

Short Reviews of Recent Books

The Battlefields of Imphal. By Hemant Singh Katoch, (New Delhi, Routledge, 2016), pp 182, Price Rs 765, ISBN 9781138203549.

The decisive battles of Imphal and Kohima during the Second World War have been voted the greatest battles fought in the history of the British Army in a contest organised by the National Army Museum in England. The contest was held in April 2013. The book comprehensively describes the Battles in Imphal which in some ways were the battles for defence of India and bring out the finest fighting qualities of the Indian soldier.

The book has five Chapters. Chapter One deals with North East India, the canvas to the Second World War; Chapter Two deals with Manipur on the Front Lines; Chapter Three deals with Imphal 1944, clash between the 14th Army of Britain and the 15th Army of Japan; Chapter Four describes the battlefields along the hubs and spokes and finally, Chapter Five gives details on Battlefield Tourism. The Conclusion aptly terms it as the Greatest Battle fought between March to July 1944.

This book goes into the nuances of the battles and the views of a large number of locals and other experts. Apart from describing the actions of the British and the Japanese, the book covers the actions undertaken by the First Division of Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army. Geographically, Imphal lay as the Gateway to India. Japan's overall aim was to reach Dimapur which was the rail head connecting it to the rest of India. The book stresses on the role of leadership, firepower, ingenuity and use of airpower. Imphal had six airfields during the battle. As a matter of fact the turning point was the airlift of Indian 5 Infantry Division from Arakans to Imphal. This along with regular flow of supplies ensured that the 14th Army of Britain was able to win the logistics battle which paved the way for eventual victory.

The author rightly devotes a chapter on Battlefield Tourism of Imphal. After reading the realistic accounts one is tempted to visit important locations on which the battles were fought. With India's 'Act East policy and the development of the Imphal - Moreh – Tamu – Kalewa road, it would be possible to drive down to Myanmar while seeing these battle locations. The book possibly could have covered the impact of Subash Chandra Bose in forming the

Japanese strategy for the Manipur offensive. It was at his insistence that the offensive was launched by the Japanese.

A well written book which makes a good reading for soldiers and civilians alike.

Major General PK Chakravorty, VSM (Retd)

Gorkha Hat and Maroon Berret. By Lieutenant General Chandra Shekhar, (New Delhi : Ambi Knowledge Resources Pvt Ltd.), 2016, 244p, ISBN: 978-81-903591-6-0.

This autobiography takes the reader through the fascinating journey of a second generation army officer, from the mountains of Kumaon to donning the Gorkha Hat as a young officer and after holding many coveted command and staff appointments, finally retiring as the Vice Chief of Army Staff.

The narration is simple and succinctly put interspersed with anecdotes of a thoroughly professional soldier endowed with great physical, moral and intellectual prowess, spanning experiences of varied nature to include : exercises and operations, counter-insurgency, airborne, snow warfare, mountains, plains, deserts, amphibious, instructional appointment at Defence Services Staff College and through various courses including two in the US. His reflections include the ethos and training in the army and its contribution to society at large including 'Operation Sadbhavna' in J&K, and above all the 'camaraderie' that is the hallmark of the Indian Army.

He laments misplaced emphasis on diplomacy rather than military power in 1962 and gives insights into J&K militancy of early 1990's: involvement of Pakistani, Afghan, Arab terrorists; subversion in J&K Police; disarming a battalion of J&K Armed Police; the hostage crisis of Home Secretary and Director General Police of J&K requiring deployment of Infantry Combat Vehicles (ICVs) to secure their release. He attributes lack of surveillance, intelligence, Higher Defence Management and unresponsive defence procurement apparatus as the limiting factors during the Kargil Conflict.

The General highlights that vital defence related issues, institutional reforms and modernisation are all suffering due lack of political resolve. Military strategy cannot be planned in a political

vacuum. He also draws attention to many problems affecting the Army: declining values of society, dilution in high standards of physical and moral values that were rules rather than exceptions and dilution in personal discipline leading to avoidable corruption; and above all Government's apathy to sustained downgradation of the military in terms of pay and allowances, pensions and their status vis-à-vis civilian counterparts. The absence of a national war memorial even after 70 years of Independence also finds a mention in the narrative.

This remarkable book will keep the reader engrossed with its simplicity and clarity of thought. It is recommended to be read by everyone, by soldiers and civilians alike.

*Lieutenant General PC Katoch, PVSM,
UYSM, AVSM, SC (Retd)*

The Men who Served Jammu & Kashmir. By Dr Sudhir Bloeria, (Vij books India Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2016), pp..244, Price 750.00, ISBN 978-93-85563-27-0

Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) has for long been a disturbed border State with 70 km of Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL), 750 km of Line of Control (LC) and 210 km of International Border (IB), persistent militancy, insurgency, cross-border terrorism and externally fostered internal security threats blended with separatists' mindset. With protracted low intensity conflict, the basket is full of turmoil, struggle, crises and unpredictable arson, violence and unrest in the State. Under these circumstances addressing the problems of common man, providing essential services, restoring peace and normalcy is an extremely difficult task and poses challenges for civilian bureaucracy at all levels for performance and evolving a delivery mechanism.

The book provides a splendid observation by a celebrated bureaucrat about weak statecraft and fragile governance in the State from 1990-2010. Thanks to a painful provocation on October 10, 1996, the book offers a glimpse of professional competence, integrity and moral standing of 'brothers in arms' in a troubled State. It was not an easy task to bring the State back from the brink of disaster. They were a committed band of civil servants with zeal to restore the semblance of normalcy to revive a moribund and collapsed civil administration and State police.

It is very difficult to collect micro and macro data and relevant information pertaining to issues and concerns of J&K administration of two decades. Yet, the author has demonstrated the courage and conviction to embark upon this gigantic task, which is largely memory based. Hence, the book offers an excellent primary source to the researchers. The author has brilliantly brought out the chemistry between the Army and other security forces with its civilian counterpart that is essentially a unique role model for modern governance.

Restoration of peace and normalcy in J&K has often been attributed to security forces. The role of Army and other security forces is certainly commendable for their supreme sacrifices and significant contribution. But one should also understand that no insurgency or internal disturbances can possibly be handled successfully by security forces alone. Security forces can aspire to create secure and conducive atmosphere for political establishment; however, it is for the civil administrative structure to perform their legitimate functions and duties. It is a saga of blood, sweat and tears, also of constant danger to life and limb which is ongoing. Needless to say, all the actors – the civil servants and the police forces of J&K, Central Armed Police Forces and the Army deserve a salutation.

Professor Gopalji Malviya

Soldier Mountaineer : The Colonel who got Siachen Glacier for India. *By Colonel N Kumar with Colonel NN Bhatia, (Vij Books India Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 2016), pp.254, Price 850.00, ISBN : 978-93-85563-55-3)*

Colonel Narinder Kumar, commonly known as 'Bull' to all those who know him, is a legend. Bull Kumar himself has written a number of books and, a number of books and articles have been written about him, his expeditions and exploits. Soldier Mountaineer is a biography of Bull compiled and written by Colonel NN Bhatia. Never before this book has a comprehensive biography of Bull Kumar been written encompassing his whole personality and character.

Starting from his birth in Rawalpindi, his life as a boy scout, his commissioning as an officer in the Kumaon Regiment, rising to be a mountaineer of repute and as an adventure specialist; the

book covers as to how he was lured to the mountains and was member of the first All Indian Expedition to Mt Everest in 1960. Bull was always the centre figure in all expeditions he took part in. He was the leader of nine out of 13 expeditions over 24,000 feet in which he took part. In his efforts to launch river rafting in India, he made the first descent of River Indus in Ladakh and the Teesta in Sikkim.

Soldier Mountaineer is the story of the exploits of the major expeditions of which Bull Kumar was a part. These expeditions have been covered in all essential details including some anecdotes and make a very interesting reading.

Bull Kumar is the most decorated soldier mountaineer. His decorations and awards include Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM), Kirti Chakra, Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM), Padma Shri, Arjuna Award and the IMF Gold Medal by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. On 25 June 2010, Bull Kumar was honoured with the MacGregor Medal, awarded by the United Service Institution of India for the best military reconnaissance conducted by him on the Siachen Glacier 30 years back.

In 1961, very early in his mountaineering career, Bull Kumar got frostbite during the Nilkantha Expedition which adversely affected his toes for life and he was medically advised not to ever go beyond 7,000 feet. He never lost heart. Because of his indomitable will and dogged determination Bull Kumar was back again in the mountaineering field in 1964 as the Leader of the Nanda Devi Expedition. Most of his climbs to fame are after 1964. This book is a story of all these years and much more.

People in military and civilian life will equally find this book an interesting reading. In particular, I recommend this book to the youth. For them it is a lesson in courage and determination to accomplish so called impossible tasks.

Brigadier DK Khanna, VSM (Retd)

Gorkha Society and Politics. By CS Thapa (Ghaziabad: DPS Publishing House Centre for Reforms Development and Justice, 2016), pp.228 Price Rs 675, ISBN 9788182749191

The book is a sequel to 'Gorkha: In search of an identity' written by the author in 2013. The author, born and brought up in Dehradun, a fifth generation soldier, has taken up the cause of the Indian

Gorkha distinct from the Nepali; the latter, a resident of Nepal, who is in India to earn a living, as a soldier, a labour or pursuing any other vocation, as a consequence of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950.

The book has 14 chapters and 2 appendices. The initial eight chapters deal with aspects related to the identity of the Indian Gorkha and history which highlights Gorkha's presence in different states for more than a century; and his tribulations at not being able to get his dues, be it related to identity, social acceptance, permanence of abode or support of the central/state government in fulfilling his aspirations, despite having contributed to the nation's security in an admirable manner over the years. Subsequent chapters dwell upon the Indo- Nepal Treaty, situation in Nepal and its impact on the Indian Gorkha as also India's relations with Nepal and China and demand for Gorkhaland.

It is a fact that a large number of Gorkha's have been residents in India for about 200 years. Generations of them have been born in India and thus fulfil all conditions of being citizens of India; but are not accepted as such by people in some states and instead are considered to be migrants from Nepal. The author has painstakingly established this distinction and put forth his arguments forcefully to seek empowerment of the Gorkha. After concerted efforts by various Gorkha groups they eventually succeeded in having the Nepali language included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution on 22 Aug 1992. The author laments the fact that Gorkha's are concentrated only in Darjeeling, Sikkim, some areas in the North Eastern states, Dehradun and Dharamsala and also a large number are in isolated small pockets in J&K, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and other states, which does not allow them to form a cohesive group which can become a 'vote bank', thus denying them political clout. He also highlights the fact that the small groups allow themselves to fall prey to the wiles of leaders of big political parties for short term local gains.

The book is a useful reference material and fills a void in the existing literature about the Indian Gorkhas who form a small but an important part of the Indian ethnic mosaic. However, the 'omnipresent printers devil', poor editing, non-conventional formatting of pages which is distracting, are deductibles which could have been avoided.

Lieutenant General Arvind Sharma, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)

Saudi Arabia in a Multipolar World : Changing Dynamics. By Zakir Hussain (New Delhi, Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group), 2016), pp..266, Price Rs. 895.00, ISBN- 9781138217812

Zakir Hussain has structured this analytical study about Saudi Arabia in six chapters. In Chapter I, the challenges currently encountered by the Kingdom are analysed. Here, the author examines the internal dynamics of Saudi Arabia influenced by the recent Arab Awakening. In Chapter II, the author describes how Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, the founder, created a unique mix of the temporal (oil) with the incorporeal (Islam) and used it shrewdly to legitimise strength and expand a monarchical regime well into the eyes of Muslim world as well as internationally. In this quest for power, Al Saud was supported by Muhammed Ibn Abdl Wahhab and Wahhabism.

In the next three chapters the Kingdom's foreign relations are discussed with special reference to the triad of the US, China and India; the omission of Pakistan is curious. Although Saudi Arabia has mediated in Pakistan's internal political matters and invested heavily in Pakistan's economic well being too, Pakistan has not shown any enthusiasm to get embroiled in Saudi operations against Yemen. Saudi relationship with China has burgeoned rapidly in recent years mainly because of Chinese farsightedness. Today, Saudi Arabia is the largest energy supplier to China. China is their largest trading partner that includes defence (missile deal 1988) and civilian-nuclear agreement.

In Chapter V, the author elaborates on the need for India-Saudi Arabia to establish a robust relationship. Issues of common concern like Afghanistan, Palestine-Israel conflict, energy, migration and terrorism are covered at length. Incidentally, India is the only nation in the world that heavily subsidises Muslims going for Hajj which is correctly mentioned by the author is a sop to gain political mileage. With the implementation of *nitaqat* (policy to reduce expatriate workers in private sector) over 70,000 Indian workers are likely to be retrenched. Saudi Government remains wary of its Shia minority. Its traditional carrot-and-stick policy of distributing billions of *dinars* and stifling dissent with National Guards along with '*mutauwa*' (religious police) is not wholly effective. The modernising force of social media (48 per cent of the population use internet) seems to favour a democratic regime in the long run

Overall an interesting book that provides many a useful insight into Saudi Arabia.

Major General Ashok Joshi, VSM (Retd)

India's Armed Forces : Tempering the Steel. By Lt Gen Ravi Dastane, AVSM, VSM (Retd), (Continental Prakashan, Pune-411030, 2016), pp. 115, ISBN: 978-81-7421-199-6

This slim volume is not an autobiography but a treatise on important military matters based on General's reflections during 44 years (counting NDA and IMA) that he spent in uniform. The book consists of five chapters, each dealing with a subject of great import and then there are six appendices which support the contents of the main chapters. Let me touch upon a few important issues that the book deals with.

The First Chapter highlights the basics of a Service career that an officer goes through, the importance of 'Operation Art' for a military commander and more importantly, various aspects of professional military education; hence the title : Tempering the Steel.

The Second and the Third Chapters are really the heart of the book. They deal with inadequacies of our 'National Security Apparatus' and 'Organisational Reforms' for the Indian Armed Forces. The author has made some very perceptive suggestions which are worth a serious consideration by the powers that be.

The Fourth Chapter 'The Making of an Officer and a Military Leader' is again no less important as it brings to fore with great candidness – that great moral force which sets apart the profession of arms from all other professions. The role of senior officers in restoring the pride and self-esteem across the board has been highlighted. The last Chapter ends with a kind of a prayer for India to realise its full potential with the Armed Forces fully integrated into the instruments of 'National Power'.

An interesting suggestion by the author merits a mention even in this short review. It is the need for 'The Chakravyuh' (a defence city on the lines of Pentagon) which would house all the offices of the MoD, the three Services, the DRDO and other allied departments. The requirement for such a complex is so obvious;

yet not even a brick has been laid in this direction over the last 70 years.

The book has been written in a very concise and clear language and would be of great value for all those who are concerned with national security.

Major General PJS Sandhu (Retd)

Geopolitics, Security and Bilateral Relations : Perspectives from India and South Korea. *Edited by Maj Gen BK Sharma (Retd) & Cdr MH Rajesh, (New Delhi : Vij Books, 2016) pp..146, Price Rs. 695/-, ISBN 978-93-85563-83-6*

This book, a collaborative research project between the United Service Institution of India (USI) and the Research Institute for National Security Affairs (RINSA) could not have been better timed. What makes this work really special is its format which attempts to bring to the discerning reader, perspectives from both New Delhi as well as Seoul on four very interesting themes; namely – Geopolitics of the Regions, Security Cooperation, Nuclear Issues and India-South Korea Bilateral Relations.

The book is laid out in four main parts, each devoted to the four chosen themes. Each part has two chapters, authored by an expert from each country, explaining the Indian and Korean viewpoint. Part I is devoted to the shifting regional geo-politics. Threat perceptions of both nations are cogently covered, logically deduced from noticeable trends and actions of active players, both regional as well as extra-regional. While an incisive cause-effect analysis of most recent developments finds mention, a little crystal gazing into possible Korean re-unification would have added value. The two chapters in Part II focus on security cooperation between Seoul and New Delhi. The Korean author makes a case for cooperative governance on security issues citing the European model. The Indian author traces the trajectory of Indian establishment's understanding of security. The book makes an interesting reading and brings out how the world is beginning to come to terms with the much more realist idea of mutual security based on multifarious needs.

In Part III, the opportunities and challenges on Nuclear Security are discussed. There is significant commonality of

concerns as the nuclear programmes of both Pakistan and North Korea are believed to be, not only surviving, but also growing with Chinese help. Important developments, trends, prognosis and way ahead are logically covered.

The final part is devoted to bilateral cooperation. Both authors, in their informative articles bring out the history, fruition and the future trajectory of the entire canvas of cultural, political, economic and security cooperation between the two nations.

This book would be useful, not only for students of geopolitics and strategic security, but also those interested in India's historical ties with the Far-East. This being a first-of-a-kind initiative, it is hoped, would act as a precursor for further collaboration and research among scholars and think tanks in both countries.

Colonel IS Panjra, SM

Developments in Central Asia: India-Kyrgyzstan Relations.

Edited by Bal Krishan Sharma and Nivedita Das Kundu, (New Delhi, Pentagon Press, 2016), pp..107, Price Rs 695, ISBN 978-81-8274-929-0

A slim volume which is an outcome of joint research conducted by the scholars from Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation(CS3), United Service Institution of India (USI) and International Ataturk Alatau University (IAAU), Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The book aims at bringing forth the Indian and Kyrgyz perspectives in one collection; with chapters narrating various viewpoints, opportunities and challenges faced by Central Asian Republics in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular.

The book has six chapters; primarily compilation of essays by various authors. These authors have done well in highlighting aspects related to nation building and national identity in Post-Soviet Central Asia; role of external and great powers in Central Asia, Afghanistan factor and its influence on regional security and India- Kyrgyzstan relations.

The book is especially relevant in the present geopolitical environment. It highlights the fact that Central Asian Republics are endowed with an immense amount of natural resources and are located in the very centre of Eurasia, acting as the vital fulcrum between the dynamism of South and East Asia and the wealth and

technology in Western Europe. India may not be a key player in the region as of now due to lack of direct access; however, in the times to come, it will be able to connect to the region through the North-South Corridor and Chabahar-Zeranj-Delaram route. This will facilitate India's increased political and economic linkages with the Central Asian Republics. The authors have brought out that institutionalised linkages like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation of which India is now a member shall provide India with opportunities to be more active in the region. An emerging India has to strive to maintain its strategic space in the region amidst increasing geostrategic and geo-economic interests by extra regional players.

The book makes an interesting read for students of international relations, especially India and Central Asian Republics. It has relevant recommendations for the policy makers as well.

Colonel Zubin Bhatnagar

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