

Remembering General Jagjit Singh Aurora the Inexplicable denial of Bharat Ratna

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The finest hour of the century for India descended on Dec, 16, 1971, at 4.51 p.m. when Lt.Gen. A.A.K.Niazi, GOC-in-C, East Pakistan, and his 93,000 strong army surrendered to Lt.Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, GOC-in-C, India's eastern command, hero of Indo-Pak war, that gave birth to a new independent nation on the globe, in only 13 days. This is the only example in the world history. **In India's military archives, the most celebrated photograph is that of the surrender of Dhaka in 1971.** After a period of 2300 years, when in 303 BC, Chandragupt Maurya defeated Seleucus Nicator, it was our FIRST decisive victory over any foreign army of importance. **The Architect who crafted this 13-day war, was Gen. Aurora who was paid tributes by none other than the Field Marshal Sam Manckshaw himself,** the then Chief of Indian Army, in the words, "WE ARE PROUD OF YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS""WHILE JAGGI DID ALL THE WORK, I GOT THE BATON (of field marshal)". Once in an interview to Delhi Television's perspective, Gen. S.H.F.J. Manekshaw said, "I cannot do better than read the message to Lt. Gen. Aurora." Defence Minister Pranob Mukherjee described Gen. Aurora as the "principal architect" of the 1971 victory and A GREAT WAR STRATEGIST.

Born on Feb. 13, 1917 in District Jhelum (Pak) Gen. Aurora got his primary education at Rawalpindi. After commissioning in India Military Academy, he was deputed as Commissioned Officer in Punjab Regiment in Jan. 1939. He took part in action against Kabaili intruders and Pakistani forces in May 1948 in Kashmir, as a Lt. Col. Of Para-Regiment-1 (Punjab). In 1947 at the time of partition, he was assigned the job of rescuing the refugees from Pakistan, which he accomplished with great tenacity. In 1961 he was sent to Bhutan on a special mission and he proved to be the main architect in shaping the military ties between India and Bhutan. Under his leadership, a unit of the Indian army gave a befitting reply to Chinese forces when, in 1967 they attacked Nathu-La. It was a glorious moment for the Indian Army which was badly frustrated by the Chinese army in 1962. In 1966 he was promoted to the post Lt. Gen & the Dy. Chief of the army staff. He served the army as Goc-in-C of eastern command from 1969-1973.

The 1971-war was ONE OF THE SWIFTEST MILITARY CAMPAIGNS IN the WORLD HISTORY and the strategy of this war, crafted by Gen. Aurora along with his chief of staff Lt. Gen. J.F.R. Jacob, is taught in military academies all over the world as an example of brilliant planning. The super hero of the Indian army who changed the political map of Asia died in May 2005.

Though Bangladesh, for shaping it a new country, honoured him with "VEER ANANYA PURSKAAR" award, but his own country, for his distinguished services rendered to the Indian army and for displaying outstanding leadership and professional skill of very high degree during the 1971 war, awarded him only Param Vishisht Sewa Medal and Padam Vibhushan whereas his superb achievements and creating the most glorious moment of Indian history after 2300 years, he deserved BHARAT RATNA or the baton of Field Marshal posthumously, and unveiling his statue at a prominent place in Delhi. On his death in 2005,

George Fernandez, then Defence Minister and co-ordinator of N.D.A. wondered why Gen. Aurora had not been awarded Bharat Ratna. It is an irony that our real life heroes, whatsoever the field may be and whatsoever the highest achievement may be, generally do not get their due from this country. In the words of Major Gen. Himmat Singh Gill (Tribune 08-05-2005), "Gen Harbakhsh Singh also died unsung, yet, had it not been for him, half of Punjab would have been in Pakistani hands in 1965. At least now, let us recognize Gen. Aurora's place in history." Again Major Gen. Gill writes under the title "Gill, Aurora, real architects of Bangladesh victory," in Tribune on July 27, 2008, " Finally, though, Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw got all the credit, some of us who were right there do know that the nation should have better recognized Lt-Gen I.S.Gill, the DGMO, who so often clashed with Sam in the Operations Room and stood up to Indira Gandhi and Jagjivan Ram in not prematurely launching the operation, and Gen. Aurora, who engineered one of the greatest military victories in modern times."

As per S. Tarlochan Singh M.P. and former chairman of the minority commission of India, there are only two heroes in Indian history available who crossed the border and frustrated the enemy. One is S. Hari Singh Nalwa who crossed the river Sindh in May 1834 and won Peshawar, and the second is J.S. Aurora who crossed the border in 1971 and defeated the enemy on his own land i.e. Dhaka and captured it.

Had it been for the then Army Chief Gen. Manekshaw, we would have lost, as alleged by Major Gen. J.F.R. Jacob, the then Chief of staff of Gen. Aurora and one of the members of the think-tank (along with Brig. Shbeg Singh) who crafted the strategy of 1971-war, in an interview with Karan Thapar's "India Tonight" programme on CNBC on June 30, 2007. As per Gen. Jacob, if Manekshaw's plan had been followed, " We would not have been able to capture Dhaka. " Gen. Jacob sharply criticized war plans and tactics of Gen. Manekshaw suggesting these could have denied the India the Victory.

Gen. Aurora is the fittest case for **Bharat Ratna**, and an indebted nation must honour its hero posthumously with this highest honour.



The Indo-Pak War: 1965 Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh says IAF was against Ceasefire

Ritu Sharma

On the 43rd anniversary of the war with Pakistan, Arjan Singh, the only Marshal of the Air Force, who led the Indian Air Force (IAF) during that conflict, rues that the war was too "short" and the IAF was not in favour of a ceasefire.

Mr. Singh, one of the first few pilots in independent India, is the first and the only IAF chief to be adorned with the rank of "Marshal of the Air Force", the only "five-star" officer in India currently.

"When the ceasefire came, IAF was not in its favour as the IAF had consumed only 8-9 per cent of its resources. The war was too short," Mr Singh reminisced in an exclusive interview with IANS. Mr. Singh became IAF chief in 1964 at the age of 44 years.

The 91-year old Singh, who was awarded the rank in 2002, also feels that the IAF's resources were not fully utilised.

"I feel in hindsight that had the IAF known that the war was going to be short it could have used the resources in a bigger way," said Mr. Singh.

The Pakistan Army's incursions in India culminated on September 1, 1965, in a massive

attack in the Chhamb sector (Jammu and Kashmir) by the Pakistan forces. The IAF finally joined the conflict on September 6 with a full-blown war breaking out on the western frontier of India.

The Pakistani incursions in Jammu and Kashmir continued for about a month till the ceasefire was effected under the aegis of the UN Security Council on September 23, 1965.

Mr. Singh, his memory still razor sharp for his age, says that the IAF, after starting off at a disadvantage, soon gained advantage over the Pakistan Air Force.

“We had an impression that the Pakistan Air Force was better equipped as it had air-to-air missiles, Sabre fighter aircraft and better radars than us. On the other hand our Gnat aircraft had short reach and were smaller,” Mr Singh said sitting stiffly for a man of his age.

He added that Gnat was not famous before and nobody liked to fly it, as it was difficult to fly and did not give any scope of error.

“But as the war progressed the Gnat shot down two Sabre aircraft, boosting our morale. Its small size was also a good advantage because it could not be seen properly on radar,” Mr Singh said proudly.

The IAF was used for the first time in the history of independent India in the 1965 India-Pakistan War. This gave important war lessons that came handy to secure a victory in the 1971 India-Pakistan War, which was won on the strategic use of the IAF.

Close air support missions of the IAF in the Gujranwala sector, in the Sialkot-Lahore-Ferozepur axis and in the Khemkaran Kasur sector in Pakistan, contributed to the destruction of 300 Patton tanks of Pakistan.

[Courtesy: IANS]



WWI Medal Discovery Reveals Story of the Forgotten Hero of World War I

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Sandeep Singh Brar, an avid Sikh historian, purchased a World War I medal from a dealer in England and quickly realized its historical significance. The medal revealed a fascinating story of heroism and - tragedy.

One, Buckam Singh came to British Columbia, Canada, from Punjab in 1907, at age 14 and subsequently moved to Toronto around 1912/13. At the start of World War I, he enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the spring of 1915. He was one of the earliest known Sikhs living in Ontario at the time as well as one of only nine Sikhs that we know of who served with the Canadian troops in WWI, according to Brar.

In the prolonged war, private Buckam Singh served with the 20th Canadian Infantry Battalion in the battlefields of Flanders during 1916. He is a genuine Canadian hero because not only did he serve in Europe, but he was wounded twice in two separate battles, says Brar. One of the interesting discoveries include the fact that, after being shot, Private Buckam Singh received treatment at a hospital run by one of Canada's famous soldier - poets, Doctor Lt. Colonel John McCrae.

While recovering from his wounds in England, Private Buckam Singh contracted tuberculosis and spent his final days in a Kitchener, (Ontario) military hospital, dying at age 25 in 1919. His grave in Kitchener is the only known WWI Sikh Canadian Soldier's grave in Canada.

It's sad that he never got to see his family again and died forgotten, but it is exciting that his heroic story is now being reclaimed and celebrated, including an 'online' exhibit at the sikhmuseum.com website and a wreath laying ceremony at the gravesite on Remembrance Day.

For the full story and high res images for press - see www.sikhmuseum.com

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