

## India's Wars – A Military History 1947-1971\*

Major General Ian Cardozo, AVSM, SM (Retd)<sup>®</sup>

India's Wars – A Military History 1947-1971 is a book I had always wanted to write but never did. This excellent narrative by Air Vice Marshal Arjun Subramaniam, AVSM walks us through all the wars and conflicts that India has faced since Independence and fills a void that has existed all these years.

The writing and publication of this work by a senior, serving officer of the Air Force could not have happened without an enlightened and perceptive attitude by the Air Force hierarchy who have had the moral courage to unshackle themselves from the false sense of security that has bedevilled and befuddled the thinking of the armed forces all these years and prevented the soldier scholar from putting down on paper what really happened in all the wars that we have fought since 1947. This is a great breakthrough and it is hoped that it will engender a more enlightened approach to this aspect of military history.

The author, Air Vice Marshal Arjun Subramaniam, AVSM has been able to knit together an extremely interesting and very readable account of the part played by the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force in the modern era of our military history and also gives us a perceptive insight into the political direction of these wars that will facilitate a better understanding of how these wars were fought.

Without being overly critical, the author has been able to bring out in a balanced manner not only the great work done by the armed forces in defending India but also where we could have done better. The author's passion for military history and his diligent research combined with an eminently readable style makes his account a very compelling and interesting read.

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**India's Wars – A Military History 1947-1971.** By Air Vice Marshal Arjun Subramaniam (Harper Collins, New Delhi), pp.. 562, Price Rs. 799, ISBN 978-93-5177-749-6.

<sup>®</sup>**Major General Ian Cardozo, AVSM, SM (Retd)** was commissioned into the 5<sup>th</sup> Gorkha Rifles (FF). He has taken part in the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971. He retired as Chief of Staff of a Corps in the North East. After retirement, he has been working for the cause of soldiers with disabilities and has written several books and graphic stories which have been publicly acclaimed.

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This book will hopefully serve as a catalyst that will open the door to less secrecy and more openness and encourage other service officers to write objectively on our wars and the lessons that we could learn from them. The study of military history is not of much use if we cannot use the knowledge of the past to make better plans for the future.

It is tragic that the subject of military history is not part of the curriculum of all our universities. At present, only one university has taken a tentative step in this direction, that too, thanks to the handholding being done in this regard, by the Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research of the United Service Institution of India.

In our own approach to military history, greater emphasis has been placed, in the past, on European campaigns rather than the rich heritage of wars fought on the subcontinent. Perhaps we are ourselves to blame because of the restrictions on what cannot be written about and an unnecessary emphasis laid on the so called 'interests of national security' and the desire to be seen as being 'politically correct'.

As a 'soldier-scholar', Air Vice Marshal Arjun Subramaniam, AVSM is eminently qualified to write this book. His knowledge of past wars, engendered by his passion for military history and bolstered by his PhD in defence strategic studies has helped in giving the reader a clear insight into military strategy and the games that nations play on the chessboard of power and politics in the international arena.

A detailed compilation of the history of the armed forces covering the period of its origins to the present day is also a need, but that would perhaps take more than a dozen volumes and probably an equal amount of time. The need of the hour however was a single volume to cover India's wars and to that extent the author has more than delivered.

I hope that the compilation of this work by Air Vice Marshal Subramaniam will not only raise the awareness of what the armed forces do for the country but that it would also initiate a greater interest in our military history and thereby form part of part of the curriculum of most of our universities.