

appeared to us to be a nightmare.

She had also suddenly developed a temperature of over 102 degrees. When her mother asked her why she was so restless, she replied quite clearly that she had died in her dream. When asked how, she said she was hit by a bullet and she knew and pointed to the place on the body where she had been hit. On further questioning, she gave categoric answers that she had been fighting against the enemy when she was hit and that she was then a man soldier. She asked her mother why it was in war that some people died and others escaped untouched and added that Daddy (meaning me) was also in the war and although there were bullets all round him, not one touched him. Who knows what exactly this incident signifies? Could it be that Shubha was one of my officers or jawans in the 1962 or Burma war where I had had a number of narrow escapes and many of my officers and men had actually been killed? My own feeling was that it must have been the 1962 war. This did reinforce my belief in rebirth.

There are repeated references in old diaries to my concern for the welfare of the troops under command and their families. The concern was not merely for routine work and performance of duties and problems connected therewith but for their further advancement in life. One would make it a point to know the names of all the men in the regiment and try to know about the families and problems. And it would be upsetting to find that some of the subordinate company commanders did not know or even try to know all their men or their problems. They would be told, "If I can know the men in not only your company but in all the other companies also, then why not you?" I had trained myself to be able to 'know' the men properly and all this was imbibed in the early years of service by closely observing and copying some of the really fine officers I had had the privilege to serve under.

In my early years in the Army, I was deeply impressed by the fact that some British officers would visit the villages from where their jawans were recruited. They would go during their leave at their own expense and get to know all about them, their families and their problems at home. This was the kind of ideal I had set for myself.

I had given instructions to all the jawans that when they saluted me, they should smile to show me that they were happy in my command and thus show their trust also. Many a time, a defaulter would be taken aside by me and asked what was bothering him. Some who had no worries but had merely forgotten to smile would never forget to smile thereafter. But in other cases one would find out the problem(s) and attend to them. This little 'order' had by itself contributed well to building up a spirit in my command.

In the Signal Regiment in Assam in early 1960, something which one of my British senior officer had told me earlier was put into practice. He was one of the practical down to earth soldiers who was critical of some of the procedures in the army. One such was the peace-time system of promotion examinations to the ranks of captain and major. So I decided to try out a new system of tests on Tactics for promotion to captain.

The young officer would be made to conduct a raid practically on a security area like an ammunition dump or a sensitive area like a signal centre. He would be given a period of 10 days in which to plan and then tell me about the details of how he proposed to do it. We had to take precautions against accidents; after all we were in an operational area. I would be there personally on the spot without any other person in the Regiment knowing about it.

There was the case of a very fine young officer which I remember well. He was unfortunately killed in the 1962 war against the Chinese. He chose a particularly dark night when it was raining heavily to raid the quarter guard where the arms and ammunition of the unit are normally kept. He dug and bored his way through a tunnel upto the ammunition dugout. He came out of the trench to tell me that he had touched one of the metal ammunition boxes and offered to bring it out for me.

His word was taken and the alarm was sounded. We found that he had truly succeeded. I was really happy for him and for other reasons too. Thereafter the sentries on duty in the whole Regiment would always be alert, not knowing when another such raid would be conducted. It was such a shock to know on return from the PoW camp in 1963 that this officer had been killed in action. After an uphill task of canvassing, I got him the award of a 'mention in

despatches' in 1963. One of the roads in New Delhi was named after this officer — Lt D.K. Chopra.

Even now, eighteen years after my retirement, some of the old serving and retired soldiers come to see me in Auroville. It is so gratifying to be reminded of such episodes and to be saluted 'with a smile' once again. A number of them keep in touch through letters and tell me of what they have achieved, as per the advice given to them earlier for their advancement in life. Living in the isolated atmosphere of Auroville, all these reminders are a real tonic. Every single letter received is replied by me within a matter of two or three days at the most.

I was very touched to be reminded by an old soldier who came to visit me in Auroville. He told me a few things of the old days. He said, "Sir, you used to say to us — I may be a man small in size but I have a very big heart which is constantly concerned about your welfare. So don't ever hesitate to ask for help any time."

One of the biggest regrets in my service has been the fact that after returning from China in the middle of 1963, I did not succeed in getting adequate recognition for the outstanding performance of duties, against unusual and heavy odds, by some of the officers, JCOs and jawans of my Regiment even though the Army had suffered a debacle. Many a time I thought of resigning my commission in protest but fortunately I was advised by friends against this step, as they rightly said it would serve no purpose at all.

I have believed that we in the Indian army are too conservative when it comes to granting or recommending subordinate officers and men for honours and awards. Earlier mention has been made of my British brigade commander's advice that when one wanted to say that a chap was good, one should say he was very very good. One does not quite know the reason for this conservative attitude.

It would be obvious that more awards in a unit would reflect favourably on the commander of the unit. Even then there is reluctance, not only to initiate recommendations for awards but also to endorse those put up by subordinate commanders. Are we too self-centered in our inner consciousness to praise or reward

others? Of course, the opposite extreme is to give out 'quota' awards without basis, which is even worse than giving no awards at all.

After my return to India from Tibet and China, I donated all the grants received by my wife, Kamla from the State government in my absence, to Army HQ for the rehabilitation and resettlement of jawans who had lost their limbs during the war against the Chinese. I was happy to be informed officially later on by the SO-in-C that the amount had been used for seven soldiers, four from my own Regiment and three from the Ladakh region.

Even before I was formally introduced or initiated into spirituality, I find repeated mention in my diaries of motivating talks given to the jawans which referred among other things such as discipline, loyalty etc, to a 'spiritual brotherhood' which would look after us in all our difficulties and needs. I was deeply convinced that a Divine hand was guiding me, my family and all the others who were sincere in their work.

I have earlier spoken about an unusual and unexpected confidence and certitude which had come to abide in me after contact had been established with the Mother in 1971-72 in Pondicherry. The sincerity, genuine and selfless honesty of purpose in work and in one's dealings with others was always there too. This was already rewarded in the strange, yet logical appointments I was given in the service in connection with the training of officers in the army. But the Divine Grace reinforced all that was there before.

Amongst Sri Aurobindo's writings was one thought which touched me deeply: "When thou hast the command, care only to fulfil it. The rest is God's will and arrangement which men call chance and luck and fortune." How true and reassuring.

One often hears about one's youthful looks in spite of advancing years. No one believes that I am at least ten years older than I look. No doubt this is also due to the Divine Grace. It would be due in no small measure to an active life led to date with a sincere, humble and honest approach. Yet another factor could be the goodwill one has enjoyed from the troops under command throughout my 35 years of service, of which, even now after almost 39 years of retirement one gets demonstration from time to time.

Similar compliments have been paid to my wife, Kamla, who has been told more than once by those working with her that they could never have guessed that she was a general's daughter, a general's wife and the sister of the ex-Chief of the Army Staff. Of course, the Charter of Auroville does say, among other things that Auroville is a place "...of youth that never ages." One tries to live upto it.

There are also repeated references in the diaries to the feelings about the suffering masses of India. Some of the sights of poverty and misery would haunt me for days afterwards. And then to see affluence and its vulgar display by some with no feelings at all for those who are denied even the basic necessities! One felt frustrated more at one's own inability to help matters. In this context, particular attention had been given to the upbringing of our children since their childhood. We would insist that not even a grain of food was left on their plates after they had finished eating. They would be reminded that for the little bit of food so carelessly left by them, there would be tens of starving children of their own age in India who would fight for their leftovers.

We shifted towards the end of 1976 to what people normally refer to as the "peaceful and spiritual" atmosphere of the Ashram and Auroville. Here too we were subjected to an intense period of turmoil. But as they say, when one has chosen this kind of path, the real 'work' shifts to the inner latent level. And even external things become more pronounced. In other words, one may get the inner peace but at the external level, life's battles continue. So, life did not become that peaceful and easy. But it is my belief that this was also 'arranged' to teach certain lessons.

Auroville is a 'living laboratory', as the Mother had described it Herself, where research in varied fields is being conducted, particularly human behaviour towards achieving human unity. All, of course, on a spiritual base. There are a lot of problems to be faced in the course of normal life in Auroville. The Mother has said that difficulties are opportunities for one's growth. One faces these difficulties in Auroville with that attitude. A brief note on Auroville is enclosed as Appendix 3 at the end.

In conclusion one can say that this journey has been intensely

engrossing; at times, full of surprises even for me as the main actor. It has been worth the effort to pen all this. These are the reminiscences of a soldier who loved his life in the army and who had the good fortune to have served with the Indian jawan, who always inspired him throughout his service and to whom this book is dedicated. One is now equally happy to be part of the army of the Divine. One is privileged to be in the midst of a wide variety of spiritual seekers from different parts of the world in a unique experiment in collective living at Auroville — the City of Dawn — named after Sri Aurobindo.

Assessment of the Present Situation

Inspite of having retired in 1976, I cannot erase from the mind a lifetime of commitment in the service of one's country. After all, a serving soldier has to be ready to make the 'final sacrifice' at any moment in the performance of his duties for the country. Thus it is that I have looked with deep concern at the present situation in the country, not only at the internal political level but also in the context of international developments.

In the Prologue, I said this book was written as a result of my looking through old diaries kept since my young days before burning them. Most of the information in the book was from those diaries except for odd comments added here and there. The circumstances existing at the time were also totally different. Now that I have been out of the 'olive green' atmosphere, I can look back dispassionately and examine afresh the views and reactions of the time.

I was by nature averse to politics and took little interest in it outside the demands of my professional duties. I refer in the book to the 'politicising' of the Army at one stage. Krishna Menon as the Defence Minister played a kind of role which led not only to the 1962 debacle against the Chinese, it also resulted in the then Chief of the Army Staff, General K.S. Thimayya quitting service in protest against the Defence Minister's interference in the command and control of the Army. He was one of the ablest and the most highly respected Chiefs. In the process a few other veteran generals of World War II vintage also left. This was an irreparable loss to the nation.

The attitude of service officers today is very different to what it was in my service days. The fact that there has been no war for more than 28 years and that the army has been involved in low intensity wars against terrorism in aid to civil power, is one major factor which introduces a new kind of pressure on officers. And

it is also not possible for men in uniform to be insulated from the general happenings in the country, particularly the degeneration in values like integrity and honesty. Under the circumstances it is quite creditable that the armed forces are still perceived as the best functioning and least corrupt of all government services.¹

It is easy to put the blame for the ills of the country on the political leadership. Rightly so because that is where the rot starts, with the unprincipled and corrupt power-mad leaders. But this cannot be entirely true. It is my considered opinion that a substantial part of the blame must be shared by the bureaucracy too. It is to be accepted that civilian bureaucrats are really the base on which the government in a democracy such as ours functions, effectively or otherwise, even though the political leaders of the ruling party are the actual bosses.

A very senior ICS officer who was the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir while I was in service, talking about the situation in the country in our Officers Institute at Udhampur, remarked, “You know, when I joined service during the British days, we were called civil servants or public servants, implying clearly the role of serving the people or public. Over a period of time, the term changed to government servants implying service to the government in power and the public was put into second position. Now, even that aspect has been forgotten; now they call themselves bureaucrats — the real bosses, owing little regard or concern for the public or the political masters.” The implications of his remark are significant!

Not to be branded as being too prejudiced against the present day bureaucracy namely, IAS — let me also add here that the ICS also had their reputation of being called ‘heaven born’ which someone had described as ‘neither Indian, nor civil nor a service’.

With frequent changes of political parties in power, the only prop in the governing machinery which provides the needed continuity in a democratic set-up is the bureaucracy. This is understandable. Aware of their own pivotal role, the bureaucrats tend to exploit their position quite blatantly. Even in the Ministry

1. Reference: India Today survey, late 1997.

of Defence, they virtually 'rule' over the defence services and many an expert professional recommendation is overruled, just to assert their privileged position. Brig John Dalvi in his book *The Himalayan Blunder* had given the example of a defence ministry official, who when asked for the sanction of money for training in the army, had remarked, "You mean to say that the army has not been trained even after all these years?" No further comment is necessary on this. It is, after all, the civilian bureaucrats that retain the final word on matters of national security.

There has been serious agitation in the Air Force over the pay structure of different types of officers, flying and non-flying, towards the end of 1997 and early 1998. From what has appeared in the press, it is apparent that there was a lack of coordination at various levels in permitting the agitation to go on and involve even the wives of officers. Is it not the responsibility of the ministry officialdom to keep a check on such happenings so that timely action is taken?

It is strange that no official histories of all the wars fought by us since independence have been published so far. War histories are studied as a fundamental part of training in the armed forces so that mistakes committed once are not repeated. Why then are the official records not being opened for study? Whose responsibility is it to release the documents for study, or shall we put the question another way: Who, the politicians or the bureaucrats, is responsible for the decision not to release the papers for research? Normally, 30 years after an event, war documents should be declassified and released, but in our case no documents of the three wars with Pakistan or the 1962 war with China have been declassified so far.

I understand that Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi had agreed to the publication of the history of wars and a Historical Research Team was appointed in early 1980's. That team is believed to have researched the 1965 war but so far there has been no publication. The story about the war with China in 1962 is even more complicated and is possibly being kept under wraps both for political and bureaucratic reasons. One very important and invaluable paper which has been made public and which gives

insight into the events leading upto the Chinese attack on India in 1962, is a letter written by the then Deputy Prime Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to the Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, just a month or so before the former passed away. This one letter should provoke anyone to want to know more, but all those important papers remain locked away from public view.

The history of wars fought since independence belongs to the public domain. It cannot be just the archaic secrecy laws which prevent the publication. There is perhaps some attempt to cover up the facts which prevents open research. Could it be that the political parties and the bureaucrats are hesitant to explain some wrong decisions; including the overruling of professional advice during planning and execution which resulted in setback to combat readiness and poor results?

One can understand the politician's need to stay in power by any means, but why are the bureaucrats collaborating in this game? The Ministry of Defence in our country unlike the War Office in United Kingdom is officered entirely by civilian bureaucrats who keep it exclusively as their own preserve and no service officers (serving or retired) are allowed to disturb this preserve. It is a poor reflection of the country's gratitude for the disciplined, selfless and devoted service rendered by the armed forces in the past 50 years at the cost of thousands of precious lives.

Outside the domain of military service, public grievances, complaints and inconveniences due to administrative lapses at the state or district level or even lower keep mounting. Yet no accountability is enforced on civilian government officials for their apathy. The public runs from pillar to post to no avail. Even class 3 and 4 staff in various government offices take advantage of the situation to get their 'cut' in the corruption that follows as a result of indifference at official levels.

This is quite unlike the armed forces where at each level of command an officer is held responsible. What allows bureaucrats to continue to rule the roost? Do they use the fear of a military takeover, which has happened in more than one of our neighbouring countries, to retain their upper hand? No one seems to question their lack of commitment and accountability. This is not to say that

everything is wrong with the civil services and everything right with the armed forces, but the difference in 'functioning space' is illustrative of a deep malaise in the country.

There are pressing problems facing our country — national security, economic disparities, corruption at all levels or increasing population; all of which result in discontent and disillusion among the people. The manner in which our politicians conduct parliamentary and state assembly proceedings is deeply disquieting. A telling example was the open fight in the Uttar Pradesh assembly in November 1997 and the drama caused by the hasty action of the UP Governor in installing a new Chief Minister in February 1998, only to have it quashed by the Supreme Court. What has gone wrong and why?

A number of books and articles have recently been published which examine such issues and there have been numerous discussions in the media. There is need for deep reflection by all who love their country, have faith in its future and have no personal or political axe to grind. The lack of strong and inspired leadership, a sense of complacency or even apathy, a lack of discipline and commitment, a life style built on corruption makes one wonder where we are heading. Yet I retain a faith in the future of the country, with all its ancient culture and latent inner strength. We need to turn the people's attention and interest towards positive aspects and attend to the malaise which is eating into our society and spoiling its outlook.

Some of the books one has read recently point in that direction. But unfortunately they tend to be abnormally critical in their condemnation of whatever has happened without a convincingly dispassionate analysis to justify that viewpoint. We need to look to the future while attending to the present. It would be nice to remember the words of Winston Churchill when England was down and out at the beginning of World War II, how he inspired his nation to look to the future by saying, "If you let the present sit in judgement on the past, you may lose the future". We seem to have a Machiavellian attitude of not facing up to the problems but merely allocating blame on others.

A book has recently been compiled by Kittu Reddy of Sri

Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry under the title *Heroes of India* based on the life stories of servicemen who won the highest gallantry awards in actual wars or in peace time. It is a good and timely publication. My immediate reaction to the author was, “Excellent! Now you should compile another one under the title *Unsung Heroes of India*”. There are so many in every war which was ever fought. I believe that every regiment, unit, formation which has taken active part in war, should be directed to compile data on such cases and bring belated honour to many such unknown heroes who have laid down their lives for the country or otherwise set an inspiring example of devotion to duty for others to follow. Even though the events of 1962 are dozens of years behind us, it still rankles me deeply to recollect how some of the most deserving cases of gallantry were completely ignored at the time inspite of repeated entreaties.

It is shocking that our country has not so far put up a separate memorial for those killed in wars fought by independent India. We have the Amar Jawan Jyoti in New Delhi at the India Gate, a memorial for those killed in the World Wars, built by the British. We have only added the *jyoti* there. Homage is paid there on special occasions by VIPs but it is hardly a visiting sight for the public who merely gaze at the large India Gate. In contrast, the United States of America has put up a memorial for their soldiers who died in Vietnam — a war fought so far away from their country, and there are proper ceremonies held in Washington, DC at this memorial to pay homage.

A recently published book under the title *Amar Jawan* by Vice Admiral K.K. Nayyar (Retd) gives the names of 18,326 men of the services who gave their lives for India. It is again a timely publication but a small beginning. I have given earlier in the book examples of the outstanding behaviour of some of our soldiers under adverse conditions as PoWs. The nation is not even aware of such cases whom I call the unsung heroes.

When asked to give talks I am often questioned about our neighbour China and the Chinese Army. I have no ‘love’ for them even after this long lapse of time although I do have some personal Chinese friends. They are a shrewd nation led as they are by a

communist regime which has developed a confidence in dealing with others by taking full advantage of the latter's weaknesses and needs. The proof lies in the way they have built up their relations recently with their old 'bitterest enemy', the USA, whom they used to refer to as 'paper tigers' and 'imperialists' in our PoW camp. The United States' need for trade has been used to mesmerise them into forgetting all their talk on human rights and the inhuman and ruthless suppression in Tibet.

There was a very apt cartoon in The Hindu daily showing President Clinton bending over backwards to shake hands with President Jiang Zemin of China on the latter's visit to the US in late 1997. The Chinese have won the most favoured nation (MFN) status from the USA by their sheer inflexible determination without giving up much except perhaps to release an odd dissident. How many more dissidents have been wiped out or are kept locked up, one does not know! Yes, the USA has also gained by being allowed to trade. Venal economic self-interest governs most Western nations' foreign policies, notwithstanding all the loud talk about human rights. China recognises this fact and has given 'concessions' only after attaining a position of strength.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Chinese have assumed the role of another world superpower. They have given enough proof of this in the way they have acted lately. In Mao-Stalin days there was a tussle for leadership of the communist bloc especially during the Korean war, but Stalin while he was alive managed to keep the upper hand. When he died the Chinese openly defied the Soviet domination and Khrushchev was rebuffed by Mao.

Enlightened self interest is a legitimate need for any nation. Under Pandit Nehru's stewardship, we initiated the Non-Aligned Movement at a time when there were hostile power blocs, for which we were branded as 'Soviet stooges' and in spite of all the rantings of 'sitting on the fence' by the western nations, we stuck to it. It served a purpose until it became fossilized rhetoric and was no longer modified or adjusted to changes on the international scene. And the Chinese were the first to take full and openly blatant advantage of this rigid approach even during Pandit Nehru's

leadership.

Now the Chinese talk of peace on the borders with India after having grabbed what they wanted in Aksai Chin and certain other parts of Pak Occupied Kashmir (POK) from Pakistan by befriending them. This is typical of their approach: "This is who we are, take it or leave it." The present communist rulers may be comparatively mild compared to Mao Zedong's time but they have not given up any of their aims and ideals as a communist regime; which it must be recognised as a fact, is nothing but a society of informers and spies and a ruthless police state. They have to 'fool' their own people also if the autocratic system is to last and there is strict control on the media. Their system of evening collective sessions for people to admit their faults (or be branded by others) for violation of self-discipline, allows for little deviation. This was quite explicitly explained to us as PoWs.

With the old Soviet Union disintegrated and the rejection of communism in the West, I have no doubt that it will go in China too but perhaps by a very slow process of 'democratization', as one is witnessing it today. The real change will come only when the present leadership cast in Mao's footsteps fades out, hopefully sooner rather than later.

There is a lesson here for India. The Chinese approach their foreign policy with a deep confidence in the 'Chinese way'. They do not sermonize or pontificate or score 'brownie points' with international political blocs. Their policy is based on a pragmatic 'what is best for China' attitude. The Chinese were not colonised as we were in India. The 'Opium Wars' taught them a never-to-be-forgotten lesson, one that we in India have yet to learn. They have never followed a policy of appeasement. They meet every situation with a deeply intelligent pragmatism: China comes first. And their 'friendships' have always been governed by this fact.

It is perhaps the direct result of colonization that we Indians have little confidence in an Indian way of approaching policy. After all, even our present system of governance is borrowed from our erstwhile masters. A system created and perfected to suit the temperament and conditions of an insular island people has been transferred in a large unassimilated chunk to the Indian

subcontinent, to a race wholly different, to conditions completely alien and with the understandable eruptions of discontent and non-acceptance from within as a result of the latent memories of the ancient indigenous culture and traditions.

In the PoW camp we would carefully study the Chinese guards and later discuss them among ourselves, especially the English speaking ones who were meant to brainwash the officer PoWs. They were not very intelligent but they were certainly indoctrinated to the extent that they carried out their task like 'robots' who had been programmed in a particular way. I have said earlier that their efforts at brainwashing the Indian soldiers failed and they must have known it. Yet they kept at it all the same. This kind of 'programming' of humans which only a totalitarian communist regime can pursue, will produce results for some time but not for all time.

The human mind is basically individualistic and as more prosperity comes to people, there is bound to be more free thinking. That is when the grip of communist ideology will tend to wear out. What Mao's regime did provide through its strict regimentation was the basic needs of people for food, clothing and to some extent housing, but at the heavy cost of individual freedom. I have given examples of what we observed as PoWs. I am confident that the significance of the Tiananmen uprising, so ruthlessly suppressed, was clearly an indication of the simmering undercurrents finding expression. And they were serious enough for the post-Mao regime to take note of and to offer concessions — much publicized but controlled in actual fact, such as permitting a few selected people to see things for themselves or allowing free trade to certain extent, letting some critical articles be published; all to fool the world but also to fool their own people.

The Chinese play up fully any publicity exercise such as the visit of their President to the USA in November '97 or the return visit to China by the US President, but there is no apparent change of heart vis-a-vis Tibet where an ancient and unique civilisation and culture is being systematically and ruthlessly destroyed. More and more Chinese from the mainland are being sent to settle in Tibet, they are marrying Tibetan girls, producing Chinese children

and in the process outnumbering the Tibetan population. Could there be a more ruthless genocide, than the systematic wiping out of the culture and reducing to a minority the Tibetans themselves in Tibet? Mao had openly said, as mentioned earlier in the narrative, that ten million Chinese should go and settle down in Tibet.

We too have the festering problem of Kashmir which is unresolved after more than 50 years. Of course, for idealistic or other reasons of pressure from certain quarters, we had gone to the United Nations Security Council and thus restricted our own hand and capacity to deal with this problem. I wonder if it could have been solved if more Indians had gone and settled there! Our governance of the state has not produced the desired results. We have our own wrong-headed policy to thank for this. The destruction of Charar-i-sharif mosque was only the grossest manifestation of the systematic erosion of the Sufi Islam practised in the Valley which we have allowed to be overrun by the steam-roller fundamentalism of Pakistan's Sunni variety.

The Chinese leadership have learnt their lesson from the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union and thence of communism in the West. They are adapting their controls and their grip on the people in a modified way. After all, the basic system of communism of self-criticism in their commune meetings must continue. At the same time they have been able to demonstrate to their people that they (the present rulers) have earned for China the status of a world power with a nuclear capability, the return of Hong Kong, and trade with the USA, to name just a few achievements. All this will impress the people for the immediate future, but people's expectations of free expression and freedom of action are also bound to grow.

The open gateway through Hong Kong will have its impact while China continues to reap the benefits through trade. And as more interaction with the world outside, especially with democratic countries takes place, the people will want more freedom and political change too. It is bound to come but with the typically inscrutable logic and cleverness of the Chinese, it may take longer than it might in another country under the same circumstances. The present regime has had plenty of experience in controlling

dissent. Even though this dissent may be beneath the surface there can be little doubt that there are heavy undercurrents awaiting their moment. How could they have withheld the news of the disastrous famine in the early 1960's when nearly 30 million people are reported to have died of starvation! This was the direct result of a drop in food production due to the failure of their agricultural reforms under the commune system. It is one living example of the controls exercised by that regime. And it is reported that the Mao regime would not permit the import of food then, lest the secret of famine due to the failure of their system got exposed. What a price to pay for the sake of their system!

With our subcontinental neighbour, the problem is really accentuated by the failure of our older leadership. The partition of the country was a mistake and unless the leadership thinks and plans on that premise, the confusion will remain. We have fought three wars and just when, at the end of each war, we have attained the upper hand, we have deliberately held back, against our national interest, from finding a permanent solution. Our gains in war at no small cost to human life have been frittered away to Pakistan at peace tables. Pakistan's philosophy of full support to Indian anti-establishment movements and terrorism seem to have been 'accepted' by our leadership without going in for a concerted diplomatic or military counter-initiative in the name of so-called peaceful co-existence.

All this is because of our unrealistic and idealistic approach. Ideals are necessary and even fundamental to life, as stated earlier, but not as a badge of weakness. This is not the lesson of the Gita. When Prithviraj Chauhan allowed Mehmud of Gouri to return home after defeat, he only created the future conditions for his own self-destruction. Know your adversary, his strength and weaknesses — this is the true ideal. We have to appreciate that Pakistan loses a fundamental reason for its existence as a separate entity if it drops its anti-Indian bias. It is in its national interest to keep India destabilised and weak.

From 1947 and after referring the Kashmir issue to the Security Council, India has followed a strangely weak policy of incomprehensible concessions, often against its national interest.

Our soldiers have served merely as cannon fodder for this misguided policy. Compare this with the American approach of protecting each American citizen's life with such an aggressive policy. A leadership that genuinely values sacrifice will only strengthen the basis of its governance.

We seem to forget that our neighbour is pursuing its agenda with the covert support of others in a ruthlessly determined way. The solution does not have to be the undoing of that country as happened to its erstwhile eastern wing (now Bangladesh), but India must approach the problem on terms from a position of strength and firmness. We could seek a confederation with adequate safeguards. This solution has to come.

Sri Aurobindo in his message on 15th August 1947 said, “.. the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even an invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position amongst the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that it may come about naturally... But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved...”¹ How prophetic! His prophecy remains unfulfilled still.

Earlier in April of that year he had said about India, “...The difficulties that surround her now and may increase for a time, especially with regard to the Pakistan imbroglio, were also things that had to come and to be cleared out... Here too there is sure to be a full clearance, though unfortunately, a considerable amount of human suffering in the process is inevitable...”²

As a soldier, I see an inexcusable disregard for the sacrifice of thousands and thousands of soldiers' lives in so many wars fought,

1. SABCL Vol. 26, p. 402

2. SABCL Vol. 26, p. 172

with needless wasteful political backtracking as conclusions. Why are we as a nation so hesitant to acknowledge the mistakes of our leadership from time to time? The very hint of any critical comments about some of our old political leaders is taboo. We go on adding more and more monuments in the memory of these leaders and very soon the banks of Yamuna river in Delhi will be nothing but such monuments! It is good that we respect our leaders but why this blind or blinkered adoration at the cost of country's good and future? Such godlike worship of 'great leaders' belongs more to a totalitarian regime than to a democracy.

The general public is more and more confused instead of being educated to believe in the future greatness of the nation. Why are we so hesitant to present the truth in order to restore the faith and trust in the eternal values of our ancient culture and tradition? After all, is *Sanatana Dharma* a religion? Everyone acknowledges that it is a way of life based on our ancient heritage. This is the one great thing of value in our tradition. Why has it been labelled as a religious concoction? Why are we pandering to certain sentiments of the so-called secularists at the cost of our ancient beliefs and culture?

In his stirring address to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, Swami Vivekananda said, "I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions; I thank you in the name of the millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects... I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true..." His words had such an impact on the audience, and then what do we do but go and discard it as being non-secular! Is it only to catch votes that today's so-called leaders function? The persons for whose sake the term secular is so strongly argued by our leaders, are certainly not very secular in their outlook. They are definitely exclusive, expansionist and rigid. *Sanatana Dharma* or the Vedic teaching was all-inclusive, a fact which the world accepts but not some of our leaders.

For the future of the country with its tremendous and yet latent

potential, one can only hope and pray that better sense will prevail among our political parties and that they will put national interest above their party interests in order to exploit the potential for which the world is certainly waiting. We pander to the so-called minority community in the name of secularism and forget the very apt words of the great down-to-earth, practical political leader of our freedom struggle, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: “A minority that could force the partition of the country is not a minority at all.”

The main disclosure of the Jain Commission report on Rajiv Gandhi's assassination which requires careful and detailed attention, is what it says about the functioning of our intelligence agencies and the need for a rectification in their functioning. The failure to take action on the obvious implications of what was being observed and heard on the radio transmissions (not to mention warnings like the one by the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat), as also the faulted operations of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka (even though it must be acknowledged that they achieved substantial successes also) at the cost of a large number of precious lives, was due clearly and mainly to the failure of the performance of our intelligence services in different areas of functioning, namely, collection, collation and distribution of information for timely remedial action. The story of the 1962 debacle was certainly repeated because we had not drawn the right lessons. And how can the lessons be learnt if the records are still being kept under wraps and not released for research and study even after so many years?

We do have different intelligence agencies as well as different types of paramilitary forces each of whom have got their own specified role to fulfil. They are controlled by different ministries and departments in the government. What is lacking is the effective coordination of their activities and proper analysis of information which is gathered, for the good of the nation and without a spirit of one-upmanship. In my earlier narrative I have cited examples of this exclusive spirit.

The same applies to communications which are like the nerves in a human body. We need to enforce a rigid coordination of all communications by different agencies; we shall thereby not only

conserve scarce resources but also prevent breaches of security and compromise of codes and ciphers which might lead to dangerous consequences.

As with intelligence and communications, there is the need for coordination among the three services — Army, Navy and the Air Force by a Joint Defence control with adequate clout for decision making and not at the mercy of non-professional civilian bureaucrats. There was a noticeable improvement in these aspects of coordination in the 1971 war as compared to the 1962 war. This could be because some of the main players of the 1962 war were still on the scene in 1971. But this story is now more than 28 years old and I hope that the lessons of 1971 have not been forgotten because the controls are in the hands of those who have little actual war experience and who are denied the wisdom to be garnered from the war histories which are yet to be written. What one reads in the newspapers on the failure of intelligence in the low-intensity terrorist-led war does not point in a reassuring direction.

Are we afraid that the hallowed reputations of some of our older leaders will be sullied if a critical analysis of their period in power is undertaken? Take our first Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. What tremendous love and affection he commanded from the people whom he genuinely loved. I believe an objective analysis of that period of history or that of his successors will not diminish reputations so much as restore the balance by removing the blind cult of personality while benefitting the country no end for the future. Keeping the wraps on the old records only helps to spoil reputations by generating suspicion that there is something to hide.

Not to close the chapter on too critical a note, I would reiterate my firm belief in the bright future of our country as has already been envisioned by enlightened souls. One hopes and prays that one would be privileged enough to see it happen in one's lifetime. There are clear signs that a sort of *manthan*¹ is taking place in the country to bring all the poison to the surface to expose it and get rid of it. The two bulwarks in the country today are the armed forces and the judiciary. If they can continue to hold their

1. A mythological term meaning 'churning up'.

own traditions and values as they have done so far, then we can certainly look forward to a change for the better sooner rather than later. My one prayer is that we as a nation try and study what the enlightened souls of our nation have said in this very century in an attempt not only to understand but also to recover our ancient heritage and culture.

Let us not forget that China went through a cultural revolution that destroyed much of the traditional dead-wood that still burdens and hampers India today. But then in that kind of violent revolution so much of what is good is also lost. What India is going through is perhaps an evolution without an absolute revolution. There is no doubt in my mind that there is a wonderful light at the end of the dark tunnel through which we appear to be going at present.

Some Thoughts on the Future

It is my strong belief that the progress of our country is being held back purely because we are not claiming or even seeking the inner values of our own culture and heritage. We are presently lost in the prevailing world view of modernity and liberalization which, in a practical sense, merely involves freedom from all moral and ethical values. The resultant attitude seems to throw everything up for grabs at the material level with no holds barred and little concern for the country or other countrymen. In our ancient history, there were periods when rulers were not just ordinary rulers but sages who headed the nation because of their inner strength. They were required to uphold Dharma in its true sense, not merely in a sectarian manner.

It is a sad misfortune for India that the words Dharma or the *Sanatana Dharma* are routinely and automatically associated in the country today with Hinduism. And the word Hinduism is a misnomer, misunderstood and grossly misrepresented. The word was used for the first time only a few hundred years ago, initially to describe the people who lived beyond the Indus river (the Arabic word Hindush) from which followed the words Hindu and Hindustan. It has been imposed on India by foreigners. The so-called 'Hindus' called their religion *Sanatana Dharma*, meaning the 'Eternal way of life'.

What is this *Sanatana Dharma*? Perhaps it is easier to say what it is not rather than what it is. It is the simplest of 'religions' — it has no centralised authority, no hierarchy, no direct or divine revelation, and it has no rigid narrow moral code. It does not need temples to be practised in. One can worship anyone of the many gods or reject them all and believe in 'one reality' nameless and unknowable.

We need to revise the thoughts and ideas which we have inherited from our erstwhile rulers. In fact, I believe we were

systematically ‘brainwashed’ through the educational pattern imposed on us by the British. Allowing the Macaulayan system of education meant to produce clerks and servants of the British raj to persist, is to allow ourselves to continue to be colonised. We are yet to find a National System of Education that brings out the best of our innate strength and values. And nothing appears to be more appropriate today than to study and reflect upon the writings and teachings of some of the greatest thinkers and even sages produced by our country in this very century who have covered so comprehensively various aspects of what ails our nation today.

As a true practising ‘secularist’ soldier of our Army (unlike the slogan raising politicians of today), I consider myself most fortunate to have been introduced to Sri Aurobindo’s writings. He has written so fully on various aspects and in such a lucid manner, if only we would take the trouble to read him. His is not an ordinary writing but a comprehensive analysis of various problems. I quote below some excerpts from his writings which I find are so relevant for our reflection.

Sri Aurobindo puts it very aptly when he says, “...How again can Hinduism be called a religion when it admits all beliefs, allowing even a kind of high-reaching atheism and agnosticism and permits all possible spiritual experiences, all kinds of religious adventures...”¹ He further analyses in the *Foundations of Indian Culture*:² “A spiritual aspiration was the governing force of this culture, its core of thought, its ruling passion. Not only did it make spirituality the highest aim of life but it tried... to turn the whole of life towards spirituality.

But since religion is in the human mind the first native if imperfect form of the spiritual impulse... its endeavour to take hold of life, necessitated a casting of thought and action into the religious mould...” It recognised that — “... man does not arrive immediately at that highest inner elevation... At first he needs lower supports..., he asks for some scaffolding of dogma, worship, image, sign, form, symbol... on which he can stand while he builds up in

1. SABCL Vol. 14, p. 123

2. Now reissued as *The Renaissance in India*

him the temple of the spirit. Only when the temple is completed can the supports be removed the scaffolding disappear. The religious culture which now goes by the name of Hinduism not only fulfilled this purpose, but unlike other religions it knew its purpose. It gave itself no name...; it claimed no universal adhesion, asserted no sole infallible dogma, set up no single narrow path or gate of salvation; it was no less a creed or cult than a continuous enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavour of the human spirit. An immense many sided, many staged provision for a spiritual self-building and self-finding, it had some right to speak of itself by the only name it knew, the eternal religion, *Sanatana Dharma*.¹ And yet again Sri Aurobindo wrote in 'The Ideal of the Karmayogin' - "There is a mighty law of life, a great principle of human evolution, a body of spiritual knowledge and experience of which India has always been destined to be guardian, exemplar and missionary. This is *Sanatana Dharma*, the eternal religion. For the religion of India is nothing if it is not lived— The religion that embraces Science and faith, Theism, Christianity, Mohamedanism, and Buddhism and is yet none of these, is that to which the World Spirit moves."²

And in his writings from the revolutionary period he exhorts his countrymen, "... First, therefore, become Indians.

Recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thoughts, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga. Recover them not only in intellect or sentiment but in your lives."³

In various parts of the world today we have observed major changes, which at face value tend to lead towards disintegration and destruction. But it would not be wrong to say that simultaneously, there are other hopeful signs and trends too. Take for instance moves in various parts of the world towards different types of unification (not the military pacts of yester-year), whether it is the European Union, SAARC, ASEAN, CIS and the like. There is a definite movement towards a greater unified cooperative life

1. SABCL Vol. 14, pp. 121-2

2. SABCL Vol. 2, p. 17

3. SABCL Vol. 2, p. 20

of the human race at the international level in so many fields of endeavour — afforestation, environment, health, science and technology and so on. Different parts of the world are virtually being brought together at so many levels through a collective effort to find answers to the common problems faced by humanity.

Of course, man resists change and the vested interests of certain self-centred nations, organizations or individuals do create obstacles to a progressive growth for the better — which trends are pretty daunting too at times. But then Nature has its own play in the evolution on the earth. As Sri Aurobindo wrote, “Nature uses such means, apparently opposed and dangerous to her intended purpose to bring about the fruition of that purpose.” He further wrote, “There are many conditions and tendencies in human life at present which are favourable to the progress of internationalist idea. The strongest of these favourable forces is the constant drawing together of these knots of international life, the multiplication of the points of contact and threads of communication and an increasing community in thought, in science and in knowledge, Science especially has been a great force in its direction, for science is a thing common to all men... The growth of knowledge is interesting the people in each other’s art, culture, religion, ideas and is breaking down at many points the prejudice, arrogance and exclusiveness of the old nationalist sentiment.”¹

How aptly has Sri Aurobindo said, “The end of a stage of evolution is usually marked by a powerful recrudescence of all that has to go out of the evolution.”²

In order to advance towards the bright future awaiting this great nation of ours, we need to get over the petty squabbling and slogan mongering for political gain over one’s opponents and instead truly work for the future of the country. The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram had said prophetically and reassuringly, “India has become the symbol representing all the difficulties of modern humanity. India will become the land of its resurrection—the

1. SABCL Vol. 15, p. 527

2. Sri Aurobindo 1909-10

resurrection to a higher and truer life.”¹

It is to be hoped that after all the problems and confusion created by different political parties through their hunger for power — using all means, unfair and corrupt, with utter disregard for the country's future, this resultant downward slide in our internal and international affairs will be halted soon. The people of India need to be awakened and guided on to their true heritage and ancient culture without the utter confusion created by materialistic pursuits through the corrupting influence of money-power.

People have been fed over the years with so much false information and propaganda and anti-this and anti-that slogans. It is time that sane thinking people exerted their influence to expose the selfish tactics being followed by politicians just to gain power and importance. Sri Aurobindo had warned, “The possession of power is the great test of all idealisms and as yet there have been none religious or secular which have withstood it or escaped diminution and corruption.”² And he exhorted, “Break the moulds of the past, but keep safe its genius and its spirit, or else thou hast no future.”

It is the great misfortune in our country that at the time of transfer of power from the British we started on the wrong foot so to say after our long struggle for independence, when we ignored the advice of one of the most illumined souls of this century. And then we further paid no heed to the warnings and chose to ignore the true historical evidence of our ancient culture. Instead we believed the motivated, coloured and misguided interpretation of our culture and heritage propagated by an alien power whose interest lay in keeping India divided. Even the false theory of an Aryan invasion was foisted on us and still holds sway in our history books today. This myth was questioned by Sri Aurobindo in the early years of this century and is now being further proved false through recent scientific and archaeological evidence.

I have earlier spoken about the politicians and bureaucracy sharing responsibility for the present state of affairs in the country.

1. *Words of the Mother* Vol. 13, p. 376

2. *SABCL* Vol. 15, p. 459

The situation at present is not very encouraging. A lot remains wrong at the functional level of the government machinery — the attitude appears to disdain even a slight effort to put it right with the excuse that there are too many other pressing problems needing attention at the same time.

We shall have to wake up as a nation by reminding ourselves that it is darkest before the dawn and better days will come only if we can shake ourselves out of our lethargic misguided notions and become true Indians.

Post Script (1999)

While the second edition of the book had gone to the press for publication, we had the 'explosive' and unexpected news about the series of five successful nuclear tests (including the so-called hydrogen device) carried out by our country on 11 and 13 May 98 after a gap of 24 years. The news was welcomed by an overwhelming majority of Indians, and rightly so. As an old soldier, what made me specially happy and proud was the fact that we in India had managed to do this in absolute and total secrecy inspite of the snooping satellite eyes of the big powers 'policing' the world from the skies and failure of all their other intelligence devices and agencies. The entire world was taken completely by surprise. After all, surprise is the main factor when dealing with a hostile neighbourhood which every general in war would aspire to achieve for a successful mission.

There had been numerous reports in the press in recent months about the clandestine activities going on in Pakistan, based on its nuclear ambitions, in collusion with China and otherwise. And on the other side to the North, the deployment of a number of nuclear missiles in Tibet facing South was known more widely since a few years. Indian leadership had rightly taken note of all this.

The follow-up by way of sanctions against India by the big powers was to be expected. In the reactions and pronouncements the world over, one pleasing development was the categorical statement of our Defence Minister (even though he was accused of being undiplomatic) naming the source of the main perceived threat to India. Our neighbour to the North, specialising as it does in double-talk, having so blatantly violated the Panchsheel (five principles) agreement on peaceful co-existence by unprovokedly attacking India on 20 October 1962, has very cleverly done a complete somersault from an aggressive one-pointed anti-USA stance to making friends with them. So much so that the

reactions of the big powers led by USA have been manipulated on the following line — the nuclear arsenal by China in Tibet no matter; how dare India carry out nuclear tests?

In June 1964, when I was the General Staff Officer Grade 1 in the Military Training Directorate at Army HQ, I was directed by the Deputy Adjutant General, Maj Gen A.S. Naravane to suggest some motivational slogans for the Army with regard to the Chinese. I submitted the following suggestions to him on 29 June:

- We shall not be bluffed again by the bogus slogans of *Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai*. We say bye-bye to that treacherous friendship.
- We shall not rest till we have redeemed the pledge taken on our behalf by our late beloved Prime Minister to throw every Chinese out of the Indian territory.
- We say to you, Chinese, “Try it again if you have the guts. We know what your professed friendship meant. We promise you only one thing for sure — a bloody nose.
- We owe it to our comrades so treacherously killed by the Chinese in Oct/Nov 62 by the sudden unprovoked attack, and their widowed and orphaned families, to settle scores with the enemy sooner than later.
- We too have the modern weapons now and we dare the Chinese to try their strength again with us.

With the USA's, one-track obsession of capturing the vast Chinese market for commercial reasons, a convenient nexus has been developed with China together with Pakistan, who was the earlier 'cold war' ally. All the professed and loud earlier pronouncements on human rights violations in China and ruthless suppression in Tibet have been ignored. The covert terrorist activities being openly sponsored and supported by Pakistan since the early 1990's in Jammu and Kashmir and in certain other part of India, are conveniently overlooked by USA and its allies. I have no doubt that the Chinese have long term plans regarding this friendship with USA to which they are giving loud support at the moment. They are an extremely shrewd and calculating nation

ruled at present as they are by a strong and experienced leadership. They could not have just the liberation of Taiwan in mind but I am convinced that they are aiming for a foothold in the Middle East for oil. Time will tell how flawed the American policy has been in its relations with the two most populous nations in the world — one demonstrably democratic at whatever cost and the other ruthless in the pursuit of its goals which only a communist state is capable of.

Is India being punished for not toeing the line and for being too 'independent' minded? Do the big powers hope to bend India down through the imposition of sanctions and other denials? Do they wish as a punishment to deny a flourishing democracy of almost one billion people a voice of their own by denying its rightful membership of the Security Council? It is a testing time for India and Indian leadership. We have to present India's case more strongly and effectively from a position of strength as a nation.

The pity of all these games being played by big powers is that China with its ancient civilization has missed out on India's friendship. It has forgotten how it was India that fought for China not so long ago, against Western domination in the United Nations, for a permanent seat for it in UN, after the communist take over... Has India posed any threat to China ever? Yet the kind of vicious and false propaganda/statements against our country emanating from Beijing, makes one wonder why India should be cowed down and not pay back in the same kind of language. They are not very diplomatic in their language towards us.

What about USA? After the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, USA had intervened in Viet Nam to 'protect' it from the communist takeover. What tremendous destruction was caused in that country in trying to keep a foothold. All kinds of weapons were used including chemicals for defoliation and flame throwers against the civilian population to break the spirit of the North Vietnamese! No consideration was shown at that time of human rights. The only redeeming part of that story leading to an ignoble withdrawal by USA was that it did not resort to the use of nuclear weapons as it had done against Japan in 1946.

It is indeed unfortunate that in India, in the Parliament or outside it, there has seldom been a well informed debate on defence matters. Lacking in practical experience (unlike the Chinese leadership) although there may be any number of theoreticians, the level of discussion, if any, on defence has never been very encouraging. I doubt if any of our *netas* (leaders) have any ideas of the rigours of life which the troops, including para-military forces deployed in the inhospitable border areas, have to face, against what odds, particularly with low intensity terrorist led warfare. It was heartening to read that the present Defence Minister has gone round to most of the difficult areas personally not once but more than once and has recently got some of the bureaucrats sitting in comfortable chairs in Delhi to go out and experience living for few days in some of the difficult areas like Siachen, to appreciate the problems.

Appendix 1¹

Draft of 'the Warrior's call'

The early August afternoon hangs hot and heavy over the fields. In the distance a row of listless palms fronts the sea, ~~which is seen~~ ~~the distant horizon~~ as a line of shimmering blue coolness, inaccessible and slightly unreal in the oppressive heat. The sky is a clear blue canopy, cloudless and unconcerned; it has not rained in many months.

An occasional gust of wind rushes over the land, but instead of relief, it picks up dust and sand from the roads, obliterating travellers, causing them to stop and shield themselves as best they can until it ceases.

Two men ~~on~~ ~~they~~ are bicycling on one of these roads. Steadily, they maintain the shoulder, which is the only hard surface swept clear of sand. Now and then they stop, for the road has become inundated with sand, or climbs so steeply they must walk their cycles to more level ground. They are dressed alike: shorts, tee shirts and tennis shoes, though very dissimilar in appearance.

1 Refers to p. 10.

He then seats himself behind the desk, after asking them to sit on the two chairs which stand on either side.

His face is a burnished bronze, handsome and intelligent. His dark hair and short but bushy mustache are well trimmed and speckled with grey. It is, as in most human faces, his eyes which hold the greatest clue to the man. They are dark, penetrating although friendly. When he speaks, they search immediately for the listener's eyes and hold them at attention, maintaining contact afterwards to ~~gauge~~ assess reaction. This ~~is~~ done in a relaxed if vigilant manner which has the effect of relaxing the listener. It seems a natural part of the man. As he ~~speaks~~ ^{speaks}, his eyes flash, as though with a deep sincerity no matter what ~~is~~ ^{is} said. His speech ~~is~~ clipped and English, well formed and articulate - ~~but~~ ~~confers~~ all the more pleasant for the melodious rise and fall of its slightly Indian tone.

As soon as the other two ~~are~~ ^{are} seated, he asks "Won't you fellows have some water?" and when there ~~is~~ ^{is} a murmur of assent, ~~spring~~ ^{spring} up and stride ~~over~~ to the low cabinet on which an earthen water jug stood, covered with gunny cloth.

In India this offer is synonymous with the offering of any choice refreshment in the West. Drinking water, cool and restorative is a treat at anytime - doubly so on this hot, August afternoon.

He filled two crockery cups and handed them to his visitors, seating himself afterwards again behind the desk.

As they ride in single file, the lead man moves with a studied ease, suggesting that he is used to such exercise. They are both slim and tall, but the man in front is obviously Indian, the other a bearded Westerner, who paddles with an awkward determination rather than skill.

Suddenly they turn into a farm, ride fifty meters up a moderate incline, and stop underneath an open overhang ~~which~~ protruding from a one-story white brick building.

"Hel. L-i-l. O." The Indian calls through an open doorway, ^{while} on the other side of a beige towel-seal jeep parked under the overhang.

"Dineesh!" a voice from within answers, and is followed immediately by its owner, a khaki clad man of average height who steps through the doorway.

"We have come to see your farm."

"Do. Come in. Come in."

The men jerk their eyes and follow him into the building. The interior is dark and much cooler than ~~outside~~ outdoors. There are two rooms, one of which can barely be discerned in the gathered darkness. It holds a ~~bed~~, upon which lays a cabinet of some sort. There also seems to be some low furniture against the walls. The room in which they stand is half taken up by rolls of ^{fencing} wire which occupy its floor. The rest of the room is devoted to a huge desk, which gives both the impression of order and use, a bookcase on the rear wall, lined with thick volumes, pamphlets and other diverse reading material, and another low lying cabinet coming to just under the sill of the window which line the wall facing the desk. Leaning ~~then~~ against this cabinet are a few farming tools such as hoes, etc.

Appendix 2¹

Sri Aurobindo and Bangladesh by
A Lover of India

Behind the jostle of provisional points of view and immediate interests there are the Eternal Landmarks. To lose sight of them is to lose one's way and to steer onto the reefs of expediency and comfortable compromise upon which we shall founder a moment later. Behind the little frontal events there is the greater tide of history and to lose sight of it is to lose one's direction and to let go the golden thread which leads to our perfect fulfillment, be it individual or national. Those who have left their unique mark upon the labyrinth of history are those who have seized the golden thread and affirmed the Greater History and the Greater Meaning against all the claims of expediency.

The Greater History tells us that the whole earth is a single body with a single destiny, but that within that single destiny each part, each nation, has its special role and its rare moments of destiny when it must make the decisive gesture, the true gesture in the total movement of the Eternal History. Each nation is a symbol. Each gesture of each nation potentially represents a little victory in the total victory or a little defeat in the total defeat. And sometimes the whole of our history is at stake at a symbolic point in the global body; and, for better or for worse, the repercussions of a tiny gesture, that little turn to right or left, sound down the ages and over the entire earth.

India is precisely such a symbol and Bangladesh is another, a little turning point in the decisive turning point of the earth. The time has come to sight the Landmarks and read the greater tide in the small eddies. And the greater tide points to India's

1. Refers to p. 181.

role as being the spiritual heart of the terrestrial body just as, for example, the role of France is to express clarity of intellect, or that of Germany to express skill, or that of Russia the brotherhood of man or that of the United States enthusiasm for adventure and practical organization, etc. But only if India is ONE can she fulfil this role, for how can one lead others who is herself divided? Thus the division of India is the first Falsehood which must disappear, for it is the symbol of the earth's division. As long as India is not one, the world cannot be one. India's striving for unity is the symbolic drama where the world's striving for unity is at stake.

From this simple, eternal Fact will issue all the policies which will culminate in the fulfilment of the terrestrial destiny. Sri Aurobindo declared in 1947, "... The partition must go... unity must and will be achieved..." Dire will be the consequences for India and for the whole earth if we fail to heed this eternal Theorem: "The old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country," declared Sri Aurobindo. "It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest." We now know, twenty-four years after this prophetic declaration that the Chinese dragon is at our gates and only awaits her hour to invade the entire continent, seizing on precisely this division of India to strike at the spiritual heart of the world and, perhaps, frustrating realization of the entire terrestrial destiny or delaying it until a future cycle after much suffering and complication.

The Greater History declares that India must again be one, and the current of history is so imperious that twice already destiny has managed to confront India with the possibility of her reunification. The first time was in 1965 when Pakistan's foolish aggressiveness allowed India to counter-attack and carry the battle right into the suburbs of Lahoret — and up to Karachi had she but had the courage to boldly seize her destiny. It was indeed the hour for a decisive choice. Mother declared categorically: "It is for the sake and the triumph of Truth that India is fighting and

must fight until India and Pakistan have once more become ONE because that is the truth of their being..." Instead, at Tashkent, we settled for a petty compromise which was to lead us into a second, more sanguine and painful reef, Bangladesh. There too destiny graciously arranged to allow India to speed to the aid of her massacred brethren; even the famous sky-jacking incident of January was, as it were, arranged by the Grace so as to spare India from delaying her intervention until it was too late (or to spare her the shame of not intervening at all and allowing Pakistan's planes to fly over her head loaded with weaponry and murderers to slaughter her brothers), But there again, yielding to the demands of the moment and the small, short-sighted interests, we refused to accept the challenge of Greater History. We now find ourselves on the brink of a new compromise which will lead us inevitably to a third reef even more disastrous than the others. For it is inevitable that India must one day, again confront that which, twice before, she has fled, and each time the conditions will be more difficult, the confrontation more dangerous for her and for the world — so dangerous that the whole earth will perhaps, as a result, find itself engulfed in another general conflict — whereas the whole story could have been resolved at the little symbolic point that is Bangladesh, at the right hour, with the right gesture, with a minimum of suffering.

For let there be no doubt about it, the story of Bangladesh is not a local event, it is a world event. The division of India is not a local misfortune, it is a terrestrial Lie which must disappear if the division of the world is to disappear. And here again it is the voice of Sri Aurobindo we hear when, six months before his passing away, we were confronted by another phenomenon which seemed of such slight importance, so far off, so obviously a "local" affair at the other end of the world: the invasion of South Korea in 1950 twenty-one years ago. And yet that small Korean symbol, like the small symbol of Bangladesh (or the one of Czechoslovakia in 1938), contained in germ the whole fatal course along which the world still moves towards a sinister destiny: "The affair of Korea, "wrote Sri Aurobindo", is the first move in the Communist plan of campaign to dominate and take possession first of these

Northern parts and then of South East Asia as a preliminary to their manoeuvres with regard to the rest of the continent — in passing Tibet as a gate into India.” Now twenty-one years later, we see that Tibet and the whole of South-East Asia have been engulfed and the “gate into India” has truly been opened by the Lie of Pakistan — already, or shortly, the Chinese are, or will be in Khulna, only some hundred and twenty kilometers from Calcutta, to help Yahya Khan to “pacify” Bengal. To his words quoted above Sri Aurobindo added, “If they succeed, there is no reason why domination of the whole world should not follow by steps until they are ready to deal with America.”

This is the stage we have reached. That which we seek to flee returns upon us with tenfold force. The hour for political calculation, for the pros and cons of our petty mathematics of expediency (which always goes awry) is past.

The time has come to rediscover the Greater Meaning of India which is really the Greater Meaning of the world, and to place our faith in the Spirit which leads her Destiny, rejecting petty fears of a phantom ‘world opinion’ and the half-measures which only lend strength to the enemy. Tomorrow America, will, perhaps, resume her economic aid to Pakistan on the pretext of counter-acting the Chinese presence. The Bangladesh slaughter will be glossed over by a pseudo-regime which will function with the blessing of the international community. But one does not cheat the tide of history: eventually our little compromises will crumble and we will have to face a terrible ordeal, its intensity nourished by our successive failures in the past.

The sooner not only India, but America and Russia too, understand the irreality of Pakistan and the magnitude of what is at stake, the sooner may the looming catastrophe be halted before it becomes totally and definitely irrevocable. “One thing is certain,” wrote Sri Aurobindo a few months before his passing away “that is, if there is too much shilly-shallying and if America gives up now her defence of Korea (we could go further and say, the defence of Bangladesh) she may be driven (and this is even more true for India) to yield position after position until it is too late. At one point or another she will have to stand and face the

necessity of drastic action even if it leads to war.”

The battle of India is the battle of the world. This is where the world's tragic destiny, or, it may be, its hopeful leap into a new world of Truth and Light, is being prepared; for we are told that the deepest darkness lies nearest the most luminous light.

The last Asura must die at the feet of the Eternal Mother.

Appendix 3¹

Auroville

Auroville, the city of Dawn, named after Sri Aurobindo is located in Tamil Nadu State along the Coromandel coast about 150 Km South of Madras. Some small areas of Auroville are also located in the Union Territory of Pondicherry. The centre of Auroville is about 12 Km north of Pondicherry.

Auroville is a unique project meant to give a concrete expression to the evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo. This international cultural township for a planned population of 50,000 was inaugurated on 28 February 1968. Two youth, a boy and a girl, each representing their respective countries and all the States of India poured handfuls of soil, brought from their countries and states, into a marble lotus-shaped urn which is now to be found in the middle of a specially built amphitheatre at the centre of Auroville. Earth from the then 125 member nations of UNESCO and the different states of India was mingled together, symbolising the creation of a city dedicated to universal understanding and human unity. The urn was then sealed.

The Mother described Auroville as a “Living Laboratory,” where people of all races, religions, cultures and nationalities could live and work together in a spirit of peace and progressive harmony. Auroville was also described by the Mother as a “window on the world.” Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have affirmed that humanity is about to enter into a new age. This new age, according to them, demands an unprecedented growth of consciousness of the individual and the collectivity. It demands not only a meeting of the East and the West, but also a complex unity which would establish in material life the ideal of the Family of Man. To bring

1. Refers to p. 212.

about this great change, an intensive research will be needed both in material and spiritual sciences. Auroville has been founded to create conditions in which all these changes can be worked out. Auroville should therefore be looked upon as a field of research and experimentation and as a field of new creation.

Sponsored by the Government of India, the proposal for Auroville township was supported by a number of unanimous resolutions of the UNESCO General Conference in 1966, 1968 and 1970 and subsequently. In its resolution of 1966, the General Conference “invited international non-governmental organizations to participate in the development of Auroville as an international cultural township designed to bring together the values of different cultures and civilization in a harmonious environment with integrated living standards which correspond to the man’s physical and spiritual needs.”

The Charter of Auroville presented below was given by the Mother in 1968 at the time of inauguration:

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular; Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages.
3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realizations.
4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

The site chosen for this international city was a most challenging one. Located on a dry over-grazed plateau with severe soil erosion, it was characterized by a network of ravines cutting through the exposed red laterite earth, down which tons of topsoil was lost to the monsoon rains every year. With the coming of summer, hot winds sweeping across the already barren fields had turned the area into a quasi desert.

The first priority in Auroville, after its foundation, was to restore life to the barren and dying land. A tremendous amount of work was done by the early pioneering Aurovilians, soil conservation and water preservation through scores of miles of contour bunding, check dams and other measures while simultaneously undertaking a massive afforestation programme. Today there is vegetation all round with lush green forests, virtually bringing an ecological revolution. More than an estimated 2 million trees are now planted on Auroville land, and another 2 million or more on village land in collaboration with the local people.

At the centre of Auroville stands the nearly completed Matrimandir, a giant sphere, nine storeys high, the “Soul of Auroville” in the Mother’s words, “a place for concentration” for silence and for self-finding. Radiating out are the four zones — cultural, international, industrial and residential, each focusing upon an important aspect of the community’s activities. Surrounding the city area there will be a forested green belt. While a good part of the land has still to be acquired, Auroville presently manages only around half the total land needed to make up the combined city area and surrounding Green Belt. One of Auroville’s key initiatives is an attempt to secure the land required to assure a harmonious and sustainable development of the complete plateau and bioregion.

The present collectivity consists of over 100 settlements of varying sizes. Activities are multifarious, and include greenwork, organic agro-forestry, educational research, health care, village development, appropriate technology, small and medium scale business, artistic enterprises and community services.

Until her passing in 1973, the Mother was in charge at the physical level. Thereafter, Auroville was embroiled in a struggle with an organization which claimed ownership of the project. During this time Auroville had to evolve its own organization and identity. In 1980, responding to requests from the community, the Government of India took over the management of Auroville’s assets and undertakings temporarily. A period of renewed stability and growth followed. In 1988, under the new Auroville Foundation Act passed by the Parliament of India, these assets

and undertakings were vested in an autonomous body called the Auroville Foundation, with the aim of ensuring that the Auroville collectivity would be free henceforth to develop in accordance with its Charter and other ideals given by the Mother.

The Auroville Foundation consists of three main components: the International Advisory Council, the Governing Board and the Residents Assembly. The International Advisory Council advises the Governing Board and the Government of India on matters relating to the management and development of Auroville.

The Governing Board has the overall responsibility for the proper management and development of Auroville. The Chairman and members are appointed by the Central Government. The day to day functioning is overseen by a Secretary to the Auroville Foundation who is the official representative of the Government residing in Auroville. The Residents' Assembly, comprises all the residents of Auroville (over the age of 18). It is this body which decides upon the terms of its membership, and is responsible for evolving and implementing a master plan for Auroville's future development in consultation with the Governing Board. It is also the Residents Assembly that oversees all the different activities of Auroville which are run by autonomous Working Groups.

A Perspective Auroville Township Master Plan 2000-2025 was approved by the Government of India in February 2001, and is in process of being gradually implemented.

Auroville has been making steady progress in various fields since its foundation. Besides the fact that a quasi-desert has been turned into a green and beautiful environment, a number of activities have been started, some of them with the support of the Central Government and the Tamil Nadu State Government. One such is the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) whose primary aim is to take advantage of the exceptional setting of Auroville as an international community to do research and promote a new system of education. There are numerous units of this Institute with emphasis on an education that turns within and encourages growth of consciousness. Learning and teaching materials have been developed. Many books, starting with *The Aim of Life* and *The Good Teacher and the Good*

Pupil and going on to cover many topics have been compiled by Aurovilian researchers which have received a great ideal of praise from scholars and educationists in India and abroad.

The SAIIR has research teams focused upon developmental work in neighbouring villages with a number of educational experiments especially meant for the needs of the surrounding villages. Savitri Bhavan is an important research and educational centre near Bharat Nivas which houses all kinds of materials and activities relating to Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic poem 'Savitri', plus other teachings and writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Auroville's Village Action Group has been engaged in a co-evolution programme of development for the almost 100 villages in the Vanur Taluk.

Through a well established network of women's and men's Self Help Groups (SHGs), AVAG implements programmes across the four critical areas of community development, economic development, capacity building and psychosocial services with approx 5,000 villagers. The component programmes offered by AVAG include: micro-finance, micro-projects and collective work camps, capacity building training and seminars for villagers, psychological and physical health initiatives, environmental awareness, livelihood training and social enterprise development, expansion of legal access for women and children confronted with human rights abuses, caste integration exchange programmes, and exposure trips.

Increasingly involved in sharing its innovative and sustainable solutions in the bioregion, Auroville was asked by the Government of Tamil Nadu last year to establish an Institute for Sustainable Livelihoods, initially for rural Tamil Nadu, but ultimately for the whole of India and farther afield. This joint initiative is up and running and has received government workers from the local level development officers to the state level officials from Chennai for short training stints in Auroville.

There is a wide variety of experiments in architectural design in Auroville. A number of Indian and foreign students come to Auroville to study its architecture, sustainable building technology

and design programmes for short and long periods.

The Auroville Earth Institute which is recognized internationally for its stabilized mud block building technology has become one of the world's top centres for excellence in earthen architecture, working in 35 countries to promote and transfer knowledge in earth architecture. The work of the Earth Institute has attempted to revive traditional skills and to link ancestral and vernacular traditions of raw earth construction with the modern technology of stabilised earth.

Auroville Centre for Scientific Research (CSR) is an international voluntary organisation working towards a sustainable future in the field of renewable energy systems (wind, solar, biomass), appropriate architecture & building technologies, waste water recycling and sanitation, and the transfer of these technologies through training programmes.

Auroville has the highest concentration of alternative and appropriate energy systems in India, including solar, wind and biogas generating systems. Of particular interest are the huge 15-metre diameter solar collector installed on the roof of the Solar Kitchen designed to generate enough steam to cook over 1,000 meals a day, and the Matrimandir Solar Power Plant, believed to be the largest stand-alone system in India, comprising 484 photovoltaic modules with total capacity of 36.3 KW. Some 750 homes and/or offices operate entirely or mostly on solar power.

An Auroville unit, Varuna Energy & Water, owns and runs 6 wind energy generators with the aim of supporting Auroville by way of a free supply of electricity and water produced from sustainable resources. Varuna Auroville is also researching the possibilities of a desalination plant to address the long term water needs of this growing township.

The Auroville Botanical Garden was started in August 2000. Conservation and preservation of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) is the Botanical Garden's special mission. Since Auroville's inception, teams of green workers involved in the reforestation work of Auroville have been making trips to sacred groves to collect seeds of the native TDEF species. Despite this, a recent survey done by the Botanical Garden has shown that

sacred groves are still rapidly shrinking in size. Encroachment is rampant. Fortunately, with Auroville now having all the native TDEF species, seed collection happens within Auroville itself. There are a number of small and experimental centres trying methods of organic farming and greenwork where persons interested can volunteer. Sadhana Forest is a community focused on water conservation and the indigenous reforestation of 70 acres of severely eroded Auroville land located inland from Moratandi, off the Pondicherry-Tindivanam road. Sadhana Forest is based on volunteers coming to work there around the year from India and all over the world. A thousand volunteers a year are provided with free accommodation in huts built from local, natural materials. Energy is provided by a solar system; other sustainable practices implemented in the community are vegan organic nutrition, recycling and waste minimisation, biodegradable toiletries, composting toilets, a grey water system, and, very importantly, positive and supportive emotional attitudes.

Almost from its inception, Auroville has been running a Primary Health Centre with many sub-centres in local villages.

Auroville Health Centre, equipped with modest facilities and staffed over the years by Indian, French, German and Spanish doctors serves, besides the Auroville community, more than 100 patients daily from the neighbouring villages. The Centre provides preventive health education as well as treatment, dental care and family planning programmes. There are other centres that cater for different systems of medicine besides allopathy: namely homeopathy, biochemic, acupuncture, ayurveda, massage, etc.

Occupying a beautiful seven acre beachfront compound approximately five kilometers north of Pondicherry, the Quiet Healing Center is Auroville's health spa. Quiet offers a wide variety of natural healing therapies. A place to relax, rejuvenate, recharge and heal; a place to discover deep contentment, inner peace and joy.

In Auroville there are around 180 commercial units operating, falling under the following broad categories: Architecture & Construction, Clothing & Fashion, Electronics & Engineering,

Food, Handicrafts, Shops & Boutiques, Travel, and Others.

Auroville is approaching its 50th year of existence. It presents itself as a vibrant, rich, growing and expanding environment for all who seek a place to research, study and experiment upon creating the conditions which can bring about the growth of consciousness that can change humanity's future.

Glossary of Terms/Abbreviations

AVSM	Ati Visisht Seva Medal
ADMS	Assistant Director of Medical Services
Bde	Brigade
Bn	Battalion
BOO	Brigade Orderly Officer
BOR	British Other Rank(s)
BOWO	Brigade Ordnance Warrant Officer
Brig	Brigadier
Capt	Captain
C in C	Commander-in-Chief
CO	Commanding Officer
Col	Colonel
Coy	Company
COAS	Chief of Army Staff
CSO	Chief Signal Officer
EI	Extra Issue
FFI	Free from infection
FS	Field Service
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOC in C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
GS	General Staff/Service
HF	High Frequency
HQ	Headquarters
IAC	Indian Air Lines
IGAR	Inspector General of Assam Rifles
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
IMA	Indian Military Academy
INA	Indian National Army
IOR	Indian Other Rank(s)
J & K	Jammu and Kashmir
JCO	Junior Commissioned Officer

Lt	Lieutenant
Lt Col	Lieutenant Colonel
Lt Gen	Lieutenant General
LCA	Landing Craft Assault
LCI	Landing Craft Infantry
LSH	Landing Ship Headquarters
MA	Mountain artillery
Maj	Major
Maj Gen	Major General
MLO	Military Landing Officer
MM	Mixed Madrassis
MT	Mechanical Transport
MVC	Maha Vir Chakra
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
NEFA	North-East Frontier Agency
OC	Officer Commanding
OTS	Officers Training School
P&T	Post and Telegraph
PMs	Punjabi Musalmans
PoW	Prisoner of War
PT	Physical Training
PVC	Param Vir Chakra
PVSM	Param Visisht Seva Medal
QMG	Quarter Master General
Retd	Retired
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
SEAC	South East Asia Command
SO-in-C	Signal Officer-in-Chief
Sqn Ldr	Squadron Leader
VCO	Viceroy's Commissioned Officer
STC	Signal Training Centre
VHF	Very High Frequency

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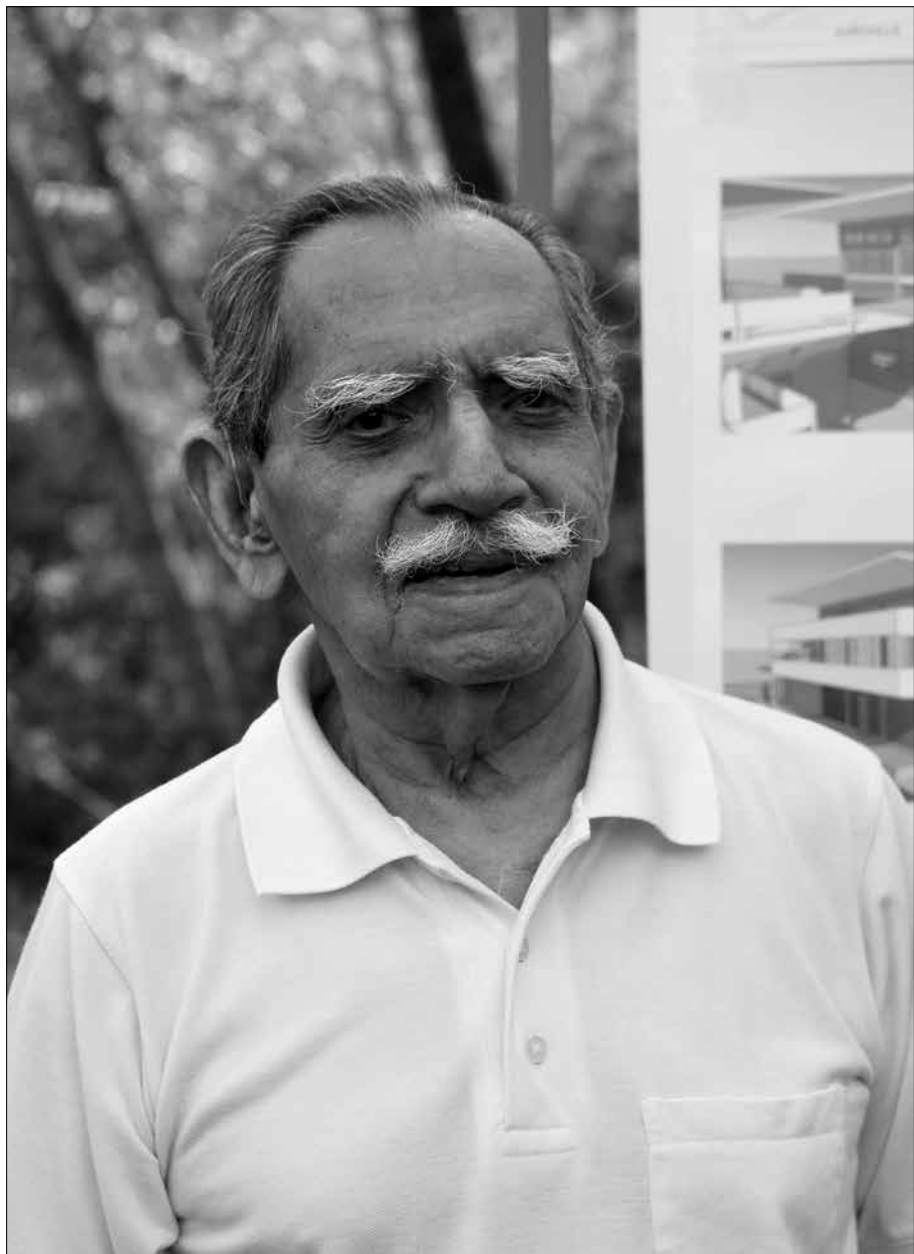
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Author at 93, on the occasion of the *Bhumi Puja* of the new Auroville Archives building (October 4, 2015)

Maj Gen Krishen Kumar Tewari, PVSM, AVSM was commissioned as an officer in the British Indian Army in 1942. During World War II, he served in the Allied War effort that successfully pushed the Japanese out of North East India and Burma.

Subsequently he took part in the amphibious assault on Malaya in September 1945 and the formal surrender by the Japanese Army in Kuala Lumpur.

At the time of the 1962 conflict with China, he was taken PoW and spent 7 months in captivity in Tibet.

In 1971, during the Bangladesh Liberation War, he was posted as the Chief Signal Officer (CSO), Eastern Command (Kolkata), responsible for the communications on the front.

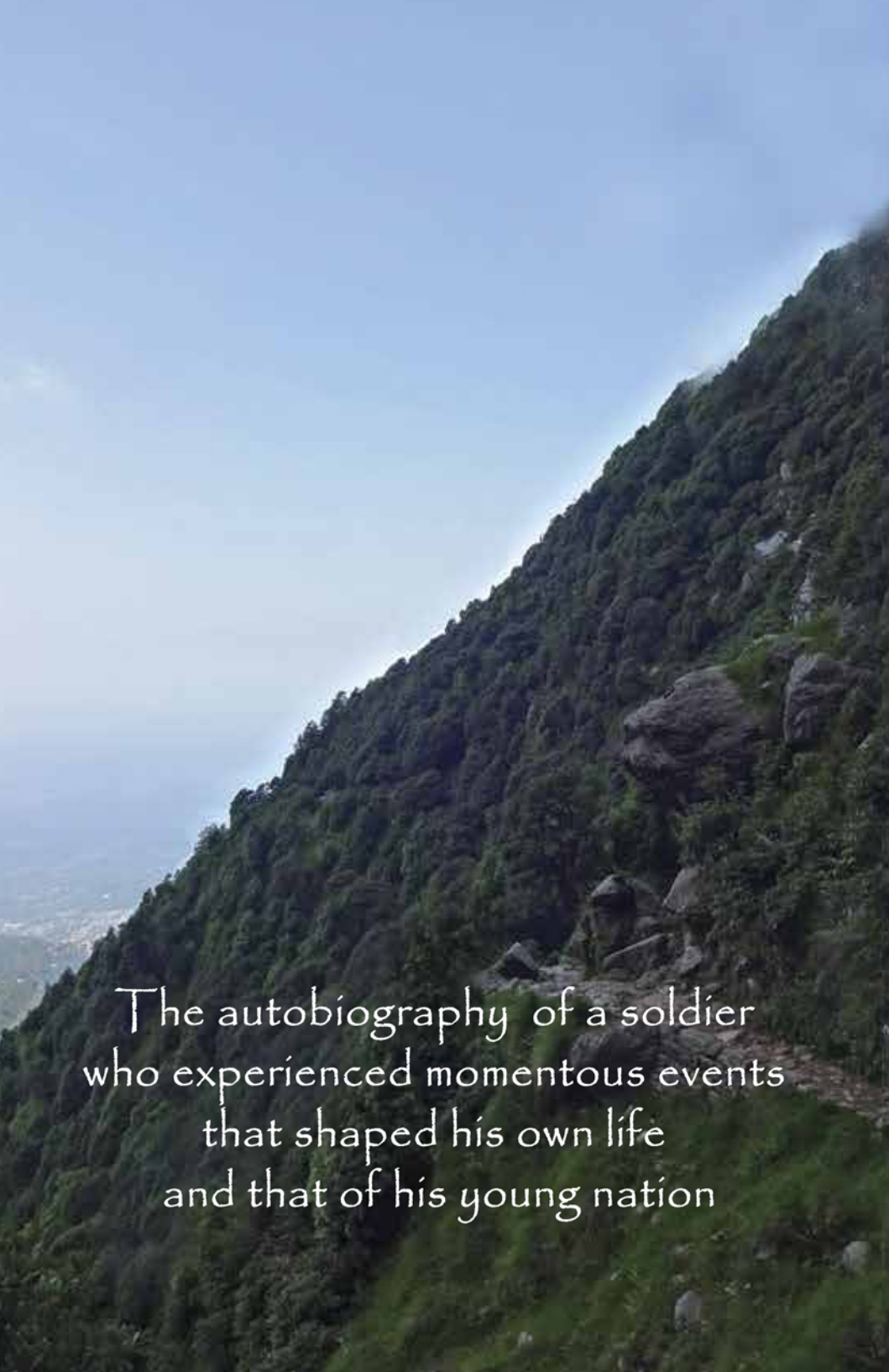
After the surrender by the Pakistan Army in Dacca, he decided to visit the Ashram in Pondicherry with his family, where they had the privilege of a personal darshan of The Mother.

In 1976, he retired as the CSO, Northern Command.

Concluding an illustrious career spanning 35 years, with more than its fair share of combat experience, he retired, a highly decorated soldier of the Indian Armed Forces, to take up a new career in Auroville that anticipates no retirement.

At 93, he still runs the Auroville Archives.

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A photograph of a steep, forested mountain slope. The mountain is covered in dense green vegetation, with several large, dark rocks visible on its face. The sky is a clear, pale blue. In the lower-left background, a small town or city is visible in a valley. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

The autobiography of a soldier
who experienced momentous events
that shaped his own life
and that of his young nation