

III/2011

NISHAAN

NAGAARA



**Infinite Courage :
Sikhs as Warriors
The Khas Fauj
Clash of the Lions
Tryst with Destiny**

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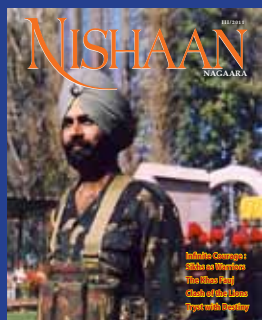
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Cover : Jawan of the 2nd Sikhs at
Baramulla Memorial parade
(photo by Pushpinder Singh)

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Infinite Courage: Sikhs As Warriors

If anyone knows anything at all about Sikhs it is their martial antecedents. It is usually the first and often the only topic that Sikhs and non-Sikhs touch upon when the subject is Sikhs or Sikhi. Their narrative of courage and as warriors is awesome, with few parallels in the annals of mankind; this special issue will have many erudite descriptions and analyses of it.

Remember that human and Indian history are old and there is no day one to them but Sikh history is barely 500 years old; the founder of Sikhi, Guru Nanak, was born only in 1469.

I will not dwell in any detail on the many events of Indian history that might have turned out painfully different but for the sacrifice and martyrdom of Sikhs, even though they never amounted to more than two percent of the burgeoning Indian population.

India became independent only in 1947. In its protracted struggle for freedom over two thirds of all Indians who were sentenced to death, imprisonment for life or exile were Sikh. India's army, whether under the British or post independence had always been dominated by Sikh soldiers; indeed its officer corps was better than 40 percent Sikh. The two great World Wars claimed over a million Sikh lives in defense of freedom; cemeteries in France, Belgium and Italy bear ample testimony to their courage and sacrifice. Their awards and haul of the Victoria Crosses and other tributes to courage are larger than that of any other people of similar numbers. In their heyday the British recognised Sikhs as a *martial race* even though anthropologically they are not and never were a separate race.

Modern India also experienced the indomitable Sikh courage in fighting the British in the 1840s and in 1920s; and fighting different enemies in 1947 and in 1984.

Many of these are contemporary matters that come with rich antecedents that shaped a people. But I leave them to another day. Each demands and deserves a special chapter. A map of the Indian subcontinent reveals interesting political geography.

Its northern border is the Himalayan mountain range, as good a natural and impenetrable barrier as nature could design, and reinforced by India's triangular rim guarded by the sea. This left only a murky and risky passage through the Khyber Pass into northwest India – connecting Afghanistan and the Middle East with Punjab, the homeland of the Sikhs. And until the Continental Europeans and the British came in larger numbers by the sea, it was the Khyber Pass that was the inlet for the myriad invaders of India, from the Caucasian-Aryans to the Greeks under Alexander the Great, Mongols, Persians, Afghans, Egyptians Arabs and sundry tribals from the Middle East; they came to conquer and stay, plunder and return or perish.

As Islam entered the mix, a hefty dose of religious tension, friction, fanaticism and intolerance was added to the heady brew of invasions. Thus invasions of India through the Khyber Pass became, for millennia, an annually recurring theme until Sikhs finally put a stop to it in the early 18th century. I also acknowledge that during the 16th and 17th centuries the Mughal Empire largely curtailed such "across the border" raids.

My thoughts go the oft-chanted cry "Remember the Alamo" that is now embedded in American ethos and history. There are so many incidents like that in Sikh history – like the siege of Anandpur in the 17th century and the battle of Saragarhi in the 21st. I can do no better than to cite Gary Brecher, a commentator on military tradition, that "Sikh military history is so packed with glorious last stands that George Armstrong Custer would be a smalltime footnote if he'd worn a big turban ..."

Poets and balladeers still sing of infinite courage of Sikhs in battle and their nobility even when the stakes were high and ground realities against them. Their enemies in battle, even when demeaning them as "dogs" recognised that Sikhs did not loot civilians or abduct their women; they fought honorably, ministered a fallen foe. They were ready to negotiate peace even in the midst of the most horrendous battle. As General Eisenhower reputedly said "What matters

in a fight is not the size of the dog but the size of the fight in the dog." This is courage.

History often turns on a dime.

While we celebrate Sikh heroism amidst unimaginable adversity we often forget that this Sikh military tradition is of relatively recent vintage – less than half a millennium old. If it now appears to be inseparably embedded in their DNA, was it always so?

I understand the biological dictum of "hybrid vigor." Were the Punjabis of northwest India so energetic and fearless because the invaders and their religions met and collided in that part of the world? The seed of courage may have existed in the Punjabi Indian but, when for centuries marauding invaders succeeded so well in debasing India, even then they were dealing with the same Indians – the same stock -- from which the Sikhs later emerged.

Modern biology tells us that not every gene expresses itself fully, automatically or immediately and not every seed flowers or bears fruit that's of any use. A nurturing ambience is equally necessary. And that was the unique contribution of Sikhism. Not just by theoretically teaching was this achieved but by living purposefully was a people taught how to live and die with dignity. And that, to me, is the quintessential message of Sikhism.

In the celebration of the awesome Sikh heroism we also overlook the larger meaning of courage – the most fundamental and visible trait of the warrior.

Life asks us to fight many battles. An oft quoted line sometimes ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh goes "*man mai(n) har chit mai(n) judh nichharay*," recommending the name of God on the lips and thoughts of war in the heart. To me, it doesn't promote duplicity in motive or glorification of war; the battlefield recommended here is that of the mind that remains the foremost, never ending battle; I see similarly the exhortation that the Khalsa should fight everyday (...*karay nit jung*). One only needs to juxtapose these lines with another from Guru Granth that says "*Man jeetay jag jeet*." The coward dies a thousand deaths; the brave dies but once. *Aisee marni jo maray bahur na marna hoye* is the boon to ask and to live so that in the battle of life to never abandon the field (*purza purza cut maray kabhoo na chhaday khet*).

The whole idea of empowering people started with Guru Nanak. Keep in mind that at that time the majority of India was Hindu by religion while the

politically dominant were Muslims. Hindu society was divided along rigidly defined lines of caste that allowed no upward mobility and virtually created a whole population of low caste slaves. Islam had, by its military prowess, turned increasingly intolerant and fanatic; simply stated it had become: "Convert to Islam or die."

How does one create a paradigm shift? How to empower a disenfranchised people? What is the meaning then of hope, dignity and courage. The times demanded transformation of the individual and nation-building.

Guru Nanak laid the seeds of the revolution of the mind by showing how to speak truth to authority and dedication to truth. And, quite expectedly, he spent time in jail for it.

A century later, the citadels of power in the Muslim and the Hindu worlds saw their hegemony threatened by Guru Nanak's message; as a result Guru Arjan was martyred then and another hundred years later Guru Tegh Bahadur. When in 1699 Guru Gobind Singh demanded a head five Sikhs stood up as evidence of the cultural sea change that had resulted from Guru Nanak's message and subsequent Sikh history.

It is not that one sheds all fear, the lesson is in how to transcend it.

By that time transparency, accountability, participatory self-governance had been learned; the gene of courage had found expression. Metaphorically, the modest flame of courage had become a never-ending roaring fire.

Today, I see a growing interest in the ethos of courage, sacrifice and martial spirit, especially in the diaspora. Amandeep Singh Madra and Paramjit Singh, both U.K. based, authored a handsome well-written narrative "*Warrior Saints: Three Centuries of the Sikh Military Tradition*". A Canadian Sikh, Sandeep Singh Brar, developed a virtual museum (Sikhs.org) on many aspects of Sikh life and tradition including their military history.

We often overlook one great lesson of Sikh military history and the Gurus: "No one abhors war more than the soldier who has lived its depravity and cruelty."

Courage: The more we remember it the more it grows like wild flowers. If it is like a fire it is only by history that we continue to fan it. And then courage becomes infinite.

Dr IJ Singh



Genesis of the Sikh Army

The despot emperor Aurangzeb died in 1707, which was followed by what amounted to a free-for-all between the Mughals, Afghans and Persians. However, such power vacuum in the Punjab was in fact to be filled by the Sikh confederacy and by 1748 the various chiefs reorganised themselves into the *Dal Khalsa* or 'Army of the Pure', further divided into 12 individual commands or *misl*s ('equals') each under its own *misl*dar or *sardar* (chief). These forces drove out the Mughals, repelled nine determined Afghan invasions, and in 1764 captured Lahore, traditional capital of the Punjab.

The *misl* chiefs had begun to create their own standing armies in the second half of the 18th century. Although there were a few infantry and a small amount of artillery, these consisted predominantly of cavalry. All respectable Sikhs fought mounted, and an infantryman was held in universal contempt, being 'left behind to garrison forts, to look after the women or to follow, as best he could, the fighting force, until he in turn could afford to change his status and buy or steal a horse for his own use'.

There are several estimates of the military strength of the *misl*s at about the end of the 18th century, which amounted to an overall strength of some 60-75,000 horse, upto 25,000 infantry and 40 guns. Ranjit Singh's Sukarchakia *misl* was reputedly capable of fielding 22,000 horse and foot in 1792.

While appreciating the flexibility and manoeuvrability of traditional Sikh organisations and tactics, Ranjit Singh was quick to recognise the advantages – at least over undisciplined native forces – enjoyed by armies which had adopted French or British military systems, and he was determined to organise an army of his own along similar lines. Cavalry would no longer be considered the dominant arm on a battlefield;

instead, artillery and large masses of disciplined infantry would come to predominate.

Though Sayyad Mohammed Latif, writing in the 1830s, describes Sikh regular infantry campaigning in Jhang in 1803, it is now generally believed that Ranjit's first disciplined battalion was raised in 1805. By 1807 at the latest he had raised three battalions of regular infantry and by 1808 some 1,500 men were organised into five battalions, by 1811 more than 2,800 were organised into nine battalions. By 1813 these disciplined troops secured a decisive victory over the Afghans at the battle of Chuch.

Ranjit Singh was perhaps unable or unwilling to abandon the traditional Sikh military system entirely — not only because the majority of his *sardars* demonstrated a strong aversion to both discipline and the adoption of European methods, but also because it would take time to build his new disciplined force up to effective strength. By respecting the *sardars'* prejudices, he could continue to depend on their loyalty and their sizeable military resources. He nevertheless recognised the need to bring such irregular elements under more centralised control.

Maintaining the old irregular army alongside the new regular troops entailed dividing the kingdom's armed forces into two separate branches: the state army, and the *Jagirdari Fauj* or feudal army. The former comprised the new European-style regular units, the most well trained being the *Fauj-i-khas*, or the Royal Army (today's Special Forces), then the *Fauj-i-ain*, or regular army, and then there was a central corps of irregular troops maintained by the state, consisting of the *Ghorchurras* or *Fauj-i-sowari* (irregular cavalry) and the *Fauj-i-qilajat* (fortress garrisons and guards).

Extracted from *The Sikh Army 1799-1849* (written by Ian Heath and illustrated by Michael Perry and published by Osprey).



*(top) Jagirdari horseman, 1799-1849
(left) Irregular infantryman, c.1815
(right) Early regular infantryman, c.1810-20*

The Khas Fauj of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia



Extracts from the book by Sumant Dhamija*

Jassa Singh's troops were impressive. Being Jats they were known to have a wiry physique and to possess a 'cool obstinate courage'. They were hardy and used to hardship. Warren Hastings, in a minute presented to his Council in 1784 said of the Sikhs that they were 'by their bodily frame and habits of life, eminently suited to the military profession...'. They made excellent cavalymen. Another observed that 'he (the Sikh) looked after his horse as none other...and although he would spend a mere farthing on himself, was lavish on spending on his horse...'. Like other Sikhs, Jassa Singh too had this love of horses, a natural empathy and concern which developed on his first job which was to feed and care for the Khalsa equerry. He went to great pains to ensure they were properly fed and immediately treated after injury.

GRC Williams wrote in the Calcutta Review 1875, 'At a pinch he could march 20 or 30 miles a day...A tent he despised. Baggage in the ordinary sense of the word he had none... Besides his weapons his whole kit consisted of horse gear, a few of the simplest cooking utensils, and two blankets...'. In emergencies he could ride 50 miles a day.

Their requirement for clothes was simple, as they were, like the peasants and marginal farmers of the time, clad in a pair of loose breeches and a kurta and a turban. The latter was taken off when charging the enemy on their steeds. In winter, they wore a thin shawl made of cotton worn partly around the middle and partly over the shoulder. They could exist on very little, and mostly lived off the land. Their basic diet was *karah prashad*, *dal* and *roti*. When on the march, they were content with *chanas* (parched gram) and jiggery, a nutritious high calorie diet, washed down by water. They ate meat whenever they could get it, but would never touch beef, although there were rare instances of imbibing this in times of extreme

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia followed Guru Gobind Singh's high ideals in letter and spirit and gave the benefit of these to his troops. No soldier under him would kill an enemy who had laid down his arms. Similarly he did not allow his troops in anyway to disrespect women-folk. He followed the *rahit* strictly on this matter. Jassa Singh, a stickler for the *rahit*, went further. If ever women fell into their hands, they would be given shelter and protection and if possible, escorted to their families. These actions, combined with their leader's daring, fostered in his men, the *khas fauj*, of about 10,000 an *esprit de corps*, not unlike the revolutionary armies under Napoleon, as they stood taller than the rest and followed him with pride. Such behaviour, through his effort and example, soon spread to the rest of the Khalsa, and became the subject of the very flattering writings on the Sikhs in the third part of the century. But there was something much more about him, which commanded loyalty and awe – they saw that he innately and genuinely believed in the absolute possibility of complete victory, when others in similar leadership positions would possibly imagine it as a distant dream. Later victories would give them a feeling of invincibility.

hunger. These habits and experiences made them hardier and their endurance became legendary.

Their strength also came from their faith and from following the *rahit* which gave them a sense of solidarity. In line with Guru Nanak's teachings they were to practice *nam simran*, meditation on the divine name. Further it was understood they would wear the symbols of the faith – *kesh* (long hair), *kanga* (comb), *kara* (steel band), *kachh* (short breeches) and *kirpan* (short sword or dagger). These symbols fostered a sense of brotherhood, reinforced by eating together at the *langar*. Sikhism not only did away with social justice, but gave character, because no Sikh of Guru Nanak would accept injustice, and no Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh would tolerate it, ever ready to fight against it. It also gave them great faith in the righteousness of their cause. The history of struggle inspired them and martyrdom and countless sacrifices were central to this idea. They would repeat daily, Guru Gobind Singh's prayer, *Raj karega khalsa aqi rahe na koi; Khwar hoe sab milange bache sharan jo hoe*, loosely translated as 'The Khalsa shall rule and none shall defy them; all those seeking shelter shall survive; all those who oppose them shall meet an ignoble end'. In continuation of the same prayer, the Guru gave them the assurance that *wahe guru ji ka khalsa, wahe guruji ki fateh* translated – 'the Khalsa is the chosen instrument of God, and victory is always His'. It would reinforce their determination in a just cause giving them the faith and confidence to rise above themselves, and perform deeds of great valour, without giving too much regard to their lives. It was the kind of feeling that prevailed a little later in the French revolutionary armies, their strength based on the power of an idea, impossible to beat. Evidence of their faith was reported by a European traveler quoting Muslim sources inimical to the Sikhs, writing about the period following 1739, reflecting upon the revolutionary change brought about by Guru Gobind Singh in changing Sikh character '...an instance was never known of a Sikh...consenting to abjure his religion'.

The atmosphere in the camps too gave a feeling of belonging. In a platoon men were drawn from either the same extended families or a similar area, and so it literally gave them a feeling of closeness and comfort. Further, the set-up in the camps was based on equality. The officers and men ate from the same kitchen, and together. Only the chief got a small makeshift tent, a blanket hung on four poles when on campaign, less for comfort and more as a symbol. There was no reason to believe that Jassa Singh's arrangements were in anyway different. All the recruit could expect was food, camaraderie and equity. There was always buoyant optimism. To capture a horse was the greatest reward of a battle, as it would make a mounted warrior out of a foot soldier thus increasing fighting

power and greater rewards in respect of the loot—as a horseman/trooper always got double the foot soldier. For soldiers, it meant getting a better mount. The horses bred in Punjab, owing to breeding with Afghan and Persian imports, were the best in the empire and highly prized. Unlike the grain which went into a common pool, the horses and arms were distributed according to those who had lost them, before being given to those responsible for acquiring them. Another feature which raised the morale, was the ability to rise to high ranks, simply by merit. All that was needed was physical and mental courage and good organisational ability. Shared dangers increased the feeling of belonging, making the units of the Sikh army strong and almost invincible. The *sardars* in turn did their best to lead well because a recruit, if dissatisfied, could leave to join another *misl* and every chief was on the lookout for more recruits, to increase his individual power. This by implication, meant that the *sardars* too had to be more daring, more adventurous and above all, more successful, if they were to retain the interest of their men.

First with Kapur Singh, and then with Jassa Singh, the *sardars* rose to the occasion, and quite brilliantly. Jassa Singh knew how the heroic Banda Bahadur had been easily crushed and his followers dispersed. So he set about revamping the Khalsa. He made his own band the most tightly disciplined and highly trained group, the example of which he hoped others would follow. The Sikhs became excellent swordsmen, bowmen and matchlockmen. As marksmen, they were reputed to drop an enemy at a long distance with their muskets. They also became adept at aiming and shooting while riding, something they shared with the Marathas and Afghans. Such marksmanship gave the kind of flexibility which all generals dream about. Each soldier knew his place and responsibilities, and each military commander knew what was expected in any given situation. Discipline was easily maintained, in view of the dedication to the cause, and the fearlessness and focus of leaders' intent on increasing their bands, in what was a surprisingly democratic set up. Most armies now had begun to have a respect for Sikh fighting prowess. George Thomas, an Irish adventurer based in what is present day Haryana, writing to Lord Wellesley years later grudgingly stated that 'when mounted on horseback, their black flowing locks and half naked bodies, which formed in the stoutest and most athletic mould, the glittering of their arms and the size and speed of their horses, render their appearance imposing and formidable, and superior to most of the cavalry in Hindustan'.

**Jassa Singh Ahluwalia 1718-1783:
The Forgotten Hero of Punjab
By Sumant Dhamija
Published by Social Science Press 2011
Hardbound, 361 pages*



The epic of Saragarhi 1897

The Orakzai-Afridi build up in the North West Frontier Province, particularly the Tirah Region in 1897 continued through early September, with the hills teeming with upwards of 20,000 tribals, who were impatient to launch all-out attacks before the main Field Force arrived. As day broke on 12 September, the Orakzai-Afridi lashkar with scores of standards flying, swarmed around the isolated post of Saragarhi, while others attacked Fort Gulistan and a third body cut off communications with Fort Lockhart. It was impossible for either Col. Haughton commanding the 36th Sikhs in Fort Lockhart or his deputy to rally out in support of Saragarhi.

Saragarhi was now truly under vicious attack: 21 men of the 36th Sikhs defending themselves against nearly ten thousand — fearful odds by any standard.

The command of Saragarhi had fallen on Havildar (Sergeant) Ishar Singh, a noncommissioned officer, a man always considered an unlikely choice as material for promotion or higher rank. A Jat Sikh peasant from the Punjab, with twelve years service, he had with him 20 young Sikh soldiers, none with more than five years service, now preparing himself and his band of youngsters to take on incredible odds. This

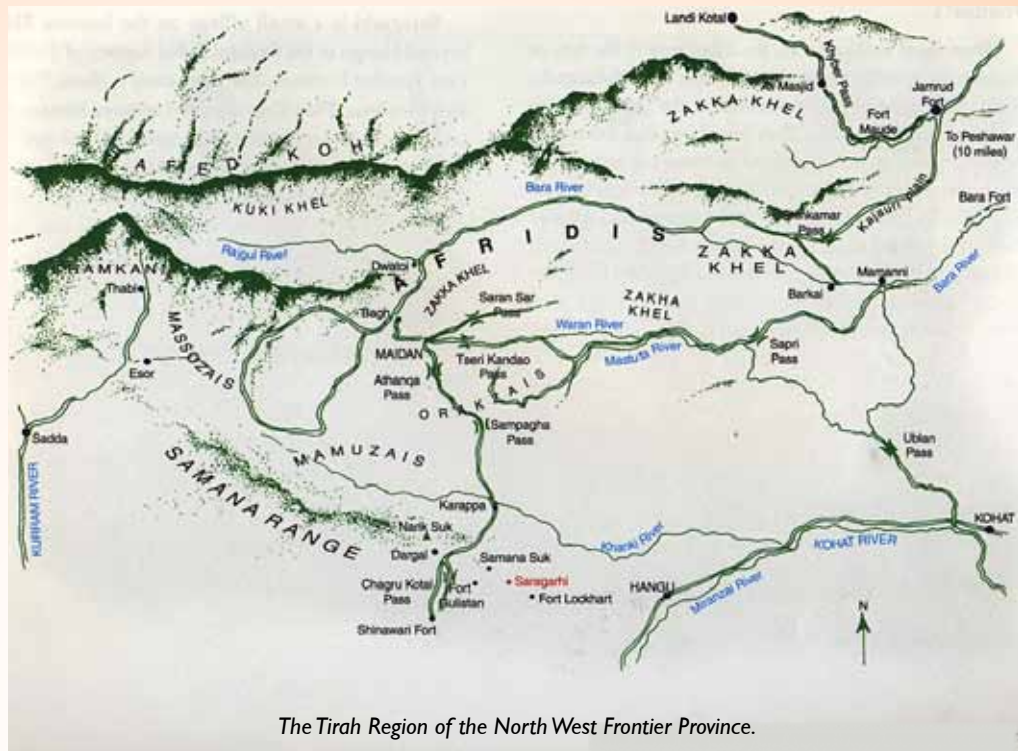
was nothing new for Ishar. A somewhat maverick character, whose independent nature had more than once brought him into confrontation with his superiors, his character and survival instinct in a Sikh army unit, epitomised, in many ways, the advice of the British Indian Army, still being given to young officers in Sikh units. “Work these men until they drop and you’ll find they make the best soldiers. But if you relax and let them idle, there is no kind of mischief known to man they will not become involved in”. Equally strong of character, he was quick to take the underdog’s side and was fated to give the enemy “his best”. Ishar Singh took charge of his wards at Saragarhi and, inspiring them, was to give the most magnificent, final performance of his military career.

Ishar prepared the defences, even while faithfully transmitting messages between Lockhart and Gulistan, waiting for events to unfold. On the morning of 12 September began the crescendo of tribal battle cries and drum beating as the tribesmen started the assault on Saragarhi. To the garrison, the handful that they were, it seemed as if every Pathan in the Frontier was screaming for their blood. A proud and independent people, the tribesmen had historically felt resentment under the Sikh rule of Ranjit Singh and then the

British added insult to injury, using the latter's former adversaries once again to subdue the Pathans. The Orakzais and the Afridis were under the impression that the British Field Force with their artillery, communications and mobility had the capability of relieving Saragarhi and so had to quickly overwhelm the Post.

At first the tribal leaders came forward to the defenders of Saragarhi with offers of surrender on easy terms, playing on the theme that their fight was against the British and not the Sikhs. Ishar's answer to this was certainly unprintable, as uncompromising as surely obscene. The tribal chiefs then turned to threats and taunts which did not make the slightest impression on Ishar Singh whose standard reply in *pushto* was again, unprintable. The lull was broken by unremitting fire from many hundreds of muskets, with the tribal leaders anxious to reduce the garrison before the relief columns arrived. The tribals did not know what Col. Haughton knew - that there was no relief capability worth the name. The CO of the XXXVI Sikh himself was under extraordinary pressure, but Saragarhi had to be held by its defenders in some way. If there was a fighting chance, then in Ishar Singh, the Regiment had the right man — at the right place.

Every soldier had to make a mark, make every bullet count. The defenders were under a fusillade of intense fire even as they kept up steady fire themselves, saw the attackers fall even as others rushed forward, crouching under cover of the rock outcrop, remaining at an angle to the fort where they were on dead ground, away from the view and fire of the defenders. It was an old Frontier ruse, well known to the



The Tirah Region of the North West Frontier Province.

veterans. Unknown to the defenders however, some of the tribals remained behind the wall while the others withdrew under cover of fire. The binding mortar, long exposed to elements like heat and cold, starts falling apart after being loosened. Having shaken out the mortar with long knives, the tribals now inserted crow bars between some stone blocks and removed them, to make a narrow opening into one of the lower rooms of the post. The moment the breach was sufficiently wide, a mass of tribals surged forward to deliver what they thought would be the *coup de grace*.

They had not reckoned with Ishar Singh : ever alert and wily, he was watching all that and had already got some of his remaining men to fix bayonets to kill each attacker as they came through, thus choking the breach with the dead and dying. Once more, the Orakzais and the Afridis withdrew, suffering casualties, humiliation and frustration.

As their numbers dwindled, Ishar had Signaller Gurmukh Singh keep up a regular update to his officers in Forts Lockhart and Gulistan, sufficient to inspire them to attempt two more sorties to reach Saragarhi. Laconically, Ishar Singh transmitted: "I am down to half my men but the remainder now have two weapons each and so a larger share of ammunition!" Col. Haughton had seen two massive attacks repulsed with great casualties inflicted on the attackers. The battle had been on for three hours without respite. At midday, another foray was



Men of the XXXVI Sikh at ruins of the Saragarhi outpost after it was retaken.



Cairn built later on the site of Saragarhi Post.

made under Lt.Munn and some volunteers to create a diversion and warn Saragarhi of enemy attempts to breach the defences. This did not provide any relief. At 1500 hrs., Col.Haughton, in a desperate last bid, with Lt.Munn and 98 volunteers from his garrison at Fort Lockhart, advanced for about a thousand yards against heavy fire to reach out to Saragarhi. In the meantime, as Col.Haughton moved forward, the attackers made fresh charges, bringing forward great bundles of burning

brushwood, pushing these through the breach with utter disregard for their own dead and dying. To Ishar Singh it must have now become clear that the end was near, but he was not about to give the enemy any respite. Saragarhi post was by now a mix of friend and foe, the dead and the dying as Ishar's remaining soldiers lunged at the tribesmen to take as many as possible with them in their final moments.

At Ishar's command, Signalman Gurmukh Singh sent a final message on the helio: "We are being overrun, but will not surrender. Request permission to close down". The permission was given and within minutes Col.Haughton could observe the attackers go over the walls. Ishar Singh, supremely aware of his duty as a last act carefully placed the heliograph in a corner where it was later found charred but intact.

He then went down leaving Gurmukh Singh in the Guard Room. Fixing his bayonet and shouting *Wahe Guruji ka Khalsa, Wahe Guruji ki Fateh* he charged into the milling attackers to take many with him in a final act of heroism before joining his comrades in death. Saragarhi Post fell at 1630 hrs on 12 September 1897.

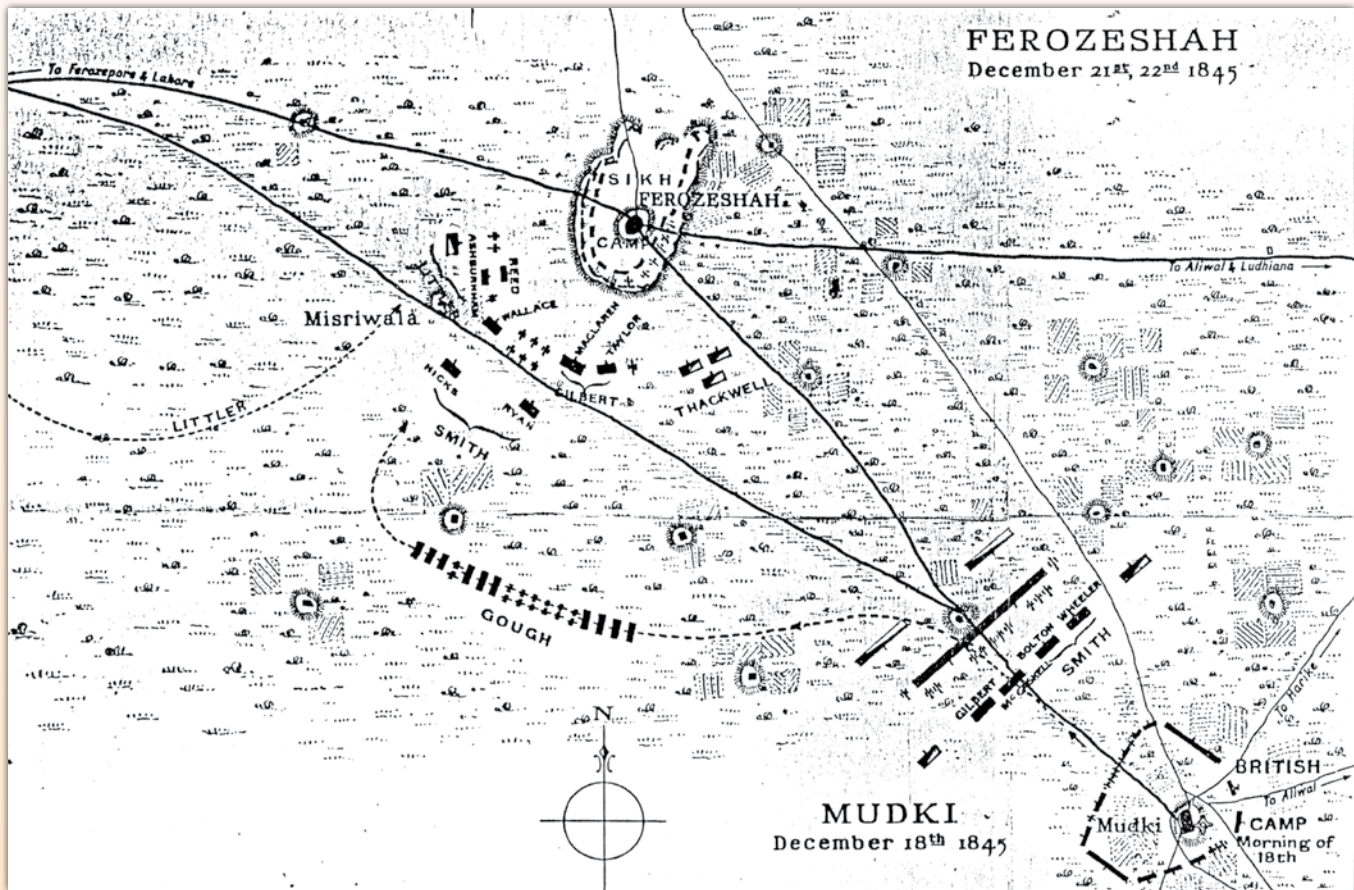
Relief, just around the corner, came a little too late for the defenders of Saragarhi.

As the gallant end came, the frenzied tribesmen, with no regard even for their own dead and dying, brought in flaming bundles of brushwood to turn the entire fort into a sea of flames, engulfing everything and consigning everyone, including friends and foes to the flames. The tribesmen then melted away to the hills, to their villages, but after having paid a terrible price. They had lost in this battle on the Samana Ridge an estimated 450 killed and wounded, mostly to the bullets of Saragarhi's gallant defenders. The XXXVI Sikh had lost 23 men in all, including the 21 at Saragarhi Post.

On that hallowed ground, the Saragarhi Post, made sacred by the supreme sacrifice of these 21 men of the XXXVI Sikh, was latter erected a stone cairn by the Army. This was from the dressed stones of the original post and could be seen for miles around, a tribute to those valiant defenders. The cairn was intact when last seen by Indian Army officers returning to India at the time of partition in 1947.

Extracted from Nishaan III/2000

Clash of the Lions: bravery amidst treachery



The First Anglo-Sikh War

The First Sikh War between the Lahore Durbar and the British was marred by the treachery of a few influential figures of the Durbar, but the battles fought are a testimony to the bravery, fighting skills and sense of sacrifice of the Sikh soldiery. In successive battles their heroism in the field stood out and despite the odds against them they came close to shattering British supremacy in Northern India.

The British, wanting to fish in the troubled waters of the Punjab, had increased their force from 17,000 to 40,000 men by the autumn of 1845. A stormy meeting of the Durbar on 17 November 1845 took note of British intentions of aggression. Their army, poised on the frontier, waited for the Governor General and the Commander-in-Chief to cross the pontoon bridge on the Sutlej.

The Durbar, preparing to resist, divided the army into seven divisions of eight to twelve thousand men each. Four were ordered to proceed against the British advance positions at Ropar, Ludhiana, Harike and Ferozepur, one each to man the North Western Frontier at Peshawar and Attock and in the south along the Sindhu. One was kept in reserve at Lahore.

The British asked for an explanation of these troop movements and were clearly told that they were meant to counter British preparations. Further, the Durbar sought the return of Suchet Singh Dogra's treasure, which was enormous, in fact cart-loads, which the British had appropriated. The act of crossing the Sutlej remains as debatable a point today as it was then. It centres around whether the Durbar troops had crossed over into their own territory or

was the crossing tantamount to a violation of the treaty of 1809 and consequently amounted to an act of war. On 13 December, Lord Hardinge declared war, accusing the Sikhs of invading British territories “without a shadow of provocation”.

Treachery

The Sikh Army consisting of five divisions numbering 50,000 men and 108 guns was assembled on the right bank of the Sutlej. They were to invest Ferozpur, where Major General Littler was caught unawares with 7500 men and 35 heavy guns. Two divisions under the command of Lal Singh, a Brahmin from the Gandhara Valley and the Sikh Army C-in-C, took position at Ferozeshahr village, ten miles above, to intercept the main British Army marching from Ambala to relieve Ferozpur. The other commander was Tej Singh, again neither a Sikh nor a Punjabi, nor true to his adopted country which was Ranjit Singh’s Punjab. He was a Gour Brahmin from Sardhana, Meerut, and had been placed in the position in 1845 during the infant Dalip Singh’s rule.

Before moving onto Ferozpur —as he should have done—Tej Singh secretly informed the British Agent at Ferozpur, John Nicholson: “I have crossed with the Sikh Army. You know my friendship with the British. Tell me what to do!” Nicholson advised him not to attack Ferozpur and “to halt as many days as you can and then march towards the Governor General.”

The other player in this sordid tale of treachery was Lal Singh. On 13 November 1845, a sketch



Sikh soldiers of today looking at the memorial erected by the British at Ferozeshah after the battle in 1845.

map was sent by him to Sir Henry Hardinge, the Governor General, and General Hugh Gough the C-in-C who joined him at Ambala Cantonment. It showed the entire battle plan of the Sikh deployment of forces for the attack and the cavalry charge, the position of the foot soldiers for accuracy of fire, the placement of guns, and finally the method of attack. The stratagem had a touch of the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s French generals including shades of some of Napoleon’s battle plans. There could have been no worse treachery in history.

The Battle of Mudki

True to his promise, Tej Singh encircled Ferozpur in a bold sweeping move, but did not attack. His retort to the impatient Sikh soldiers was that his status and dignity demanded that he only engage with the Governor General himself, implying that anybody below that rank would be a slight to his position. The British C-in-C and the Governor General arrived at

Mudki, twenty miles from Ferozepur. There they were met by the smaller Sikh detachment under Lal Singh who commenced the attack but in accordance with his original design quickly deserted command leaving his soldiers to fight the British. Unable to stand up to the superior numbers of Gough's infantry, the Sikhs nevertheless offered stubborn resistance but lost the battle and were compelled to withdraw.

The action at Mudki though not significant militarily gave the British their first experience of the fighting qualities of Sikh soldiers. British casualties were heavy and they required reinforcements from Ambala, Meerut and Delhi. Lord Hardinge voluntarily joined the C-in-C as his second-in-command. Tej Singh with his now numerical superiority, was supposed to take Ferozepur after overwhelming General Littler, a task not too difficult. Instead he deliberately allowed General Littler to slip out and join forces with General Gough and Lord Hardinge at Ferozeshahr.

The Battle of Ferozeshahr— what if?

After the Mudki setback the Sikhs moved to an entrenched themselves around the village of Ferozeshahr, ten miles from Mudki. Sir John Littler who had affected a junction with the main body of the British Army four miles from the Sikh entrenchments, now decided upon an immediate attack.

The British artillery mounted a steady barrage of fire followed by an infantry attack, gaining a foothold in the Sikh entrenchments. The Sikh infantry drawn up behind its artillery guns retaliated with fierce musketry

fire and the British were hurled back with heavy losses. The next British charge succeeded in wresting advantage from the Sikhs, the contest continuing with greater determination throughout the night earning it the appellation "night of terror". The position of the British grew graver as the night wore on.

The British had suffered terrible casualties with every single member of the Governor General's staff either killed or wounded. That frosty night "the fate of British India trembled in the balance". Sir Hope Grant, one of the British Generals bloodied in the Anglo-Sikh Wars recorded: "Truly the night was one of gloom and foreboding and perhaps never in the annals of warfare has a British Army on so large a scale been nearer to a defeat which would have involved annihilations. The Sikhs had practically recovered the whole of their entrenched camp". Lord Hardinge sent his son back to Mudki with a sword awarded to him for services during the Napoleonic campaigns with instructions that in the event of a defeat, all his private papers were to be destroyed.

An entry in Robert Gust's diary reveals that the British generals had decided to lay down arms: "News came from the Governor General that our attack of yesterday had failed, that affairs were desperate, all state papers were to be destroyed, and that if the morning attack failed all would be over; this was kept secret by Mr Currie and we were considering

measures to make an unconditional surrender to save the wounded..."

However in the morning, the Sikh soldiers were once again betrayed by their leaders. First Lal Singh fled the battlefield. Then Tej Singh with a large force from the Sutlej did not even attempt to repulse the



Memorial at Chillianwallah, now in Pakistan.

British. Having exhausted their men and munitions the British had neither fight in them nor were they a match for the Sikh. Treacherously, after firing a few rounds Tej Singh retreated. He had intentionally delayed his arrival and not appeared on the scene till he had seen Lal Singh's forces dispersed.

The battle of Aliwal, north-eastward of Ferozeshahr, on 29 January 1846 was more of an extended skirmish against mostly Dogra irregulars and a prelude to the final action at Sabraon two weeks later.

Battle of Sabraon

On the left bank of the Sutlej at Sabraon the Sikh Army had established itself in a strong position. The British decided to delay the attack until they had received reinforcements from Delhi. It was again typical that Tej Singh did not make a move to capture the stores on which the British were relying to win the war. This despite the fact that the Sikh Army was 37,000 strong, with 67 guns, compared to the British force of a mere 15,000 men.

The British massed their heavy artillery on commanding positions opposite the Sikh entrenchments which were under the command of Tej Singh. The fire spread death and destruction and though the Sikhs continued to fend the attack the British soon began closing in on them. After a keen contest over every inch of ground, Sabraon was lost.

Once again Tej Singh deserted the army and even cut the boat bridge which linked the Sikh forces to the opposite bank of the river leaving them to perish under deadly showers of shrapnel as they tried to swim across.

Describing the battle at Sabraon as the "Waterloo of India", Lord Gough paid great tribute to the Sikh

soldier: "Policy precluded me from publicly recording my sentiments on the splendid gallantry of our fallen foe, or to record the acts of heroism displayed not only individually, but almost collectively, by the Sikh Sirdars and the Army: and I declare, were it not for a deep conviction that my country's good required the sacrifice, I would have wept to have witnessed the fearful slaughter of so devoted a body of men". General Sir Joseph Thackwell who witnessed the battles wrote, "for though defeated and broken, they

never ran, but fought with their talwars to the last and I witnessed several acts of great bravery in their sirdars and men". Lord Hardinge, who saw the action, wrote "Few escaped, none it may be said, surrendered. The Sikhs met their fate with the resignation which distinguishes their race". This was a major British victory against a people afflicted with internal treachery and treason and was the beginning of the end of the Great Sikh Durbar.

The British Governor General of India, Sir Henry Harding laid down stiff terms, including cession of the districts of Kashmir and Hazara. Within hours, Gulab Singh Dogra accepted the conditions and so ended, nominally, the First Anglo-Sikh War.

The traitors Lal Singh and Tej Singh were "immortalised" in

doggerel verse, to quote a historian punning on their names:

*Laloo lost the blush of shame,
Teju lost his lustre,
By turning their backs in the field
They turned the tide and the battle yield*



Memorial to the British fallen on 13 January 1849 at Chillianwallah. This is in the heart of Chelsea, in London.

The Relief of Chitral 1895

The wondrous
colours at Chitral

Legend of the XIV Sikhs

Chitral is at the extreme north-west of the sub-continent and arguably the most romantic, captivating and enchanting place in the majestic Hindukush Range. The landscape of Chitral is extremely mysterious, with steep harsh mountains, lush green valleys, beautiful meadows and big glaciers which have made it one of the most difficult and inaccessible areas of the world. Chitral is divided into small valleys by the mighty Hindukush mountains, the highest peak being Terichmir, which is at a height of 25,263 feet, just 36 miles away from Chitral town, also called the 'palace of fairies'. No mountain in the region is less than 14,000 feet and over 40 peaks have an altitude of 20,000 ft. Chitral is surrounded by the Wakhan corridor, Badkhsan, Asmar and Nooristan provinces of Afghanistan to the north, west and southwest. On its southern boundary lies the upper district of Dir, while in the east is Gilgit-Baltistan and in the southeast the valley of Swat and Kohistan district.

This is where, in 1895, men of the XIV Sikhs became the "sheet anchor" in defence of the fort under seige aganist great odds.

The valley of Chitral lies at an elevation of 4,900ft above sea level, the weather extremely harsh and cold in winter while the summer is very pleasant. There are certain famous places and valleys in Chitral like

Garam Chashma valley, Booni, Golen valley, Yarkhun valley, Madaklasht valley, Arandu, Birir, Rumbur and Bumburate which can certainly qualify as being 'paradise on earth'. The latter three valleys are the Kalash valleys which are repository of one of the unique cultures and mysterious histories of the world, certainly a residuary of the pre-historic age.

The people of Chitral are called Khow having a great ethnic diversity. In the pages of history, Chitral was known as an independent princely state. In 1970, it was declared as district of Pakistan and attached to the Malakand Division. Chitral is at the junction of the old Chinese Empire, British Indian Empire, the Imperial Russian Empire and Afghan's kingdoms. It came under the consideration of British Empire when after feeling the sense of Russian danger, the British government of India sought new friends in the mountainous range and the tribal belt.



India Medal with
Relief of Chitral clasp



Colonel Kelly (with beard) with British and Indian officers of the 32nd Punjab Pioneers who marched from Gilgit to relieve Chitral.



The North West and location of Chitral.

Then Major John Bidulph visited the country in 1876 and reported to the government of India about the strategic importance of Chitral. Thus began a relationship between the British and Chitral which resulted in the famous Chitral incident of 1895.

An independent state in 1876, the Chitralis had come under the protection of the Maharaja of Kashmir and so into the British sphere of influence. In 1892 the Mehtar (ruler) of Chitral died, which unleashed a series of murders as his relatives scrambled for the throne.

Umra Khan, a tribal leader from Bajour entered Chitral to challenge one of the claimants to the throne, Amir-ul-Mulk. The British authorities ordered Khan to leave and sent the political agent at nearby Gilgit, Surgeon Major George Robertson to report on the situation, who soon moved to the Chitral Fort. Meanwhile another claimant to the throne, Sher Afzal, made his presence known and joined forces with Umra Khan. Mehtar Amir-ul-Mulk moved towards

a settlement with Khan and was immediately placed in custody by Robertson at Chitral Fort and declared his younger brother Shuja-Al-Mulk as provisional Mehtar.

Meanwhile Sher Afzal moved his forces to Chitral Fort. A sharp engagement occurred which killed 15 Indian troops and one of their British officers with another wounded. Regimental Surgeon Harry Frederick Whitchurch was to receive the Victoria Cross for his heroism in assisting the deceased officer in a fighting retreat back to the fort. The epic *Siege of Chitral* began the next day, 15 March 1895.

Forever to be associated with the Seige of Chitral, were the XIV (King George's Own) Ferozepore Sikhs, formed in 1846. The Regiment had a number of different titles over the following years: the XIV Bengal Native Infantry 1861-1864, the XIV (The Ferozepore) Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry 1864-1885, the XIV Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry (Ferozepore Sikhs) 1885-1901, the XIV (Ferozepore) Sikh Infantry 1901-1903 and finally after the Kitchener reforms of the Indian Army in 1903, the XIV Ferozepore Sikhs. Further changes in name followed: the XIV Prince of Wales's Own Ferozepore Sikhs 1906-1910, the XIV King George's Own Ferozepore Sikhs 1910-1922. In World War I they took part in the Mesopotamia Campaign with the 51st Brigade, 17th Indian Division. In the post World War I reforms of the Indian Army they were amalgamated into a large regiment and became the 1st Battalion 11th Sikh Regiment.

Their heroic history in the Second World War is recorded in an accompanying article 'First Sikhs in the Second Burma Campaign' as are their actions in Kashmir in October-November 1947, which saved the valley for India; but back to Chitral, 1895.

In June, 1894, the XIV Sikhs were ordered to escort the British political agent proceeding to Gilgit. 'A' and 'B' Companies, under the command of Captain CR Ross, were detailed for this role and left Ferozepore on 15 June. On arrival at Gilgit, A Company, under Lieutenant Harley, was sent to Mastuj while B Company remained at Gilgit.

All was quiet until January, 1895, when the Mehtar of Chitral was assassinated. At this time the assistant political officer was in Chitral with an escort of nine men of the XIV Sikhs, so Lieutenant Harley immediately sent Subadar Gurmukh Singh with fifty men from Mastuj to reinforce the escort. On 27 January the British agent set out for Chitral to investigate the situation and took with him the remainder of A Company under Lieutenant Harley and three hundred Kashmir State troops under Captain Campbell. On arrival at Chitral the agent took over the fort and completed the stocks there in case of emergency.

Meanwhile, Umra Khan of Bajaur, a tribal leader, invaded Chitral territory and soon overcame the weak resistance of the Chitralis. By the beginning of February Umra Khan had captured the fort at Drosh, a few miles from Chitral and was now joined by Sher Afzul, who claimed the Mehtarship. Umra Khan supported Sher Afzul and demanded withdrawal of the political agent and his escort. Negotiations shortly broke down and the Chitral pretender advanced on Chitral.

On 3 March Captain Campbell took a force of two hundred men of the Kashmir State troops and reconnoitered along the road to Drosh. The enemy were encountered two miles from the fort and Captain Campbell then attacked. The enemy were in much greater strength than had been anticipated and the column was repulsed with heavy losses. Lieutenant Harley was therefore instructed to bring out a party of men to cover the retreat. He immediately moved out with fifty men and took up a position in the Serai, a quarter of a mile from the fort. By the time the Sikhs were in position it was quite dark and the enemy were pressing on hard after the Kashmir Rifles. The Sikhs held on to their position, they then successfully broke contact and withdrew in good order back to the fort. Captain Campbell was very seriously wounded in this action, so his second-in-command, Captain Townsend, (*Later General Townsend and defender of Kut in the First World War) took over command of the Chitral garrison.



Ramparts of the Chitral Fort

The fort, which was on low ground near the river, was difficult to defend, as it was commanded on three sides by hills, while water for the garrison had to be obtained from the river. The siege started in earnest on 4 March, when the enemy fired into the fort all day long. At the beginning the Sikhs were detailed to hold the southern face of the fort and the keep, while the Kashmir Rifles were allotted to the northern and western faces, covering the main gate and the water point. Steps were immediately taken to improve the defences and construct a covered way to the water point.

On the night of 7 March the enemy made a determined effort to fire at the tower covering the waterway. They were repulsed, but the Kashmir sepoys holding the tower had been so shaken by the action that it was quite evident that they could not be trusted to defend any of the important points in the fort. The Sikhs therefore took over the north and west faces as well.

On the night of 14 March the enemy made ferocious attacks against the western face, but were repulsed with heavy losses by a party of XIV Sikhs under Subadar Gurmukh Singh. After this the enemy concentrated on trying to seize the water point, so twenty men of the XIV Sikhs occupied a sangar near the water's edge, an unpleasant duty, as there were always six inches of water in the sangar and there was no cover from the heavy rain and snow which fell continually at the beginning of the siege. The Sikhs accepted the duty cheerfully, as it was considered a "post of honour."



The deposed Mehtar of Chitral, Amir-ul-Mulk, guarded by soldiers of the XIV Sikhs

Everyone was placed on short rations at the beginning of the siege and duties were very heavy, but all hardships were borne cheerfully and the Sikhs never complained.

On 6 April the enemy occupied a summer-house situated close to the garden wall outside the fort, while at about 5 a.m. they attacked the water point under cover of heavy fire on the western and northern faces of the fort. The Sikhs threw back the enemy from the waterway, but during the fighting another party of the enemy, unnoticed by the Kashmir sentries, piled up and set a heap of firewood alight at the bottom of the south-eastern tower. This fire set light to beams in the tower and there was great danger of the tower collapsing. The fire was put out with the greatest difficulty, as the enemy kept up a continuous fire on that part of the fort. However, a party

apparently quiet days, a sentry heard the noise of picking from direction of the summer-house and it was soon obvious that a mine was being made and that the enemy had reached a point about twelve feet from the fort. Captain Townsend decided to send Lieutenant Harley with fifty Sikhs and sixty men of the Kashmir Rifles to capture the summer house and destroy the mine.

At 4 p.m. the assaulting party assembled at the eastern gate, with the Sikhs in front. Harley dashed through the gate followed closely by his men, and charged straight for the summer-house. A party of Pathans, located in the summer-house to cover the men working in the mine, fired a volley at the assaulting party, but they fled down the garden wall as the Sikhs closed in with the bayonet. The enemy took up a position at the end of the garden and opened up very heavy fire on the Sikhs around the summer house. Harley told off a party to engage the enemy while he searched for the mine. Another party of Pathans opened up from the left of the summer-house and two young Sikhs dashed forward and assaulted the position. Although these two men were immediately killed, their gallant action put the Pathans to flight and they were all killed by fire from the fort.

The mine was well hidden and the Sikhs could not find it for some time. It was eventually discovered behind the garden wall and Lieutenant Harley and six men immediately jumped down the shaft. Twenty Pathans armed with swords tried to escape, but they were all bayoneted as they dashed forward. Lieutenant Harley immediately laid some powder bags to blow up the mine, but found that the fuse had been damaged during the fighting. While he was repairing the fuse two more Pathans tried to escape from the mine and two Sikhs opened fire and the powder exploded. The explosion opened up the mine from end to end and killed the six Pathans who had remained in it. Fortunately the force of the explosion was expended by the time it reached the Sikhs at the end of the mine and Harley and a few of the men were only knocked to the ground. Lieutenant Harley had completed his task, so he ordered his men to withdraw to the fort. The Sikhs dashed back under heavy fire, taking the arms and accoutrements of the casualties and a number of rifles and swords of the enemy. The Sikhs lost only three killed and five wounded, while the enemy's casualties were at least a hundred, of which thirty-five were killed by the bayonet.

During the night of 18 April a Pathan came to the fort and reported that the enemy had fled and that British troops were near. In the morning there was no sign of the enemy and the siege was over. The next day Colonel Kelly arrived with a relief force from Gilgit. Captain Townsend, in his report on the siege, wrote:

of Sikhs was sent to reinforce the garrison of the tower and the fire was eventually put out after six hours' hard work. Sepoy Bhola Singh was awarded the Indian Order of Merit for his gallantry when helping to put out the fire. He was severely wounded in one arm, but continued to throw water on the fire, although constantly exposed to heavy enemy fire.

On the next day, men of the XIV Sikhs asked to be allowed to hold all four towers of the fort as well as the water sangar, since the safety of the garrison depended on the vigilance of the sentries on these important posts. Captain Townsend accepted the suggestion and the Sikhs took over these positions as well and held them until the end of the siege.

On the 11 April the enemy made another attack on the east and west faces, but they were again beaten back without much difficulty. On 17 April, after a few



View of the Chitral river and the road to Ayun and Kalash valleys. The cantonment town of Mardan is 250 km to the south while Tirich Mir, the tallest mountain in the Hindu Kush Range is to the North.

The Second Afghan War: 1878-1880

The Second Afghan war was brought on, like the first, by an all-consuming British fear of Russian aggression. Afghanistan was a buffer state between the British Empire in India, and the Russian Empire which had recently annexed much of Central Asia. The second war was provoked, like the first, when the Afghans received a Russian Embassy. Britain immediately insisted they receive an embassy from India too so that the Britons would have an equal opportunity to interfere in Afghan affairs. This request was refused, so Britain sent two Divisions to enforce their "request". The intention was to march into Kabul to display a show of force, so that the Afghan leaders would seriously entertain Britain's concerns.

General Roberts 'Bobs Bahadur' was put in command and very quickly won such a decisive victory that the Afghans sued for peace. The peace mission that was sent to Kabul however, was treacherously slain, so the war resumed with even greater intensity. As soon as he heard of the disaster Roberts led another successful campaign, and marched his army into Kabul. He was joined by another Division of the army that had met with equal success, and with Afghanistan pacified, it was decided that one Division could leave Kabul, but before it left, there was news of another calamity near Kandahar. A British troop had been routed with the loss of over 1000 men, and the survivors were besieged in Kandahar. At once Roberts led



A Sikh orderly protecting General Roberts from enemy bullets.

a relieving army from Kabul to Kandahar and in a months time had dealt the besiegers a decisive blow, and relieved his comrades. Once more peace was declared, but this time instead of placing an incompetent and helpless figurehead on the throne, the British supported a member of the Royal family who had much support also from the Afghans. Thus ended the Second Afghan War.

"The spirit of the XIV Sikhs was our admiration; the longer the siege lasted the more eager they became to teach the enemy a lesson. There could not be finer soldiers than these men of the XIV Sikhs and they were our sheet anchor in the siege."

Youngusband, in his *Relief of Chitral*, recorded "It was the discipline ingrained into these men that saved the garrison. As long as a Sikh was on sentry, while Sikhs were holding a threatened point, Captain Townsend had nothing to fear. The enemy would never catch a Sikh off his guard and could never force their way through a post of Sikhs while one remained alive. They saved the garrison and the officers gratefully acknowledged their service."

In recognition of the gallant and successful defence of the fort at Chitral, the Viceroy sanctioned a grant of six months' pay to all ranks, while Lieutenant Harley was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and appointed brevet major. Subadar Gurmukh Singh was appointed to the Order of British India and Jemadar Attar Singh and seven men of the XIV Sikhs were awarded the Indian Order of Merit for gallantry.

In June the two companies of the XIV Sikhs marched back from Chitral under Lieutenant Harley and arrived in Ferozepore at the end of the month. Although only one company of the Regiment took part in the siege of Chitral, the XIV Sikhs were given the honour of inscribing *Defence of Chitral* on their Colours.

Gallantry of the 47th Sikhs



The 47th Sikhs in action at Neuve Chapelle on 28 October 1914.

Fog and mist had prevented an early advance and it was not until 11.00 a.m. that a short general bombardment of the positions was begun by four British and nine French batteries. At 11.15 a.m. the artillery lengthened to five hundred yards and the Infantry should have moved forward. However, no properly combined movement between the units of the three different nationalities involved resulted, and the attack on Neuve Chapelle was carried out solely by four companies — two of the 47th Sikhs, with the 20th and 21st Companies of the Sappers and Miners on either side of them — with the greatest of gallantry. Their right was to have been protected by the 9th Bhopals but as the unit advanced, it came under very heavy fire and halted and only continued to fire from a trench they had reached. The Sikhs and Sappers went on. Covering the seven hundred yards of open ground between them and Neuve Chapelle

by rushes alternating with fire, as if on a training ground, the four companies reached the ruins of the village. Casualties were numerous but the excellence of their fire control saved much heavier loss. The Sikhs drove out the Germans (battalions of the famous 16th Bavarian Regiment of which Corporal Adolf Hitler was part) by close hand-to-hand fighting.

“When our men were about 100 yards from the outskirts of the village, the Germans in the front trenches began to bolt, pursued by the gallant Sikhs and Sappers with the bayonet, a few being killed and others captured. The Indians then tore on into the village, Sikhs and Sappers mixed together, and worked in parties up the streets, under a furious fire from the roofs of buildings.

By degrees, the houses were cleared after desperate hand-to-hand fighting in which a soldier of the 47th Sikh

captured three Germans out of eight, having previously killed the other five. From another house, the 47th recovered a wounded British soldier and two wounded Germans. The latter were searched, and one of them lifted his voice and wept bitterly, evidently thinking that our men were feeling for a soft place in which to insert a bayonet, until comforted by a stalwart Sikh who patted him kindly with the words "be not afraid".

On reaching the cross roads in the centre of the village, the troops came under frightful machine gun fire. Captain McCleverty, always in advance, cheering on his men just as he had cheered on the regimental hockey team, dashed across the roads, the rest following close on his heels, but he was shot dead at a corner by a German concealed only a few yards away. A PM of the Sappers soon stalked the German and killed him on the spot. Losses were rapidly becoming serious from enemy rifle fire in the houses and several machine guns posted outside Neuve Chapelle which swept the mainstreet. The Indian troops had even penetrated to the eastern and northern borders where they were met by heavy shell and machine gun fire as counter-attack after counter-attack was launched against them.

"The blood of our men was up and nothing could stop them. After a prolonged and ferocious struggle, the whole of the main street was captured".

The Germans still held on like a vice and each house turned a small fortress which had to be stormed before further advance could be made. The Sappers & Miners were also taking terrible losses, especially their officers, charging with impetuous valour ahead of the men.

The fighting went on, counter-attack following counter-attack, the German's using the bodies of their own dead as cover. Major SR Davidson of the 47th Sikhs was collecting his men for a final charge when the Germans came on in overpowering numbers from the North and East and at the same moment, the machine gun fire re-doubled its fury down the main

street. Without immediate reinforcements, the position of the 47th was now quite untenable as their losses had been very heavy. Thus Major Davidson was compelled to give up all he had won at such fearful cost, and retire, the line lying over some 500 yards of open ground, exposed to a tornado of shell and machine gun fire : the bodies of the gallant Indians soon lay thick on the ground. Eventually, the remnants of the two Companies of the 47th got back to comparative safety —but only 68 out of the gallant 289 actually collected on the La Bassee road.

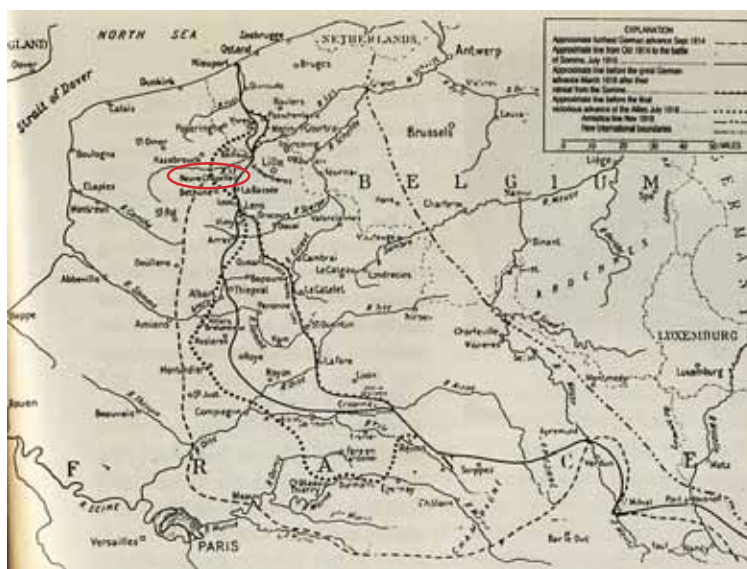
The troops were suffering terribly from want of water and were already dead beat but the Germans were counter-attacking all along the front and every man was required. Major Davidson was ordered to collect at Rouge Croix as many of the 47th Sikhs as were left with a view to holding the cross roads, which were almost certain to be attacked.

"He asked his men whether they could do it, exhausted as they were, and to his delight, found

that they clearly resented such a question. Off they marched again towards Rouge Croix, but were met by orders to go into billets."

Such was the spirit of the Sikhs and it is on record that during the retreat from the village, under a fire described as hellish, the men were laughing and joking with each other and Captain Brown, afterwards killed at Neuve Chapelle, stood up at the halts to fire, his example being followed by many of the men. Major Davidson had throughout this confused and dingdong fighting shown the highest qualities of bravery and leadership and was awarded a brevet Lt.Coloncy in recognition of his services.

In the end, the 20th Sappers & Miners were left with just 20 men in the centre of Neuve Chapelle. Lt.Rait-Kerr, leading some reinforcements, was wounded but Sapper Dalip Singh stood over and kept up rapid fire to deter several parties of Germans from advancing,



The front in France and Belgium, during the Great War.



47th Sikhs preparing for attack in fields around Neuve Chapelle.

incredibly charging a party of 20 Germans who simply turned and fled. He then carried his officer back to safety. Another officer Lt. Nosworthy displayed an incredible example of bravery combined with an irrespressible love for fighting!

As recorded in official war history "The attack (on Neuve Chapelle) was magnificently carried out and was within an ace of success. It is probable that, had reinforcements been available, the 47th Sikhs and Sappers would have held the village which they took with such superb elan and at such a heavy cost".

The magnificent conduct of the troops was recorded for posterity by Field Marshal Sir John French who, in his despatch dated 20 November 1914, recorded "On the 28 October 1914, especially the 47th Sikhs and the 20th and 21st Companies of the Sappers & Miners, distinguished themselves by their gallant conduct in the attack on Neuve Chapelle, losing heavily in officers and men".

As General Sir James Willcocks later wrote, "The 47th Sikhs were raised in 1901 and have no battle honours on their colours. Throughout its service in France, this magnificent Regiment never failed to answer all calls. Its reputation would be secure and its right to fight shoulder to shoulder with the best British troops would be established, if based only on the record of Neuve Chapelle, but this action was only one of many in which the 47th Sikhs distinguished themselves."

The 47th Sikhs esprit de corps

The 47th Sikhs had been raised as a Class Regiment of Sikhs in 1901 and previous to the date of the Great War had served in Sialkot, North China, Dera Ismail Khan and Jullundur, but as a Regiment had not yet been on active service.

From the day of formation a high standard of military efficiency had always been aimed at and as far as demonstration of results without the acid test of War can show, had been attained. Above all things *esprit de corps* amongst all ranks was undoubtedly excellent.

In the pre-war days in India one school of military thought held that the training of the Indian Army should be confined

to the requirements of War with "uncivilised enemies" only. Fortunately, this never became the official teaching and when the Indian Corps was sent to France on the outbreak of War the training of its Units was well up-to-date as the "civilised" German Army would soon learn at its cost.

The proudest boasts of the 47th Sikhs is that no Regiment of the Indian Army did more actual front-line work and hard fighting, that it never lost a yard of trench in any theatre of War, that on no occasion was it ever withdrawn for reconstruction though reconstruction was often rendered advisable by casualties, that no Regiment was more often specially mentioned in orders and despatches, and, finally, that on returning to India after the conclusion of War it was the only unit of the Indian Army given the Honour of a Royal Colonel-in-Chief in recognition of its services during the War.

As written in the Foreword of the 47th Sikhs History, "All who at the present and in future have the Honour to belong to the 47th Duke of Connaught's own Sikhs should know the glorious War records of the past and strive to emulate or surpass them in the future".

Extracted from the Nishaan Issue I/2001



Some 90 years after the epic battle of Neuve Chapelle men of the 47th Sikhs (now 5th battalion, The Sikh Regiment) at their headquarters.

My Grandfather's Story

On my last trip to Delhi, I sweet-talked my father into recording the family history.

The recording sessions were not easy. There were moments of intense silence; moments when tears flowed; moments of laughter and moments filled with gratitude.

It was a very special time and I will cherish it forever.

Dad and I share a very close relationship. I am his first-born. In his eyes, I can do anything that I set my mind on, and I will never do anything wrong. His simple trust has played a huge part in my life. It has prevented me from doing things that may not have been kosher.

In my eyes, "My father is a very noble man." In today's world, the word noble is rarely used to describe an individual. But that is the word that comes to mind when I think about my father. Even people, who do not get along with him (I cannot understand why), begrudgingly acknowledge his compassion, sincerity and honesty. I could go on and on about my father. But that is for a later piece.

This story is about the man who brought my father, Bawa Gurnam Singh, into this world - my grandfather, my knight in shining armor.

"Dad, tell me about Pitaji," I ask, as we begin with the recording.

Dad looks at me: "You were his favorite. He adored you the moment you were born. No, I think he loved you even before you were born. None of the other grandchildren had his complete undivided love and attention, like you did. In fact I think none of his own children got his love like you did."

"I know, Dad, I know! Sometimes, I wonder why he chose to love me the way he did. At other times, I'm filled with gratitude, to have experienced love of this purity. But Dad, I know so little of his life?"

"Your grandfather, my father - Bawa Hari Singh - was born in 1898 in Chakwal, Panjab," Dad starts. "His father, Kalyan Singh, died when Hari Singh was



With all reverence, the Guru Granth Sahib leads troops of the 3rd Battalion Sikh Regiment in active service during the Great War in Mesopotamia, 1917.

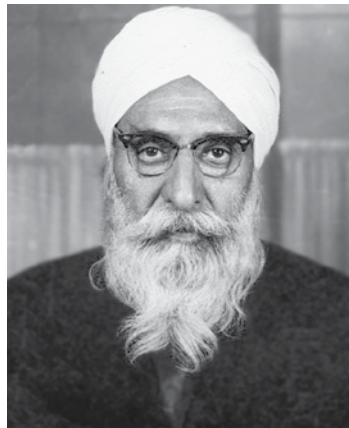
only five years old. He was raised by his three older brothers, Jivan Singh, Bishen Singh and Bhagwan Singh. Jivan Singh and Bishen Singh were saints. Yes! I know, for you Pitaji was a saint. And you are right.

Pitaji was saintly but his two older brothers were the real saints. I'll tell you about them at another time. He also had two older sisters, Ram Lubhai and Ram Rakhi.

Pitaji studied at the Khalsa High school in Chakwal up to Grade 10. After that he joined his brothers. The family had about 500 acres of farming land in Chakwal, with about 400-500 people working for them.

When World War I broke out, Pitaji enlisted in the British Indian Army and joined the Sikh Regiment. His Regiment was sent to Bombay and from there they sailed to Iraq. They landed in Basra. From Basra they made their way into Baghdad and from Baghdad onwards they fought the Turks. They captured the town of Kirkuk, and established a base there.

Pitaji rarely spoke about his days in the army. The story that I remember well is his telling us how his Regiment would look after the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Wherever the Regiment landed or was stationed, the first thing they did was to make sure that the Guru



Bawa Hari Singh.

Granth Sahib was placed in the most appropriate place. Only then did the Regiment undertake their other tasks. The British Officers also showed proper respect to the Guru Granth Sahib.

When Pitaji's Regiment was in Kirkuk, the best tent was put up for the Guru Granth Sahib. It was also the first tent that went up. The Hindus and Muslims in the army used to get very upset with the preferential treatment given to the Guru Granth Sahib. A few of them went to complain to their commanding British Officer about this disparity.

The British Officer told them that he would decide on this matter the next day. He asked them to come the next day at 4 pm with their respective holy books. The Officer

dressed with kirpans in their hands. Behind them were a few more soldiers singing a shabad and behind them was the Guru Granth Sahib properly decorated and hand-carried by four soldiers with bare feet. Pitaji was one of them. Behind the Guru Granth Sahib was the entire Sikh Regiment in full uniform.

When the Sikh Regiment reached the British Officers tent, the Officer covered his head and bowed. He thanked the soldiers for bring their holy book and told them that they could go back. The Sikhs then took the procession around the entire cantonment. It took them nearly two hours to take that round. Only after that was completed did they go back to the tent and placed the Guru Granth Sahib in its rightful place.

After the Sikhs left, the British Officer asked the Hindu and Muslim soldiers whether they still needed an explanation as to why the Sikhs were being given preferential treatment.

He told them, "How can you expect me to respect your holy books when you yourselves do not respect them. See how the Sikhs respect their scripture. I too bowed my head. I felt compelled to do so because of their faith in their scripture."

The Sikh Regiment was stationed in Kirkuk for some time. After the war escalated they were sent to Istanbul. They fought their way through Turkey to reach France where they fought the Germans.

While they were in France the new helmet law was introduced. It became mandatory for all soldiers in the British army to wear helmets. The Sikh Regiment outright refused to wear the helmet. They told their British commanding Officers that it was against their religion to remove their turbans and wear the helmet. The British Officers told them that they had to abide by this law. The Sikh Regiment once again refused. Pitaji somehow became the leader of this struggle. The British Officers decided to court-martial him and two other Sikh soldiers over this. The Sikh Regiment revolted. They told the British Officers that if this action was taken against Bawa Hari Singh and the other two Sikh soldiers they would not stay in the army. Seeing the mood of the soldiers the British Officers decided to dismiss Pitaji and the other two Sikh soldiers and they were sent back home.

In 1918, at the age of 20, Pitaji came back to India and joined the Akali party in Amritsar. He was very sympathetic to the Bhagat Singh movement and became an active participant in the movement to gain



On the eve of joining service, Sikh troops swear allegiance to the Guru Granth Sahib at their passing out parade at the Sikh Regimental Centre, Ramgarh.

also asked the Sikhs to come to his tent at 4 pm with their holy book.

The next day, the first people to appear before the British Officer were three Hindu soldiers. They had brought the Gita with them in a torn shoulder bag. The British Officer asked them to sit down. They sat down and placed the Gita on the table. The Muslims came next. They had the Koran wrapped up in a cloth which they also put on the table. While they were sitting, they heard singing. Everyone came out of the tent to see what was happening.

There were two Sikh soldiers leading a procession. They were throwing water on the ground. Behind them were five Sikh soldiers (*Punj Pyare*) properly

independence from the British. For that reason he was jailed many times and was often tortured. The British used to lay him on slabs of ice for hours. They wanted two things from him; firstly to apologize for his actions and secondly to leave the political scene. But Pitaji refused to apologize and neither was he prepared to give up the struggle for Independence. Needless to say he spent quite a bit of time in prison.

While he was in prison, his older brother got him engaged to Harnam Kaur of Jhelum. Harnam Kaur's father, Sardar Mehtab Singh Maini was also very active in politics. He belonged to the Congress party and later became its head. Pitaji met his future father-in-law for the first time while at at Lahore jail. Both of them were sentenced by the British for their political activities.

In 1918, Pitaji got married and brought his wife to Chakwal to live with the rest of the family.

13 April, 1919. Pitaji was at the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar when the army opened fire on the crowd that had gathered there peacefully. He managed to escape with just an injury to his leg. His older brothers became very concerned about his political activities and feared for his safety. They persuaded him to leave for Iran. Pitaji very reluctantly agreed. His brothers persuaded the British authorities to release him from jail. He was released on the condition that he would leave the county.

So in 1920 Pitaji went to Iran and worked for Sardar Mota Singh for five years. In 1924-25 he and Sardar Jai

Singh Bhasin established their own business under the name of Bawa Hari Singh & Jai Singh in Zaidan, Iran. That is how Pitaji came to Iran and we became known as Iranis."

"Dad, this was an amazing lesson in history! But how come Pitaji agreed to go to Iran? It sounds so out of character?"

"I don't know. Maybe it was the love and respect he had for his brothers. They were the ones that raised him. As far as I can remember, he never went against their wishes for anything. My marriage to your mother was also arranged by his older brother," replied Dad.

"First session over," states Dad getting up and leaving the room. I continue to sit on the couch absorbing what I've heard. Memories of my dear, dear grandfather flood in.

Once, while I was still a child, I saw his back and remember asking him about the scars on his back?

He smiled and said nothing. He was a man of few words. He didn't need to speak, his presence said it all.

His is the photograph that I carry in my wallet. He is still my knight-in-shining armor.

Shukar, shukar and more *shukar* for the love he bestowed on me.

Inni Kaur

Author of the children's book, Journey With The Gurus, which is available at www.JourneyWithTheGurus.com

Amrut Sanchar or the Amrit ceremony is the Sikh ceremony of initiation or baptism. This practice has been in existence since the times of Guru Nanak Dev (1469–1539). *Khande di Pahul* (Amrit Ceremony) was initiated in the times of Guru Gobind Singh when the Guru established the Order of Khalsa at Sri Anandpur Sahib on the day of Baisakhi in 1699.

Khande Di Pahul not only embodies the primary objects of Sikh faith and the promises connected therewith, but also is itself a promise to lead a pure and pious life to unite with Almighty Lord. It is about inward cleansing of the conscience and seeking unity with Supreme Lord through His Grace. The word *Pahul* is a derivative from the substantive, *Pahu-* which is an agent which brightens, accelerates or sharpens the potentialities of a given object.



The photograph shows young Sikh recruits at the Amrit ceremony at a Regimental Gurdwara, before they join the ranks of a Sikh Regiment.



DEFEAT INTO

The First Sikhs in the Second Burma

Iconic photograph of Sikh troops destroying Japanese in their bunkers in Burma, 1944.

The 1st Battalion of the Sikh Regiment were mobilised for war in February 1942 and destined to fight the Japanese in Burma till August 1945. Those three and a half years of fighting in the tropical jungles, hills and rivers of Burma have been powerfully described in General Bill Slim's epic *Defeat into Victory*. The 1st battalion of the Sikh Regiment were an integral part of this great XIV Army, sometimes described as the 'Forgotten Army',

which tenaciously fought to stem the Japanese invasion of India.

Rangoon was devastated and deserted when the 1st Sikhs arrived in the city on 3 March. The 17th Indian Division ("Black Cats") had endured a harrowing time but displayed matching bravery when withdrawing from south-east Burma, the Division commanded by another XIV Sikhs officer, Major General John Smyth, who had won the Victoria Cross at Ypres in the Great War.

VICTORY

[Presentation by Pushpinder Singh at the annual 'Profiles of Courage' lecture at the Imperial War Museum, London]

strafed from the air for an hour. The battalion stuck to its position and soon 600 Sikh bayonets fiercely assaulted the Japanese, routing them and pursuing them for miles. The road block was cleared but at the cost of heavy casualties, the battalion being reduced to 350 men.

The forward battalions of 48 Brigade were unfortunately overrun and 63 Brigade readjusted its position. The entire force was in retreat but once again, the Sikhs were selected to picket the heights, which they did, while others hesitated to do so due to what was called a 'frightful' condition of the troops. The Sikhs were praised for their 'fitness and willingness' to do what others could not. Great tonic for the battalion indeed! On the preceding day, its morale high, the 1st Sikhs had marched 62 miles in 53 hours.

Campaign

The Japanese had established a road block at Taukkyan-Pegu, which the 7th Armoured Brigade had failed to clear. Thus, on 8 March, 63 Brigade along with the tanks of the Hussars were ordered to clear it and the Brigade moved post-haste from Illegu under the personal orders of General Alexander.

The 1st Sikhs undertook the first phase alone, notwithstanding loss of an element of surprise and having been exposed on an open field, bombed and



Epitome of a Sikh soldier: painting at the Imperial War Museum, London.



Stalking the enemy through the Jungles of Burma.

Between 18 and 23 April, marching all the way, the battalion were at Wunwin, 20 miles west of Meiktila and placed under command of the 7th Armoured Brigade to act as rearguard for extrication of Chinese forces from the Sittang Valley. It was a fighting withdrawal, with Japanese Zeros continuing to bomb and strafe the allied land forces, but the Chinese were helped out. The

Chinese C-in-C General Hoying Chin later expressed his deep gratitude especially to the 1st Sikhs for helping his troops out of a death trap and become a good friend of theirs while at Ramgarh, where the Chinese Army was being re-equipped and trained.

By now, the battalion had been reduced to just 215 all ranks from its earlier strength of 900. The battalion



With fixed bayonets, Sikh troops await the order to advance.

reached Imphal on 22 May and moved to Kohima on 6 June. Here, although there was no danger of enemy attack, the tracks coming from the east were well guarded. Long range patrols were sent towards Ukhrul and Chindwin, these arduous tasks carried out at the height of the 1942 monsoons.

By March 1944, the 1st Sikhs were back with the 33 Brigade as an integrated battalion and its full combat potential was now to be exploited. 33 Brigade embarked upon its earlier objective, the capture of Buthidaung and the area around, with *Poland* and *Rabbit* being its preliminary objectives, leading onto *India Hill*. Many other acts of gallantry were performed during the confused and bitter fighting as the Sikh annals of heroism continued unabated. L/Nk Karnail Singh was awarded a posthumous IOM for his outstanding gallantry and devotion to duty. The life of Major Spink, the company commander, was saved by Sep. Mehar Singh, who was awarded a Military Medal. L/Nk. Harchand Singh was awarded an IDSM.

On 9 March, 'A' Company advanced towards Hbinababyih and met with stiff resistance but this was captured through collective will and individual gallantry. Nk. Naranjan Singh, though wounded, continued to lead the section and captured three enemy trenches. For this gallantry he was awarded an IDSM. Sep. Mukthiar Singh charged another hill single-handed firing his bren gun and killing many of the enemy. He was posthumously awarded an IOM. This Military Medal was also awarded to Sep. Karam Singh and an IDSM went to Sep. Charan Singh.

The next objective was Astride in the west, just short of Buthidaung where the enemy had constructed bunkers on both sides of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road. On 11 March, at dawn, the 1st Battalion supported by tanks, artillery and air support attacked Astride. Intensive tank and machine gun fire continued to deafen and completely overwhelm the sound of close air support, tanks and artillery barrages. Amidst resounding *jaikaras*, the Sikhs charged and captured the enemy position, which enabled 4/8 Gurkhas to clear rest of the eastern face of Buthidaung.

In the battle for Buthidaung, one of the hill features which came to be known as India Hill, was left unoccupied, which the Japanese were quick to exploit. Characteristically they dug in fast and began to interfere with troops on the feature Astride. Major John Brough, the company commander was ordered to



On the left, British officer of the 1st Sikhs (in turban, with beard) with JCO of the battalion.



Naik Nand Singh of the 1st Battalion, Sikh Regiment, serving with the 7th Infantry Division in Burma.



Naik Nand Singh, Victoria Cross with his mother on return to the Punjab.



'Bravest of the Brave': battalion headquarters today, with bust of Nand Singh VC to inspire the personal and future Jawans of the Sikh Regiments.

silence the post and deputed a platoon to capture it.

As described by Colonel FT Birdwood, "The Platoon moved up to the assault, with Nk. Nand Singh's section in the lead. The only possible approach on to the hill followed a narrow track leading to the enemy position. It was along this track that Nk. Nand Singh led his section. Reaching the crest, the section came under heavy machine gun and rifle fire and every man was knocked over, either killed or wounded. Nonetheless, Nk. Nand Singh dashed forward alone under intense fire at point blank range, without hesitation and captured the trench after killing the two occupants with the bayonet".

Closeby was another trench. Under continuous heavy fire, Nk. Nand Singh charged at it. He was again wounded by a grenade and knocked down but he hurled himself into the trench, again killing both the occupants with the bayonet. He moved on again and captured a third trench, still single-handed.

With the capture of the third trench, the enemy fire ceased. Nk. Nand Singh's encounter had taken little time and remainder of the platoon checked for the moment by the sudden heavy fire as it reached the crest, now moved up and captured remainder of the position, killing with the bayonet and grenade, 37 out of 40 Japanese who had been holding it.

Nk. Nand Singh's part in this brief but incredible action, his splendid resolution and utter disregard for his own life, were fittingly recognised by an immediate award of the Victoria Cross. Major John Brough was awarded the DSO and Jem. Mehar Singh, the platoon commander, an IOM.L/Nk. Dewa Singh and Sep. Hazara Singh won IDsMs.

The success of 'A' company was immediately recognised, Hav. Major Sampuran Singh was awarded a posthumous IOM, Major RJ Adams, the company commander received an MC, IDsMs were awarded to Sep. Bhag Singh and Jem. Arjan Singh. Hav. Mukund Singh, Ralla Singh, Harchand Singh and L/Nk. Sardara Singh received Gallantry Certificates. The award of VC to Nand Singh and the continuing excellent performance of the battalion in the Arakan and Imphal had so impressed General Bill Slim that he told Lt General Reginald Savory that he regarded the 1st Sikhs and 1st/4th Gurkhas as "the two best units amongst the entire XIV Army."

1st Sikhs had virtually become a legend in Burma but its ranks were depleted after the sustained fighting and they were in need of some rest and re-organisation. At Kohima, a draft of 200 young soldiers were received from the 15/11 Sikhs, which war-raised battalion was under disbandment.

Rangoon was entered on 15 June 1945, 39 months after the retreat had begun. The victor had become the vanquished; the tables had turned. A composite battalion made up of contingents from all those of the 7th Division, including 30 men from 1 Sikh, commanded by Lt.Colonel Spink took part in the Victory Parade where Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander, took the salute.

On 12 September, while the Regiment recalled its immortal Saragarhi Day, the Japanese were surrendering to Lord Mountbatten at Singapore. At this ceremony the Indian officers corps were represented by Brig. K.S.Thimayya DSO and Sub. Gurcharan Singh MC+Bar who was among the several highly decorated VCOs and men of the Indian Army present. Three days later, on 15 September, the Japanese representatives arrived at Rangoon to sign the final Japanese document of surrender.

The 1st Battalion, Sikh Regiment, had been an intrinsic part of the Burma campaign since March 1942 which saw culmination in the Japanese surrender in September 1945. The cost, rigours and nightmares of three and half years would never be forgotten. The battalion had suffered many casualties. Among the officers, only Colonel Spink survived. Among the VCOs and men there had been such a turnover that the battalion had virtually been reconstituted almost twice over. The gallantry awards however, were equally great.

Thus ended the Second World War. True to their traditions, the XIV Ferozepore Sikhs had maintained a reputation of the highest levels: loyalty, devotion to duty, gallantry and discipline. The war had cost the battalion 850 casualties, 195 killed and 655 wounded.



The 1st Sikhs are now part of the Mechanised Infantry Regiment, equipped with BMP-2 infantry combat vehicles.

TRYST WITH DESTINY



In defence of the Valley, 1947.

1st Sikhs secure the Vale of Kashmir

The 1st Battalion of The Sikh Regiment were at Clement Town, Dehra Dun in early August 1947 when they were specially selected to move to Delhi for ceremonies marking the epoch-marking Independence Day of India. The battalion mounted guard at the Red Fort, presenting arms to the last Viceroy and the many dignitaries present, both Indian and foreign. Along with contingents of the Royal Indian Air Force and Royal Indian Navy, the 1st Sikhs unfurled the Tricolour flag of an independent India at the India Gate at 6:00 p.m. on 15 August 1947 and again on 16 August 1947 at 8:00 a.m. at the historic Red Fort. Major Harwant Singh MC was Deputy Parade Commander, the fine bearing and turnout of the guard greatly praised by General Sir Rob Lockhart, the Commander-in-Chief.

Even amidst the rejoicing, however, was the grimness of communal strife and vicious rioting in northern India, in fact not far from that scene of ceremonies. The battalion, under command of Lt.Col.Dewan Ranjit Rai, formerly with the 5th Sikhs in Malaya and including Major Sampuran Bachan Singh, Harwant Singh MC, Hazura Singh, Sardara Singh, Lichmore and KLSuri, Captains Kamajjit Singh, Joginder Singh and Lt.Vijay Singh were ordered to Gurgaon, just south of Delhi beyond Palam airfield for internal security and maintaining the peace. Two companies were deployed at this town, the other two at Paiwal and Rewari and other rural areas. The battalion was shortly visited by Lt.General Sir Dudley Russell 'Pasha', Army Commander of the just raised Delhi East Punjab (DEP) Command which had been formed on 20 September 1947. As recorded by his Staff Officer Major (later Lt.General) S.K.Sinha. "During a tour of Rohtak and Gurgaon in early October 1947, the C-in-C visited several units including 1 Sikh at Gurgaon, commanded by Lt.Col.Dewan Ranjit Rai. One could not but be struck by his confidence and bearing which was strikingly different from that of other officers. Russell was visibly impressed and later mentioned that "a battalion reflected the personality of its commander." This certainly was to influence the Army Commander in selecting 1 Sikh for a very crucial operation just some weeks later. Earlier, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, the Supreme Commander writing to General Sir Rob Lockhart had singled out the 1st Sikhs on their "exemplary and impartial manner" in which they had performed "their thankless task" at Gurgaon.

In the late evening of 26 October, urgent summons took Major SK Sinha immediately to Command H.Q. for high level meetings with the BGS, GSOI (Ops) and GSO (Int) where General Russell briefed them on the grave situation developing in Kashmir. The Prime Minister gave DEP Command the vital task of defending Srinagar and driving out the raiders from Kashmir. General Russell directed that an infantry brigade be sent to Srinagar by air starting very early next morning and a parachute brigade group to start their move by road from the Punjab to Jammu.

This was now late October and winter would soon set in, rendering the small airstrip at Srinagar inoperable while the Banihal Pass would soon be completely blocked by snow. The RIAF could only muster 3 Dakotas and so other Dakotas had to come from the private civil airlines. With astonishing rapidity 40 Dakotas were requisitioned in 36 hours. General Russell directed that the first troops to be despatched by air to Srinagar would be 1 Sikh, while 77 Para Brigade from Gurdaspur would move north by road.

“I could not help feeling that General Russell had selected 1 Sikh because of the impression that its CO had created on him a fortnight earlier. They were almost immediately to justify his confidence. I sent emergency signals to 1 Sikh and 77 Parachute Brigade”. 1 Sikh, less two Company’s were to assemble at Palam airfield before dawn on 27 October 1947. To make up strength, one battery of 13 Field Regiment (all Sikhs) then located at Delhi was placed under command to function in an infantry role.

The CO was briefed on the operational task at the airfield itself, where warm clothing, rations and ammunition were issued. Information on the enemy was very scanty : ‘Tribesmen numbers and arms unknown but reliably reported to be large numbers and advancing towards Srinagar. The situation is critical’. The Op. instruction was to secure Srinagar airfield and the wireless station and “to take such actions with available troops which would drive the tribesmen away from Srinagar and provide aid to the civil administration for law and order”. However, should the pilots not establish contact with civil aviation authorities at Srinagar or if weather



C-47 Dakota of No.12 Squadron IAF lands at Srinagar airfield on 27 October 1947....



.... men of the 1st Sikhs disembark



.... and rapidly deploy to defend the airfield from the raiders.

conditions were poor, the Dakotas would divert to Jammu to await further instructions.

It was later known that the raiders (or *Kablis* mostly from the northwest frontier including Pathans, Chitralis and viscous Mahsuds plus regular troops "on leave" including the 11th (PAVO) Cavalry in mufti and commanded by Brig. Akbar Khan, of the 6/13 Frontier Force Rifles) title after capturing Muzaffarabad and Domel on the Kashmir border on 22 October had swept the few State Forces troops aside and after sacking Uri had invested Baramula, just an hour's drive from Srinagar. Some days later, the estimated number of these *Kablis*, had increased to 15,000 and they were entering the state of Jammu and Kashmir from various directions, the most ominous being in the valley.

Lt Colonel Dewan Ranjit Rai with his Tac headquarters and C Company, commanded by Capt. Kamaljit Singh, the defence platoon and a section of 3" mortars for the first airlift, were in place at 0330 hours on 27 October. The second wave to follow consisted of D Company under Major Harwant Singh MC and another section of mortars, the rest of the battalion to follow on 28 October, responsibility for the later moves being vested with Major Sampuran Bachan Singh who was to rejoin the battalion at Srinagar soon thereafter. 1 Sikh had an enviable war record, with most of the JCOs and NCOs experienced war veterans, some highly decorated for gallantry, including Jem. Nand Singh VC, now a platoon commander and there were no less than 8 Military Cross holders.

The first Dakotas took off from Palam airfield at dawn, flying northwards over the Punjab and Jammu, past the Pir Panjal range before crossing the Banihal Pass to the Kashmir Valley. They circled over the airstrip south of Srinagar but there were no apparent signs of activity and the lead aircraft touched down at exactly 0915 hours. The troops immediately deplaned and set up defensive positions at the airfield.

Lt. Colonel Dewan Ranjit Rai had two options, either to establish defences right there and so attempt to hold the raiders or carry the fight to where the enemy were, reported to be numbering some 5000 men, armed with automatic weapons and mortars, but indulging in loot and rape at Baramula some 45 miles away by hard-surfaced road. Colonel Rai was clear in his mind and immediately led his 264 men by commandeered state government buses along the

Jhelum valley passing Pattan and selecting the fateful hill on the 32nd milestone just short of Baramula, for confronting the enemy.

Major Harwant Singh MC, leading D Company had flown into Srinagar with the second wave of Dakotas by 1400 hours and almost straight away carried out a 'flag march' in Srinagar city before also moving out towards Baramula.

Meanwhile Capt. Kamaljit Singh's C Company had begun to dig defensive positions at the mile 32 hill, a dominating feature with its northern flank resting on the Jhelum. Joined by D Company in the late evening, now under command of Major Harwant Singh, the 1st Sikhs established defence positions between Khojabad and Poshbagh by nightfall and were ready for battle. Early on 28 October morning, the raiders were seen moving out towards Sopur but were now confronted by the Sikhs. The first battle of independent India had begun, fierce fire fights, including mortar fire exchanges continuing intermittently through the day, even as Colonel Ranjit Rai rushed back to Srinagar to concentrate the move of more de-planing troops. The raiders, seized of how close they had been to their prize, began to outflank the defensive lines, also moving from Gulmarg towards Sangam. By the evening, with large numbers of enemy fanning around the positions, it was decided to regroup C and D Companies at Pattan, closer to Srinagar. Tragically, Colonel Ranjit Rai fell to a sniper's bullet while re-deploying the troops close to the hill at milestone 32, his body and those of others killed being covered under some bushes to be recovered later. As later eulogised by a Pakistan military historian "... with no reserve of men or ammunition, Rai made an attack on the invading forces as if he had the whole Division at his support. He saved Srinagar airfield, dashed down the Baramula Road, delayed the raiders from advancing by vital 36 hours and enabled reinforcements sent by air to land at Srinagar. He saved Srinagar, although he gave his life in the effort". In recognition of his courage, Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai was posthumously awarded the first Maha Vir Chakra of the Indian Army and 27 October has since been perpetuated in Indian military history as Infantry Day.

The battalion re-deployed its defences, thinly spread from Pattan to Arnaburam and fought off several attacks, even as Major Sampuran Bachan Singh joined the 1st Sikhs at Pattan and took over

command. Meanwhile, airlift of troops from Delhi and Jammu continued apace and by 30 October, tactical headquarters 161 Infantry Brigade was established at Srinagar, with 1 Kumaon, 1 Punjab and 4 Kumaon. Maj.Gen.Kalwant Singh took over Command of JAK Force and the Royal Indian Air Force flew close air support with Spitfires and Tempests, first close to the airfield and then ranging over the valley for tac-recce missions.

The raiders were making flanking moves towards Srinagar airfield and fierce fighting took place at Badgam and the situation became critical. 1st Sikh remained fully deployed at Pattan with fighting patrols seeking the enemy but were again moved back towards Srinagar to cover the north-east perimeter, guarding the main approach near Shalateng Bridge.

The decisive battle of Shalateng on 7 November 1947 was to break the raider's back and spirit, removing the threat to Srinagar and the Vale of Kashmir. B Company of 1 Sikh had been attacked by nearly 5000 raiders on the 6th night, all attacks beaten back and heavy casualties inflicted. In brilliant tactical moves, while enveloping attacks were carried out by the Kumaonis and armoured cars came up from the rear, 1 Sikh continued their frontal attacks, stunning the enemy who fled the battlefield leaving 472 dead and another 146 on the road towards Baramula, abandoning 138 civilian lorries, field ambulances and load carriers plus a great quantity of arms and ammunition.

An immediate advance was begun along the main axis, 1 Sikh closely pursuing the fleeing enemy, clearing Pattan on 8 November morning, killing another 150 and wounding 200 of the raiders, capturing vehicles, wireless sets, arms and ammunition. Some of the Pathans captured were Frontier Force regulars "on leave", exposing Pakistan's perfidy.

Moving ahead, the battalion flushed out several enemy positions and on 9 November entered a devastated Baramula where the mortal remains of Col. Rai and other NCOs and men were cremated with full military honours. Continuing, the battalion advanced to Rampur and then Uri, via temporary bridges, to find utter chaos all around and established defensive picquets covering the road Uri-Domel.

The regular Pakistan Army had been committed to battle and adopting an aggressive posture, attacked

the battalion with machine guns and mortars. One of the fiercest fighting was for Nalwa picquet on the night of 23-24 November, where 1 Sikh killed about 400 of the enemy, the hero of this defensive battle of Uri being Naik Chand Singh, awarded an immediate MVC.

It was now winter and heavy snowfall meant re-deployment of Indian troops to the lower heights of the wooded Sank Ridge on Uri's southern flank, with regular Pak-Army troops dominating the Uri bowl. However the brigade, without proper appreciation directed Lt Col.Sampuran Bachan Singh to evict the enemy from Bhatgiran in a frontal, daylight attack. Nb.Sub.Nand Singh VC who had rejoined the battalion was leading his D Company platoon when an unfortunate lapse of communication exposed the advancing troops to well entrenched enemy positions and they suffered heavy casualties. Jem Nand Singh with his platoon tore into the massed enemy with bayonets, was severely wounded but continued to lead till he was killed by a burst of LMG fire. His repeated acts of "valour, leadership and devotion to duty", won him a posthumous MVC, Nand Singh passing on into military legend as the most highly decorated soldier in the Commonwealth.

To perpetuate the memory of this gallant warrior, the main bridge over the Uri nala, has been named '*Nand Singh VC*' Bridge and the road to Salamabad as '*Nand Singh VC Road*', with an imposing memorial built, overlooking the bridge.

Meantime, Sub.Bishan Singh MC of D Company launched a counter attack and in severe hand-to-hand fighting, the enemy was thrown back. Even as more waves of troops were thrown into battle but Bishan Singh, continuing to cheer and encourage his men, was killed fighting. His cool courage, inspiring leadership and dogged determination against heavy odds, earned him a posthumous MVC. Sub. Gurcharan Singh MC&Bar also showed gallantry of the highest order and earned a VC. but the battalion suffered 125 casualties in this futile action because of inept orders from the top.

However, the Pakistanis thereafter stopped interfering with traffic over the Uri bridge, which led to another successful operation that cleared the area upto Sank. 1 Sikh had within six days re-captured the towns of Pattan, Baramula and Uri over a distance of 100 kilometres suffered severe casualties but inflicted

multiple times that on the enemy, mostly regular Pak. Army troops. The Kashmir Valley had been saved by the bold and courageous warriors of the 1st battalion, The Sikh Regiment.

Lt Col Harbaksh Singh had now taken over as C.O. 1 Sikhs when during the height of severe winter, news came of the enemy having crossed over Pharkian Gali and then spreading into the Tregham Valley. On 8 February 1948, the battalion moved out in darkness, via Sopur and advanced along the snow bound road securing a firm base at Handwara the next afternoon. Ironically, the Pak. 1st A K battalion facing 1st Sikhs was commanded by Lt Colonel Nausherwan Khan, formerly of the 5th Sikhs and a colleague of Harbaksh Singh. Soon Handwara was cleared and the 1st Sikhs advanced along the road Wodhapur-Naugam-Kupwara, the going very hard because of snow and burnt bridges. Tregham was then relieved, the enemy seen fleeing and pursuit continued with some fire fights including at village Shulur where 40 of the enemy were killed. The clearing operations in the Tregham Valley were some of the toughest in the J&K operations, but tackled with courage and tenacity.

After some rest and re-organisation, 1 Sikh were in fine fettle and spirits when regular Pak. Army formations were identified as astride the heights along the Uri-Muzaffarabad area and Haji Pir, spreading north of Uri and into the Kishenganga area. The Pakistan Army's "official" involvement in J&K was eventually admitted in April 1948 by General Sir Douglas Gracey, C-in-C Pak.Army stating that "it is imperative that the Indian Army is not allowed to advance beyond the general line Uri-Poonch-Nowshera". The first Pak Army's formation to go into Kashmir was 101 Brigade and by June 1948 both the 7th and 9th (Frontier) Divisions were in action.

Major General K.S.Thimayya, GOC Sri Div (later 19th Infantry Division), with 163 Brigade commanded now by Brigadier Harbaksh Singh of which 1 Sikh, 3 Garhwal and 1 Madras were constituent, had planned offensive operations towards Domel in spring but resources were grossly inadequate. Regardless, 1 Sikh secured Chokibal on 21 May 1948 and two days later Tithwal was captured. 1 Sikh were assigned the task of clearing the heights of Richmar Gali and Point 7229 on the left of Nastachhun Pass and north of the Kishanganga. Commanded by Lt.Col. Keshar Singh

IDSMS, 1 Sikh carried out a reconnaissance in force, B and C Companies being grouped under Major Harwant Singh MC.

The approach to Richmar Gali involved a climb in single file up a steep gradient with enemy positions to be cleared all along. On 30 May, assaults were launched against the strongly held ridge, wooded crests well covered by series of machine gun posts : the C.O. had declared that even though the enemy was strongly entrenched, "*Sheron Chhad Jao !*" (My braves, capture it !). They did and the 1 Sikhs assaulted the enemy (identified as the 3/12 Frontier Force Regiment, the venerable 53rd (Royal) Sikhs of undivided Indian Army) with severe hand to hand fighting. The 10th Pak. Army Brigade included some five battalions, with 4/16 Punjab, 3/12 Frontier Force Rifles, 5/12 FF Regt ('Guides') and MMGs of 1/15 Punjab plus a mountain battery.

1 Sikh defences then leant on Pir Sahiba in the west with a rifle company on Nangi Terki, the troops creating very strong defence works in the wooded feature. On 4 June, under heavy artillery fire, the enemy launched strong attacks, but were held by Jem Harchand Singh's platoon and counter attacked with bayonets and grenades, killing 53 and capturing arms and ammunition in this battle which coincided with *Gallipoli Day*.

Although a UN-directed Cease Fire was anticipated, the enemy used heavy artillery, mortars and machine guns to continuously attack 1 Sikh positions, having declared the Kashmir war as 'jihad'. The re-capture of Tithwal, with Richmar Gali as vital objective, became the Pakistan Army's obsession and a reinforced brigade, with artillery, was deployed to ring the position, and the General even broadcast that the Tithwal Valley - Nastachhun pass upto Kupwara was to be "an Id gift for Pakistan".

A four-man section of Sikhs on a small knoll covering the knife edged ridge beat back battalion-sized attacks, the man of the moment being L/Nk Karam Singh who had won the Military Medal in Burma. From the evening of 12 October 1948, heavy artillery and mortar fire damaged the main defences but the saddle had been overlooked. Throughout 13 October, the battle was fought, wave after wave of assaulting Pak.Army troops beaten back and Karam Singh, though wounded, fought it out, bayoneting



The historic Gurdwara Sahib on the banks of the river Jhelum at Baramulla.

those who came near his trench, holding the saddle for over three hours against five waves of attack.

Counter attacks, artillery fire and RIAF strafing during daylight hours held the enemy even as Sikhs in the forward most trenches grappled with the attackers using bayonets and grenades. On the night of 13 October and following morning the seventh and last of the attacks was beaten off and even if every bunker was destroyed, the enemy did not capture any. While the Pak Army lost over 300 men and 500 wounded, with many POWs taken, the 1st Sikhs had 15 killed and 263 wounded.

Maj.Gen.Thimayya brimming over with pride and praise, termed the battle for Richmar Gali as “a magnificent fight” L/Nk Karam Singh was awarded the Param Vir Chakra for his fiercely proud spirit and as a “dauntless and born leader of men in crisis, where spirits could neither be subdued by fire nor hardship.”

1st battalion The Sikh Regt were given the battle honours *Srinagar 1947* and *Tithwal 1948* and *J&K 1947, 1948* as Theatre Honours.



Colonel Harwant Singh MC at the historic Mile 32 hill memorial near Baramulla, 2006.

General Harbaksh Singh: epitome of the Sikh General



*Lt. Gen. Harbaksh Singh,
when GOC-in-C Western Command.*

General Harbaksh Singh was a gallant and brave soldier, adept in the handling of troops in changing battlefield scenarios and in strategic and tactical thinking. With vast battlefield experience he was a versatile leader of that era, motivating troops under his command to achieve desired goals. Removing him from command just before the imminent battle of Sela was perhaps the most crucial and unwise decision of the 1962 conflict. History could well have been different had Harbaksh Singh continued to command IV Corps.

Sikh soldier at Sela, at 14,000 feet above sea level.

October-November 1962

In less than four weeks the self respect and confidence of India had taken a severe jolt and image of its professional Army, with a century of world wide esteem, carelessly sullied. The officers and men of the Army did not falter but their leaders did, right upto the highest in the land. The Indian Army had been made to carry out suicidal posturing by country's politicians who believed in their own fantasies but were in for a rude awakening.

Strategic analysts and military history students have now for half a century fought and re-fought

those desperate battles along the jagged ridges, mountains and passes of India's north eastern frontiers. What clearly stands out is "leadership" during those crucial months, and that would have been provided in full measure by none other than the then Colonel of the Sikh Regiment, Lt. General Harbaksh Singh who had been appointed as GOC IV Corps In Tezpur after the first round of fighting (till 23 October 1962). His predecessor had been evacuated as sick and even in the brief five days that this doughty warrior held the reins, he infused great spirit and planned for the resolute defence of NEFA.

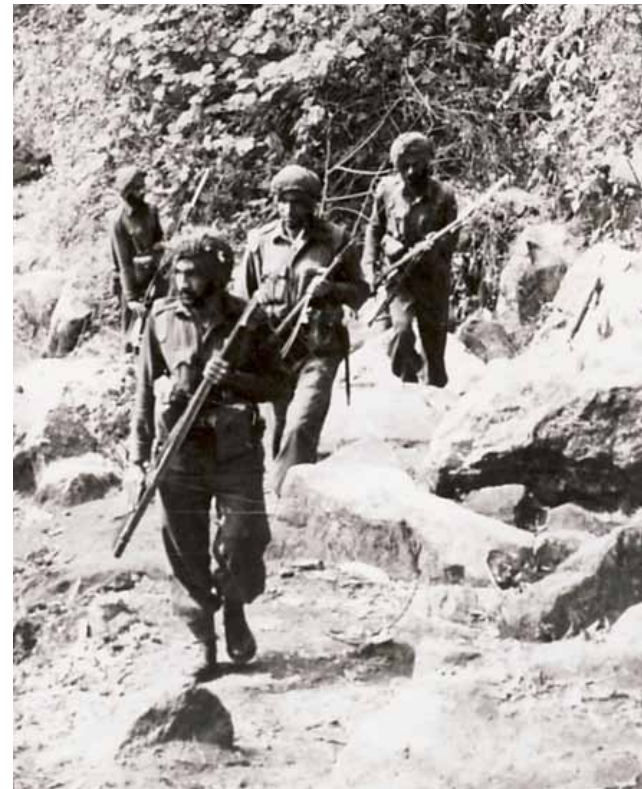


And what if ?

On 24 October 1962, Lt. General Harbaksh Singh took over as GOC IV Corps. After ground reconnaissance of the Sela and Bomdila areas, General Harbaksh Singh decided to hold Sela strongly as a fortress, with 4th Infantry Division headquarters located within it. His predecessor who had been at Delhi throughout the battle of Namka Chu, still found excuses for the debacle and fall of Tawang to "inept handling of troops by lower formation and unit commanders". To redeem "lost prestige" he reappeared at Tezpur and re-assumed command of IV Corps, displacing Harbaksh Singh who was then shifted to XXXIII Corps in north Bengal. Indian intelligence agencies had assessed that the Chinese were unlikely to continue their operations beyond Tawang before the winter closure of passes and the Indian Army, therefore, could consolidate their positions at Sela and Bomdila during such a break in the Chinese offensive enabling it to thwart enemy designs during the next summer.

The *Fortress Defence* concept propagated by General Harbaksh Singh was not given adequate thought as Kaul had planned to fight the battle according to his own thinking. By the second week of November, Brig. Hoshier Singh commanding 62 Brigade had occupied a compact defended sector at Sela with 1 Sikh, 4 Sikh LI and 2 Sikh LI. 4 Garhwal Rifles were deployed forward, overlooking Jang, as covering troops. 65 Brigade which, under the Harbaksh Singh Plan, was to be deployed at Senge to provide depth to Sela, was instead down located at Dirang Dzong for providing close protection to 4 Division headquarters. 48 Brigade had just arrived in Bomdila after being pulled out from 17 Infantry Division at Ambala.

The story of disintegration of 65 Brigade at Dirang was as tragic as with the other Brigades. The battle of Bomdila was similar to the ones at Namka Chu and Sela. Contradicting orders from Corps and Division weakened the already limited defences. Elements of the 5th Infantry Division had started arriving at Tezpur including 16 Sikh from Ferozpur airlifted in US Air Force C-130 Hercules aircraft



Patrolling the Jungle-hills of NEFA, October 1962.



Nk. Joginder Singh of the 1st Sikhs posthumously awarded the *Param Vir Chakra* for his incredible bravery in defending outposts against the attacking Chinese Army on 20 October 1962.

but it was too late to employ them as the situation had deteriorated beyond redemption. To add humiliation, on 20 November, after the capture of Chaku, the Chinese, with characteristic



Sikh troops in their bunker in (then) NEFA, facing the Chinese hordes.

drama, declared a unilateral cease fire, effective from mid-night of 21–22 November, which suddenly brought an end to all fighting in the Kameng sector.

Lt General Harbaksh Singh had planned the *Fortress* concept with Sela and Bomdila being prepared as impregnable defence localities, “akin to a knife sticking into the sky with Dirang Dzong completely rejected as being a death well”. The steep spurs rising from Jang to Sela would have become a graveyard for the Chinese. Sela with a Division less Brigade and Bomdila with a Brigade Group were to be strongly held, independent of each other with no reliance on road maintenance if and when cut off and to be maintained only from the air. The outflanking Chinese would rapidly be cut off themselves and then it would be as to “who was behind whom.” With winter getting in, the Chinese troops would either withdraw or be forced into surrender or perish in large numbers.

All of General Harbaksh Singh’s preparations were nullified when in a surprise move Kaul was returned to IV Corps on 29 October. Kaul allowed Sela to be exposed when GOC 4 Division obtained his clearance to

move his headquarters and 65 Brigade down to Drang Dzong, a defenceless bowl situated in low ground. The Chinese then disrupted the Indian command and control at will and laid road blocks with impunity. Rudderless, the troops were devoid of information and direction from the Divisional headquarters. Locating itself at Dirang Dzong, 4 Infantry Division was thus sacrificed and this was the prime reason for debacle of the Indian Army in the Kameng Sector. Outcome of the Battles of Sela and Bomdila could certainly have been different and exacted a terrible toll on the Chinese and avoided the humiliating defeat of India’s once proud and unvanquished Army.

Less than three years later, now as GOC-in-C Western Command, Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh personally directed the desperate battles in the Punjab during September 1965, with a weak 4th Mountain Division and the 2nd Independent Armoured Brigade stoutly holding their defences in the Khem Karan area against Pakistan’s crack 1st Armoured and 11th Infantry Divisions. The tables were turned and Khem Karan became the graveyard for Pakistan’s Army.

By Air into Battle



IAF Antonov An-32.

Sikh troops have long been involved with aeroplanes to go into battle. In fact, the very first occasion in history where a large number of troops were carried by aircraft for military operations took place in 1923 in Iraq. The 1st battalion of the



1923: Sikh troops await airlift in Vickers Victoria of the RAF to Kirkuk (Kurdistan).



2006: 11th battalion, Sikh Regiment in battle gear before embarking in Ilyushin IL-76 at Palam.

Sikh Regiment were at Kut al Amara where they were employed for garrison duties after which they were moved back to Baghdad for protection of the Royal Air Force aerodrome there.

Tribesmen in Kurdistan under the leadership of Sheikh Mahmud had engaged in active hostilities against the British administration, who had not been able to deal with them during the severe winter months. In February 1923, 'A' and 'B' Companies were detailed for reinforcement of Kirkuk and were accordingly transported by ten Vickers Victoria troop carrying aircraft for the purpose. A maximum of 20 troops could be airlifted under optimum conditions in this RAF aircraft of No.70 Squadron, whose cabins were stripped off all appurtenances, with folding cabin seats running the whole length of the cabin. What would normally have taken a week by route march, took less than an hour and the Sikhs were in action immediately.

The 1st Sikhs also took part in the punitive operations directed by the RAF Commander in Iraq against Sheikh Mahmud in May and June 1923, concentrating in Kirkuk and traversing Kurdistan country, making many long marches but there was no serious fighting. Sub.Bhogh Singh was awarded the Military Cross before the Regiment returned to India in early 1924.

23 years later, the 1st Sikhs were to fly into battle once again, this time to maintain independent India's sovereignty in Kashmir. On 27 October 1947, Tac headquarters, 'C' and 'D' Companies of the battalion were flown in C-47 Dakotas of the Royal Indian Air Force and other Dakotas of various civil airlines from Palam and Willingdon airports in Delhi to Srinagar in the Vale of Kashmir. The 'A' and 'B' Companies and other support troops flew into Srinagar the next day, 28 October 1947 when the battle was being fiercely fought out at Baramula, 45 miles away. The 1st Sikhs saved the valley and their distinguished record has never been emulated [see in this Issue].

The 4th battalion were rushed to Walong in the Lohit division of erstwhile NEFA in October 1962, being flown from Tezu in upper Assam to the advanced landing ground in the mountains by DHC Otter single engine utility aircraft, each carrying a maximum of 10 troops with first line ammunition. Scores of sorties were flown and the 4 Sikh were in position to repel Chinese advances which began



Sikh troops manoeuvre jeep into C-47 Dakota before being flown to the Kashmir Valley.

shortly thereafter. Located with the 5th Infantry Division at Ferozepur where the Chinese frontier war erupted in October 1962, 16 Sikh were part of the troops airlifted directly by USAF C-130 Hercules transports to Tezpur and forward deployed in the Foothills.

Sikh troops continue to fly in tactical transport and heavy-lift aircraft of the Indian Air Force, as operational exigencies demand. In October 1987, the 16th battalion of the Sikh Regiment were airlifted from air bases in southern India in Indian Air Force Antonov An-32s and Ilyushin Il-76s to Palaly airfield in the Jaffna Peninsula of Sri Lanka for reliving the besieged troops in Jaffna Fort.

In these photographs taken in April 2006 are troops of the 11th Battalion Sikh Regiment with Ilyushin IL-76 heavy-lift transport aircraft of No.44 Squadron Indian Air Force on the tarmac at Palam airport where six decades earlier the 1st Sikhs had been airlifted in Dakotas to Srinagar, and history.



4th battalion Sikh Regiment disembarking from Otter at Walong, October 1962.

More than Everest

The Extraordinary Life of Autar Singh Cheema*

Lieutenant Colonel Autar Singh Cheema, SM, VSM, Padam Shri, Arjuna Award, or 'Tari' as he was popularly called, was nine years old at the time of the partition of India and had to migrate with his family from Lyallpur, in West Punjab, to Chak 4e in the town of Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan. There were countless others who went through this great human tragedy at an equally impressionable age and many of them were tempered by this adversity. It gave them an inner steel to succeed in life and Tari was one of them.

Rivers have been the spiritual soul of India; the source of philosophy, poetry and romance. The Partition brought Tari to the banks of the Gang Canal fed by the river Sutlej, that flowed past his father's large farm at Chak 4e and he was more often than not in it. In all weather he swam across it, with it, against it and was despondent only when the waters were stopped for dredging. The other river in his life was the Jhelum at Baramula in Kashmir, where his family held some property on its banks. He learnt a lot from the rivers;



Autar at college.



Lt Autar Singh Cheema.

he learnt patience to swim across their fast flow, gained stamina and strength swimming against their currents. He realised that God was the river and was testing him. He knew to respect the water as it gave new life and only by giving could one receive. His nature became one with the river — strong, energetic, confident and always seeking to give. The spirit of the rivers stayed with him through life.

School and college then took him to the Indian Military Academy as a Gentleman Cadet in the 'Kohima' Company. He was in the Company's swimming and athletic teams but his real love was for the *shikar* club of which he was president. On completion of training at the academy, Tari was commissioned into the Parachute Regiment and joined its Second Battalion. Tari was most

suitied for the Parachute Regiment as he had the courage, dash and stamina for it. He did not get the opportunity to lead his troops into battle during his Army career but there was enough adventure and chances to lead in his life to make up for it.

India's relations with China in the mid 1950s were at an apogee; the euphoric mood deteriorated thereafter with Chinese incursions into the Aksai Chin and their expression of extensive territorial claims in the North East. By the early 1960s a threat was imminent that the Chinese would try to realise their claims by force. Major Narinder 'Bull' Kumar had led a successful mountaineering expedition to Mount Nanda Devi, close to the trade route entering India from Tibet at Bara Hoti. To thwart possible aggressive Chinese designs along that route, the Government of India summoned Bull and asked him to make a plan to secure Bara Hoti and ensure logistics were in place to hold it. Bull made it clear to the Government that with his experience of the Nanda Devi expedition he would work out the logistics,

rescue party through a blizzard at night, located a crashed aircraft at over 18,000 feet and brought back the remains of the occupants. With great tact he raised the morale of both his troops and civilians in the area. The Company gradually established themselves at Bara Hoti and held the area with a sure and intrepid presence; when the Chinese attacked India in 1962 they did not attempt to force a passage through Bara Hoti. Both Tubby and Tari were awarded the Sena Medal for their gallant conduct for *Operation Trishul*. Tari's display of toughness and tact in this operation had an important bearing upon his future when candidates were to be suggested as climbers for India's expedition to Mount Everest in 1965, as both Tubby and Bull recommended Tari's name for it even though he had no formal mountaineering experience.

An air of humiliation and defeat hung over India after the Chinese advances in the Sino-Indian War of 1962. To add to that failure, for the first time India had to resort to the mass import of food grains to feed its millions. Nothing



The route to Mt. Everest.



The climbers.



Nearing the summit.

but the success of the enterprise rested upon special troops being made available. 'A' Company of the Second Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, was hastily deputed for the task. Major 'Tubby' Nayyar was in command with Captain Autar Singh Cheema as one of his company officers.

This was an extremely difficult assignment at high altitude with immense logistical problems but Tubby and Tari were equal to the task. Tari had to climb amongst the source of the Ganga, and crossed and re-crossed its many rills, streams and torrents going about his job. He led a

was going right and it seemed that India was in decline. The ego and morale of the great Indian Army had been severely bruised by its military defeat along the Himalayas. Much was needed to raise the heads of the people of India, they needed a victory.

In 1921 the British had carried out a reconnaissance on Mount Everest to ascertain the feasibility of climbing the mountain. This was led by General Charles Granville Bruce and one of the members of the team was George Mallory. The team returned in 1922 for a first attempt; on 23 May

they reached 8,320 metres (27,300 feet) using oxygen for the first time. In 1924 the Third British Expedition was launched led by Lieutenant Colonel Edward Norton. George Mallory was the climbing leader and amongst others, Andrew Irvine was also in the team. On 4 June, Norton and Somervell began an oxygen-less ascent, Somervell dropping out at 28,000 feet while Norton went on to reach 900 feet short of the summit. On 8 June 1924, Mallory and Irvine started up the slope using oxygen and never returned. In 1999, Mallory's body was found but not that of Irvine. Some believed Mallory might have reached the top but this could never be substantiated and that climb became one of the great mountaineering mysteries and part of the mystique of Mount Everest.

summit from the North Ridge; the feat was hotly debated amongst the mountaineering and geographic communities and perhaps grudgingly it was felt the Chinese might have climbed the mountain. On 1 May 1963 there were no such doubts when James Whittaker and Nawang Gombu reached the top to plant the flag of the United States on the summit. Gombu was later to repeat the feat with Tari.

Till this point in the history of Mount Everest, only the British, Swiss and Americans had reached the summit. Indian mountaineering was in its infancy, the preserve of amateurs, school masters, some civil servants and the Army for whom it was almost a natural habitat. Climbing equipment had improved since the failed ascent by Mallory and Irvine but in India reliance was still on guts, stamina,



Everest climbers from the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute.

Tenzing Norgay, a Sherpa from Nepal, attempted the mountain first with a Canadian expedition in 1947 and again in 1952 with the Swiss; he failed both these attempts. In 1953, he climbed with the Ninth British Expedition, led by Colonel John Hunt. At half-past eleven on 29 May 1953, the rope of Edmund Hillary of New Zealand and Tenzing Norgay of Nepal, reached the summit of Mount Everest. The news reached England on the morning of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and so Colonel John Hunt and Edmund Hillary came down the mountain to be told they had been knighted!

Although Mount Everest was conquered, its romance remained and the age of discovery of the earth was not over. That mountain still stood as a challenge to the human spirit and nations were tempted to accept that challenge. In 1960 a Chinese expedition claimed that they had reached the

training, will and perseverance. For most Indians, the Himalayas were the abode of their Gods, the people went up to pay their respects but no Indian had climbed Mount Everest. In early 1965, India was still grappling with ghosts of the 1962 Indo-China war defeat, and a shortage of food. Pakistan, sensing a weakening of spirit in India had encroached upon Indian territory in the Rann of Kutch and was seeking a wider trial of strength. It is with this backdrop on the subcontinent that an expedition to climb Mount Everest by Indians was allowed. On 20 May 1965, a young member of the Indian expedition, who had never been a mountaineer, planted the Indian flag and a pennant of the Parachute Regiment on the summit of Everest, the first Indian to do so : Autar Cheema with Nawang Gombu on his rope. Seven other members of the expedition also reached the summit and it was no coincidence that they were mainly from the Indian Army thus igniting the spirit

of the Army and India. In three and a half months India was at war with Pakistan, its spirit revived, to win. Tari received the Padam Shri and Arjuna Award from a grateful nation.

Tari settled down to routine army life that provides both the usual and unusual. Commanding a company in the Sugar Sector, on the India-Tibet road beyond Simla would have been a normal field posting but for the fact that an earthquake devastated that area. It fell upon Tari and his troops to provide shelter, food, medical aid and morale to the unfortunate. His dynamism, practicality and humane approach to the problem with shoe-string resources won the hearts of the people and appreciation from his superiors.

Tari was preparing to write the examination to enter the Defence Services Staff College when he was made an offer to take over as the principal of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling. This was close to his heart and he accepted



More than Everest...



In command of 10 Para Commando.

with alacrity though he knew that he was young for the post and would have to manage Everest greats like the legendary Tenzing Norgay and Nawang Gombu. The institute had been going through a rough patch because of ego contests amongst the faculty and this challenge whetted his resolve to take on the task. His zest for life, personal humility and a practical approach to problem solving enabled him to have a successful stint as principal of the institute. Towards the end of his tenure at the institute he was pleasantly surprised to learn that he had been nominated to attend the Defence Services Staff College at Wellington, in the Nilgiris!

The Parachute Regiment had spawned many good leaders but it is the nature of the beast that over a period of time units draw good and not so good commanding officers, Tari was keen to take command of 2 Parachute Battalion and had been assured of that billet but it was not to be; there had been unease within the 10 Parachute Commando. Battalion and Tari was selected to set things right. Commando battalions had been raised with a view that they should be employed in specific geographical areas, and drawing their manpower from that region. This thinking was perhaps an offshoot of the success of Scout battalions who recruited from the difficult areas

in their charge, and their troops could even live off the land if called upon to do so. 10 Para Commando had operated boldly in the desert during the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict, led by Lieutenant Colonel, later Brigadier, Bhawani Singh MVC, and Maharajah of Jaipur. It is likely that succeeding Commanding Officers of the battalion found it difficult to live up to the image of the Brigadier and this had invited comparisons, bickering, rumour and bad blood.

When Tari took over command of 10 Parachute Commando Battalion, the commando battalions were little different from regular parachute battalions. They had begun to get some necessary equipment that gave them capabilities for strategic deployment; they were expected to carry out special tasks and had been organised in a manner such that they could operate in small teams. A commando was expected to be different and although he needed to be physically tough, what was valued more was mental resilience, ability to operate under stress in isolation and moral courage. It was especially tough to become a commando however once in, a commando continued to serve in his battalion like any parachute battalion. Tari had a straightforward and tough approach to training and could walk anybody into the ground. He was affable, cheerful and helpful and that was all the battalion really needed. Within six months, the battalion had regained its bounce and some. The high spirit of the battalion became apparent to everyone but for Tari this success took a different turn.

Within a year of commanding 10 Parachute Commando Battalion, Tari was asked to move and command 1 Para Commando. Tari did not take



On the mountains

difficult for Tan but fortunately he was asked by the army to use his talents to raise an Army Adventure Cell. A desk job was not to Tari's liking but he gave it his best shot and he shot well! The Cell was raised and adventure activities organised; he was getting into full swing when he was informed he was to go for the Higher Command Course, a step ladder to the higher ranks in the army. At the same time, however, ill tidings came from home that his older brother, who managed the family farm and was an amputee, had severely damaged his good leg in an accident that incapacitated him completely. With the ill there was good news too, that he had been awarded the Vishist Seva Medal for his work in the Adventure Cell. Tari had now to make a decision on what he should do with his life — it was a choice between a glittering career or service towards his family.

Tari loved the army, he was a graduate of the Defence Services Staff College, had commanded his battalions exceptionally well and with another award and the offer of the Higher Command Course, he was sure of further advancement up the chain of command. On the other hand, the more difficult choice was to leave the army, manage the family farm and look after his aged mother and extended



either 10 Para Commando or 1 Para Commando to battle but many who had served with him and later led commands at different levels during operations in Sri Lanka and Jammu and Kashmir swore by him; Tari was a great trainer of men. Leaving command of 1 Para Commando was emotionally



.... in the air. A life of adventure !



On top of the world.



On his beloved mountains.



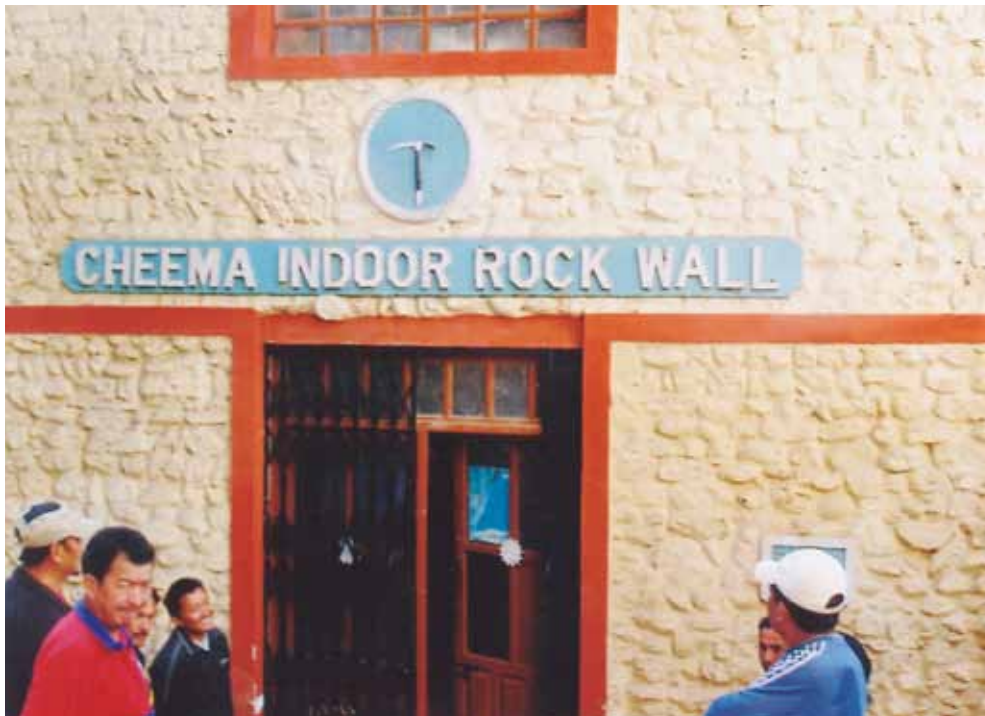
Keeping the record.

family. He set personal ambition aside and decided to go home. He did not return home to relax but set himself targets to improve the farm and while doing so, bring up the lot of farmers in the area. He was restless to give back to society and that too, soon. At no stage did he project himself to head various committees that could have come his way but laboured on practical projects like one that could do good-seed growing for farmers, a school for the blind, and a school that could give quality education to children of the area so that they need not go far away to schools such as Sanawar, Doon, Mayo, Scindia or Welhams.

A few years later Tari began to feel he lacked his well known zest. The lack of vitality persisted and it was decided he see a doctor. There followed a swift and irrevocable change in his life as he was diagnosed with leukemia, The family went through the horrible cycle from hope to the inevitable, but in Tari there was no despair and he continued to give strength to the family. His interest in his projects never slackened even when the doses of medicine became heavy and debilitating.



Autar Singh Cheema with President Zail Singh and Harish Sarin.



At the HMI, Darjeeling.

He knew that once again he was in the Gang canal swimming against the flow but he could not swim across or glide down its waters. He would now have to keep his head upstream and stroke by stroke fight the mighty pressure of water. He did not go softly into the night for he did not know how. Instead he fought silently till God said 'enough' and took him away.

*Lieutenant General (ret'd)
TS Shergill, PVSM*

***Preface to the Book
More than Everest: He
Conquered the Hearts of
Men: The Extraordinary Life
of Autar Singh Cheema**

Man of the Century



Incredible Fauja Singh has become the first person to sign up to the 2012 Edinburgh Marathon Festival race.

The marathon runner at 100

Fauja Singh was born in Bias Pind, near Jullundur in the Punjab, on 1 April 1911. He lived with his wife in his village and moved to London in 1992 to live with his son after his wife's death. He speaks only Punjabi and cannot read or write. The death of his son Kuldip and earlier of his wife forced him to find a worthwhile alternative in life. At 89 years, he took seriously to running and ended up in international marathon events. When he first turned up for training at Redbridge-Essex, he was dressed in a three-piece suit. The coach had to rework everything, including his dress! Singh then ran his first race, the London Marathon, in 2000.

The five-foot-eight, 115-pounds endurance sport wonder attributes his physical fitness and longevity to abstaining from smoking or alcohol and to following a simple vegetarian diet. "My diet is simple phulka, dal, green vegetables, yoghurt and milk. I do not touch parathas, pakoras, rice or any other fried food. I take lots of water and tea with ginger." He has a perpetual smile eternally fixed beneath his silver beard. Perhaps that's the reason behind his strikingly inspiring and

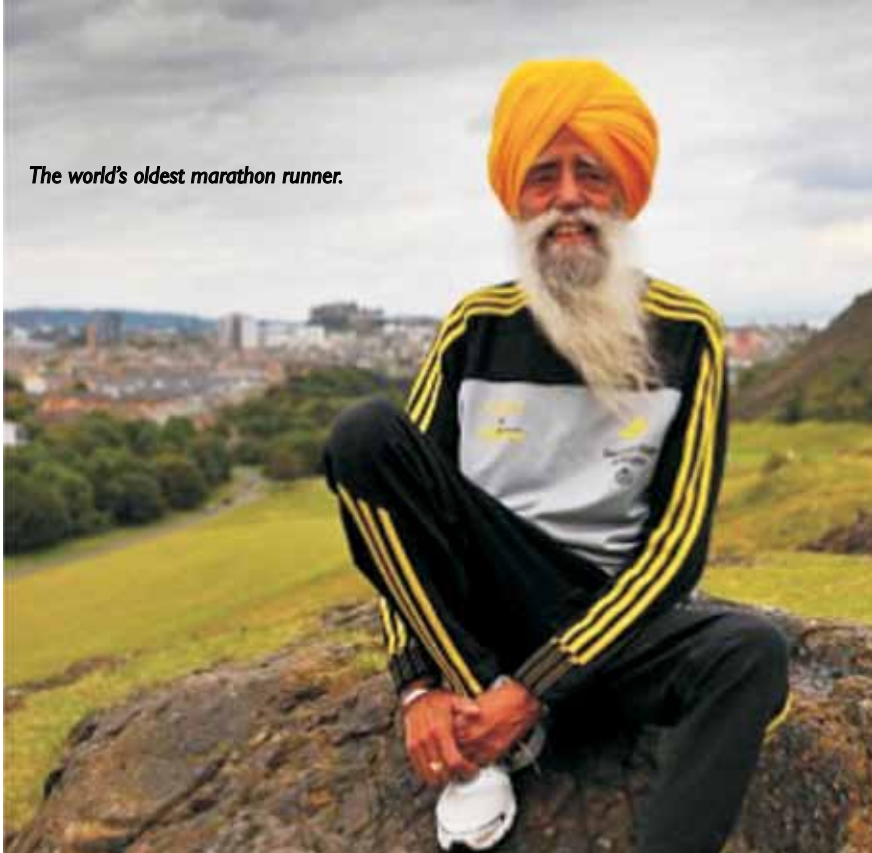
positive attitude. "I go to bed early taking the name of my Rabba as I don't want all those negative thoughts crossing my mind."

Speaking about the marathon, he said, "The first 20 miles are not difficult. As for last six miles, I run while talking to God".



Training: Fauja Singh has revealed the key to conquering his daily 10 mile run is "eating plenty of ginger curry and drinking copious amounts of tea."

The world's oldest marathon runner.



challenging other pensioners to races and has now run five marathons in London, one in Toronto and one in New York.



Keep running!



The running man: Fauja Singh will compete in Edinburgh's marathon in 2012.

And he has revealed the key to conquering his daily 10-mile training regime is : eating plenty of ginger curry and drinking copious amounts of tea.

"I am not a learned person in any shape or form. To me, the secret is being happy, doing charity work, staying healthy and being positive. If someone says I must stop running I ignore them, invariably they're much younger than me. The secret to a long and healthy life is to be stress-free. If there's something you can't change then why worry about it? Be grateful for everything you have, stay away from people who are negative, stay smiling—and keep running."

Fauja Singh holds the world record for the men's over-90 category after completing the 2003 Toronto marathon in five hours and 40 minutes.

He now hopes to take part in the Edinburgh Marathon Festival 2012, 26.2-mile race, as part of a four-man relay team with an average age of 86.

He is the world's oldest marathon runner and at the grand old age of 100, Fauja Singh is certainly showing no signs of slowing down. The quick-footed centenarian, who has completed seven marathons since turning 89, has become the first person to sign up for the 2012 Edinburgh race.

Despite being born on 1 April 1911, Mr Singh insists his age is no April Fool's joke. He is indeed 100 years old and still as fit as they come. He developed his love for running whilst working as a farmer in the Punjab.

With the help of his coach, Harminder Singh, he soon started

Profile of a Superman !

HE IS
100 Yrs OLD

WEIGHS
52 Kgs

FEASTS ON
DAAL
ROTI &
VEGGIES

TRAINING TO
BREAK
MARATHON
RECORDS

HIS NAME
FAUJA SINGH



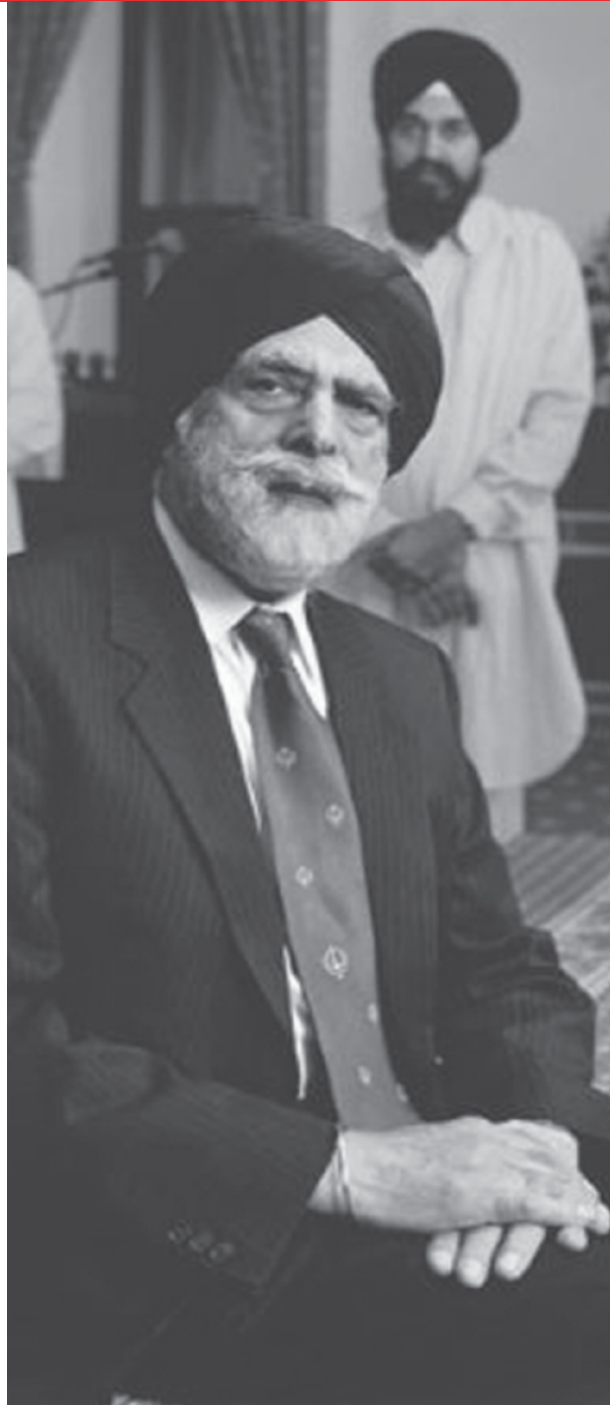
'Lord Singh'

The first turbaned Sikh in the UK's House of Lords

The first turbaned Sikh selected to sit in the UK's House of Lords on 5 September 2011, says he is likely to be styled 'Lord Singh of Wimbledon', not because of his fondness for tennis but because that is the name of the London suburb where he lives!

Indarjit Singh, now 79, was born in Rawalpindi and came to the UK when he was only a year old. In recent years, he has become a familiar voice on the prestigious *Thought for the Day* programme that is broadcast on BBC Radio 4. His contribution to the programme he has been broadcasting for 28 years invariably contains a reference to the Sikh faith, which means he can take personal credit for introducing British listeners to the life, times and ideas of Guru Nanak. His programme contributions over the years total more than 250.

A champion of inter-faith harmony, he has also edited a journal called the *Sikh Messenger*, which has entitled him to represent the Sikh faith at many important official events, such as the recent wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.



Commenting about the process of becoming a British Lord, Indarjit said, "It all hit me too quickly. But the first step is getting the title, followed by an induction period. They wanted to make the announcement when the current Parliament was sitting, but this is a short session and I will probably take my seat during the new Parliament which convenes in mid-October."

Asked if his wife would also have a title, Indarjit responded with humour, "The important thing is that my wife will be Lady Singh." She is Amritsar-born Dr Kanwaljit Kaur, the daughter of Harnam Singh Bhatia, a former Secretary of the SGPC.

The future Lady Singh has a title in her own right because she was honoured with the OBE (Order of the British Empire) for the work she has done as an inspector for the schools inspection authority known as OFSTED. An ex-head teacher, her Ph.D from Panjab University is for a thesis she wrote on the contribution of women in Sikhism. The couple's two daughters, who are doctors married to doctors, will not have any titles.



Although the son of a doctor, the first turbaned Sikh to reside in the UK, Indarjit Singh himself is an engineer by training. He studied engineering at Birmingham before taking up jobs in mining and engineering. He is best known for his commentaries on Sikh issues. Indarjit's views on 1984 and the consequences of *Operation Blue Star* are important. The issue is still a deeply sensitive one but he believes most Sikhs in Britain have moved on. About 1984, he said: "The shadow is still there. It is not just Sikhs (but also) India has been weakened by 1984. Now Sikhs have moved on but harm was done to the Indian way of thought," according to Indarjit Singh.

Turning to domestic issues, he commented: "The Sikhs in Britain have done very well. We still have odds and ends of people who use 1984 for their own end, playing on emotion. They don't do the community any good. But the community generally has moved on. There is great emphasis on education – there is emphasis on the ideals of Sikhism, like looking to the needs of others. There is something quietly been done."

Indarjit described his elevation to the peerage as "an opportunity but also responsibility as well – it is no good being there if you can't make a positive contribution".

When asked where his political sympathies will lie in the House of Lords, he responds, "I was approached by one of the political parties, but I told them I didn't want to be tied to political electioneering. I will sit as an independent, cross bench peer and will look at issues on their merits."

*Extracted from Dr Indarjit Singh's interviews with the **Tribune** and the **Telegraph**.*

Maintaining Maryada in Pakistan

Sindhi Sehajdharis become Amritdharis

Gurdwara
Nankana
Sahib.

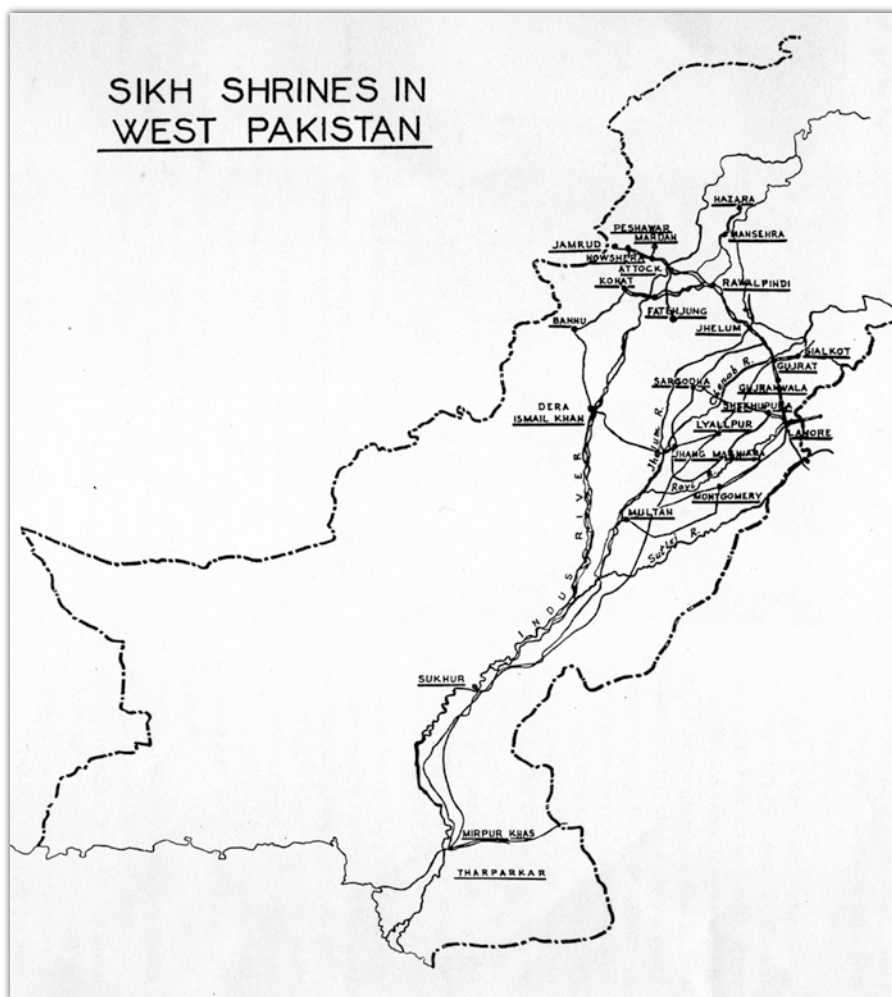


Some of the Sindhi Sehajdharis who joined the Khalsa Panth recently and are determined to maintain 'maryada' in the gurdwaras of Pakistan.

While the Sikh leadership in India, especially in Punjab, is worried over the rising trend of 'patitpune' (apostate), a large number of Sindhi Sehajdharis in Pakistan have embraced Sikhism by getting themselves baptised. At least 25 percent of the Sehajdhari Sikhs from the Sindh province have entered the Khalsa Panth after taking Amrit. As compared to the Hindus, Sikhs are considered 'safer' in Pakistan. Thus, many Pakistani Hindus, who had come to India in the past had never returned to their country owing to their continuous persecution.

Those who introduced themselves as Jawahar Singh, Vijay Singh and Parkash Singh with flowing beards were Jawahar Lal, Vijay Kumar and Om Parkash respectively, only few months ago. There used to be more than 15 lakh Hindus in Sindh province itself, who were devout Sehajdhari Sikhs. Most of the Sindhis would easily read Sri Guru Granth Sahib in the Gurmukhi script without any effort, Gurmukhi being taught in Hindu temples and Gurdwaras to the younger generation, so that they could remain devout Sikhs. These temples, schools and Gurdwaras include Baba Hardass Ram School, Gurdwara Nanakwara, Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh, Guru Arjan Dev Pathshala and Baba Bhoj Ram Temple.

Baba Amir Singh and Baba Amarjit Singh from Peshawar said the Pakistani



Gurdwara Panja Sahib.

Sikhs were disappointed when they saw 'patit' Sikhs accompanying the Indian jathas, who visited Pakistan every year, to pay their obeisance in Gurdwaras there. In fact they said the Government of India should not grant

visas to the 'patit Sikhs' to visit Pakistan as their appearance hurts the sentiments of the Sikh Sangat in Pakistan nor should the SGPC recommend the visas for some 'patit Sikhs'.

Baba Amarjit Singh, a Granthi of Gurdwara Joga Singh (Peshawar) said the Sikh pilgrims from Pakistan would meet Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, Jathedar Akal Takht for seeking his guidance to maintain 'Maryada' in the gurdwaras of Pakistan.

Though the SGPC objects to the performance of akhand path in temples in India, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is placed in a number of temples in Pakistan. A number of Pakistani Hindus including Jai Ram and Jaipal said they perform path of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in their temples every day.

An excerpt from Varinder Walia's article in The Tribune.

Welcome to Canadian Punjab!

What's in a language? If it's Punjabi, a lot!



Sikhs of British Columbia.

Statistics reveal that “Chinese is Canada’s third most common language; while Punjabi has quietly moved into the fourth place.” Stepping into any public place, a financial institution or a hospital, especially in areas like Surrey, Delta, Abbotsford (satellite towns of Vancouver), where there is a fairly large

concentration of people of Punjabi descent, one finds instructions, manuals and announcements in both English and Punjabi.

An example: “Attention customers: Please no sampling. *Grahkan de dhyaan vaaste, kirpa karke vichon cheez chukk ke na khao.*” Thus reads the placard in an aisle in a departmental store of monolithic proportions, in Vancouver, Canada! It is not everyday that one discovers English instructions translated into Punjabi on foreign soil and as an immigrant, one finds respect and recognition given to their mother tongue in one’s adopted country where the first two official languages are English and French. Indeed it is a matter of pride and helps to elevate an everlasting faith in the power of a culture.



Queen Elizabeth II received at Vancouver, B.C.

Punjabi is not merely developing as a culture but also as a medium and a tool of communication. It is being explored and looked into, a history that is being read, a language that is being taught in schools, a language, (according to the 2001 census), spoken



The new gurdwara at Surrey, B.C.

by 121,740 people in the province of British Columbia, that has a population of 3,868,875.

So much so, that a regular notice at a child's school would be bilingual, in English and in Punjabi. "Schools recognise the need and importance of connecting to students' parents from different communities. Hence, the effort," says Amandeep Kaur Arora, a young mother whose son attends school in Surrey.

It doesn't stop at the effort of connecting with parents; it goes further and one recognises the strength of a language that is not limited to a communication tool. It is expanding and has touched Canadian businesses too. A major financial institution has Punjabi as one of the language options in its ATMs! One doesn't need to know



The Sikhs of British Columbia.



Langar at the Vancouver Gurdwara.

English alphabets for one's daily banking needs; if Punjabi alphabets are learnt well, one could function as well as any English-speaking person in Canada.

That is not all: any major announcement, promotions or a rate change by a giant Canadian telecom company are also bilingual, in English and Punjabi. Also, there is



The impressive new Gurdwara in Vancouver.

no chance of getting lost in British Columbia. Walking down the Punjabi Bazaar in Surrey or the Punjabi Market in Vancouver, one beholds road signs spelling directions and street names in Punjabi.

Welcome then to Canadian Punjab!
Anupreet Sandhu Bhamra

US Army Sikh Officer receives combat decoration

Major Kamaljeet Singh Kalsi, a medical doctor, received the medal for "exceptionally meritorious service as an emergency medicine physician" while deployed in Afghanistan during the first half of 2011. He was the first Sikh to be allowed to go on active duty with a turban, beard and unshorn hair in more than 20 years. Working for the rights of Sikhs in the US, Sikh Coalition was instrumental in Kalsi joining the US Army after he was initially refused an entry on religious grounds.

Among other reasons for receiving the Bronze Star, an official recommendation from Major Kalsi's superiors cites his resuscitation back to life of two patients who were clinically dead on arrival; his "expert" emergency care of over 750 soldiers and coordination of 5 mass casualty exercises.

Major Kalsi had set up camp-wide Internet access for over 200 soldiers at Camp Dwyer in Helmand, Afghanistan where



Major Kamaljeet Singh Kalsi, the first turbaned US Sikh officer has received the Bronze Star Medal, for his meritorious services in Afghanistan.

he was deployed. After his service, he was promoted from Captain to Major.

"It continues to be a tremendous honour to serve my country," said Kalsi.

The Canadian Turban : a Matter of Pride

Belonging nowhere and everywhere at the same time encompasses greatness in itself. Not only has it been an opportunity to learn about other cultures, but it has become a great chance to educate people, as I travel more. A quick glance at a coloured person in a predominantly white community renders inquisition. It sparks the curiosity, and tingles the mind. The question "Where are you from?" can't help but escape the lips of many I have encountered. If not that, "Parle Espaniol?" "Mexican?" "Namaste!" are close second and third places.

A few months ago, I started working in a different end of this small big town. As of then, a whole new curiosity has been sparked. No longer do the same questions and I make acquaintance. While exchanging chit-chat with a client, she turned to me with a raised eyebrow and said: "Do you wear a *burqa* when you are not here?"

Fair enough, I thought. I could just as well be from Pakistan. I jested: "No, I am not a Muslim. And if I did wear the *burqa*, you would have noticed by now. Doesn't quite work that way. Plus, you know I am not religious."

She turned to me, matter-of-factly: "Of course. I knew that. I mean... are you Islam?"

I could not help but break into an awkward laughter. Hold on a second. What? Am I Islam?

Living in Canada, or more so, growing up in Toronto through most of my childhood never really exposed me to such ignorance of racial, cultural and religious diversity. But this? This was new. I was not annoyed, angered or humiliated at this situation. Nor do I have any reason to be. The realisation occurred; the problem is not with the people who do not know, but with those who do.

Different ethnic and racial groups tend to conglomerate and socialise amongst themselves, regardless of who they are and where they come from. Where we lack, as human beings, is the willingness to go beyond our comforts into something unfamiliar, to educate and to be educated.

The Canadian Government in promoting conservatism has not helped much either to this cause. Where minority groups lose their funding, and are silenced by the roars of the elite, how can we possibly expect the minority to be anything other than just that?

Alright, alright. I won't make this about my political views. It is just interesting to see how globalisation has just homogenised people. Travelling through the world is no adventure as it used to be. Same stores, same clothes, different people. Same culture. Commodification outweighs culture.

On the same end, there are people who embrace their roots, their cultures and religions to inspire and educate themselves and others to employ individuality and uniqueness (It must be mentioned, in all of this, that I, by no means, at any point, refer to any sort of extremism).

There are many examples of this sort. One, whom I wish to speak of, is a young Sikh Canadian, better known to us as Jusreign Singh.

About a year ago, I had got in touch with him, ready to write a piece about the young South Asians in Canada who inspire. Somehow, the

piece never panned out at the time. Recently, on discovering a new video of his, this writing came about.

With his laugh-out-loud comedy, a large audience and bubbly personality, he culminated the art of performance with the ability to educate.

How does everything I have mentioned so far tie together? Well, there are still a lot of people who are unfamiliar with Sikhism. That being said, Jusreign has provided a means to overcome that with his YouTube video : *How to tie a pugh (turban)*.



It teaches any Joe, Mary, or Kumar, start to finish, on how a turban is tied by a Sikh. It resonates pride in where he comes from, and his sense of responsibility to his community. One, which does not exist through obligation, but through respect.

For those who live in the misconception of who the Sikhs are, and why they wear turbans, Jusreign helps, by just that much more, to overcome the oblivion existing in current, modern, globalised society.

Akakaamazing, another young Canadian Punjabi, uploaded a three-minute beautiful video after his touring Punjab.

A salute to the many young persons like Jusreign and Akakaamazing, who provide another reason for young Punjabis, Sikhs and Indians to be terrifically proud of their roots.

Sheeba Singh, from Ottawa in Canada



The Saragarhi Challenge Cup 2011

On the bright and sunny afternoon of 3 December 2011, the annual Saragarhi Challenge Cup was held at the Jaipur Polo Grounds, in the heart of New Delhi, to

of the XXXVI Sikhs (today's 4th battalion of the Sikh Regiment) fought it out against incredible odds (estimated at over 10,000 armed tribesmen, largely Masuds and Orkazais), till the very end, taking a very heavy toll and evoking great admiration in Britain and India for their deeds.



The 'Sherdils':
Angad Singh, Dr Pawandeep 'Tony' Singh, Gurpal Singh, Jai Inder Singh and Col Navjit Singh Sandhu.

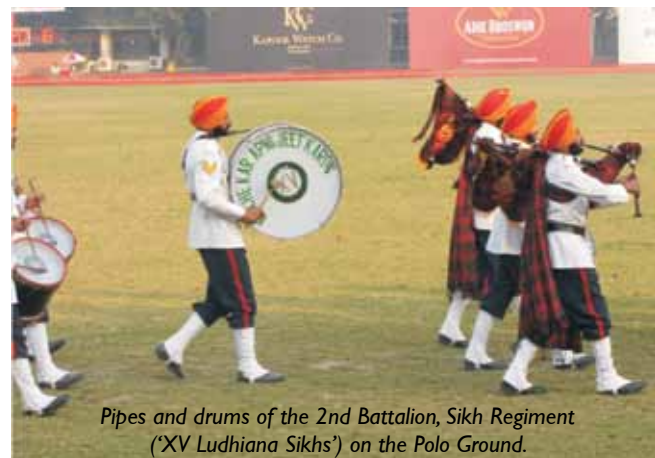
Naming the Polo team as 'Sherdils' was appropriate and had been suggested by Pushpinder Singh. Dr. Tony Singh then designed the Crest and special shirt for the team which was first worn in 2010 during the first 'Saragarhi Challenge Polo Cup' played in England for which the Nishaan Nagaara Trust designed and donated the handsome trophy.

The 'Sherdils' were originally the special body guard troops of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, known for their special skills and prowess. After the Anglo-

commemorate the valour of the 21 soldiers of the XXXVI Sikhs at the outpost of Saragarhi in 1897. The British Army and Indian Polo team - the Sherdils - indulged in a great game of Polo, as an enthusiastic crowd watched and cheered the Sherdils emerge as winners 7-3. In 2010, the British team had won, narrowly, 5-4.

Sikh wars, the disbanded soldiery was eventually re-formed to become part of the British Indian Army and they distinguished themselves not

The inspiration behind the Saragarhi Challenge Cup and having such a polo tournament evolved from discussions between Dr. Pavandeep (Tony) Singh and Pushpinder Singh of the *Nishaan - Nagaara* Trust. The Saragarhi epic battle was the muse, which took place in the North West Frontier in 1897 during the Tirah Campaign much in the same area where the current operations are taking place in Waziristan. There, the 21 soldiers



Pipes and drums of the 2nd Battalion, Sikh Regiment ('XV Ludhiana Sikhs') on the Polo Ground.

only in various frontier campaigns but overseas in military expeditions. Their successor regiments continued to retain the 'appellation' of Sherdils and so, after the Indian Army reorganisation of 1922, became the 1st Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment ('Sherdils').

After partition, this Regiment was transferred to the new Pakistan Army where

but surely inspires great deeds - on and off the polo fields.

Captain of the 'Sherdils', Col Sandhu, scored three goals for his team, while Angad Singh and Jai Shergill pitched in with two each to make it a comprehensive win. For the British Army, Captain of the side, Ben Vestey was the leading scorer with 2 goals. The annual one-off



Sherdils versus the British Army, circa 2011.



Glamour on the Polo Grounds.

in their re-organisation of 1956, they became the 5th Battalion, Punjab Regiment ('Sherdils'). Naming the Polo team as 'Sherdils' has not only revived this time honoured title in India

match, now in its second edition, lived up to the standards set in the inaugural edition in England, with Preneet Kaur (Maharani of Patiala and presently Minister of State for External Affairs) as the chief guest of the event and a host of Ambassadors and senior representatives from the British High Commission, U.S., Greece, Brazil, New Zealand and Bulgarian Embassies present.

Captain Ben Vestey, of the British Army Team said that, "The fact that we are playing here for a reason, to mark one of the greatest acts of bravery, makes today's match even more special. But don't think we considered this a friendly... we took our polo very seriously, but the Sherdils emerged winners on this day."



◀ *Preneet Kaur, Minister of State for External Affairs presenting the trophy to the Sherdils. On the extreme left is Harbinder Singh of the Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail and The Saragarhi Foundation, U.K.*

Paintings by Sidharth on Barahmasa

ASAAD



Asaad (June-July)

Asaad bhala suraj gagan tapai

In Asaad the sun scorches.
Skies are hot
The earth burns like an oven
Waters give up their vapours.
It burns and scorches relentlessly
Thus the land fails not
To fulfill its destiny.

The sun's chariot passes the mountain tops;
Long shadows stretch across the land

And the cicada calls from the glades.
The beloved seeks the cool of the evening.
If the comfort she seeks be in falsehood,
There will be sorrow in store for her.

If it be in truth,
Hers will be a life of joy everlasting.

My life and its ending depend on the
will of the Lord.
To Him, says Nanak, I surrendered
my soul.

SAWAN



Sawan (July-August)

Sawan saras mana ghan varsai rut ae

O my heart, rejoice! It's Sawan
The season of nimbus clouds and rain,
My body and soul yearn for my Lord.
But my Lord is gone to foreign lands.
If He return not, I shall die pining for Him.

The lightning strikes terror in my heart.
I stand all alone in my courtyard,
In solitude and in sorrow.

O Mother of mine, I stand on the brink of death.
Without the Lord I have neither hunger nor sleep
I cannot suffer the clothes on my body.

Nanak says, she alone is the true wife
Who loses herself in the Lord.

BHADON



Bhadon (August-September)

Bhadon bharam bhuli bhar joban pachtani

In the month of Bhadon
I lose myself in a maze of falsehood
I waste my wanton youth.
River and land are one endless expanse of water
For it is the monsoon the season of merry-making.

It rains,
The nights are dark,
What comfort is it to the wife left alone?
Frogs croak

Peacocks scream
The papeeha calls 'peeoh, peeoh'.
The fangs of serpents that crawl,
The stings of mosquitoes that fly
Are full of venom.

The seas have burst their bounds in the ecstasy
Of fulfillment.
Without the Lord I alone am bereft of joy,
Whither shall I go?

Says Nanak, ask the guru the way
He knoweth the path which leads to the Lord.

Text extracted from 'Hymns of Guru Nanak', translated by Khushwant Singh