



Colonel Pyara Lal, AVSM

(Director, USI from 23 Oct 1986 to 23 Nov 1987)

Colonel Pyara Lal, AVSM was a revered figure among India's military scholars-practitioners. Born in Lahore in 1916, he pursued legal studies at Oxford University before joining the Indian Army. Commissioned into the Maratha Light Infantry in 1943 during World War II, his academic background and aptitude for analytical writing soon led to his appointment as the Army Public Relations Officer in the Burma Theatre. He also served with the Allied Occupation Forces in Japan and contributed significantly during the 1947–48 Jammu & Kashmir operations and the Hyderabad Police Action.

Colonel Pyara Lal's expertise in strategic communication and analysis was further drawn upon during the 1962, 1965, and 1971 wars. In 1950, he was posted to the Military Secretary's Branch as Deputy Assistant Military Secretary (DAMS) and concurrently served the United Service Institution of India (USI) in an honorary capacity. In 1957, he was formally appointed as Secretary of the USI, a role he fulfilled with unmatched dedication until 1987—both in and out of uniform—for a remarkable tenure spanning three decades.

The post-independence period was particularly challenging for the USI, as institutional support waned significantly. Yet, through Colonel Pyara Lal's unwavering commitment, the Institution not only survived but grew in stature. One of his most impactful contributions was the introduction of correspondence courses to support officers preparing for promotion examinations, which provided both financial stability and academic value to the USI.

Between 1960 and 1972, he also served as GSO 1 at the newly established National Defence College (NDC), even as he continued to function as Secretary, USI. This made him the longest-serving staff member in NDC's history. His primary role involved identifying and inviting eminent personalities to deliver lectures—an intellectually rich experience he later described with characteristic wit: "I was like a Hollywood scout in those early days [of the NDC], but instead of looking for beautiful women, I was looking for eminent people to talk to the students." The enduring relationship between the USI and NDC is, in large part, a legacy of the foundational bond he established.

Colonel Pyara Lal served with distinction until his last days, passing away in harness. His steadfast dedication and resilience saw the USI through its most challenging phases. Today, the USI honours his memory through the Col Pyara Lal Library and the Annual Memorial Lecture instituted in his name—fitting tributes to a man whose vision and service shaped the Institution's trajectory.