

Letters to the Editor

I

TRIBUTE TO OUR WAR DEAD

Sir,

In the Jan-Mar 2006 issue, Maj Gen E D'Souza, under the caption 'Thimayya of India', has mentioned the galaxy of tributes paid at his death to this great soldier. To name a few who paid tributes were the citizens of Turkey and Cypriots, the UN Secretary General, and the UK High Commissioner. The pall bearers were from the Canadian contingent, and the Guard of Honour was provided from the Canadian Guards. It is a pity and shame that, whereas the world recognised this soldier statesman's rare qualities, it was not so in his own country. At his last rites, there were none from Delhi present, not even the Army Chief.

The above is nothing new. At the last Vijay Diwas wreath laying ceremony at the National War Memorial in Pune, in spite of 25 invitations being sent to top officials of the government, except for the lady major, not a single civilian official attended the function. However, it is worse still that, although similar invitations were sent to all the retired Army officer's societies, and individually to 40 General Officers of the three Services, only four attended the ceremony. It will be agreed that, if the Service Officers don't pay homage to their own dead, it is asking too much for the civilian society to do so.

To conclude, a nation that does not remember those who laid down their lives for it, cannot always remain a nation worth dying for.

Yours faithfully

Brig N B Grant, AVSM (Retd)

II

Training of Women Cadets in the Army

It was with a sense of déjà vu that I read the well written article "Training of Women Cadets in the Army-Some Issues and Challenges" by Capt Deepanjali Bakshi (Retd) in the Oct-Dec 2005 Issue of the *USI Journal*. Poignantly highlighting aspects close to every lady officer's heart, I thought it prudent to pen down a few random thoughts.

For a long jump you don't require long legs, what you require is right attitude. Some one must have kept this in mind while inducting women in Defence Forces 14 years ago. Initially it was started on an experimental basis for a shorter duration of five years commission. Later, it was extended to 10 years and presently it stands at 14 years.

This periodic extension in the short service commission for lady officers is indicative of the fact that the experiment of inducting women into the Defence Services has met with success. But, somewhere in the minds of the Indian society, mythology still prevails that women are weaker sex. This is why different standards are set for lady officers during training. Being short service commissioned officers, lady officers are given training at the Officers Training Academy (OTA), Chennai for six months, whereas training for gentleman officers is for 11 months. Besides, the level of toughness of training also differs.

Capt Deepanjali Bakshi (Retd) is absolutely right when she says that there is no rationale behind this difference. When the rank is the same, emoluments are similar, then why not the "toughness" in training.

Women perform biologically tougher functions of life (of being a mother) than men. So who is stronger, man or woman? Right from the Services Selection Board, this disparity is created, when in the obstacle test, certain obstacles are kept optional for lady candidates and the same are mandatory for gentlemen. If this distinction is not made in the initial stages and if training for both genders is kept similar, there is no reason why lady candidates cannot compete with gents in any aspect of training, especially when they compete in academics, sports and other activities.

When a fresh course of lady cadets joins the Academy, the previous course has already passed out. Thus, there is no interaction between two courses, which results in a void of handy experience being given by senior courses to junior courses. This experience could greatly reduce the burden on instructors of lady cadets and also save time in teaching cadets basic military etiquettes.

During training, more emphasis is laid on intracadet (lady cadets vs lady cadets or gentleman cadets vs gentleman cadets) competitions and not on intercadet competitions which result in lower level of confidence in lady officers when they join their units. A lady officer has to work with not only gentleman officers but men also. That confidence level could be inculcated in the lady officers during training. The lady instructors posted there can be a source of motivation, not only for lady cadets, but also for gentleman cadets. But for this they need to set an example in front of all the cadets. For instance, there are a number of lecture cum demonstrations conducted at the Academy for cadets but not even one of them is conducted by a lady officer.

The accommodative treatment to lady cadets in the Academy results in embarrassment and a sense of inferiority in lady officers when they join their units and when they are unable to perform at par with their male colleagues.

Women are excelling in every field. The recent example is the first batch of women commandos who successfully completed training at NSG, Delhi. Then why is it that lady cadets are not given training equivalent to that of gentleman cadets? It is more mental strength and will power than physical strength which matters in overcoming a physical obstacle.

The Indian Constitution envisages equality for men and women, not only in terms of rights and privileges, but also in terms of duties and obligations. How can we demand equality for women when women cannot give equal contribution to the Nation.

If right from the beginning of training, there are similar standards of toughness for both lady cadets and gentleman cadets, and if similar training is provided to them for equal duration, lady cadets will, no doubt, be able to compete with them and will, later on, excel in their career also. To project the latent capabilities of lady cadets in a right way, at least on a trial basis, lady cadets and gentleman cadets should be given training in a similar way and for the same duration. This will ensure equality in the real sense.

Lieutenant Bindu Sharma