

Short Book Reviews

1971: Stories of Grit and Glory from the Indo-Pak War. By Ian Cardozo, (Gurugram: Penguin Random House India Pvt Ltd Ebury Press, 2021), Pages: 347, Price: Rs 399/- (Paperback), ISBN: 9780143454557.

Wars and warfare have been an integral part of human history since time immemorial. The American civil war General, WT Sherman famously proclaimed “War is hell”! While this is a widely acknowledged truism yet, today it is equally well understood that there is more to war than mere warfare. The soldier knows this to be a fact more than any theoretician or vicarious observer who may try to inject order or clarity into an activity that is both, governed and driven by primeval passion as well as obscured by the perennial ‘fog of war’. The codification of conventions developed by modern nation states tries to put limits on the conduct of war in order to ensure that warfare remains within civilised bounds. Belligerents must adhere to certain norms in their attempts to pursue the ‘continuation of policy by other means’. Yet, when the lines between the soldier and the state get blurred then the system of checks and balances that is established to ensure that warfare remains civilised, and that violence does not become an end in itself, also becomes ineffective. In such cases, the army, as an instrument of state policy, carries the logic of violence to its natural all-consuming conclusion. Mayhem and genocide are the result. This is precisely what happened in 1971 when the Pakistan Army, acting on behest of the ruling West Pakistan military junta, turned upon its own hapless Bengali citizens. The genocide that followed the launch of ‘Operation Searchlight’ in East Pakistan by the Pakistan Army, in March 1971, resulted in the death of thousands of civilians and an influx of several millions of refugees who fled across the border. Ultimately, neighbouring India had no option but to intervene but before it could do so, Pakistan attacked. If ever, in post-colonial history, there was a ‘just war’, the Indo-Pak conflict of December 1971, waged by the Indian Armed Forces against the forces of tyranny and oppression, lays claim to it.

As far as the armed forces were concerned, 1971 was also India’s finest hour! Never before, or since, has a struggle for delivering justice through an armed conflict been so vigorously prosecuted with near total synergy by all arms of government or by all three Services acting in concert. In India, there have been many books written about the conflict, from a variety of

perspectives, but, till now, none have managed to capture the essence of the myriad moments that coalesced into the resounding victory for Indian arms on 16 December 1971. The accounts have been either too dry or too technical; some have been overly jingoistic while others too self-congratulatory. Almost none have been able to take the reader on a journey into the human heart of a nation at war. This book does precisely that.

Written by one of India's most respected soldiers, this book is an outstanding testimony not only to the historian's craft but also to the valour and sacrifice of the men and women whose stories it narrates with such felicity. The author is himself a distinguished war veteran (here I deliberately eschew the overused and hackneyed term – hero) whose personal valour, grit, perseverance, and integrity have made him a source of inspiration to following generations of officers. In addition to his professional achievements, he is also a master storyteller and brings to life the events of 1971 that led to the birth of a nation.

This book is not a comprehensive history of the war. It is, instead, a collection of true stories, based on interviews, narrative accounts, and the author's personal experience, recounted with warmth, sensitivity, and an eye for detail. The author provides a brief background history of the conflict, and the events that led up to it, in order to provide a context to the individual stories that he has chosen to highlight. These include meticulously researched accounts of the war on land, on the sea, and in the air and include perspectives from Pakistan as well. The style of writing is aimed for the general reader. It is simple without being simplistic and, at the same time, provides enough detail to engage the professional reader. The stories highlight most of the professional ethos of the Indian Armed Forces which have served their nation selflessly through the ages. The stories deserve to be widely read and the author deserves the collective thanks of the Services fraternity for having set on record this amazing saga of the 1971 war in such vivid detail.

Sqn Ldr Rana TS Chhina, MBE (Retd)

The Betrayal of East Pakistan*

Major General S C Sinha, PVSM (Retd)**

In April 1971 Lt Gen Tikka Khan was replaced as Commander of Eastern Command in East Pakistan by Lt Gen AAK Niazi, known as 'Tiger' Niazi, the highest decorated officer in the Pakistan Army and the author of this book. Being in overall command of the Pakistan forces in the then East Pakistan during the 1971 Indo-Pak War and in the know of the course of events, the actual facts and the circumstances that influenced the Pakistani decision-making, Lt Gen Niazi is eminently well qualified and the right person to write on the Pakistani version of the campaign, which ended in the breaking up of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. The author was in a unique position to contribute an authentic historical record of the campaign, which would have been of great value to posterity and to soldiers on both sides of the border. Unfortunately, the truth appears to be the first casualty in this book.

In the preface to the book, Lt Gen Niazi states: "It is an inherent trait of human nature to discard unpleasant memories." This is exactly what he seems to have done in this book. He then goes on to remark that "certain events have a deep imprint on our lives and their memories can never be obliterated". If that be so, then the General has certainly kept these memories to himself. Lt Gen Niazi seems to have attempted to convert "Defeat into Victory". While Field Marshal Slim, who wrote an excellent book of the name, had actually converted defeat into victory on the battlefields of Burma during the Second World War, Lt Gen Niazi has tried to achieve the same results by allowing full rein to his imagination in this book by fabricating a wishful course of events the campaign in Bangladesh is supposed to have taken. He writes that the Soviet Union actively join the war on the Indian side. He accuses the Indian forces of having used poison gas. Strangely enough such accusations were never made by Pakistan at that time nor by any other Pakistani authors, who have written about these events. Further, the great advocates of human rights the United States of America, who were so sympathetic to the Pakistani dictatorship, would certainly have taken India to task had they made any use of poison gas. Lt Gen Niazi estimates that against

his three weak divisions, India fielded more than twelve divisions. In fact, Indian forces never exceeded more than seven divisions with a brigade plus under a Communication Zone HQ and barely a brigade strength of paramilitary forces operating in the Chittagong Hill tracts.

Although the author has given the course of battles fought in the various sectors of his command, he has kept these to the broader outlines highlighting only those aspects which show up his troops favourably. He would have us believe that the Indian attacks were all blunted by the heavy casualties inflicted on them and thus held up on all fronts. He does not explain the deep penetration lines of the Indian forces shown on the maps reproduced in his books. He also makes much of the fact that at the time of the cease-fire most of the major towns were in Pakistani hands, thus showing how successful his defence plans had been. He conveniently plays down the fact that these towns had been deliberately by-passed by the Indians and that the Pakistani garrisons of these towns had been cut off and bottled up in these defences. There is of course no gainsaying the fact that, under the extremely adverse conditions that they were in, most of the Pakistani troops fought bravely and well. But going by General Niazi's narrative it is difficult to figure out how the Indian troops made such deep penetrations as they had achieved on all fronts, how they managed to clear Sylhet or how they were able to cross the mighty Meghna River to threaten Dacca and force him to surrender.

It is but natural for a defeated commander to search around for excuses to mitigate his own inadequacies and those of his command. But this becomes inexcusable when all blame is shifted to subordinates, predecessors, and colleagues by accusing them of incompetence, cowardice and even downright treason. He has not spared such imminent colleagues as General Tikka Khan, Sahibzada Yaqub Khan and Gul Hassan. He also seems to believe in Goebbels' adage that misinformation if repeated often enough is likely to be more easily believed. In his book the author repeats *ad infinitum* the theme how he halted the Indian Army advance of all fronts, how well and successfully most of his commanders fought and how, but for the betrayal by his colleagues in West Pakistan, he could have beaten back the Indian forces and prevented the emergence of Bangladesh. It is a pity that, in his

efforts at self-glorification, such a senior officer should have reproduced in his book self-serving Annual Confidential Reports and in his narration should have strayed so far from the truth. Readers of this book will, however, certainly sympathise with him that his government should have chosen to deny to such a brave soldier his well-earned pension for a defeat that after all was inevitable.

***The Betrayal of East Pakistan.** By Lt Gen AAK Niazi, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1997, pp 321, Rs. 450.00.

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Editor's Note

This book review format was the one being followed in 1998 by the USI Journal. The review has been reproduced in the original format.

Deeds of Gallantry: Fifty Years of the 1971 Victory. *Edited by Amlesh Kumar Mishra, (New Delhi, National Book Trust of India, 2021), Pages: 210, Price: Rs 260/- (Paperback), ISBN: 81-237-9825-3.*

The month of December 2021 will mark fifty years of the Indo-Pak War of 1971. The war resulted in a crushing defeat for the ruling military junta in Pakistan, the surrender of that country's Eastern Command, and the creation of the independent sovereign nation of Bangladesh. Fought by India to put an end to the genocide of innocent civilians unleashed upon the hapless Bengali citizens of erstwhile East Pakistan by their West Pakistan compatriots, and to defend the integrity of the country from an unprovoked attack; the conflict brought together the various and disparate elements of the Indian State in a classic fusion of synergy to attain the national war objectives. For the Indian Armed Forces, fighting a two-front war in the East and the West, the conflict came closest to the rubric of a "just war" as any embarked upon in their history.

Following the failed pre-emptive strikes launched by Pakistan against Indian airfields in the West on 03 December 1971, the Indian Armed Forces launched a lightning offensive in the East, while fighting and maintaining a defensive posture in the West. By 16 December, the garrison of East Pakistan had fallen, and with the signing of the unconditional surrender by Lt Gen AAK Niazi, GOC-in-C Pak Eastern Command, at 1630 hrs at Dhaka, the liberation of Bangladesh was complete. Having achieved its national war aims, India declared a unilateral ceasefire at 2000 hrs on 17 December, and the war came to an end. The Simla Agreement of 02 July 1972 has provided the framework that has shaped Indo-Pakistan relations ever since.

However, victory came at a price wherein, the Indian Armed Forces suffered 12,189 casualties including 2998 personnel killed in action. The exact number of casualties suffered by the Mukti Bahini of Bangladesh, who fought gallantly alongside the Indian forces for the liberation of their motherland, may perhaps never be known but it numbered in the thousands. There were also numerous acts of valour and devotion to duty performed by members of the Indian Armed Forces in the best traditions of Indian arms. Some 600 personnel were decorated for gallantry in action. These included, inter alia, four awards of the nation's highest

gallantry award, the Param Vir Chakra (PVC); 76 awards of the Maha Vir Chakra (MVC), and 513 Vir Chakras (VrC).

This volume, compiled under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence History Division, seeks to highlight some of the acts of gallantry and self-sacrifice performed by members of the Indian Armed Forces during the war. In order to do so, the editor has chosen 20 battles/themes to provide an even coverage of the geographic spread of the conflict as also to cover the deeds of all three Services. These include the Battles of Basantar, Longewala, Gangasagar, Tangail, Punch and Chhamb as well as the exploits of the INS *Vikrant*, the naval raid on Karachi harbour, the Meghna Heli-Lift, and the gallant last stand of Flying Officer Nirmal Jeet Singh Sekhon of the Indian Air Force at Srinagar, among others. These accounts are written in an easy-to-read style, devoid of military jargon and aimed at a general readership. It should be noted that the book is not a comprehensive compendium of all awards but aims to provide only a sampling to highlight the deeds that led to the successful conclusion of the war and the liberation of Bangladesh.

The book is well illustrated with photographs, maps, and sketches, including specially commissioned portraits of select recipients. Each battle/section is a self-contained account by itself. The book should be recommended read for school children who will benefit greatly from learning about these true deeds of valour, sacrifice, and devotion to duty. The publication aptly commemorates the 50th anniversary of the India Pakistan War of 1971 and pays a tribute to the gallant soldiers, sailors and airmen who made victory possible. The book is recommended for purchase by all Service libraries, NCC units and schools in order to motivate and educate our armed forces and youth about the virtues of gallantry, valour and sacrifice.

Sqn Ldr Rana TS Chhina, MBE (Retd)

Traditions and Customs of the Indian Armed Forces. *By Major General Chand N Das, 1984. Revised, enlarged, and edited by Brigadier S.P. Sinha, VSM (Retd), (New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 2021), Pages: 633, Price: Rs.4500/-, ISBN: 978-93-907-02-9*

The first edition of the book 'Traditions and Customs of the Indian Armed Forces' compiled by the late Major General Chand N Das was written in 1984. The revised edition has been undertaken as per the desire of the late Major General Das who had desired that the book be updated with the changing times. In the past 37 years, societal norms and the environment have undergone a change. Resultantly, some customs and traditions have also been affected. While the core military values don't change but some aspects of traditions and customs do change.

Military customs evolve over long periods. During India's colonial past, many military customs were designed to advance the imperial interests. After independence, our national and military symbols reflected the changed ethos and our civilisational heritage. Each Service has its own unique customs that contribute to build the 'esprit de corps' and in which every member takes immense pride. They are building blocks on which the foundation of esprit-de corps is built and shape institutional values. Military customs and practices have evolved because of long historical processes. Many of these hark back to some event or experience of the past. To the uninitiated these may appear meaningless and anachronistic, but they are effective tools to bond individuals together into a cohesive team. It is important that officers, soldiers, sailors and airmen know the traditions, customs and practices of their own Service as well as the other Services. It is an even greater imperative today when most future military operations will be of a tri-service nature.

The book is not merely an edited and updated version of the first edition of the book. New themes and chapters have been written to make the book contemporary and contextual. These have been added in the following chapters:

Chapter 2: Women Officers in the Armed Forces.

Chapter 3: Civil-Military Relations.

Chapter 4: Regimental System.

Chapter 11: The Ethos.

Chapter 21: Army Wives

Chapter 33: Other Practices.

In addition, there has been minor updating in a number of other places such as Appendix 27, where there are additions to the order of precedence due to the raising of new entities.

The book, as the title states, is not only about the traditions and customs of the army but is also a compilation of the customs of all the three Services. The significance of crests, insignia, formation signs, flags, uniforms, dresses, and badges of rank of all the three Services have been explained along with illustrations.

The book brings out the subtle difference between custom and tradition. The reader will understand as he reads that while military customs are the usual way of doing things in the military, tradition has a deeper meaning; something that impels a military person or a group to perform in a particular way in a given situation. While both custom and tradition draw inspiration from the past, tradition evolves over a much longer period, over centuries. Military customs and traditions are unique in many ways. To the uninitiated military customs may appear meaningless or anachronistic but to those who understand their origin, they hark back to a past event or experience. For example, 5 Gorkha Rifles, a regiment of the Indian Army, wears the chin strap of the Gorkha Hat below the lower lip: It looks strange but is reminder of the times when the soldier had to stalk his prey silently without making any sound. The custom has rationale even today.

Military customs evolve over a period of time, and some are even discarded. There was a custom to pass cigars/cigarettes at the end of the dinner night in army messes. In the present context, the ritual has been discarded. There was a time not far in the past when ladies were not entertained in the main lounge of army messes. The gender bias is now gone forever. Today women are commissioned officers in all the three services. There is a proposal to induct women in combat roles. The Air Force already has women fighter pilots on experimental basis.

The Indian Armed Forces are proud inheritors of customs and traditions that will never go out of fashion: respect for seniors and elders irrespective of their status, utmost regard for women and children, not to hit below the belt, gentlemanly conduct even

with opponents, not to discuss politics and women in the mess and many more. The Army, the Navy and the Air Force are institutions which are trusted and admired by the countrymen. They are the custodians of national values. As national institutions, the national interest is paramount in the armed forces and reflects their secular and apolitical character. Each Service lives by its own creed but great traditions that are common: Gallantry, Honour and Never to Surrender.

Customs and traditions manifest in almost all aspects of military life; reveille and retreat, dress and accoutrements, flags and insignias, parades and ceremonials, military courtesies, honours and awards, mess and musical customs and military funerals; which have been covered in 33 chapters of the book.

In revising, there are a few slip ups. One is the statement that “a war memorial to honour those who fell defending the country after independence is yet to be erected”. Since the National War Memorial filling this void was inaugurated in Feb 2019 and the book was published in 2021 this omission is glaring. One wishes it had been added at in the epilogue if not in the body. Similarly the memorial to Indian Servicemen of World War I, at Villiers Guislain, France, which was inaugurated by the Vice President of India in 2018 through a project executed under the aegis of the USI should not have been missed out in a book published by the USI of India. In the part on Corps formation signs, 17 Corps which was raised in 2014 is left out.

However, such omissions are minor in a book of this breadth. All in all, this well-researched and neatly bound compilation updates as well as fills the void in understanding military past and present history and the significance of the ceremonial and other practices in our armed forces. The book will be of interest for all service personnel especially those joining the military and equally for anyone else interested in Service customs and etiquette, particularly those who have to deal with the military and could deal better with it if they understood its culture, ethos and practises better.

Lt Gen Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)

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OUR ACTIVITIES

Library and Reading Room

The library holds over 68,000 books, and journals, including some books of 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, on an astonishing variety of subjects. While the principal emphasis is on strategy and defence, there are a large number of works on different vistas of Indian life. There are memoirs, biographies, recollections, diaries, journals, manuscripts for scholars and researchers. The reading room is air-conditioned, spacious and well stocked in terms of current reading material. Library was automated in 2002.

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The Institution runs regular correspondence courses for officers of the Armed Forces to assist them in preparing for promotion examinations, and for the entrance examinations to the Defence Services Staff College and Technical Staff College. Over the years, this has been a significant and well-received activity.

USI Journal

The USI Journal is the oldest surviving defence journal in the country and in Asia, having first appeared in 1871. In an era when there is a feeling that free expression of views by Defence personnel is not looked upon kindly by the establishment, the Journal in fact provides just such a forum, without regard to seniority and length of service in the Armed Forces, subject of course, to propriety and quality of the written work.

Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation

The Erstwhile Centre for Research and its resources have been merged into the new Centre named as USI Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (USI-CS3) wef 01 January 2005. The Centre aims at conducting detailed and comprehensive enquiry, research and analyses of national and international security related issues, and gaming and simulation of strategic scenarios, to evolve options for wider discussion and consideration.

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The Centre was established in 2000 and functioned with USI till Aug 2014, when it moved out of USI premises and was delinked from USI. Its aims were organising workshops, seminars and training capsules for peacekeepers, observers and staff officers – both Indian and foreign. It also oversaw the practical training of Indian contingents. It functioned under a Board of Management headed by the Vice Chief of the Army Staff and worked in close coordination with the Service Headquarters and the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence. In August 2014, CUNPK moved out to the accommodation allotted by the Army HQ.

Centre for Military History and Conflict Studies (CMHCS)

The Centre was established on 01 Dec 2000 and encourages study and research into the history of the Indian Armed Forces with objectivity, covering different facets such as strategy, tactics, logistics, organisation and socio-economic aspects and their implementation.

Gold Medal Essay Competitions

Every year the Institution organises two gold medal essay competitions: one for officers below 14 years of service and the other open to all officers. These essays, the first one of which was introduced in 1871, constitute a barometer of opinion on matters that affect national security in general and the defence forces in particular.

Lt Gen SL Menezes Memorial Essay Competition

This has been instituted from 2015 on a subject related to Armed Forces Historical Research. The Essay Competition is open to all across the globe.

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This medal is awarded to Armed Forces personnel for valuable reconnaissance and adventure activity they may have undertaken.

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