

Letters to the Editor

Letters are invited on subjects which have been dealt in the Journal, or which are of general interest to the services.

I

Dear Sir,

INFANTRY DAY

We in Infantry are grateful to Brig NB Grant, AVSM (Retd) to remind us of our infantry ethos and traditions; specially the fact that in Infantry allegiance always has been to a particular Regiment. Now Infantry has added a new tradition of celebrating 'Infantry Day' on October 27, the date on which in 1947 Infantrymen landed in Srinagar to fight against well planned Pakistani military operation to capture J & K State. It is in the highest tradition of the Army and particularly Infantry that Army Headquarters has not justified the rationale for the decision, as traditions need no justification and are based on human emotional attachment to an event. In any case this event cannot have the privilege to be included in Guinness Book as Indian Navy has some time back started the tradition of celebrating 'Navy Day' on December 4, the day it raided Karachi harbour.

Infantry was airlifted into the battle zone. Had the infantryman given a choice, he would have preferred to march on foot but then history of Kashmir and India would have been different today. On this day when Sikhs and Kumaonies were being airlifted to fight a battle in the unknown territory, another infantryman, Brig Rajinder Singh who happened to be Chief of the Army Staff of Princely State of J&K had personally led all available reserves from Srinagar Cantt to fight offensive defence at Uri to delay the Pakistani advance into the Valley where he sacrificed his life and was the first person to be awarded MVC in Independent India. It is the infantryman who is required to capture and hold ground physically and bears the brunt of fighting. Indian infantryman is bearing the brunt of fighting since October 27, till date in the valley to keep the flag of Independent India flying high. Emotional value of his cause may not be very relevant to others, but ask any infantryman or widow who has lost her near and dear one while fulfilling this task undertaken by infantry on that fateful day which we now call "Infantry Day".

As no country can do without an Army, no Army can do without infantry and infantryman lives and dies on traditions. The difficulty is that all other than infantrymen consider themselves experts on all aspects of infantry including the right to decide on Infantry Day. We in infantry deal with so few concrete elements and to motivate and train dynamic minded infantry is to exercise an art whereas to train the man in other arms is to apply a science to execute a concrete task in a definite manner. But to the infantry, use of his tools is only complementary to the use he makes of ground and guts, while believing in courage and cause. Is it that others have taken more technical reasons into consideration while deciding their Corps Day.

Each Regiment, Corps or Service has its own reason to decide on a tradition. Infantry believes more in carrying out the operational tasks and citations read out on each Republic day are ample proof of Infantryman's resolve in his courage and reinforces our faith in new tradition of 'Infantry Day', for which all ranks from Rifleman to General continue to make supreme sacrifice for the Infantry, Army and Country.

Yours faithfully

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Col Amarjit Randwal

II

Sir

Apropos the letter by Brig NB Grant (Retd) (USI Journal : Oct-Dec 95) regarding the appropriateness of celebrating the INFANTRY DAY, and his eagerness to be "enlightened...." [by some subscriber] on the issue, without mincing words".

The letter by Brig NB Grant (Retd) exemplifies a mindset, which thrives on raising issues without any consideration for it's 'organisational relevance'.

Hence on the 'issue' of the INFANTRY DAY, Brig NB Grant (Retd) will be 'enlightened' if he takes heed of the sagely advice by the King in 'Alice in wonderland', who said : "If there is no meaning in it, it saves a world of bother, for we need'nt look for any".

Your sincerely

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Lt Col G. Kumar

III

Sir,

ONE RANK ONE PENSION

Regarding "One Rank One Pension" (Jul-Sep '95), Lt. Gen. K.K. Nanda has argued very convincingly why the Government should accept the formula for ex-service pensioners while implementing the 5th Pay Commission Report. However, I would like to submit some more facts to show how successive political and bureaucratic committees had snuffled, if not sabotaged, this legitimate demand of ex-servicemen.

The Jafa Committee did recommend an adhoc, one time increase in pensions for the men. As Gen. Nanda says, "a similar scheme was also in the offing for the officers but it was forgotten with the ouster of the National Front Government." In fact, even the recommendations of one time increase for men were not implemented. These were printed and kept ready for despatch in the Defence Ministry, but never despatched. So, neither officers nor the men got any increase from this Committee's exercise.

It was not only V.P. Singh but also all other political parties who had promised to implement "One Rank One Pension" formula. For example, the Congress election manifesto said : "The Congress holds ex-servicemen in the highest esteem and recalls with gratitude their services to the nation... Their demand for 'one rank one pension' will be examined and an innovative solution will be found." The BJP manifesto promised one rank one pension to ex-servicemen and also assured them service upto 58 years of age.

However, after the elections, the innovative solution to the demand of 'one rank one pension' to service pensioners was forgotten by the Government. Also it failed to implement the ad hoc increase announced by the earlier government. In August 1991, the opposition parties, both of the right and the left, stood unitedly for the implementation of 'one rank one pension' formula. They threatened the very existence of the then minority government by a cut motion to the Defence allocation in Parliament. But all this high drama had its anti-climax when the Prime Minister pleaded with the opposition leaders and suggested the constitution of a high power committee to consider the proposal.

The Committee headed by Defence Minister Sharad Pawar rejected the one rank one pension demand and instead recommended a one time increase (OTI). It fell far short of the expectations of the ex-servicemen. What is more,

it had such conditions that many of the pensioners were made ineligible for the OTI. For example, OTI was not applicable to "Military pensioners who are/were employed/re-employed re-enrolled in departments/offices of Central or State Governments, company, corporations/undertakings or an autonomous body or in a national bank, including Reserve Bank of India or State Bank of India or in a local body." Bereft of bureaucratic verbiage, it meant any military pensioner who had worked even for a day in civil service after retirement, was ineligible for the OTI. It was tantamount to punishing the ex-soldier with a monthly fine for the 'crime' of serving the government for a second time.

The uproar of ex-servicemen against such unjust clauses to deprive them of the OTI, made the Government to constitute an Empowered Committee in the Ministry of Defence, which included an additional secretary each from the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Law. The committee was to deal with the anomalies of the OTI.

After much delay, the 'anomalies' committee of secretaries too submitted their recommendations. But these too were full of anomalies. For example, it decided that only those military pensioners who had less than 10 years of civil service were eligible for OTI. What is more, the amount of OTI will be reduced by 10 per cent for each year of re-employed service.

It is only a matter of natural justice that pension earned by soldiers for their military service should not be deducted arbitrarily on flimsy reasons. Now it is not known if the Government will appoint another committee to look into the anomalies of the recommendations of the Empowered Committee to remove anomalies.

Yours sincerely

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Sub. Maj. N. Kunju (Retd.)

IV

Sir,

BRITISH COMMONWEALTH OCCUPATION FORCES

A friend of mine has sent me a copy of your kind review of my book on BCOF in recent issue of the *USI Journal*. I am glad you found it a good read, and I thought I would respond to a couple of the points you made.

First of all, with hindsight it is indeed difficult to justify our participation in the occupation in the light of the very limited role allowed to us by MacArthur. At the time I think it was felt that after the humiliation of the Malayan campaign and the fall of Singapore, there should be some public recognition of our part in the final defeat of the Japanese. It wasn't a question of the British "accepting" to participate; Churchill and others were determined that we should be there, and of course the Australians even more so. It was only later that the hollow nature of our role became apparent. However, I tried to show that there were some military achievements and political milestones which gave our participation some meaning.

I am conscious that the photographs lacked any Indian theme, apart from that one showing ratings from HMIS Sutlej viewing the ruins of Hiroshima. There were a few others available from the Imperial War Museum showing Indian troops, mainly bands, and I myself had some snaps from my time with I Mahratta, but I'm afraid the publishers had the last word on the selection to be included, taking into account the limitation they laid down on the total number.

When I met my old friend General Eustace De Souza (also ex-Mahratta of course) last year, he berated me on the relatively high price of the book. I could here again only blame my publishers, who resisted all my attempts to get the price down to what I thought would be a more reasonable level. The result was that most of my own friends borrowed the book from various libraries rather than buying it!

With best wishes and thanks again for friendly and generous review.

Yours sincerely

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