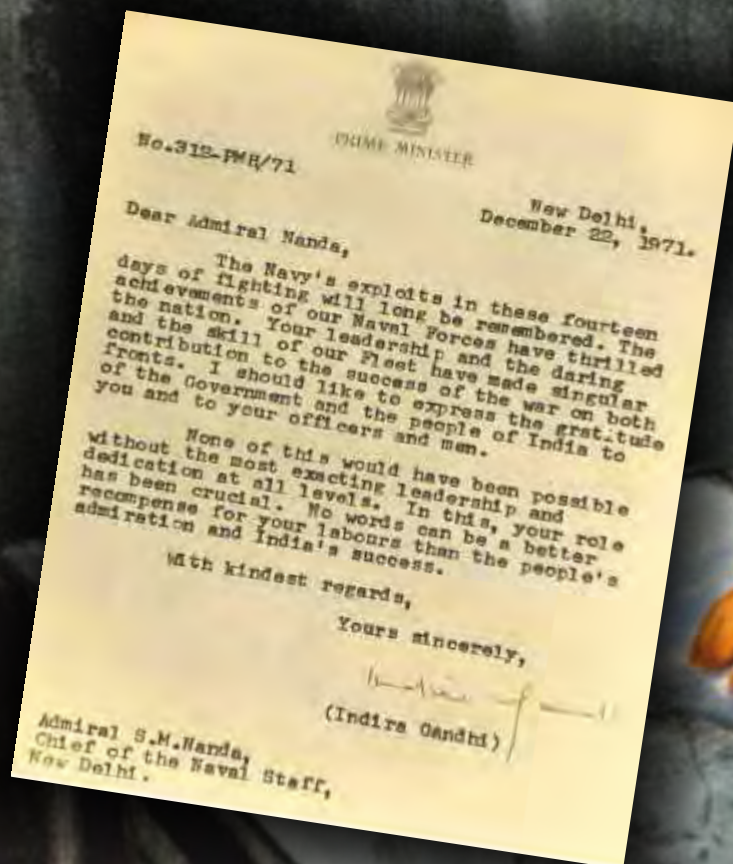




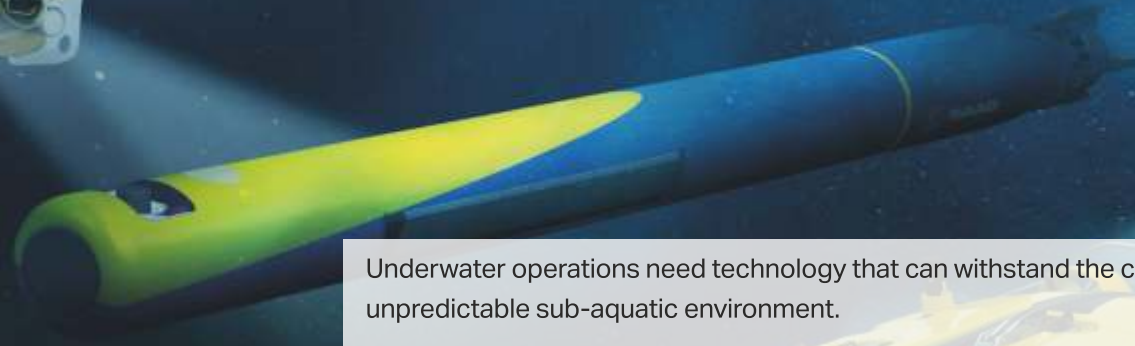
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Front cover : The architects of the Navy's victory in 1971: Admiral S M Nanda, CNS, supported by Vice Admiral S N Kohli, FOCINC (West), and Vice Admiral N Krishnan, FOCINC (E)

Back cover : Op Trident: A daring raid on Karachi by missile boats

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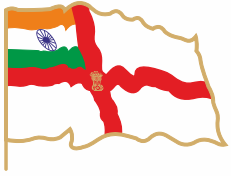
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MESSAGE

It is a distinct honour to pen a message for the *Swarnim Vijay Varsh* edition of the *Quarterdeck* magazine, as India celebrates 50 years of its resounding victory in the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict. The Indian Navy's role in the conflict is etched in the annals of military history, as it helped bring a swift end to the war, choking East Pakistan's lifelines at sea, while crippling West Pakistan's war-waging potential.

Fifty years since the 1971 conflict also provides an occasion to introspect on the strides made by our Service over the past five decades. As a network-centric, multi-dimensional, blue-water force of today, we have considerable reason to be proud of the ground that has been covered. More important, it is an occasion to express gratitude, and acknowledge the farsightedness of our veterans, whose vision has helped shape the Navy of today.

This milestone edition of *Quarterdeck* reflects on these developments, and features articles that reminisce about our eventful past, spotlight the present and crystal gaze at our readiness to sail into the future. This edition not only commemorates the *Swarnim Vijay Varsh* but also celebrates several decades of service and professional excellence by many frontline units —both in operational and support domains.

I compliment the editorial team of *Quarterdeck* for yet another fine edition, replete with interesting anecdotes, snippets, vignettes and memories. For our veterans, this edition is sure to evoke nostalgia, while for our serving personnel, act as a source of inspiration.

Happy reading, and wishing everyone a happy and prosperous 2021!

Jai Hind. Śaṃ No Varuṇaḥ.

(Karambir Singh)
Admiral
Chief of the Naval Staff

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



At the outset, let me express what an honour it is to write this note. For 34 years, *Quarterdeck* has offered the naval community—retired and serving—a canvas on which to paint their memories, learnings and experiences. For me, to edit this magazine represents a serendipitous intersection of the professional (as a journalist for close to 30 years) and the personal (a naval wife for over 25), and a singular privilege. To do so during *Swarnim Vijay Varsh* makes it doubly special.

Indeed, as the nation celebrates the Golden Jubilee of the 1971 war and the Liberation of Bangladesh, we bring you untold stories and first-hand accounts of the conflict, from its history and the strategic and covert planning undertaken backstage to the valiant operations waged across multiple fronts on the theatres of war. With this resounding victory, the Indian Navy proved itself a force to reckon with. The lessons learnt remain relevant to this day as our Navy continues to grow in strength, capacity, capability, power and global significance.

The year 2021 is also a celebratory year for naval aviation, with the Diamond Jubilee of INS Hansa, 60 years of the dependable Chetak, and the Golden Jubilee of INAS 561. Further, we mark the 70-year journey of INS Angre to its present avatar and the Golden Jubilee of INS Virbahu, so dear to the submarine fraternity, as well as the de-induction of the mighty warships Rajput and Ranjit.

The past year was a difficult one, with the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the world. As always, the Indian Navy rose to the challenge magnificently, bringing our countrymen home from overseas as part of the Vande Bharat Mission; our pages carry a bird's-eye view of Operation Samudra Setu. In addition, the magazine offers a smorgasbord of nostalgia and adventure; tales of valour, trials and tribulations; and anecdotes for you to sample and savour. We also pay tribute to many of the stalwarts who have left us—their light shines on.

My sincere thanks to our contributors whose words and images have brought these pages to life and Team DESA for their support at every step. Above all, immense gratitude to all our veterans who are the lifeblood of this publication—thank you for your service. Respect. Salute. *Jai Hind!*

- **Arati Rajan Menon**

GOLDEN JUBILEE: 1971 WAR

OP TRIDENT

By Lieutenant Kunal Gupta





Operation Trident is regarded as the most celebrated and audacious naval operation undertaken by the Indian Navy.

In 1970, Admiral Sardarilal Mathuradas Nanda had taken charge as the eighth Chief of Naval Staff of the Indian Navy. By mid-1971, it was evident that another India-Pakistan war was approaching, with the East Pakistan issue as the trigger. The Admiral, along with Chief of Army Staff, General Sam Manekshaw, aimed to attack rather than merely defend.

The plan for the Navy was twofold:

1. Surround the East Pakistan coast and block all ports for enemy activity, which meant denying trapped Pakistani soldiers opportunities to flee.
2. Attack Karachi. All external trade and transfer, including that of arms and ammunition, took place at Karachi port. It was also the headquarters of the Pakistani Navy as well as its principal oil storage facility.

The background

In 1968, war clouds were already gathering on the horizon when the Indian Navy decided to acquire Osa-1 missile boats from the Soviet Union. Osa translates to 'wasp' in Russian and these boats had a powerful sting thanks to their deadly ship-to-ship Styx missiles that could blow the biggest enemy cruisers out of the water and range-out homing radars that could out-range any naval radar of that era. Thus, these fast-moving and stealthy missile boats could look and strike deep. However, they had one crucial downside: designed primarily for coastal defence, they had a short range. Nonetheless, the Indian Navy acquired eight Osa-1s, established its Missile Boats Squadron, and flew crew members to Russia for eight-month-long training in the freezing Siberian winter.

In early 1971, the boats were finally shipped to India. As there were no heavy cranes in Mumbai, the boats were offloaded in Kolkata and towed along the coast to Mumbai. After Pakistan proclaimed a national emergency on 23 November, three missile boats—rechristened the Vidyut

class—were placed in Okha, near Karachi, to carry out patrols. They gained very valuable experience of the area and the waters in and around Okha and also proved the facilities provided at the advance base there. As the Fleet would be operating not



An OSA-1 missile boat

far from Karachi, a demarcating line was established that neither the ships of the Fleet nor the missile boats would cross. This would prevent any unfortunate incidents of own forces engaging each other.



The Pakistani authorities had warned all merchant ships bound for Karachi not to approach the harbour to within 75 miles between sunset and dawn. This meant any unit picked up on the radar within that distance was most likely to be a Pakistani naval vessel on patrol. In 1971, the port of Karachi housed the headquarters of the Pakistan Navy and almost its entire fleet was based in Karachi harbour. As Karachi was also the hub of Pakistan's maritime trade, a blockade would have been disastrous for Pakistan's economy. The security of Karachi harbour was a priority for the Pakistani high command and it was heavily defended against any air or naval strikes.

On 3 December, after Pakistan attacked Indian airfields along the border, the India-Pakistan War of 1971 officially began.

The operation

The Indian Naval Headquarters (NHQ) in Delhi, along with the Western Naval Command, planned to attack the port of Karachi. This strike group was to be based around the three Vidyut-class missile boats

already deployed off the coast of Okha. However, these boats had limited operational and radar range; to overcome this difficulty, it was decided to assign support vessels to the group.

On 4 December, what was now designated as the Karachi Strike Group was formed and consisted of the three missile boats: INS Nipat, INS Nirghat and INS Veer. As planned, on 4 December, the strike group reached 250 nautical miles (nm) south of the coast of Karachi.

As Pakistani aircraft did not possess night-bombing capabilities, the attack was planned between dusk and dawn.

INS Nirghat drove forward in a north-westerly direction and fired its first Styx missile at destroyer PNS Khaibar. The missile hit the right side of the ship at 10.45 pm (Pakistan time). Owing to the chaos created by the explosion, the signal sent to Pakistan Naval Headquarters (PNHQ) contained the wrong coordinates of the ship's position, delaying rescue teams from reaching the location. Then, Nirghat fired

her second missile, eventually sinking Khaibar and killing 222 sailors. After verifying two targets in the area northwest of Karachi, at 11 pm, INS Nipat fired two Styx missiles: one each at cargo vessel MV Venus Challenger, which was carrying ammunition for the Pakistani forces, and its escort PNS Shah Jahan, a destroyer. Venus Challenger exploded immediately after the missile hit, and eventually sank, while Shah Jahan was badly damaged. At 11.20 pm, INS Veer targeted minesweeper PNS Muhafiz—it fired a missile that sank Muhafiz immediately before it could send a signal to PNHQ, killing 33 sailors. Meanwhile, INS Nipat continued towards Karachi and targeted the Kemari oil storage tanks—while one missile misfired, the other hit the oil tanks, which were completely destroyed.

The aftermath

The Pakistan Air Force retaliated by bombing Okha harbour, scoring direct hits on fuelling facilities for missile boats, an ammunition dump, and the missile boat jetty. The Indian Navy had anticipated this attack and already moved the missile boats

to other locations. However, the destruction of a special fuel tank prevented any further incursions until Operation Python, executed four days later.

Not content to rest on the laurels coming its way after the resounding success of Operation Trident, the Indian Navy repeated the feat just four days later in Operation Python, sinking another three ships of the Pakistani Navy and setting the oil stores on fire for the second time.

By destroying its oil and ammunition supplies (and choking off resupply routes), these decisive victories drastically cut Pakistan's ability to continue engaging with the Indian forces. In fact, there was an effective blockade of the Karachi port without India having really declared one.

More important, this proved to be a turning point of the 1971 war, which would eventually lead to the liberation of Bangladesh. Such was Operation Trident's unprecedented success that it made the world sit up and take note of the Indian Navy—the daring mission was part of the first item on US President Richard Nixon's morning brief by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) the next day.

Awards aplenty

A number of Indian naval personnel were honoured with gallantry awards for the operation for their audacious planning, brilliant execution and outstanding bravery. Fleet Operations Officer Captain (later Vice Admiral) Gulab Mohanlal Hiranandani was awarded the Nau Sena Medal for the detailed operational

planning; Strike Group Commander (later Commodore) B B Yadav was awarded the Mahavir Chakra for leading the 'Killer Squadron'; Lieutenant Commanders Bahadur Nariman Kavina, Inderjit Sharma and Om Prakash Mehta, the commanding officers of INS Nipat, INS Nirghat and INS Veer, respectively, were awarded the Vir Chakra. Master Chief M N Sangal of INS Nirghat was also awarded the Vir Chakra.

In a fitting tribute to these courageous men who pulled off one of the great sea victories in Indian naval history, 4 December has been celebrated as Navy Day ever since.



About the author

Lieutenant Kunal Gupta is serving on INS Jalashwa.

Karachi harbour on fire

THE BACKROOM BOYS

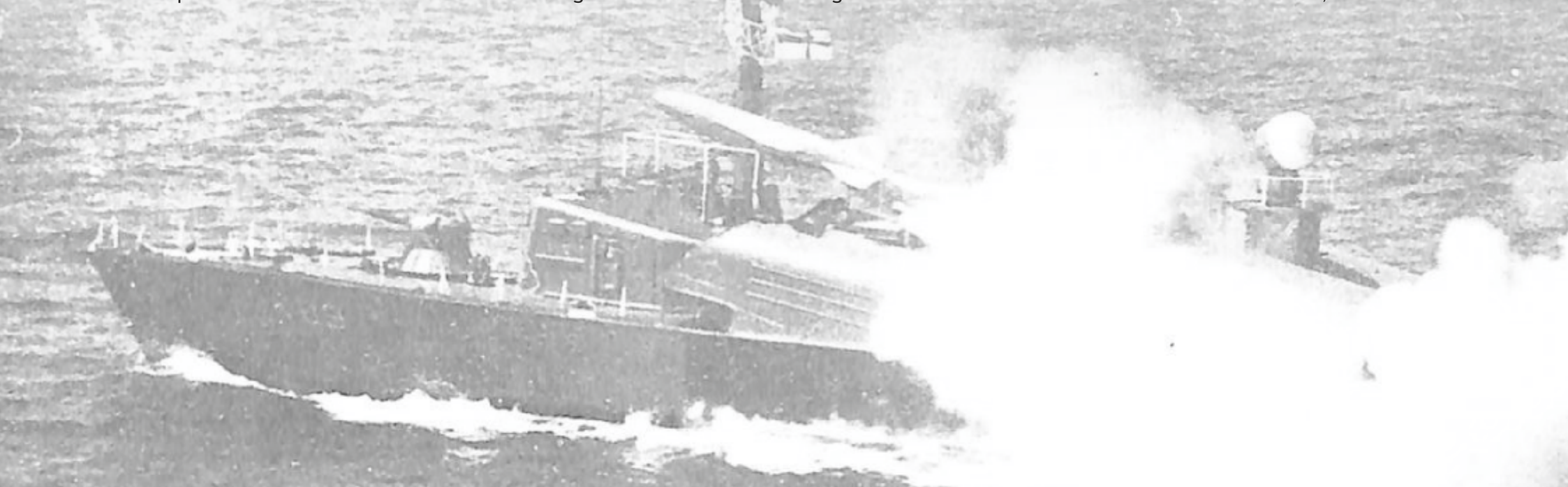
By Commander Gaurav Agarwal (Retd)

The Indian Navy's daring attack on Karachi harbour by the deadly 'Killers' is certainly well chronicled in the annals of history and has become a case study for its sheer chutzpah, out-of-the-box thinking and flawless execution. But very little is known of the efforts of a few 'backroom boys' in a small naval unit hidden in the hutments of INS Hooghly (now INS Netaji Subhash), which contributed its mite towards making this attack possible. And therein lies a tale.

One day, a high-powered team from Naval Headquarters descended onto the Warship Overseeing Team (WOT) in Kolkata and had a lengthy 'hush-hush' meeting with the Officer-in-Charge (OIC). After their departure, the OIC called the Senior Naval Engineer Overseer (SNEO), informing him that a highly secret mission had to be undertaken by them, the details of which could not be divulged to anybody, including colleagues and spouses. The SNEO was given two faded drawings with text in

Russian (a language nobody knew in the WOT), with instructions to decipher them at the earliest.

However, drawings being the language of engineers, the SNEO soon concluded that one drawing was of a complicated slinging system of 100-tonne load capacity, consisting of an arrangement of 7" wire ropes, beams and an axle, while the second one looked like an arrangement for concrete blocks. Of course, the written





instructions on the drawing could not be understood at all.

It was later informed that eight missile boats were to be unloaded in Kolkata because the heaviest quayside crane (80 tonne) in the country was located at Netaji Docks. The WOT had been assigned the critical task of ensuring their unloading in total secrecy. A rough plan was drawn up with the meagre information available and after consulting the Indian Navy crews (which had started to arrive by then), the following tasks were specified:

- Camouflaging and extensive lashing would have to be cut and removed.
- Special slings would have to be rigged and made ready to hook onto the boats. (There was no time to get them manufactured and NHQ could not confirm whether they would arrive with the boats.)
- Each boat had to be lightened to less than 80 tonne. This meant removal of stores, portable and removable fittings, propellers, etc.

- The boats would have to be hoisted and lowered onto the chocks. (This had to be completed in 72 hrs to avoid paying heavy demurrage charges.)
- Fitting of propellers, inspection of underwater hull and systems, de-preservation, etc.
- Lowering the boats in water.



A trip to the docks revealed that the crane in question had been de-rated to 70 tonne some time ago. That meant 10 more tonne of equipment had to be removed from the boats. On the positive side, NHQ had thought ahead and positioned special concrete chocks on the jetty.

When the merchant ship arrived, the team boarded the ship as soon as she was inside the lock gates and asked to see the cargo manifest. The sling was listed in the manifest. The Gods were indeed smiling.

On Day 1, the shipwrights took charge of the cutting operations for removing the camouflaging. On completion, the full boat was visible in all its ferocity! Various parts of the sling had been mustered and the assemblage deciphered from the Russian drawings. On Day 2, the sling was to be assembled around the boat onboard the merchant vessel with the help of the skeletal Russian drawing. Handling the 7" wire ropes, the heavy beam and axles manually and positioning them at the right places was an arduous task. While this continued till late in the evening, de-storing by ship's staff was in full swing. However, in the evening, a dust storm hit the port and a serious accident was avoided only by God's grace. All operations were stopped to avoid further accidents.

Day 3 started with trepidation as the deadline of 5 pm had to be met under any



Naming of INS Nirghat



circumstances. The work of rigging the sling started at breakneck speed and was completed by lunchtime. Just as hoisting was about to start, a posse of dock union workers arrived, objecting to cargo being lifted by an outside party. They were told, politely, but firmly, that this special cargo, vital for the country's war effort, would be unloaded by the Navy. They understood and departed. However, two hours had been lost and it was past 3 pm, with the deadline looming large.

Operations recommenced immediately. Tightening of springs started and as the slings were equalising, horrendous noises emanated from the hull. Hot lubricating oil

started to flow from the greased wire rope strands as the boat lifted off the chocks, and started swinging. With intricate manoeuvring along with synchronised communication between the jetty, crane and ship, the swing was controlled, though with screeching throughout. The boat was hoisted slowly and finally lowered onto the chocks, with cheering all around.

The merchant ship was released just in the nick of time without paying a single paisa in demurrage. The de-preservation of the boat, fitting of propellers and essential underwater work were accomplished by the ship's crew and the just-arrived Soviet team within two days. On the evening of Day 5, the boat was lowered in the water to be made ready for trials and the journey home.

The second boat arrived four days later and was lowered onto the quayside chocks within 48 hours of the mother ship's arrival. De-preservation was started on Day 3 and completed by the evening of Day 4, after which the boat was lowered into the water. Talk about a learning curve!

Thereafter, the boats arrived at regular intervals, with work continuing at breakneck speed with clockwork precision. WOT had worked out a schedule dovetailing each activity such that the boats were unloaded within 24 hours of the mother ship's arrival. Eight boats were unloaded and commissioned within a span of 21 days. In fact, due to lack of VIPs, one of the boats was commissioned by SNEO's wife.

Later that year, the devastating attack of the Killers on Karachi took place that broke the back of the enemy's maritime forces and tilted the scales of war firmly in our favour. Indeed, as the news of the attack became known, the backroom boys of WOT, Kolkata, circa 1971, though very much in the background, had much to be proud of.



About the author

Commander Gaurav Agarwal (Retd) is a General Manager with Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. This account was narrated to him by his father, late Captain Vinod Kumar Agarwal (Retd), who was the Senior Naval Engineer Overseer at WOT Kolkata, and team leader for the operation.



GOLDEN JUBILEE: 1971 WAR

THE GLORY THAT WAS VIKRANT

By Commander Kulbhushan S Sood (Retd)



Warships are built and commissioned to protect a nation's maritime interests. In the process, they go to war if the situation so warrants. The entire active lifespan of a warship may be spent in times of peace. It is the lucky few who really see action! One such warship was INS Vikrant—the only aircraft carrier operating east of the Suez at that time. This article highlights a glorious chapter in the life of INS Vikrant and the invaluable role played by the engineers of the Indian Navy.

Background

INS Vikrant had two distinct occasions to show its mettle in action. The first was the war against Pakistan in 1965. Unfortunately, our aircraft carrier was undergoing refit at that time. A major equipment that required overhaul was the 'catapult' without which the aircraft could not be launched. The rest of the repairs were quickly done by our dockyard but the catapult system required a critical part from the UK. That the UK delayed supply of the spares (despite having promised to expedite them) for obvious political



considerations is another story! The net result was that Vikrant was not able to take part in our war efforts in 1965. This invited a lot of criticism in Navy and political circles. The aircraft carrier was very harshly dubbed the white elephant of the Navy, a stigma the Indian Navy carried long on its shoulders since then.

The second occasion was during the Bangladesh operations in 1971. Not many will know or recall that when ominous war conditions with Pakistan were building up,

INS Vikrant was undergoing refit once again. This time, there was a serious problem with one of its boilers that limited its operation to less than full capacity. The work involved a long layoff. Naval Headquarters was in a dilemma: should they risk operating Vikrant in such a condition or allow its non-availability to become fodder for immense criticism once again? To cut the story short, a calculated risk was taken. INS Vikrant was ordered to be 'boxed up' after absolutely essential repairs and made seaworthy. The dockyard



and ship's company worked overtime. With provisioning and ammunitioning done, the ship was ready to sail in about three weeks flat, ostensibly for sea trials! The rest is history. The immense role played by Vikrant in the Bay of Bengal is worthy of narration. And I was privileged enough to witness it in person as I was serving on the aircraft carrier as First Lieutenant at the time.

Sea trials

Once out of harbour, we stayed around Bombay carrying out the leftover sea trials and tying up other loose ends. Once the engineers were satisfied they would no longer need help from the dockyard, they advised the Captain accordingly and he ordered the aircraft to be embarked. Then, INS Vikrant set course down south.

The movement that was kept confidential so far was a secret no more! Seeing all land mass on the port side of the ship, even an ordinary seaman could tell we were heading south and then to the Bay of Bengal.

In the Bay of Bengal

While on its way, the ship carried out usual

surveillance from the air as well as safety manoeuvres. Extensive day and night flying was also done. Before we entered the Bay, the ship was fully alert and operationally ready. In due course, after touching the coast at Madras, we reached Visakhapatnam. Off Visakhapatnam, Vikrant embarked Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet (FOCEF) Rear Admiral Sree Hari Lal Sarma and flew his flag on board. The ship was now leading the Eastern Fleet. In a few days after intensive patrolling, flying and other exercises with the Fleet, we sailed for Andamans for what we might now lightly recall as the 'lull before the storm', awaiting further orders.

Action stations

Finally, the orders did come. War against Pakistan had been declared. We were prowling the sea all around what was then East Pakistan. In the very early phase of operations, with complete air superiority at sea, the aircraft from Vikrant pounded the ports of Chalna, Khulna, Mongla and Cox's Bazar as main targets! The destruction caused by the accurate and successful bombings by our pilots boosted our morale

and caused depression among the East Pakistani forces. Not that our pilots did not face any resistance! They did. But skilful handling of the aircraft and their professional competence were manifest in the fact that all our aircraft returned safely into the arms of the mother ship with minimal damage.

Led by INS Vikrant, the flagship of the Eastern Fleet, we had complete command of the Bay of Bengal. Our ships intercepted all hostile ships (including two merchant ships plying under the Pakistani flag), which were ordered to proceed to Sandheads and were escorted and handed over to the Indian authorities. Four small tugs hired by the Pakistanis to boost their hinterland supply chain (and tried to defy our blockade) were ordered to be 'sunk'. In the best tradition of dealing with enemy casualties, all seamen from the sunken tugs were rescued by the fleet ships. They were finally transferred to Vikrant for repatriation to their respective countries.

The sea blockade of East Pakistan was now complete. All logistic lines from seaward



were 'snapped'. With our warships extensively patrolling the Bay, there was a lull in action. To take advantage of this development, it was decided that Vikrant should proceed for replenishing provisions and refuelling. Being the closest suitable port, Paradip on the Orissa coast was chosen. For operational reasons, this visit was kept a secret from all and sundry. Naval Headquarters was, however, advised of the desirability of landing the prisoners of war (POW) before sailing out again.

Entering Paradip

This was yet another first for Vikrant! We were perhaps the first major ship to enter the newly commissioned port. If not the first ship, we were certainly the first warship to navigate the almost virgin waters. As even the pilots' services had not yet been fully established, it was deemed to be risky. Suffice to say that with the help of two tugs and the skilful handling of the ship by Captain Swaraj Prakash, the aircraft carrier was safely brought alongside.

Port stay

If I recall correctly, the ship entered

Paradip on 13 December. The intention was to provision, refuel, land the POW and sail out as early as possible. Accordingly, all operations were expeditiously done—including the handing over of the POW to the full satisfaction and gratitude of the embassy officials (and the prisoners themselves). The ship was thereafter scheduled to sail out on 16 December. However, before the mighty aircraft carrier could sail out, the Pakistani forces in East Pakistan surrendered—the Bangladeshis had been freed from the clutches of the cruel Pakistani regime and their marauding Army!

We first heard news of the surrender over radio. When the confirmed news was announced on the ship's PA system, there was thunderous applause and jubilation. The mood was further enhanced when our impending sailing was postponed in view of the changing situation. An impromptu cultural programme of song and dance was organised by the state government onboard to entertain the ship's company. Many artists of repute were brought in from as far as Cuttack to make it an occasion to

remember. Similar and equally entertaining events were hosted at all subsequent ports we visited to complete this glorious chapter in Vikrant's life.

Key takeaways

Pilots: In the entire operation, our pilots did a commendable job for which they have been deservedly awarded and rewarded. Their professional skills are now folklore, even among the Bangladeshis! When asked in a subsequent interview whether they were scared of the Indian air attacks, their emphatic answer was 'no'. This was because they were sure that the Indians would NOT miss their target! In fact, there are reports that when the aircraft were seen approaching from the seaside, they would come on rooftops and clap with joy as if to guide the pilots to their target. The damage caused by air strikes from Vikrant had to be seen to be believed. I had the good fortune to fly a special helo sortie to see the destruction caused by our pilots. I saw ships alongside and some on the trots broken and incapacitated. Cargo sheds, too, were severely damaged and there was smoke emanating from some of them even



after many days of attack. Some key structures in their defence area, such as signal towers, were in shambles. Prior to this, in a lighter vein, I used to pull our pilots' legs for making tall claims about the damages caused by their strikes. But having seen it for myself, I became their No. 1 admirer.

Engineers: None of the glory that was Vikrant would have been possible if our engineers had not

kept the virtually limping ship operational. Kudos to them for ensuring, and at no point leaving a doubt in anyone's mind, that their engine power requirement would be fully met! I am witness to the fact that Cdr (E) B R Choudhury would himself proceed to the

engine room at all operational flying times to ensure that the best advice, if needed, would be available on the spot. True dedication to the cause and professional skill! This resulted in the fact that no mission was ever aborted for want of engine room support. Hats off to the entire ER team.

Morale and demeanour: Prior to and during the entire operation, the morale of the ship's company was sky-high! There was a spring under their step and cheerfulness and enthusiasm among all—officers and sailors, from bridge to keel. With the prevailing interdepartmental harmony, success was a foregone conclusion. It is a matter of pride for all Vikrantians that the entire Bangladesh operation was flawless and accident-free and that no planned mission was ever aborted.

The role played by Vikrant: It is my personal and firm view that the role played by the Eastern Fleet, led by INS Vikrant as its flagship, was the most important single factor in expediting the end of war and the

Liberation of Bangladesh. With landside logistics cut off by the Indian Army and hostile Bangladeshis and complete denial of sea lanes ensured by the Eastern Naval Fleet, Pakistani forces, in what was then East Pakistan, were totally starved. They had only two choices: to get butchered by the Bangladeshis or surrender to the Indian Army. The Pakistanis chose to surrender.

This operation was truly a feather in the cap of the Indian Navy and a glorious chapter in the life of INS Vikrant. As for me, my tenure onboard the aircraft carrier will remain etched in my memory as the highlight of my years in service. Did I not say, 'It is the lucky few who really see action'?



About the author

Commander Kulbhushan S Sood was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 1 January 1957. A Navy veteran who served as the First Lieutenant on board INS Vikrant during the war with Pakistan (Bangladesh Operations) in 1971, he took voluntary retirement when he was in command of INS Beas in 1977.

An aerial illustration of a port during the 1971 war. In the foreground, a large industrial building is engulfed in a massive orange and yellow fire, with thick black smoke billowing upwards. Several cranes are visible along the waterfront. A large ship is docked at the pier. In the background, a body of water contains several smaller boats. Two blue fighter jets are flying in the sky, one in the upper right and another further back. The overall scene depicts a major military or industrial target under attack.

GOLDEN JUBILEE: 1971 WAR

LIBERATION OF BANGLADESH

By Lieutenant Commander Aayush Kishan



The year 1971 is one we are all familiar with, including the bombing of Karachi and the liberation of erstwhile East Pakistan. The 1971 campaign was one of the shortest and most successful military campaigns in the world. It holds a special place in our hearts, as 4 December has forever been enshrined in the history of our nation as Navy Day. However, while all of us are aware of the exploits of our surface forces during this conflict, not many are aware of the pivotal role played by naval divers. In 1971, the Navy did not have the Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) in its current avatar; this gap was filled by the clearance divers. These divers undertook a dangerous and challenging covert mission in 1971, the first of its kind for the nation. The aim was to train an underwater commando force for the Mukti Bahini that could undertake surgical attacks on riverine and sea ports to destroy naval and commercial ships providing supplies to the Pakistani forces. The operation also brought out the role of Special Forces for strategic effect.

Conception

In 1966, it became evident to Admiral S M Nanda that the Navy was asked to sit out the 1965 war for fear of widening the war. He vowed that in any future war, the Navy would seize the initiative, and famously said, “If war comes again, I assure you that we shall carry it right into the enemy’s biggest ports like Karachi.” In 1971, when it became apparent that war with Pakistan was looming, a series of events helped Admiral Nanda identify the opportunity he had been waiting for.

The event that provided the spark for the operation was the arrival of eight crew members of the Mangro in Delhi. Mangro was a Daphne class submarine being built by Direction des Construction Navales (DCN) for Pakistan. While the submarine was in its final stages of trials in Toulon, the Pakistani Army was waging war on its own citizens in East Pakistan. The news of this genocide travelled to France along with the stirring speeches of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. These events disillusioned nine crew members of the Mangro and they

decided they could no longer serve in a military that waged war on its own people. Led by submarine telegraphist Abdul Wahed Chowdhury, a total of nine crew members left the naval base in Toulon on 29 March 1971 planning to head to the Indian mission in Geneva. One crew member parted ways and headed to his relatives in Britain. The escape was not uneventful—without going into the details, the crew members were able to reach India with the help of the Indian Embassy in Madrid.

Pakistan claims the escaped crew members originally planned to take over the submarine and sail it to the Indian Ocean



The Mukti Bahinis
Courtesy: Banglapedia



for use against Pakistan. However, these claims are easily rubbished by the fact that the submarine was in a dry dock at the time the crew chose to leave. Pakistan also claims that a vicious firefight ensued onboard the Mangro before the deserters escaped. Again, no evidence of such an incident has been provided.

Framework and training

With the arrival of these eight deserters in April, Captain Roy, Director Naval Intelligence, formulated a plan in a paper titled 'Jackpot: Underwater Guerrilla Forces'. The military complex in East Pakistan was heavily dependent on supplies from West Pakistan. These materials were majorly supplied via the waterways of East Pakistan. The ships would dock at Chittagong and from there the provisions would be distributed in smaller boats to other inland ports. With General Yahya Khan increasing the number of troops in East Pakistan, these supply lines were ever more critical for the Pakistani forces to sustain a military campaign. Admiral Nanda realised that

severing the supply lines would be the prime objective. Thus was born the naval commando team of the Mukti Bahini, with the eight Mangro crew forming its core.

The plan was bold and ambitious: training and equipping an underwater commando force for the Mukti Bahini. The core team comprising the Mangro deserters and Indian naval clearance divers would set up camp and train close to 500 commandos to carry out clandestine attacks. The camp was set up at Plassey and named C2P. The camp-in-charge was Lieutenant Commander George Martis, assisted by Lieutenant Kapil. The man on the ground who oversaw the entire operation and coordinated with the Directorate of Naval Intelligence at Naval Headquarters (NHQ) was Captain M N R Samant, staff officer (Naval Operations X). Instructors were selected from all over the Navy and brought to C2P. Administrative support for the camp was provided by the closest Army unit.

The offensive

By August, the first batch of commandos

was ready to be deployed. The first wave of commandos was designated Task Force 54 with Captain Samant heading Task Group 54.1. In a move borrowed from the Allied Forces in World War 2, the signals for going ahead with the mission would be specific songs played on All India Radio (AIR) at 0600 and 1800 hrs. The first song would be the go-ahead and the second song the confirmation to carry out the attack.

On 14 August 1971, coordinated attacks were carried out in Chittagong, Narayanganj, Chandpur, Chalna and Mongla. A total of 25 ships were struck in the span of an hour, including merchantmen from the US, China and Japan, apart from Pakistan. This would prove to be one of the largest naval saboteur attacks in the world, one undertaken by a guerrilla force assembled less than four months ago! In September, 160 assault swimmers launched a second wave of attacks, destroying a total of 17,000 tonne of shipping. On 8 November 1971, two boats escorted by INS Kavaratti mined the entrance of Pussur River and



Vice Admiral N Krishnan and Lt Gen J.S. Aurora calling on the newly elected President of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

the shipping channel. This led to the sinking of MV Berlian and PNS Tufail. This would prove to be the nail in the coffin for East Pakistan, as all merchantmen decided to stop movement to East Pakistan.

Some lessons

The entire operation was one of the best planned and executed military operations in the world. It also highlighted the need for a Naval Special Force with complimentary training and equipment. Further, it highlighted the need for indigenisation as a key hurdle faced by the trainers and commandos of C2P was the unavailability of equipment like fins and rebreather sets.

The need for innovation within available resources is also highlighted in the development of the soluble fuse and protecting it using a condom. Today, with the availability of ample resources, it is easy to forget that the same resources might not be available in times of war.

An important lesson is that of seizing the initiative. Admiral Nanda and Captain Roy saw an opportunity, seized it and took decisive action. This led to the crippling of the supply lines of East Pakistan well before the outbreak of hostilities, which in turn led to a rapid victory for India. A small lesson can be drawn from the administrative issues faced at C2P: the dog must wag the tail if we are to succeed in any operation. However, the corollary to this is that one must have the conviction to move up the chain of command if the task requires.

Conclusion

C2P succeeded in training 457 commandos and carried out clandestine

raids in enemy territory to sink and damage over 1,00,000 tonne of shipping—the largest such operation since World War 2. The commando force incurred a casualty rate not exceeding 20 per cent, as had been assumed by Captain Samant. The operation was able to train and equip raw, untrained young recruits to accomplish one of the largest underwater saboteur attacks in the world. This demonstrates the capability, competence and professionalism of the trainers.

This operation by the Service most silent is one of the lesser known facets of the 1971 war. Studying it in detail will surely inspire the reader. The concept and execution of this operation demonstrates the potential of the Indian Navy as well as the ability to forge strategic partnership. And the heroic acts of the teams are still remembered fondly by military professionals.



About the author

Lieutenant Commander Aayush Kishan is Navigating Officer, INS Kirch.



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LANDING OPERATIONS AT COX'S BAZAR

By Commander C T Joseph (Retd)

Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.

- Napoleon Bonaparte

On completion of my sea training on INS Cauvery, I reported onboard INS Gharial in the first week of November 1971 and the EXO LT Puji introduced me to the Captain, Lt Cdr (later Cmde) A K Sharma, fondly known in the Navy as 'Kakka' Sharma. During the interview, the Captain gave me instructions on OOD and OOW duties, maintenance of sight book and log books, and conduct onboard in general and on the bridge in

particular. He also asked me to take over the duties of the cargo officer and gave a short brief on the ship's programme. When I reported to the EXO for further instructions, he allotted me the largest room available onboard, which was my first and biggest bedroom ever: the tank space! Though I was a little scared alone at night initially, I soon happily settled in on the camp cot in the company of the silent solitude.

Political-level declaration

One of my first duties as cargo officer was to embark stores for Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Soon the ship sailed and I had the privilege of disembarking most of the stores to INS Vikrant, which was anchored off Port Cornwall in North Andamans as part of her tactical deployment, protected by INS Beas and Brahmaputra, awaiting to commence her operational deployment. By this time, most of the other national



resources and forces were also tactically deployed for the yet undeclared war. As the civil war in East Pakistan during 1970-71 intensified and about 10 million refugees crossed the border, political tensions between India and Pakistan also escalated. As early as 27 March 1971, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had hinted at a possible war with Pakistan in her address to Parliament. She also warned officials and fellow politicians against “interfering in the mistake of the enemy” as she wanted to avoid initiating the war. Her statement was taken as a political-level declaration of war and was soon followed up at the strategic and tactical levels by the armed forces and other authorities.

Naval blockade

Soon, Gharial returned to Visakhapatnam, got replenished and was ready for the deployment. When Pakistan declared a national emergency on 23 November 1971, followed by the recall of its reserve forces and imposition of a no-fly zone around Karachi, most fleet ships and auxiliaries were already tactically deployed, either to protect the main harbours and the carrier

or to enforce the naval blockade of Chittagong harbour. Gharial also joined the other forces, patrolling her assigned station, and continued to remain at sea till the end of the war. We did not encounter any opposition or enemy force and the patrolling was generally peaceful, except for sighting and boarding a few merchant vessels.

Amphibious operations

By 12 December, the airfields at Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar and Chittagong harbour were rendered non-operational by the Seahawks and Alizes from Vikrant, and surface bombardments by Beas, Brahmaputra and the Indian forces had established our supremacy in East Pakistan without much opposition. Escape of the enemy forces through any waterway was also rendered impossible as they were guarded; the only route left was the land route to Burma. Thus, the Indian authorities quickly decided to mount an amphibious operation at Cox’s Bazar, block the escape route and take the maximum number of Pakistani soldiers as prisoners of war (POW). Having crippled

the enemy forces, no further offensive actions were expected and the ships were detached to enter harbour, replenish, embark troops and land them at Cox’s Bazar.

Accordingly, as I remember, Gharial entered Haldia Dock, fuelled, and embarked military vehicles, stores and personnel of the 3rd Gurkha Regiment. We sailed in the company of INS Guldar and escorts so as to reach Cox’s Bazar beach, about 90 nautical miles (nm) away before the start of high tide on the night of 14 December.

Landing operations: Bad luck strikes

INS Gharial was scheduled to beach first, followed by INS Guldar. The approach channel and beaching area were marked by a few buoys by the diving team headed by Lt Cdr Martin, OIC, Diving School, Cochin. Gharial entered the channel at about 0400 hrs on 15 December. However, the ship’s bows touched the bottom owing to unsuitable gradient on top of a sand dune about half a km away from the expected beaching point and could go no closer.



Lt Puji, the EXO, was on the focsle, coordinating deck activities and reporting the progress of the operation to the bridge. I was directed to be in the tank space at the bow door to guide and assist the Army jawans in leaving the ship safely. The Captain ordered us to open the bow door; as we opened it and lowered the ramp, it went deep underwater to the other side of the sand dunes, making the exit of men and material risky and dangerous. The situation was reported to the bridge and a command decision taken to send the berthing hawsers to the shore to be manned by the Mukti Bahinis who were eagerly waiting for the landing of the Indian soldiers.

Landing by 'monkey crawling'

The heavy hawser was lowered and passed to the shore with the help of the diving team. As there were no trees or any strong points to secure the shore end, it was manned by the Mukti Bahinis and the diving team. The plan was to disembark the men by 'monkey crawling' holding the rope. Each jawan was carrying at least 60 kg in his backpack in addition to his personal weapon. A total of five men were sent on the

hawser. When the first two or three managed to move about 100 m, the weight increased and the men ashore could no longer keep the hawser tight—as the rope touched water, they fell in like ants. Being non-swimmers, the Gurkha men started drowning. I immediately removed my already wet uniform and prepared to jump. I heard the Captain on the PA system ordering Lt Puji, who was also about to jump, to stay onboard and carry out his duties. Not daring to offend the Captain, I stopped the disembarkation and ran to the bridge in my wet inner wear. I begged the Captain to stop the operation and allow me to jump in to save the drowning men. Initially, he shouted at me, saying, "Shut up, this is war!" But after a minute or so, he relented and allowed me to proceed for the lifesaving mission. By the time I reached the drowning men, Lt Cdr Martin, who was in the channel, also arrived at the scene. Between us, we took all the five fallen jawans ashore with the help of the Mukti Bahinis, who brought a bamboo raft. Meanwhile, the Captain dispatched a medical team comprising Major (Dr) Sen of the Gurkha Regiment and the ship's





medical assistant LMA Baby in a boat to administer first aid to the jawans.

It was a sad day for both the Navy and Army when Dr Sen and LMA Baby were unable to revive two of the jawans despite their best efforts. Later, when I read in one of the post-war reports that the entire Eastern Sector suffered only two deaths in the 1971 war, my heart was filled with grief, knowing first-hand who those two were.

On that day, the officers and men had little choice but to overcome their shock at the sad demise of their two comrades and resume landing operations. These were completed, though slowly, using boats from all the ships and bamboo rafts. Finally, the vehicles were disembarked when the water level reduced with the change of tide.

Misfortune strikes again

An ideal landing operation should commence at the start of the rising tide and end at least two hours before the commencement of the receding tide. While approaching the beach, the stern anchor should be dropped in time to get the

correct angle and maximum force on the anchor wire when pulled during withdrawal. Unfortunately, all planning went haywire due to the inadequate beach survey. As a result, when Gharial commenced un-beaching, the tide had already changed to low tide and owing to heavy tension, the stern anchor wire parted and the ship started broaching, almost sitting on the beach parallel to the coast, which was a very precarious situation. Before it got out of hand, INS Beas passed the tow rope and pulled the stern out. However, misfortune struck again as Gharial's quarterdeck came over its own lost stern anchor and its flukes pierced the ship's bottom plate, flooding the quarterdeck sailors' mess. The flooding was temporarily stopped using cement boxes, blankets and shoring.

The war ended on 16 December while the ship was being towed to Haldia by INS Beas, and thereafter to Kidderpore dock by Calcutta Port Trust tugs for emergency docking by the evening of 17 December. INS Gharial returned to Vizag in April 1972 on completion of her repairs.

A tribute to 'Kakka'

A K Sharma, a gunnery specialist, was a strict disciplinarian on the ship but a loving and caring father figure outside. As a Captain, he would give strong and clear instructions to his officers and men with authority. After some initial scepticism, he came to like and trust me. He was soon promoted and took over as EXO, INS Kunjali. I had the privilege of serving again twice under him. He passed away in New Delhi in February 2019 after a brief illness.

Lt Cdr A K Sharma, Maj (Dr) Sen of the 3rd Gurkha Regiment and LMA Baby received the Nao Sena Medal, Sena Medal and Shaurya Chakra, respectively, for their meritorious service onboard INS Gharial during the 1971 war.



About the author

Commander C T Joseph, NM (Gallantry), was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 9 March 1970 and belongs to the 40th Staff Course. A TAS (ASW) specialist, he has commanded INS Bhatkal and INS Kadmat. He retired on 31 March 1993.

OPERATION X

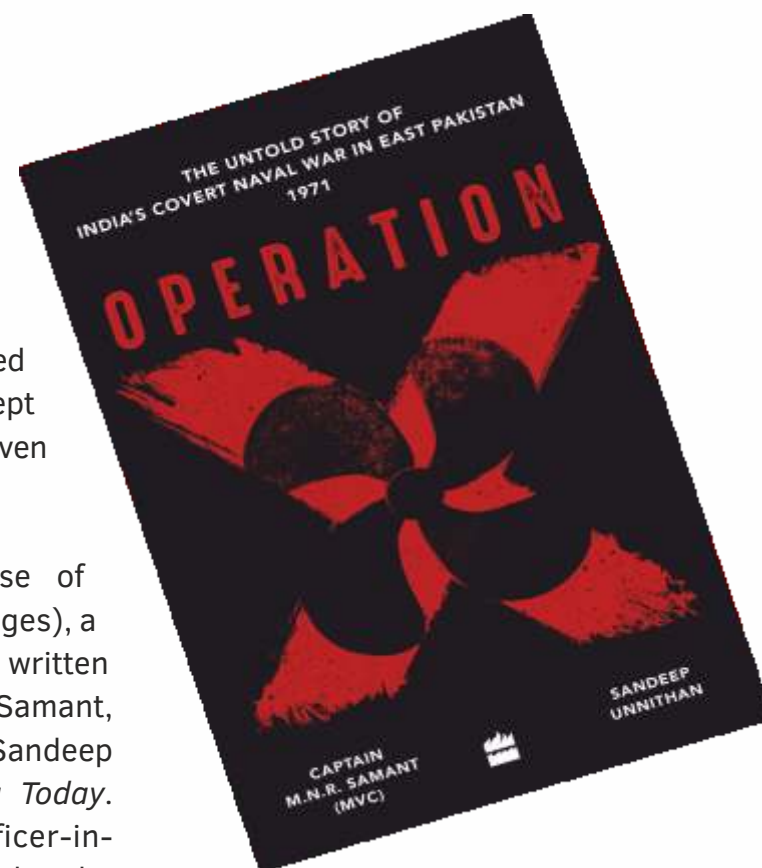
By Commander Rajinder Dutta (Retd)

If blessed with vocal cords, the Indian Navy's Eastern Naval Command, established on 1 March 1968, would proudly recount: "Still an infant under four years of age, I was called upon by Mother India to vanquish the enemy submarine Ghazi and assist in the creation of a new nation with the deployment of Vikrant's Sea Hawks amid an absolute blockade of East Pakistan by ships of my Fleet. I was thus instrumental in scripting the surrender of 94,000 Pakistani soldiers on 16 December 1971. The 1971 War was the first major war after World War 2 where the synergy of all the three forces came to the fore to script not only a win for India but the creation of a new nation, Bangladesh."

While overtly all plans were afoot to vanquish the enemy in East Pakistan by the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy, a secret operation, codenamed 'X', was being conceived and operationalised in the Naval War Room of the Indian Naval Headquarters

(NHQ). This operation, which turned the tide in India's favour, was kept under wraps and not revealed even after the war.

The year 2019 saw the release of *Operation X* (HarperCollins; 256 pages), a thrilling account of this operation, written by Captain Mohan Narayan Rao Samant, the executor of the operation, and Sandeep Unnithan, Executive Editor, *India Today*. Captain Samant, who was officer-in-charge of a covert naval unit under the Directorate of Naval Intelligence (DNI), based in Calcutta, and directed the four-month campaign of guerrilla warfare against the Pakistan army's war effort in Bangladesh, subsequently leading a squadron of gunboats for a raid into East Pakistan after the outbreak of war, was awarded the Mahavir Chakra for his efforts. Sadly, he passed away in March 2019, before the release of the book.



A memorable read

Naval Commando Operation X (NCO-X) was a Directorate of Naval Intelligence (DNI) codename for 'jackpot-underwater guerrilla operation'—a series of actions aimed at the maritime jugular of the Pakistan Army in erstwhile East Pakistan. These innovative sabotage missions, using trained Bengali college students, were part of a larger covert operation run by the Indian Government in the months



preceding the 1971 India-Pakistan war. This operation saw one of the largest use of maritime saboteurs in naval warfare.

The genocide perpetrated by the Pakistani military on innocent Bengalis compelled lakhs to leave their homes and take refuge in India. Further, many young Bengalis, in a bid to become 'freedom fighters', were eager to be trained in guerrilla warfare. Chief of Naval Staff Admiral S M Nanda and Captain Mihir Roy (later Vice Admiral and Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief East), Director Naval Intelligence, swiftly orchestrated the training of these freedom fighters to turn them into naval commandos. The site selected was a location in Plassey on the banks of the Bhagirathi. Further, seven Bengali submariners from a Pakistani submarine docked at Toulon, France, shocked upon hearing about the atrocities of the Pakistan Army, flew to Delhi and were inducted into the group of Mukti Bahinis being trained—Roy and Samant enrolled them as team leaders for the operation. The training team also included Commander V K Kapil and leading Seaman Chiman Singh.

After the intensive training, the first salvo was launched by the commandos on 14-15 August 1971 (to coincide with Pakistan's Independence Day), blowing up the ships, support vessels and port infrastructure of the Pakistani Navy. The over 400 Bengali naval commandos devastated over 1 lakh tonne of vessels in and around the harbours of Chittagong, Chhalna, Mongla, Narayanganj and Chandpur between August and December 1971. The debris caused disruption to shipping and sustained sabotage by the marine commandos kept the mercantile marine away, severely affecting the enemy's naval operations.

The war appeared to be long drawn, but Operation X changed everything. It became a turning point in the War for Liberation, resulting in the birth of the Bangladesh Navy, with Captain Samant ceremoniously being honoured as its first chief by Bangladesh's first Army Chief and Defence Minister General M A G Osmani.

Indeed, the Indian Navy had come of age and had made its presence felt in the

outcome of the Tri-Services War. The integrated battle planning and war fighting was evident in 1971 and the importance of the Navy's role in disrupting sea lanes was brought home to decision makers. In fact, the experience gained from Operation X resulted in the Navy setting up a dedicated Indian Marine Commando Force, popularly called the MARCOS.

This book by Captain Samant and Sandeep Unnithan admirably brings to the fore the true facts of the operation, right from its conception, and reveals details that are yet to be publicly acknowledged by the Indian Navy. Fast-paced and exciting, it is a must-read for students of military history.



About the author

Commander Rajinder Dutta (Retd) has been a naval pilot and a qualified flying instructor with about 3,000 hours of flying on various fixed-wing aircraft such as HT-2, HPT-32, Kirans, Islander, Super Connie, Fokker F-27 and IL-38. He is the Honorary Secretary of the Navy Foundation Mumbai Chapter, a master of ceremonies and an avid blogger.

GOLDEN JUBILEE: 1971 WAR

THE SAGA OF THE VIKRANT MEMORIAL

By Commodore Medioma Bhada (Retd)



Last We Forget
INS VIKRANT 1961-1997
In testimony of deep gratitude to a majestic Ship, which
charted a glorious innings in the service of our nation,
from those to whom her deck was a haven of warmth
and safety. She played a vital role in the 1971 War,
representing India's multi-dimensional Sea Power.
We, her shipmates, offer this monument to the iconic
VIKRANT, crafted from her recovered memorabilia, as
an offering of our everlasting tribute.

The... the untainted support of the Western
... whose continuous involvement
... not have been possible to create and
... We thank Mazagaon Dock Shipbuilders
... assistance. We are indebted to
... an appropriate venue for paying tribute
... Conceived by Cmde Medioma Bhada



INS Vikrant, the first aircraft carrier of the Indian Navy, was commissioned in 1961 and, after 36 years of glorious service to the Nation, was decommissioned in 1997. During this period, she actively projected India's sea power in the Indian Ocean Region. The ship played a pivotal role in the defeat of Pakistan in 1971, which led to the creation of Bangladesh.

Many wars have been fought over centuries where lands have been annexed, borders changed, maps redrawn and perhaps new countries emerged. However, never has a war been fought between two adversaries where the victors have carved out a piece of the vanquisher's territory to give birth to a new, independent, democratic nation.

Despite the efforts of the Indian Navy, the state government and many others to preserve Vikrant as a museum, she finally had to go under the hammer and be sold as scrap in 2014, unhonoured and unsung.

The idea of a memorial

The genesis of this memorial lies in a casual, sentimental visit in April 2015 to

the ship-breaking yard in Darukhana with an aim to pick up a small piece of her flight deck as a memento. It was a sad sight, seeing her broken up and sold by weight. Standing amid her scattered innards, I got the idea of setting up a memorial for her at a suitable place for the citizens of Mumbai.

I contacted Mr. Arzan Khambatta, a sculptor known to bring life to metal, and asked him if it was possible to create a memorial for Vikrant from the scrap available at Darukhana. He was quite excited about the proposal and we jointly identified a few pieces, like the shipside quarterdeck nameplates with the name written in English and Hindi, a part of the cable, a couple of shafts, a piece of the flight deck, etc. I had to buy these parts weighing about a tonne and a half from the scrap-dealers at the going rate. This had to be done in haste as the scrap was moving out of the yard at a very fast pace.

Collecting the parts and transporting them had their own associated problems. Being an individual, payment through the bank was a problem. And as soon as I had loaded

the truck at the weighing machine, I was asked to produce an excise number, which I did not possess. I left the loaded truck at the site overnight and contacted the Excise Department, which promptly granted an exemption. The Navy was kind enough to permit me to store these parts in one of the shore establishments.

My tryst with the BMC

I wrote a letter to the Municipal Commissioner requesting him to allot a suitable traffic island in South Mumbai for the memorial. Nothing moved until, one day, a young journalist from *Mumbai Mirror* who had heard of this project through the grapevine contacted me. He accompanied me to the yard to see what it was like and the very next day, an article appeared in *Mumbai Mirror*, headlined, "Ex Navy Men to Bring Vikrant Back to Life". That's when the file started moving.

The Vikrant Memorial Forum

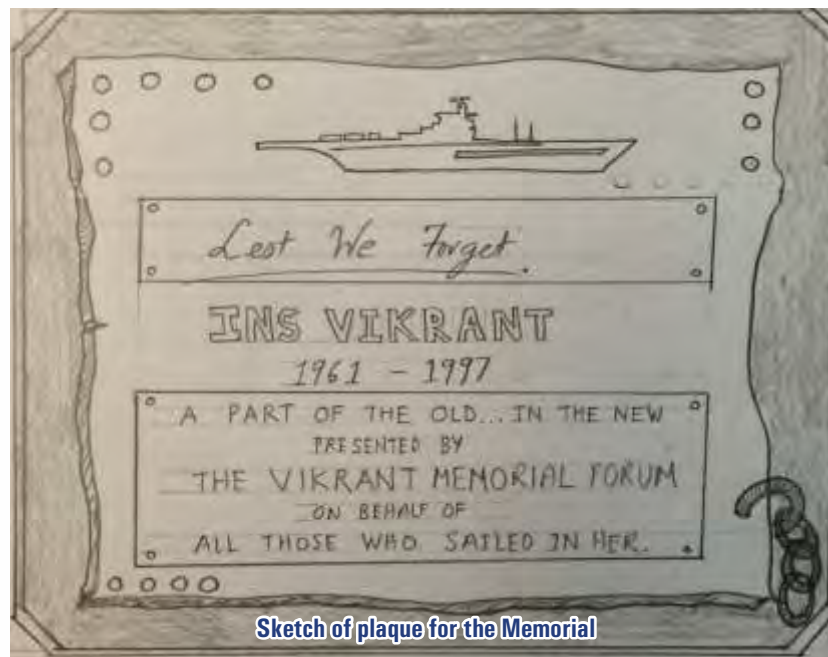
The Municipal Commissioner advised me to steer the project on behalf of an organisation because for a major project like this, the corporation could not deal



with an individual. I contacted the President, Navy Foundation, Mumbai Chapter, with a proposal to allow me to steer this project on behalf of the Foundation but he regrettably declined. Then, I decided to initiate (on paper) the Vikrant Memorial Forum (VMF) with myself as convenor and my residence as our office. I requested my dear friend Admiral Arun Prakash to come on board along with Vice Admiral M P Awati and Vice Admiral I C Rao as members. I designed the letterheads for the Forum and printed them at home.

As part of the process of getting approvals, I had to make a presentation to the Standing Committee of the BMC. The Chairman, Mr Y Phanse, was cooperative and endorsed the file. I was then requested to identify a traffic island for the installation of the memorial. Fortunately, the traffic island opposite Lion Gate, on the T-junction of K Dubash Marg (Rampart Row) and SBS Road, was available without any

encumbrances. This triangular traffic island was allotted to the VMF for the installation of the Vikrant Memorial and its future maintenance, on a 'no-cost basis', to the BMC and the state government. Soon



Sketch of plaque for the Memorial

thereafter, I had to give a presentation to the State Heritage Committee as the location of the memorial fell within the precincts of the Kala Ghoda Heritage District. I also had to get clearances from the zonal and ward office and the traffic,

roads and sewage departments of the BMC. All departments were extremely helpful.

Funding the project

I bore the initial expenses for the purchase of the scrap of Vikrant and its movement to the storage space in Worli. However, substantial funding was required for the design and manufacture of the structure, movement from the sculptor's studio to the site, installation, landscaping of the traffic island, the foundation for the structure, and lighting for the memorial. I approached the Chairman of MDL, who agreed to sponsor the construction and installation. The FOC-in-C West agreed to do the needful on the traffic island, including the landscaping, laying of the concrete foundation and

lighting, through the assistance of Naval Dockyard. He also agreed to maintain the memorial through the Naval Dockyard.

The hiccups

With all the approvals and the funding in



place, we were ready to sign an MoU between Arzan Khambatta and MDL. Unfortunately, MDL informed me that they could only sign the MoU with the VMF and not the sculptor and all the funds would be routed through us. This was problematic as VMF was not a registered body and had no bank account or PAN number. I then approached Mumbai Citizens Group (MCG), a registered NGO of which I was vice-president, with a request to sign an MoU with MDL and one with Arzan Khambatta. Fortunately, the president and all the members of the governing council agreed to help. The payments to the sculptor were then routed through the office of the MCG.

My next problem was with BEST for an electrical connection. While they were willing to give a connection at the traffic island for lighting the memorial at night, they planned to install an electric meter in my personal name, which was obviously not acceptable. With the impending retirement of Vice Admiral S P S Cheema, FOC-in-C West, the date for the unveiling of the memorial was fast approaching. My unusual request for a temporary

connection from the nearest street light was immediately conceded and lighting was available for the memorial on the due date. This has subsequently been regularised with a meter in the name of the Naval Dockyard. Thus, an idea conceptualised in April 2015 while standing in the scrapyard amid parts of the 'Mother' was finally actualised in January 2016, nine months later!

Vikrant finally immortalised

The memorial opposite the Lion Gate in memory of INS Vikrant was jointly unveiled by Vice Admiral Cheema and Shri Ajoy Mehta, Municipal Commissioner, MCGM, on Friday, 25 January 2016. The dedication on the plaque reads as follows:

Lest We Forget

This Memorial is a living testimony of deep gratitude to a majestic ship, which chartered a glorious innings in the service of our Nation, from those to whom her deck was a haven of warmth and safety, those who took forward her immeasurable legacy as pioneers of Indian Navy's embarked aviation cadres. She played a vital role in

the early victory of the 1971 War, representing India's multi-dimensional Sea Power. We, her shipmates, offer this little monument to the iconic Aircraft Carrier, Indian Naval Ship VIKRANT, fabricated from her recovered memorabilia, as an offering of our everlasting tribute.



About the author

Commodore Medioma Bhada, an alumnus of NDA, was commissioned in the Indian Navy in 1962. A fighter pilot by profession, he participated in the 1971 Bangladesh Operations as a pilot in INAS 300 from INS Vikrant. He was a flying instructor at the Air Force Flying Academy and also on the faculty of the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington. He has commanded a naval air squadron and two naval air stations and was Director Naval Air Staff at NHQ. He has also commanded two Indian naval warships. He retired from the Navy on superannuation in 1994. On retirement, he joined the corporate world and held multifarious senior assignments, including director of a private air taxi operator, CEO of a chain of hotels and head of administration of a group company. A keen sportsman, he is currently President of the Western India Golf Association.



70 YEARS OF TRANSITION: INS ANGRE

FROM CASTLE BARRACKS TO BASE DEPOT SHIP

By Commander Deepak Loomba (Retd)

INS Angre is one of the premier establishments of the Indian Navy with a rich history, the others being INS Circars, INS Venduruthy, INS Netaji Subhash and INS India.

Historical background

In 16th century AD, Bombay was an archipelago of seven marshy islands, which were leased in 1534 by the King of Portugal from the King of Gujarat. In 1548, botanist-physician Garcia de Orta, a compatriot of the King of Portugal, built a permanent wooden structure called Manor House, the first modern construction in Bombay. The area around Manor House, also known as Bombay Castle, consisted of a seafront wall

with four guns mounted on it. Over a period of time, it came to be christened Castle Barracks. On receiving Bombay from Portugal in dowry for the marriage of King Charles II to Catherine of Braganza, Manor House became the seat of power of the British Empire in 1665. With the islands of Bombay coming into the possession of the East India Company on 23 September 1668, the company shifted its headquarters from Surat to Castle Barracks in 1686. The main building within the Castle was the Governor's House, in which Gerald Aungier, the second governor of Bombay, lived until the residence was later shifted to Parel and then to Malabar Hill over the next two centuries. In 1830,

the Naval Ensign, then known as 'Company Jack', was hoisted on the Castle for the first time when the Bombay Marine was redesignated as the Royal Indian Navy. In 1940, the Castle was commissioned as HMIS Dalhousie; it was renamed INS Dalhousie on 26 January 1950 after the Constitution of independent India came into force.

INS Angre is born

INS Dalhousie was renamed INS Angre on 15 September 1951 in honour of the Great Sarkhel (Admiral) Kanhoji Angre (1669-1729). Sar-Subhedar or Grand Admiral Kanhoji Angre, also known as 'Conajee Angria', was born in Harnai near Ratnagiri



on the Konkan Coast in August 1669. His genius lay in founding the Maratha Navy and naval bases to fight the Western powers and prevent them from occupying the West Coast. His tactics at sea were similar to Shivaji's. He was dreaded by the British, Portuguese and Dutch alike for his surprise and stealth. He levied *chauth* or



Sarkhel Kanhoji Angre

tax from every vessel that passed the western waters. Angre, who never lost a sea battle in his life, operated out of a fortress on Khanderi Island for the last 21 years of his life, which was later renamed as Kanhoji Angre Island in his honour. The British captured this island, 11 nautical miles from the Gateway of India and, in

1766, built a lighthouse that still stands today. The Sarkhel died on 4 July 1729; his last resting place is in Alibag on the other side of the sea, beyond Thal.

Even after more than four centuries, Castle Barracks retains some of its original structures. Remnants of the past are still visible within the premises of INS Angre and some Portuguese-era relics have survived the test of time. These include massive, weather-beaten two-storey wooden gates, which form the main entrance to INS Angre; carved figures of pantalooned Portuguese soldiers; a rocket-shaped lookout tower; and a sundial, about 10 ft high, with grotesque carvings of heads of men, monsters and animals. The walls of the fort, 23 ft at the base, are the most impressive of all. They are made of stone, probably granite and sandstone from Rajasthan, owing to which they have admirably withstood the ravages of time and tide.

Many of these original structures have been preserved as they were at the time of

Independence, such as the 150-year-old brass cannons, main doors, fort walls and sundial. However, some changes have been made over time; dungeons that were once used to house pirates and other defaulters have been converted into offices, sailors' accommodation and stores. The credit for carefully retaining the original facade of



Manor House goes to the Western Naval Command, particularly the commanding officers of INS Angre, who have maintained the dilapidating structure over the years while carefully putting it to appropriate use. While the original Fort or Bombay Castle built by Kanhoji Angre overlooking the docks has vanished, its boundary wall



remains intact, within which the Headquarters of the Western Naval Command (HQNWC) and INS Angre are now located.

Golden celebrations for INS Angre

On the 50th anniversary of the commissioning of INS Angre in 2001, a life-size bronze statue of Admiral Angre was unveiled at the Naval Dockyard entrance to INS Angre by Admiral Madhavendra Singh, the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command. Further, a camp was organised at Angre's final resting place in Alibag, which was attended by many officers, sailors and local dignitaries. This has now become a regular feature for anniversary celebrations.



formation of the Western Naval Command, Angre assumed the duties of Station Headquarters, coordinating the activities of naval units in South Bombay. These include maintenance of NOFRA, Sailors' Married Quarters, Sagar, NT Pool, WNC Officers' Mess, Navy Week Functions, conduct of ceremonial functions and aid to civil power and disaster management.

Evolution of role and functions

The role of INS Angre has evolved over the years. Initially, after Independence, INS Angre (then Castle Barracks) was commissioned as a naval garrison to accommodate sailors to support the Flag Officer Bombay. However, with the

A unique status

Over the years, the infrastructure as it has developed in and around Manor House-Bombay Castle has given INS Angre the status it commands today. In fact, over the years, the area of operation of INS Angre grew so large that an intermediary

authority, Flag Officer Maharashtra Area (FOMA), was instituted to oversee the functioning of INS Angre. COMBRAX, as CO INS Angre is presently designated, reports to Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, West, through FOMA.

In short, Naval Barracks has come a long way since its inception. Considering its enhanced all-round development and increased charter of duties, it would not be an exaggeration to say that INS Angre has evolved to become not only the premier establishment of HQNWC but a premier establishment of the Indian Navy itself.



About the author

Commander Deepak Loomba joined the Supply Branch of the Indian Navy on 14 April 1969. He has served onboard various ships, including Ganga, Jamuna, Dharini and Darshak. He has also served as ADC to Governor of West Bengal, Training Commander INS Hamla, Director of Transport, Naval Headquarters, Joint Director (Log) Coast Guard Headquarters and at National Defence College, New Delhi.

70 YEARS OF TRANSITION: INS ANGRE

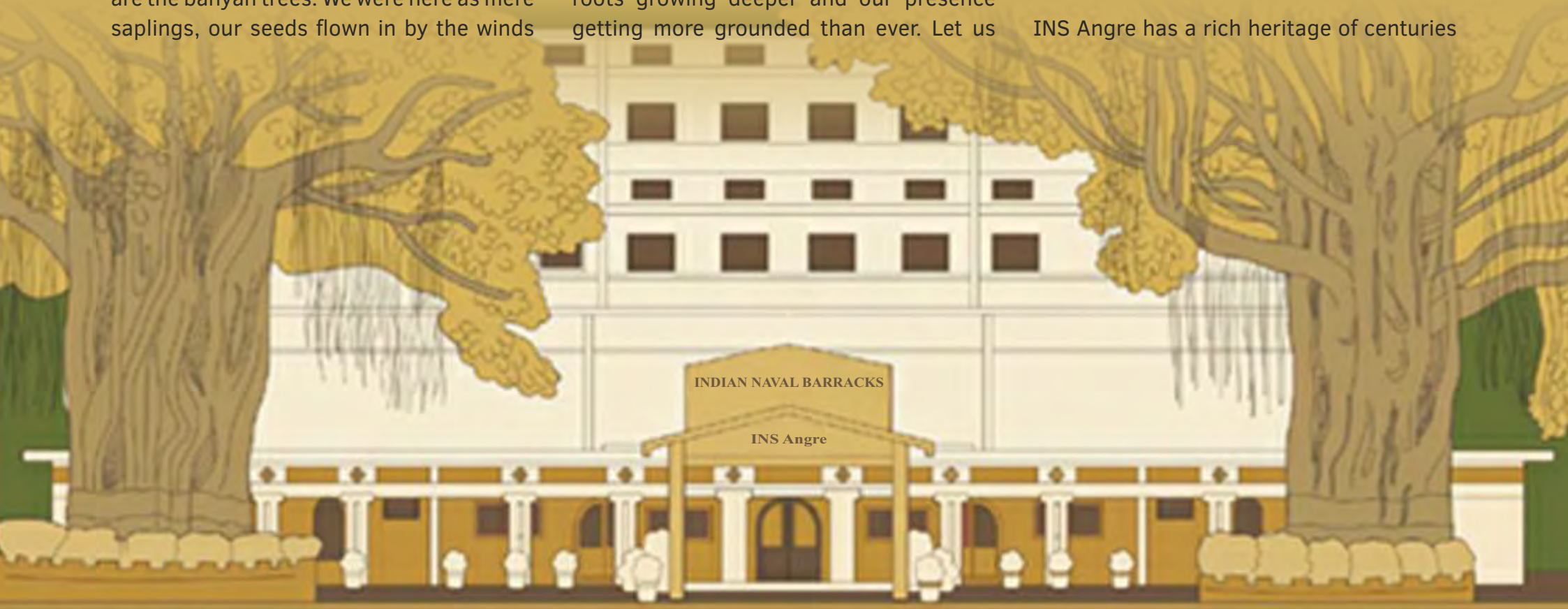
THROUGH THE EYES OF THE PERENNIAL

Welcome to INS Angre, a name that resonates deeply with everyone in the Indian Navy. We are the banyan trees. We were here as mere saplings, our seeds flown in by the winds

bygone. As we took roots in this soil, we have seen seas recede and land reclaimed. We have lived through every moment, our roots growing deeper and our presence getting more grounded than ever. Let us

take you on a glorious journey of heritage, valour, pride and sacrifice that symbolises INS Angre. We have indeed seen it all.

INS Angre has a rich heritage of centuries



INDIAN NAVAL BARRACKS
INS Angre



together and we are proud to have been a part of the journey of these barracks, since the time the cornerstone of its foundation was laid. We have been here for what seems to be the beginning of time, standing steadfast for more than 260 years. This land has been our home since the time the Portuguese called it the Bombay Fort.

The story began when the Sultan of Gujarat ceded the islands of Bombay to the Portuguese in the year 1534. In 1548, the King of Portugal gifted them to Garcia De Orta, a Portuguese physician and botanist, who began building Manor House the same

year. It is known as the first ever modern construction built on the marshy island of Colaba, which later fused with six other islands to be known as Bombay. Little did De Orta know at that time that this building would be making history as the ultimate seat of power for many centuries. It would be a building from where the destiny of a nation would be controlled.

An intimidating yet enthralling entrance facade, with a blend of Portuguese and Islamic architecture, paved the way to Manor House. This facade was and still continues to be called the Portuguese Gate. As you pass under a lofty gate, two figures look upon you. Portuguese soldiers bear aloft the great globe itself, which is a significant emblem of an inflated dominion by sea and land. To this day, it remains the biggest source of pride regarding the origin of the building and its grandeur is not to be missed.

Built on an *ilha da boa vida*, or

the island of good life, Manor House became home to Garcia De Orta in 1554. It seemed to be the perfect place for his home as the islands of Bombay had nature in abundance. This dream destination was an abode of warmth until the death of De Orta. From then on, the evolution of Bombay Fort began in the true sense.

For over a century, many came to claim Manor House as their own. Battles were fought. A lot of blood was spilt and the fort cowered before the heavy attacks. The English and the Dutch enjoyed a brief possession of the fort only to lose it to the Arab pirates who raided the fort and plundered Manor House. As swords clashed and cannons went off, the gruesome battle reduced the fort to a mere shadow of its earlier glory and opulence. But however strong the desire to lay claim on this fort was, neither of the powers could succeed. Manor House still remained the property of the Portuguese.

The English decided to forego combat to conquer the fort. Although the Portuguese Governor was against handing over





port, its two bays and the town. In the words of an ensign, it was this strategic position of Bombay Castle that made its owner the master of the land and a formidable entity.

The bastion adjoining the Portuguese Gate bears Mumbai's oldest sundial. It wears the face of a beautiful Portuguese woman, whose eyes have witnessed the fall of the British Empire and the rise of a glorious India.

In 1940, the name of Bombay Castle was changed to HIMS Dalhousie, which was then changed to INS Dalhousie on 26 January 1950, the day India became a republic. However, the barracks took on this identity only briefly. On 15 September 1951, INS Dalhousie was rechristened INS Angre as a tribute to the most notable admiral of the Maratha Navy. Kanhoji Angre still watches over the courtyard from his portrait on the stained-glass window.

Bombay Castle to the English, matrimonial politics would now decide the fate of the island. The King of Portugal handed over the island of Bombay to King Charles II of England as dowry when he married the Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza, and a new chapter of Bombay Castle began.

As the English took possession of the island, the ruined walls of Bombay Castle were pulled back up. The crumbled building took shape again and life began trickling back in. The structure had a commanding view that strategically encompassed the





One of the heroic battles of Kanhoji Angre has been depicted through a mural above the auditorium. He had caused significant damage to the prestige of the colonial powers and fiercely protected the western coastline of India against European enemies, who had a far superior naval power and techniques in warfare at sea. Undeterred, he valiantly fought them off the coasts and in the Arabian Sea—this man of steel passed away undefeated. Hence, it was only fair that INS Dalhousie be renamed after someone who had given his heart and soul to protect the motherland. And there was none other than Kanhoji Angre who commanded that respect.

The jailhouse is an example of tales screaming to be told. It has witnessed its own share of events that time has etched in history. Justice was served here. Wrongdoings never went unpunished.

The barracks were the origin of the naval mutiny in the year preceding independence. The dawn of 18 February 1946 witnessed the first signs of an

uprising on this very land. The Royal Indian Navy rose in revolt against British rule and swore to bring down the Union Jack. The Indian sailors of the Royal Indian Navy onboard ship and shore establishments at Bombay harbour went on a total strike. It turned into a path-breaking mutiny called the Royal Indian Navy Revolt, or the Bombay Mutiny. From the initial flashpoint in Bombay, the revolt spread and found support throughout British India, from Karachi to Calcutta, and ultimately came to involve 78 ships, 20 shore establishments and 20,000 sailors. The revolt saw many martyrs. A few yard crafts, tug Madan Singh and B C Dutt, have been named after the heroes of the Naval Uprising. The brave sailors had demonstrated to the British that they would rise in defence of their motherland, thus leaving the foreign imperialists little option but to quit. It was during this mutiny that the jailhouse was used to hold soldiers who rose in uprising as prisoners.

But the story of the jailhouse does not end there. Even today, the cells house the guilty and justice continues to be delivered

here. The court martial room that stands on the bastion above on the far left corner resonates with the ‘rogue’s gun’ every time the court proceeds against the guilty.

Further to the left, leading through the narrow corridor, are the ‘dungeons’. These are the rooms built in the ramparts used for storage of arsenal and stores by the British. To this day, they continue to be used as office and storage spaces.

While the Castle Barracks has braced invasions from many and seen war bringing strong men down to their knees, it has also had moments to be thankful for, which have given it a deep legacy. The collective power of four bastions fortified the building. Back in the day, these ramparts stood tall to protect the fort while it was perched atop the cliff that opened out to the sea. Complete with arsenal, they braved every invasion and stood up to fend off every possible attack. Ask the cannons that still have the scars from old wars and they might just bring their stories to life. Today, they hum the tune of peace and silence as they sit as proud accessories of the



barracks. They peek over the beautiful gardens at the South Gate that have taken shape through reclaimed land where waves would once break against the fort walls.

Today, we see the light of a new dawn—a dawn that is ours to create. The building signifies everything that will take us to a better future. This is the place where young

men pledge their lives to the nation and soldiers are chiselled out of them. It would be impossible to find a single soul in the Indian Navy who has not passed through these gates and walked on this ground. INS Angre has been an integral part of every personnel of the Indian Navy.

The castle today is a hub of activity. It is

home to over 1,000 bachelor sailors who live and dine here. They parade, play and work out here to stay fit and healthy. We see standing guards practise on these grounds every day and we share their pride in being part of this valiant heritage. These soldiers bring several ceremonies to life. We are happier than ever to see the Indian Naval Ensign flutter in this Castle.



DIAMOND JUBILEE: INS HANSA



SHINING FROM
SEA TO SKY





A naval Detachment was established in Coimbatore in 1952 as a tender to the Gunnery School of INS Venduruthy. Its main purpose was to provide facilities by way of accommodation and messing for the range parties that came for musketry at the small arms range at Madukkarai.

The establishment continued to perform this function until 2 September 1958 when a Naval Jet Flight (a tender of INS Garuda) was formed at the Air Force Storage Depot, Sulur. Though entirely separate units, the two establishments were accommodated in the same area and the sailors were messed together. On 28 November 1959, the Naval Jet Flight was renamed INAS 550 (A). In March 1961 the Naval Detachment and INAS 550 (A) were amalgamated and became the Naval Contingent, Coimbatore—this reformed organisation was commissioned as INS Hansa on 5 September 1961. All this time, the Navy had been looking for a permanent home for the frontline squadrons of INS Vikrant and the operational flying training of the pilots who joined these squadrons.

The airfield at Dabolim was taken over by the Navy in April 1962 after the liberation of Goa. As soon as the minimum facilities for aircraft operation were made available at Dabolim Air Station, the decision was made to shift INS Hansa from Coimbatore in phases. On 18 June 1964, INAS 551 and the administrative facilities of INS Hansa were moved to Dabolim and, with this, the commissioning pennant of Hansa to Dabolim.

Over the years, the base has become a force to reckon with to ensure the security of the entire western seafront, including offshore assets, and undertakes extensive surveillance to enhance maritime domain awareness while maintaining operational readiness to neutralise any threat from the sea. The base has also contributed immensely in aid to civil authorities, providing SAR and flood relief and supporting community activities.

Last year, as always, INS Hansa played a stellar role in supporting the operational preparedness of the Indian Navy. The air station aided the civilian establishment in

flood relief over the years and Operation Varsha Rahat in 2019 was no exception. The base also has the unique distinction of managing both civilian and naval air traffic every day with utmost efficiency and safety.

Fighting the pandemic

In the testing times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the air station has undertaken food distribution to migrant labourers in Vasco and aided civil authorities by earmarking aircraft for missions. During the lockdown period, INS Hansa effectively participated in smooth coordination with various civil agencies like the ministries of health, civil aviation and transport.

To honour Corona warriors as the country battled the virus, 1,500 personnel from the air station expressed their appreciation by forming a human chain to thank the medical personnel for their unwavering commitment. Through the pandemic, the air station has continued to maintain an operational high.

DIAMOND JUBILEE: INS HANSA



INAS 300: THE WHITE TIGERS



INAS 300 'White Tigers' is the oldest fighter squadron of the Indian Navy, commissioned at INAS Brawdy, United Kingdom, on 7 July 1960. After Independence, India decided to procure an aircraft carrier along with carrier-borne fighters as they had played a key role in World War 2.

The White Tigers heralded the era of carrier-borne aviation in the Indian Navy six decades ago with the induction of the Sea Hawk, which provided yeoman service for a little over two decades from the deck of INS Vikrant. The squadron became the mainstay of power projection over the Indian seas and proved its mettle on various occasions, including Operation Vijay in 1961, the India-China war in 1962 and the India-Pakistan wars in 1965 and 1971, where the White Tigers earned nine gallantry awards, including one Mahavir Chakra and five Vir Chakras. The year 1983 ushered in a new era for the White Tigers when the Sea Hawk was replaced by the Sea Harrier, which introduced the country to the concept of vertical takeoffs and landings and served with distinction for

over 33 years from the deck of INS Viraat. In 2016, the squadron underwent yet another reincarnation with the 4++ generation, swing role, supersonic MiG-29K bringing back the art of tail hooking along with the capability of air dominance from the deck of INS Vikramaditya.

From the time the squadron came into being, INAS 300 has brought about transformational changes in our concept of naval operations and, consequently, the way the world looks at us. The transition from isolated surface action groups, search and attack units and naval gunfire support operations to the present carrier battle group operations has been possible only with the assurance of air superiority at sea, an assurance guaranteed by the White Tigers over the past decades. With a unique distinction of producing four Navy chiefs, this one and only carrier-borne fighter squadron in the subcontinent occupies an iconic status in the Indian Navy. Let's take a closer look at its journey.

Operation Vijay – Liberation of Goa

Within a couple of weeks of INS Vikrant's

arrival in India, she was called upon to lead the task force to blockade Goa and Operation Vijay was launched on 17 December 1961 against the Portuguese enclaves on the Arabian Sea. Sea Hawks flew combat air patrol (CAP) and interception sorties. On 19 December 1961, Goa was liberated from Portuguese rule.

The 1962 India-China War

The war was fought on the icy slopes of the Himalayas. During this operational alert, the squadron initially moved to the Indian Air Force (IAF) base in Kalaikunda, where the squadron did a quick armament workup before being deployed to the IAF airbase in Gorakhpur. Within a week, the squadron was all set for action under the snow-capped peaks. After about six weeks, the situation stabilised and the Sea Hawks returned to Sulur.

The 1965 War

As the war with Pakistan appeared imminent, the squadron was placed under the operational control of Western Air



Command in Jamnagar on 3 September 1965. Soon, it received orders to launch strikes on Pakistan's high-power radar in Badin. By late evening on 6 September, all plans for attack were completed and the strike was to be launched at dawn on 7 September. The aircraft was armed with T-10 rockets and guns for the attack. Two Sea Hawks were also manning the operational readiness platform (ORP). The squadron kept waiting for launch but it was directed to stand down and return to Goa. On landing en route at Santa Cruz, Flag Officer Bombay immediately retained the squadron there for the city's air defence.

The same night (7/8 September), two Pakistani ships bombed Okha. The

squadron flew back to Jamnagar to locate and attack the Pakistani fleet but by then it was already out of range. The squadron returned to Santa Cruz the same day and flew regular dawn and dusk combat air patrol (CAP) sorties till ceasefire was declared. It then returned to Dabolim on 26 September. The White Tigers had to wait another six years to draw blood.

The 1971 War

After undergoing refit for two years, in October 1971, the squadron embarked INS Vikrant with 15 pilots and 19 Sea Hawks, as the Navy was suspecting an outbreak of hostilities in the Bay of Bengal. On receiving war orders, Vikrant, with Kamorta, Brahmaputra and Beas in company, sailed

out from Port Blair towards East Pakistan on the night of 2/3 December. The Fleet made night passage through the Coco Channel to avoid possible detection by other merchant ships. On 4 December 1971, Vikrant launched 12 Sea Hawks, 140 miles from Cox's Bazar.

Over a duration of 10 days, the squadron flew a total of 125 missions against enemy targets at Cox's Bazar, Chittagong, Khulna, Chalna, Mongla Barisal, Do Hazari and Bakarganj. Except for minor damages and some bullet hits, which were readily repaired, all our aircraft remained intact. For its gallant conduct and various achievements, the squadron received multiple accolades and awards. In mid-



LFE missions with the French Navy



January 1972, the squadron made a triumphant return back home to Dabolim.

The jump jet era

The mighty Sea Hawks had days of glory serving in two wars. But after more than two decades as the pioneers of the carrier-borne fighters of the Indian Navy, their epoch came to an end. The date 27 January 1983 will be recalled as 'historic' for on this day, the Sea Harrier FRS MK 51 was ceremonially handed over to the Indian Navy. The Sea Harrier's remarkable capabilities were exhibited by the chief test pilot executing the 'Farley Climb', a superior manoeuvre showcasing the extreme competency and capability of the Harrier.

Three Sea Harriers—IN 603, 604 and 605—undertook the longest international ferry in the history of the Indian naval air arm. Their ferry began on 13 December 1983 with extra drop tanks (the mammoth 330-gallon ferry tanks). The Harriers routed via Luqa in Malta, Luxor in Egypt through a sandstorm, and Dubai, to finally land at

their parent base in Dabolim on 16 December 1983.

Roar in the Capital

During the Republic Day Parade in Delhi in 1987, a 'Vic' formation of three Sea Harriers demonstrated a 'bomb burst' over Vijay Chowk; finally, a lone harrier stood and hovered, a thrill for everyone who witnessed it. This gravity-defying stunt between the South and North Block was imprinted on the country's memory, showcasing the Indian Navy's capabilities.



Attacks on harbours and airfields in Bangladesh during the 1971 War



Sea Hawks launch to hold CAP over INS Vikrant



Arrowhead formation over Marine Drive, Mumbai, on 3 November 1961

Operation Parakaram

During the heightened period of tension, all aircraft were ready to scramble at immediate notice to take on any intruder that might try to come close to the Fleet or Indian airspace. Eventually, owing to the international blockade enforced by our Navy, Pakistan was forced to pull back because of rapidly dwindling resources. During the same time, the Tigers had intercepted a KC-135 refuelling a B-52 bomber.

The supersonic era

After nearly two decades of air supremacy delivered by the jump jets, the Indian Navy began the search for a new carrier-based fighter to keep up with the fast-changing technological advancements around the world.

In January 2004, the Indian Navy signed a contract with RAC MiG for the acquisition of 16 MiG-29Ks; aircraft deliveries began in early 2011. Later, another contract for 29 more aircraft was signed in March 2010; delivery of these began by end 2016. The first MiG-



29K frontline squadron, INAS 303, was commissioned on 11 May 2013 at INS Hansa. After induction, the aircraft successfully concluded armament trials of the entire range of arsenal comprising air-to-surface missiles, air-to-air missiles, bombs, rockets and guns.

The Pulwama attack

After the Pulwama incident, the squadron was tasked to be deployed at Jamnagar Air Force Station, to be ready for any operational contingency at immediate notice. Despite already being on a detachment at that time in Visakhapatnam in a training role, the squadron mobilised its resources on a war footing and established an operational component in

Jamnagar. The role change of the unit from training to war-readiness in both anti-shipping and air-defence roles was carried out swiftly and seamlessly. In Jamnagar, the squadron demonstrated the capability and readiness to support IAF strike operations as part of an escort package. The armament expended included KAB 500 kg bombs and 80 mm rockets.

The Balakot attack

In the aftermath of the Balakot air strike, the squadron was ordered to augment the effort onboard INS Vikramaditya. It embarked with the full complement of aircraft and men. This was undertaken at extremely short notice and yet the machines were made war-ready. The unit was fully prepared for any operational contingency by day or night.

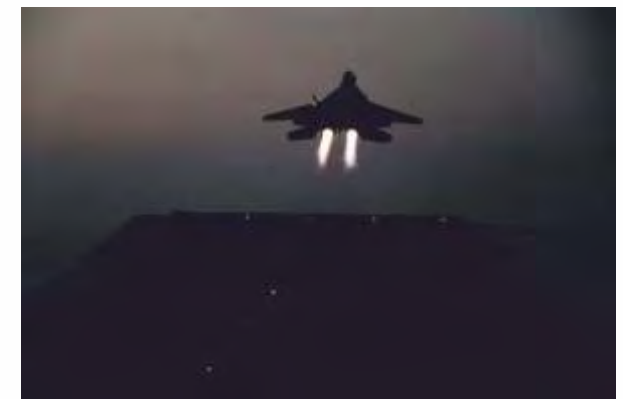
Night bombing

Towards increasing flexibility in operations, for the first time ever in the history of MiG-29K operations, the squadron undertook night bombing at the Sarmat air-to-ground range. The profile and procedures for night bombing were thoroughly brainstormed on

ground before trials were undertaken by supervisors of the unit. Training was then imparted to all available aircrew to make them conversant and proficient in the art of night bombing.

Air-to-air refuelling

During the detachment in Jamnagar, towards war-preparedness after Pulwama and interoperability with the IAF, the unit undertook the first ever trials of refuelling IAF Jaguars mid-air with the PAZ-MK refuelling pods fitted on the MiG-29K aircraft. After the trials, all pilots of the Jaguar squadron were able to get back their currency for air-to-air refuelling that had lapsed because of the non availability of the IL-78 tanker over the past few





months. Therefore, the unit was able to provide the IAF an extremely critical capability required during a war.

Large force engagements

The squadron took part in large force engagement (LFE) exercises with the IAF and the Rafale aircraft of the French Navy. It was assigned the role of free and tied escorts for the strike packages planned by the IAF on breakout of hostilities.

Missile chase

One of the most challenging tasks undertaken regularly by the unit is the

video recording of live missile firing. The high speed and manoeuvrability of the missile push the aircraft and pilot to the limit in trying to keep up. The squadron has undertaken all such missions successfully.

Surge operations

The unit undertook the challenge of sustaining 24 hours of nonstop flying operations within its resources, akin to a war. The unit flew a staggering 36 sorties amounting to 54 hours in an exercise never undertaken before in the history of the Indian Navy, pushing the limits of both men and machinery.

Turning 60 in style

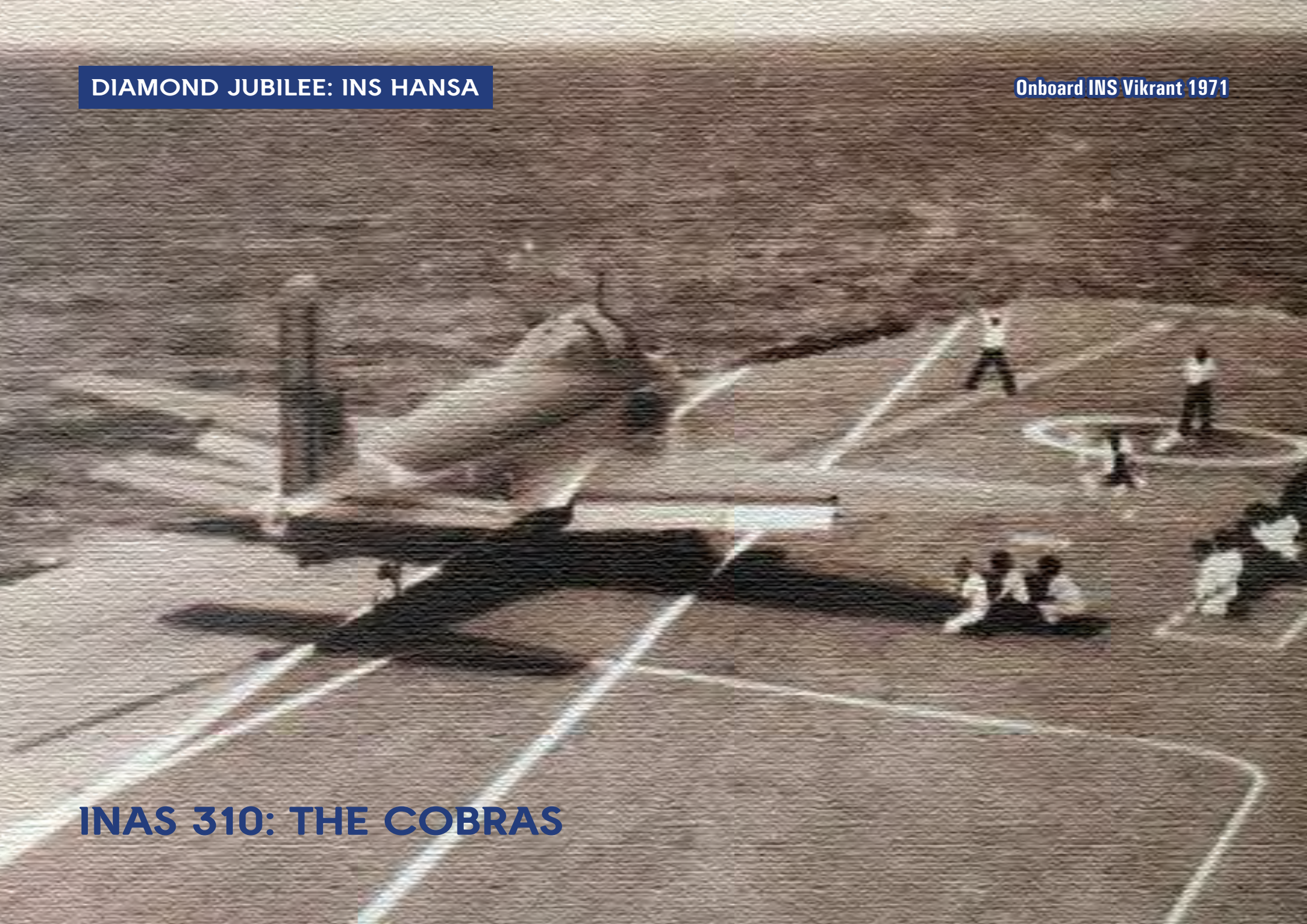
In its current avatar as the MiG-29K training squadron, INAS 300 has the responsibility to produce top-notch, war-ready, deck-borne fighter pilots who can be relied upon to defend the Fleet or carry out a precision strike on enemy warships when needed. As INAS 300 celebrates its Diamond Jubilee this year, one thing is sure: Whatever the machine, the White Tigers will certainly tame it and exploit it to the edge of its envelope to ensure secure skies over the Indian Ocean.



DIAMOND JUBILEE: INS HANSA

Onboard INS Vikrant 1971

INAS 310: THE COBRAS





*The Cobra is deadly,
Its reputation great;
Calm and composed
- Not blinded by fury or hate.*

*Striking silently,
From unbelievably far;
With frightening accuracy
- Beyond comparison or par.
Like their namesakes,*

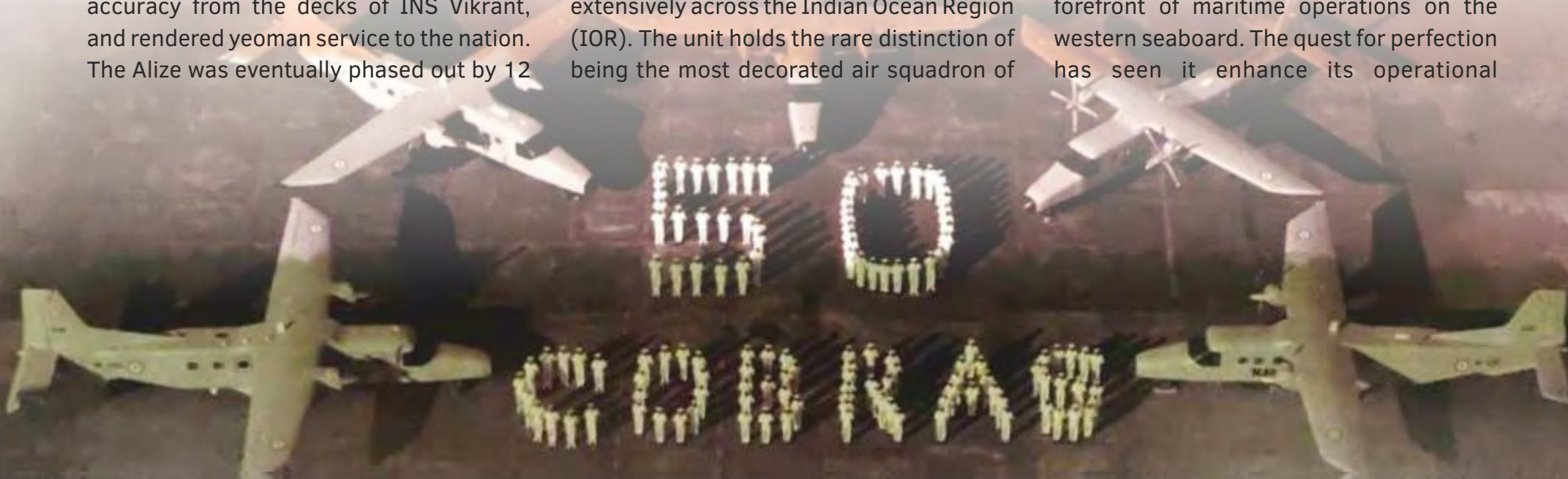
*These men are better than the best,
Achieving glory in the air
- With a snake on their chest!*

The Indian Naval Air Squadron 310 (INAS 310) is the premier information warfare air squadron of the Indian Navy, commissioned at Hyeres, France, on 21 March 1961. Christened the 'Cobras', the squadron drew its legacy from the erstwhile, yet amazingly capable, Breguet BR.1050 Alize, an anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-shipping, reconnaissance and land attack platform, striking swiftly and silently with deadly accuracy from the decks of INS Vikrant, and rendered yeoman service to the nation. The Alize was eventually phased out by 12

April 1991 and the squadron subsequently inducted the state-of-the-art Dornier 228 aircraft on 24 August 1991, thus completing the transition from carrier-based ASW and reconnaissance role to shore-based maritime reconnaissance (MR) and multi role operations. Since inception, the squadron has participated in all the major and minor conflicts, commencing from Operation Vijay (the liberation of Goa) in 1961 and has operated extensively across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The unit holds the rare distinction of being the most decorated air squadron of

the Indian Navy, having been awarded the coveted Unit Citation from the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) on three occasions. To date, the Cobras have gathered towards their legacy a total of 26 gallantry awards: one Mahavir Chakra, seven Vir Chakras, 10 Nausena Medals, one Yudh Sena Medal, and seven Mentions-in-Despatches.

In keeping with the motto of 'First In, Last Out', the squadron has always been at the forefront of maritime operations on the western seaboard. The quest for perfection has seen it enhance its operational





capability continuously with every passing year. Today, INAS 310 possesses the skills to undertake any maritime and fleet operation a short-range MR aircraft can be tasked for. Even the unprecedented situation brought upon humanity in the form of COVID-19 failed to dent the op tempo of the squadron. While the newly borne virus affected pan-Navy operations at large, the Cobras, on the contrary, were able to achieve enhanced efficiency with optimum balance between operational, training and administrative endeavours. The squadron meticulously managed

aircraft and aircrew availability towards the planning and seamless execution of numerous missions to support op tasking by higher formations as well as fulfilling requests from the Goa government towards COVID-19 support.

Let's take a closer look at the journey of the Cobras.

1961 Operation Vijay

Plunged into the thick of action within weeks of their arrival, the Cobras deployed off the coast of Goa as part of Op Vijay in December 1961. They undertook round-the-clock patrol and reconnaissance missions investigating all contacts and supporting surface combatants.

1965 India-Pakistan War

The squadron also participated in the first major war of the country, being tasked with the fourfold task of defence of the Fleet, defence of Mumbai, defence of Kochi and the destruction of enemy surface combatants. It also undertook, for the first time ever, classified electronic support

measure (ESM) operations along the entire western border from Jamnagar to Pathankot, pinpointing the adversary's radar sites.

1971 India-Pakistan War

With INS Vikrant out of refit and available for active duty, the squadron embarked the carrier with four aircraft and, along with the White Tigers, mounted intensive strikes on East Pakistan, collectively destroying 100,776 tonne of enemy shipping and maritime traffic, harbour installations, runways, fuel dumps, anti-aircraft guns and troop concentrations. The squadron struck silently by night and flew over 158 hours in 10 days.

1988 Op Pawan and Op Cactus

Answering the clarion call, the Cobras mobilised for the East Coast to participate in Operation Pawan with the IPKF against the LTTE. The squadron was detached to Madurai and sank approximately 20 boats with 200 casualties. In the same year, it also participated in Operation Cactus against the perpetrators of an attempted



themselves as the backbone of the MR stream! Their participation in the extensive trials, testing and integration of new sensors, technologies and operational procedures into the Indian Navy have gone down in the annals of naval aviation history.

Rebasing to Porbandar

After having operated detachments in Gujarat at Naliya and Porbandar, the inescapable requirement of having a squadron permanently posted at NAE (Porbandar) in the light of heightened tensions with western neighbours

saw the squadron shifting to its temporary home on 29 September 2017. A new permanent detachment was set up at INS Hansa to fulfil coastal surveillance requirements and other charters from Dabolim. The squadron singlehandedly operated two full-fledged squadrons with limited crew and undertook a collative flying task of almost 3,500 hours.

New Coastal Security Dorniers

The new-generation Coastal Security Dorniers (CSDO) were inducted into the Indian Navy commencing January 2019. History was to repeat itself, with the Cobras yet again being entrusted with the responsibility to accept, prove and thereafter train ground crew and aircrew on

achieved 100 per cent system serviceability.

During this time, the squadron held eight aircraft of different fits—four CSDOs at Porbandar, two IW and one MRIWDO and a PARA DO—against a UE of four. To operate such a large number of aircraft variants

across different locations with panache was a true testament to the grit and perseverance of the Cobras.

2019, a hectic year

The year 2019 was particularly hectic for the

Cobras, with the squadron operating as both the Blue and Red force as part of TROPEX 19 and thereafter undertaking extensive surveillance of the North Eastern Arabian sea during the build-up after the Pulwama attack. The squadron kept a vigil on the entire western seaboard while closely monitoring and tracking the Pakistani Navy and extra-regional forces (ERF) off the Makran Coast while



Formation flying, December 1961



Onboard INS Vikrant, 1971

the new machines. The difference being, they were operating a new, unproven platform, with a host of new sensors in a hostile environment out of a forward operating base with minimal support! However, as they say, fortune favours the brave—the Cobras not only accepted and proved the systems but ensured a plethora of visits by OEM reps to the quaint Saurashtran town of Porbandar and



supporting numerous humanitarian operations, including Medevac sorties from both Goa and Porbandar and during flood relief operations in Kolhapur in 2019. After a successful tenure of two years and one month in Porbandar, having catalysed the operationalisation of the HQGD&D in Gujarat, the Cobras were rebased to their old home at INS Hansa, Goa, on 29 October 2019.

COVID-19

In March 2020, when the Coronavirus

brought the whole world to a standstill, the Cobras proved their mettle, supporting intra-Navy operational and logistics requirements while taking on requests from the Goa state government. As doctors, health workers, nurses and sanitation workers risked their lives to fight the pandemic, the Cobras showed their support by undertaking extensive flying operations throughout the period of the lockdown, transferring men, material and medical stores. While the people of the nation were confined to the safety of their

homes, the Cobras were flying across the country to meet operational and humanitarian commitments.

Speed levers high, power levers max

The unit with a glorious 60 years in its wake continues to live up to its reputation as one of the most operationally tasked air squadrons of the Indian Navy. The Cobras celebrate their Diamond Jubilee on 21 March 2021, looking into the future with wings (and hoods!) spread and propellers spinning ahead!



DIAMOND JUBILEE: INS HANSA

The formidable winged stallion - IL-38



OF SUPER CONNIES AND STALLIONS!

By Commander Rajinder Dutta (Retd)

The Navy's first long-range maritime reconnaissance (MR) squadron was commissioned with five ex-Indian Air Force Super Constellation aircraft on 8 November 1976 at INS Hansa. Commander RD Dhir was the commissioning squadron commander.

I was privileged to fly the resilient 'Super Connie' with my course mate Gopakumar from 1981 to 1983 at INS Hansa Goa. Resilient, I mention, because in its sunset days with the Navy in Goa, though the aircraft seemed to display fatigue with malfunction of hydraulics and misfiring of

spark plugs, it always brought its crew back safely, after having tested their emergency actions. The aircraft gave some harrowing times to the poor flight engineer (FE) stationed behind the co-pilot, keeping an eye on the 72 spark plugs of the four piston engines on a scope that resembled an ECG



monitor in an ICU. You could either see the FE busy feathering one of the four engines owing to a sparkplug shorting or pumping away the emergency hydraulic pump to get the undercarriage down after an inadvertent drop of pressure because of a small leak somewhere in the old pipelines. D P Ashtekar, R Jayaraman, M P Verma and I S Deen are some names that I recall who ensured a good rapport with the spluttering engines!

We were known as the mighty Albatrosses. Our crew room was a fun one with the crew engaged in scrabble and chess and never-ending cups of tea flowing in. Our ever-smiling Senior 'O', Late Lt Cdr Rajesh Sharma, was an instant wit, who heralded the era of stand-up comedy. He once stopped Lt Arya in the squadron corridor and asked him, "*Tu aa riya hai ke jariya hai?*" (Are you coming or going?) Our Senior FE Lt Jayaraman had a quick-fix solution for everything under the sun. Our Senior 'P' Lt Cdr Theograj (later Cmde) was generally

engrossed in a novel (it changed daily) in the briefing room. Lt Rakesh Saxena (later Cmde) with his baby face made the room buoyant with his mere entry. Our Sqn Cdr, Cdr Macaden (later Cmde), was a soft-



The Albatrosses

spoken officer who owned a vintage car—he was mostly seen under his car than inside it as it invariably broke down at the road approaching the wardroom area. Our request for pushing it was politely declined with a smile. He was a humble man leading

a rowdy pack. If ever there was life in the Navy, *Haminasto, Haminasto, Haminasto* (it was here, it was here, it was here). This was the same aircraft that was the pride of Air India in the 1950s before being handed over to the IAF. My salute to the original Albatross of naval aviation, the mighty Super Constellation.

I had the added privilege of serving in INS Hansa in a second tenure to fly the IL-38s (INAS-315, the Winged Stallions) from June 1990 to September 1993. When cable TV had just entered Indian households in the early 1990s, Wing Cdr A S Bedi decided to produce and direct a serial on the essence and ethos of the Indian Navy with his team in Goa. He had the full support of the organisation. Those were the pre 9/11 days and security wasn't as tight. *Samandar* was possibly the first commercial serial on our fine Navy. Many service officers and sailors were cast as actors, along with Samir Soni, who played the main lead of a young naval aviator, and a few other professional actors. Our



Captain (Air), Captain Sanjoy Gupta, had an impressive short role as the CO of the air station who had to convey the unfortunate demise of Lt Cdr Shyam to his mother, played by actor Vanita Malik. Most of the shooting was conducted at Naval Air Station Goa, where I had been appointed Base Lt Cdr (Flying). Along with my wife Meena and young son Aakash, I had gone to the Naval Canteen on a Sunday afternoon where the shoot was in progress. Wing Cdr Bedi was quite amused by Aakash and instantly cast him and Meena for a fire scene in which the hero rescues Aakash and hands him over to the mother!

The huge IL-38 was a hunter killer that carried over 200 sonobuoys to locate and destroy the enemy's silent prowler with 2

Plab bombs and an ATE1ME. The squadron had rendered yeoman service to the Navy with 25 years of accident-free flying. Alas, 1 October 2002 was its saddest day. It was celebrating its silver jubilee around noon with a large gathering of aviators at the tarmac. Two IL-38s flew past the crowd from west to east in a spectacular close formation at low level. A minute later, there was an emergency siren from the ATC. Both the aircraft collided mid-air over Zuari and crashed, taking along 12 Winged Stallions. The incident left a deep scar. After 18 years, the Stallions are back on their feet with two replacement aircraft from Russia.

The squadron has erected a war memorial, Prerna Sthal, and commemorates 1 October as Remembrance Day in honour of the 12 Stallions it lost. Today, the squadron excels on all fronts. As the inscription on the memorial tells us, "commissioned on 1 October 1977, the Winged Stallions owe their genesis to the tactical acumen and vision of Indian naval personnel, who realised the importance of having a long-range MR ASW aircraft flying in support of the Naval Task Force." After

the 'Sea Dragon' upgrade, the squadron is now capable of long-range strike with KH-35E ASM and is thus more potent, more lethal and a great force multiplier. As senior veteran Commodore R S Vasan, one of the commissioning aircrew and later its Sqn Cdr (now President NFCC), said, "The support for Prerna Sthal has ensured that successive generations are inspired by the hard work of those who lived for the squadron and kept the Navy's flag flying high. Naval aviation is in safe hands."

As INS Hansa celebrates its Diamond Jubilee, we veterans wish the premier air station of the Indian Navy many more glorious years ahead!



About the author

Commander Rajinder Dutta (Retd) has been a naval pilot and a qualified flying instructor with about 3,000 hours of flying on various fixed-wing aircraft of the Indian Navy, such as HT-2, HPT-32, Kirans, Islander, Super Connie, Fokker F-27 and IL-38. He is the Honorary Secretary of the Navy Foundation Mumbai Chapter, a master of ceremonies and an avid blogger.

60 YEARS OF THE CHETAK



I AM A LEGEND

By Commander B Madhu Kiran

Legend: the word is often used in modern English, albeit in overzealous attributions most of the time. I, however, have been made to believe I deserve the name. Being the diminutive figure I am, with a slight frame and a rather understated stance, I find it hard to accept such lofty exaltations. Therefore, I look back at the 50 years I spent in Indian colours and try to find reason to believe I

am worthy of the title I have been proffered. I promise to be as dispassionate as I can be, but then who knows, I may get carried away. Stay with me, after all I am a senior citizen by any yardstick and my mind does tend to wander.

The origins

I was French. In 1953, the French joined the rotorcraft race and broke several speed

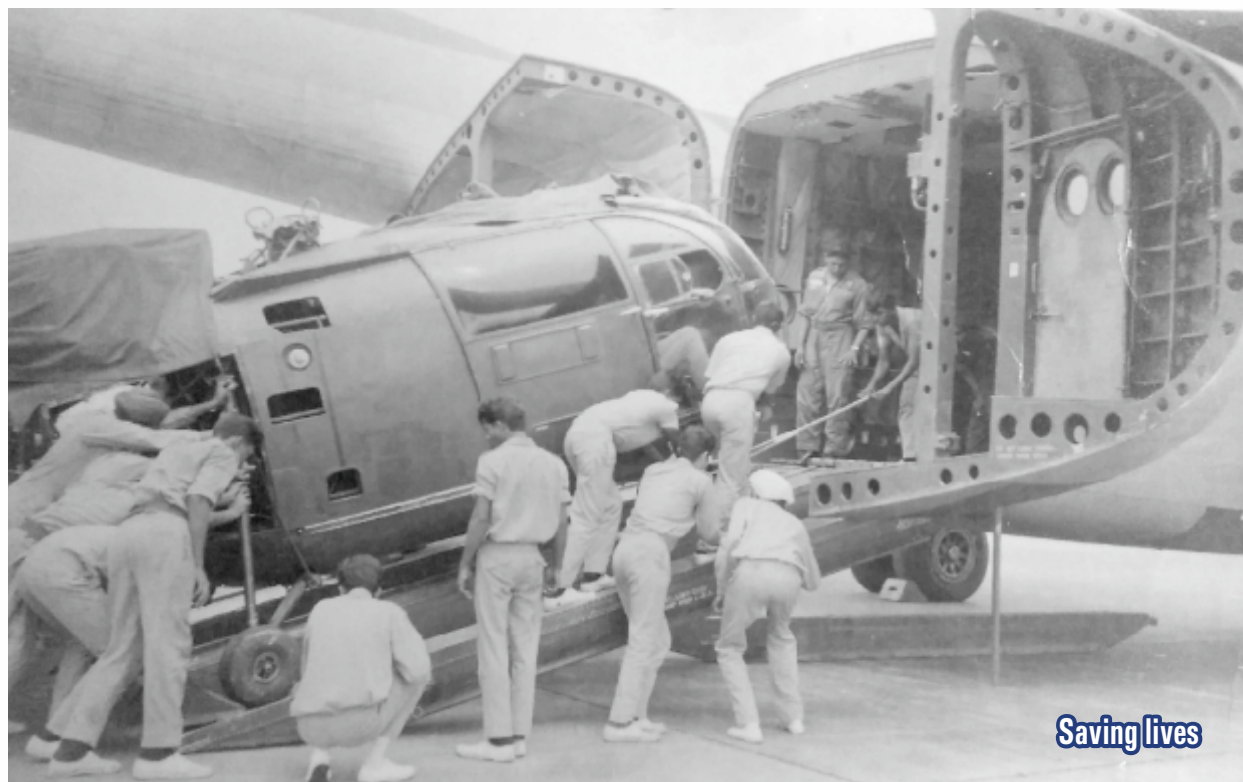
and height records with my eldest sister, the SE 3120 Alouette. But then she, no disrespect to French ladies, was deemed high maintenance (commercially nonviable) by the powers that be. The French government, however, with its typical reckless abandon, backed the project in coalition with Turbomeca, and my predecessor, the SE 3130 Alouette II, was born in April 1956. She was the first



production turbine helicopter in the world. But then, she too had her limitations and I was conceptualised. On 28 February 1959, Jean Boulet took to the skies with me for the first time and since then, I've seen many sunrises and sunsets across the skies of the world.

The Indianisation

I was born in France but my maker loved me so much that he wanted me to see the world. One such destination was India, fabled across history as a land of the good and virtuous. I was excited to come here. In 1969, when I started my life in INAS 321, the first Naval helicopter squadron in Goa, I was rechristened 'Chetak'. I didn't understand the name at first. But after a brief look at the etymology and the weight of history behind that name, I was humbled and knew I had very large expectations to fulfil. Lt Col James Tod in his account of the Battle of Haldighati referred to Maharana Pratap's horse as 'Chytuc' and the 'Blue Horse'. I guess the Navy Blue colour I adorn today, in a way, serves as a mark of respect to the King of Mewar. Little did I know, that



in Indian colours, I would live up to my illustrious predecessor and bring back several wounded men, women and children over the next 50 years.

Magnificent men and their missions

Life in the Indian Navy is like no other. Each day brings with it a set of new challenges and, with them, new opportunities. I have

seen young trainee pilots struggle to keep me airborne and I have seen masterful pilots push me to the limits. But what I remember the most is the soft corner each rotor craft pilot of the Indian Navy had for me. This love affair extended to the Fighter Boys of yore too; after all, I made them realise, 'To Fly is Human, To Hover is Divine'. I have seen my share of wars and conflicts,



On Goa Liberation Day

starting with 1971, continuing through the LTTE time and then the modern-day pirates trying to escape my gaze (wonder why they don't wear eyepatches anymore). I have seen weapons being fired and torpedoes being dropped from under my belly. I have seen a crutch being provided to me in the form of an auto pilot (somehow I didn't like it much). Through all these changes, my first love remained 'Search and Rescue'; after all, I am the Blue Horse. Bringing back wounded people through arduous conditions at sea and ashore made my Perspex swell with pride. The now famous

Antarctica are two such occasions that come to mind.

The future

It is not common for an aircraft to boast that she has had the good fortune of having seated every military rotor craft pilot of the country. Such is the legacy I carry. But then, I am not too nostalgic. Nostalgia is an emotion best suited to those who have run their race. I have a long way to go. INAS 561 churns out pilots by the bucket loads nowadays and each one of them has to woo

me to attain their golden wings. I am told that I would be flying at least until 2032—and who knows about later; I am here 50 years later, am I not? I am fuelled not by the ATFK-50 people think I consume. It is the blood, sweat, love and industry of the young boys who constantly care for me. Perhaps the first Indian naval woman helicopter pilot may also go with me one day. In aviation, they say, 'Sky above you and runway behind you is of no use to anybody'. Onward and Upwards it is, then, for me. Start searching for adjectives because, at my centenary, if I am still flying somewhere in the world, the word 'legend' wouldn't suffice—in my not-so-humble opinion.



About the author

Commander B Madhu Kiran is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy (104) and was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 1 July 2004. He is a Fully Ops Chetak QFI with about 2,900 hours of flying and is currently posted to 321 Shikra Flight as Staff QFI.

GOLDEN JUBILEE: INS VIRBAHU

A SPECIAL PLACE IN MY HEART

By Admiral Vijai Singh Shekhawat (Retd)





Jagjivan Ram, Hon'ble Raksha Mantri

for acquisition of submarines as a commander when he was Director Naval Plans and he was delighted that it had fructified 16 years later!

A sandy patch of land marked the spot where Virbahu now stands. Beyond, where the Naval Dockyard sprawls, were kilometres of muddy outcrops and tidal pools and, still further, more tidal flats stretching up to the hills, in which herds of buffalo wallowed and munched contentedly on the luxuriant vegetation. It was a scene of rural tranquillity that would rapidly disappear under the wheels of earthmoving equipment and building machinery. In a sense, it marked the beginning of the industrialisation of Vizag, which unfortunately proceeded without sufficient regard to the environmental characteristics of the area and alternate superior models of development.

A rickety, rail-cum-road bridge stretched across one of the channels, the only road access from INS Circars to the town. Many a submariner, returning to town where hired housing was provided, risked life and

INS Virbahu occupies a special place in the hearts of submariners—as it does in mine. My association goes back to the day Kalvari secured at Berth No. 6 on 6 July 1968 on arrival at Visakhapatnam after commissioning in the Soviet Union on 8 December 1967. After being welcomed by Chief of Naval Staff Admiral A K Chatterjee on a typically hot and sultry forenoon,

some of the Kalvari officers and sailors proceeded for the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the Virbahu building a short distance away.

Addressing the assembled invitees and the small number of submarine and other personnel, the CNS said with pardonable sarcasm that he had initiated the proposal



limb on his two-wheeler trying to outwit the oncoming goods train in getting across first. It was even more hazardous if it was after an evening function with an anxious spouse on the pillion seat, as on the dimly lit narrow roads one might run into buffaloes settled down for the night.

The road running uphill from Jagadamba cinema towards the rear of the Collectorate building was known to us as Buffalo Lane, at the end of which stood the two-storeyed corner house, Alhasingari building, which was allotted to me as CO Kalvari. It had a spacious open compound, since built over, and was shared at various times, with the Sayeds, Nairs and Dhingras on the ground floor. They came as newlyweds and Mamta, Madhu and Jani exchanged regional recipes and cooking tips with my wife.

Inevitably, the story of Virbahu is entwined with that of the submarines of the 8th Submarine Squadron, and their tales weave in and out of those of Virbahu, which continues to have intangible links with all submarine developments as it remains the resource base for the submarine arm.

I commanded two submarines based in Vizag but operated mostly on the west coast, and later commanded Virbahu and the 8th Submarine Squadron through their pioneering days of growth in the 1970s. I had the opportunity to serve under and learn from four Commanders-in-Chief (Cs-in-C): Rear Admiral K R Nair, Vice Admiral N Krishnan, Vice Admiral K L Kulkarni and Vice Admiral M R Schunker. FO

C-in-C (East) was designated the Submarine Operating Authority and oversaw all aspects of the growth and development of the submarine arm.

After Kalvari's commissioning in Riga, Latvia, when EXO, Lieutenant Commander Roy Millan took ill, it fell to me as Spare Crew EXO to prepare, store and sail our first submarine to India. We were escorted from





the still frozen Baltic Sea in April 1968, through the Atlantic Ocean and around the Cape of Good Hope by INS Talwar, commanded by Commander O S Dawson (later Admiral and CNS). I had commissioned Talwar in the UK as the 2nd gunnery officer in 1960, and was also navigator from Gibraltar onwards for the voyage home, so Kalvari's passage was a matter of double pride and satisfaction.

In the early 1970s, there was considerable movement of submarine personnel through Virbahu as new submarines were commissioned in the USSR and crews had to be provided from meagre resources. Skeleton manning of billets in Naval Headquarters (NHQ) was also required. Soon after arrival in Vizag, I handed over to Roy Millan. I was appointed to NHQ as Assistant Director Submarine Arm (ADSA), awaiting deputation as EXO designate Karanj. Commander M N Samant, CO designate, was DDSA, and my former CO in Talwar on commissioning, Commodore B K Dang, was DSA (Director Submarine Arm). He was a TAS (anti-submarine warfare) specialist who had sat in on a few classes in

HMS Dolphin, UK, with our first submarine batch in 1962.

My closer association with Virbahu started when we brought Karanj from the USSR in February 1970. A few weeks after arrival, I was appointed in command of Kalvari, under maintenance. Despite everyone's best efforts, we could not go to sea, and the refit in Hindustan Shipyard was endlessly prolonged for want of spares and expertise.

Following the Karanj-Ranjit collision in 1970 during exercises on the west coast, I was appointed in command of Karanj in December 1970. Her fin, periscopes and casing had been severely damaged and after effecting whatever essential repairs could be done by Naval Dockyard (Bombay), we made a surface passage to Vizag, where the remainder of work was completed, culminating in a successful deep dive lasting over six hours.

By this time the Base Repair Organisation (BRO) was functioning in Vizag and the Naval Dockyard had begun to take shape. Submarine sailors, transiting through

Virbahu between manning of new submarines, lent their limited expertise to the slowly accumulating skills in the shore facilities. At some stage, the Submarine Maintenance Unit (SMU) was set up.

Some old barracks between BRO (V) and Virbahu had been assigned to the newly arriving Petyas (Kamortas). They named these 'Panther Barracks' in an assertion of their fighting spirit. And indeed, they were fine little ships, well-armed for their small size with active rudders, a capability so far absent in Indian warships. They were also our source for seeking volunteers as the submarine arm was desperately short.

Virbahu was also nominated to oversee the command auditorium coming up. It was more or less ready and we could not influence any major features, except the sound system and the stage arrangements. The overhanging control cubicle on one side was our contribution as well.

A bear mascot, Girija (named after the tribal Girijans of Araku), came into Virbahu and the young cub soon endeared herself



to everyone. Johnson, LM(E) of Khanderi, had a forest ranger friend who had found the lost cub in the jungles of Araku, brought it home and was now at a loss to take care of it. He offered it to Johnson, whose commanding officer, Roy Millan, persuaded CO Virbahu, Captain K Subramanian, to adopt her as a mascot. A large cage made by the BRO was placed in a prominent location and Girija had her new home. She was let out for exercise and a romp mornings and evenings, with her sailor-keeper in hot pursuit. She wandered where she pleased and one day startled my

diminutive shy PA Radha by bursting into Karanj's small shore office. Roy Millan taught her his own bad habit of smoking, and blowing smoke rings! A little garden marks her memory.

For some time in 1969-70, submariners had an additional home in INS Amba, the submarine depot ship, and we utilised her facilities for accommodation, berthing, battery charging and other services until the shore arrangements came up. In the 1971 operations, she was reappropriated for fleet purposes and underwent several other transformations during her service life of nearly 38 years.

INS Nistar was inducted in 1971 as a submarine rescue vessel and, despite her limited capabilities, marked a step forward in the growth of submarine assets.

As CO Karanj, I prevailed upon the C-in-C to sanction a steam laundry for Virbahu as clothes required thorough cleaning in the submarine environment. Arun Auditto, Commander Virbahu, was not as enthused as implementation fell to him. Eventually,

we had an efficient steam laundry, possibly the first in the navy, though its financial viability remained precarious. Customers preferred a cheaper *dhobi* wash to a little costlier, clean one!

A notable cultural augmentation was a mural of an underwater scene painted by Anjolie Ela Menon, wife of Lieutenant Commander K R 'Raja' Menon. She was already a nationally known painter who later gained international recognition, particularly for her distinctive style of portraiture. For many years, this mural on the main lobby wall was a source of pride for Virbahu until, sadly, moisture from the wall damaged it and amateurish restoration attempts completely obliterated its original beauty.

Through all this evolution, submarine requirements were unobtrusively underpinned by Virbahu, always lending a hand with whatever expertise and manpower it could muster. Even before Kalvari arrived in India, the few officers and sailors trained in the UK and USSR had commenced training of new volunteers



with available documents, personal notes and improvisation. We also turned our minds to indigenisation of spares, starting with rubber components, as there was a nascent rubber industry in the city.

A major problem was locating and identifying spares, perhaps already available with the Naval Store Depot (NSD) and Weapon Equipment Depot (WED) and lying in huge unopened crates stacked high in the open. The documentation was all in Russian and English translations could be confusing. Lieutenant Commander (E) S K Singh took the lead in forming teams of technical sailors familiar with Russian who helped ease bottlenecks. SK's own Russian was atrocious but he compensated for it by possessing several large dictionaries. The

Petyas (Kamortas) did not fare so well; without dedicated base support and lacking continuity of crews, they were entirely dependent on what the depots could come up with.

Equally worrying was the shortage of submarine personnel, as news of the hard life had spread and surface sailors were reluctant to volunteer. There was also the fear of the unknown and the hazards attributed to the underwater domain. On the directions of C-in-C Vice Admiral N Krishnan, a team went to various establishments to drum up volunteers. Owing to shortages in ships, commanding officers were less than enthusiastic to encourage volunteers. As for officers, Chief of Personnel Vice Admiral Rusi Ghandi

suggested I invite target candidates to the bar, "fill them up with beer", and get them to sign on while befuddled, something like the old press gang approach!

During one such drive, two sailors showed up, looking uncertainly for the place to report. Spotting them, the LMA on lookout near the temporary Virbahu MI Room called out to the medical officer inside, saying, "Sir, *do aur murge aa gaye.*" The volunteers turned tail and ran!

By the middle of 1971, mounting Pakistan army atrocities in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and the flood of refugees into India made the possibility of conflict likely. But the condition of submarines, long overdue for routine refits and battery





replacements, was deteriorating by the day. Submarines had sailed the long way around the Cape of Good Hope and used up machinery hours in training and fleet exercises and their batteries were in varying states of degradation. Kalvari was non-operational, Khanderi had exhausted her battery life and Karanj was at 80 battery cycles, with high hydrogen evolution and severe air leaks because of improper treatment of the HP air bottles by HSL, which was unfamiliar with very high-pressure air systems. Only Kursura, the latest, was in reasonable shape.

Karanj and Kursura spent most of 1971 on the west coast exercising with the Fleet and training for the impending war with Pakistan, in which Karanj played a significant role on the Makran coast. Khanderi, despite her poor state, also marked her presence in the Bay of Bengal.

By the time Karanj returned to Vizag in early 1972 after the war with Pakistan, Virbahu had matured to provide meaningful support to the 8th Submarine Squadron. Expertise had built up and BRO

(V) and the fledgling dockyard were able to take on more repair functions. However, the spares position remained grim owing to tardy replenishment from the Soviet Union and initial incomprehension of each other's logistics systems.

In a practice adapted from the UK, CO Virbahu moved sailors as required and proposed appointments of officers to NHQ, which more or less endorsed them without question. This continued until about the mid-1970s, when the Personnel Branch, chafing from the beginning at this perceived usurpation of authority, appointed newly available submarine officers to the 'P' Branch as well as to the Engineering and Electrical Directorates, reduced the scope of Virbahu/DSA's personnel functions and fitted submarine personnel assignment into the overall scheme of the Navy. This was inevitable as the submarine arm expanded.

I came as CO Virbahu in August 1978 after a course at the US Naval War College in a somewhat dramatic manner. We arrived at a deserted Waltair Junction by train at

about one in the morning, to be met by an armed naval escort. I was handed a letter from Headquarters Eastern Naval Command (HQENC) on the platform, appointing me president of a Board of Enquiry, and was informed that there was curfew in force as there had been a serious altercation between sailors and HSL workers; shots had been fired and there had been casualties.

CO Virbahu then had an earmarked, single-storey, semi-detached bungalow with a common wall with the residence of CO INHS Kalyani in Naval Park. We settled in as best we could and, in the morning, I assumed my duties as CO Virbahu. The Board of Enquiry took a good part of my day for nearly nine months.

INS Satavahana was commissioned as a type-training school for the Petya (Kamorta) class corvettes in December 1974. It became a strong competitor to Virbahu for the command championships. In the course of time, the Submarine Escape Training Tower came up there and eventually Satavahana became the school



for training for all types of submarines. Surface ship training was transferred to the various schools under the newly created Training Command in Kochi.

My year or so as CO Virbahu passed quickly, with the days slipping by in the busy schedule of submarine sailings, commanding officer qualifying courses (COQCs), crew shortage management, and maintenance and spares problems. However, I continued to have a close association with Virbahu in my several assignments at NHQ, including as DSSD in 1984-85 and FOC-in-C(E) in 1991-92.

After my retirement, I made subsequent visits to Vizag for submarine-related events, especially the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Submarine Arm in December 2017. Fifty years is a long time by any reckoning. Virbahu has performed magnificently from inception to fulfil its envisaged role as a submarine base and earn a place of affection in the hearts and minds of the submarine fraternity. But it was handicapped from the beginning in the space allocated to it and lacks playing fields, a modern swimming pool and other facilities that should be easily accessible to submarine crews.

Perhaps it is time for a comprehensive re-conceptualisation of Virbahu—the scope of its functions, its geography, its sanctioned establishment and the means at its disposal to fulfil its responsibilities. There are entities on its periphery that could be relocated to provide more space to Virbahu without disadvantaging their functioning.



About the author

Admiral Vijai Singh Shekhawat is a former Chief of Naval Staff and Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), and served on the National Security Advisory Board for two tenures in 2001-03. He joined the National Defence Academy, Dehradun, in January 1952 and was commissioned in July 1956. He was a member of the 1961 Indian expedition to Annapurna III (24,858 ft), Nepal, and is a member of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. His early service was in frigates and cruisers. He qualified in submarines in the UK (1963-64) and the USSR (1966-67) and commanded two submarines, the 8th Submarine Squadron and an ASW frigate in the 1970-80s, and the Western Fleet in 1986-87. An alumnus of the US Naval War College (1977-78), he served as Deputy Commandant of the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, from 1979-81. His senior staff appointments included ACNS - Operations (1984-85), DSSD (1985-86) and DG, Defence Planning Staff (1988-90). He was FOC-in-C East (1991-92), Vice Chief of Naval Staff (1992-93), Chief of Naval Staff (1993-96) and Chairman COSC from 1 January 1996 until his retirement on 30 September 1996.



GOLDEN JUBILEE – INAS 561

THE ALMA MATER OF HELICOPTER PILOTS

By Captain Krishanu De



The date of 15 September 2021 commemorates 50 years of INAS 561, the alma mater of all rotary wing pilots of the Indian Navy—five decades of glorious service to the Navy and the nation in producing some of the finest helicopter pilots, and certainly a landmark event.

As in July 2020, a total of 741 pilots have successfully passed through the portals of the illustrious school, including the Indian Coast Guard and friendly foreign nations. This is where trainee pilots ‘learn the ropes’ and take their baby steps into naval aviation. There is no greater satisfaction for the commanding officer and staff when, during every POP, conducted twice a year, the Chief Guest pins the coveted ‘Wings of Gold’ onto the chests of the graduating pilots.

On 21 October 2020, as I relinquished command of INAS 561 as her 30th Commanding Officer, I was overwhelmed by a sense of deep emotion as I realised what a wonderful journey it had been over the past year. I could manage to graduate

17 pilots in two courses on time with 11 more being currently moulded into confident naval aviators. As I turned over a few leaves of the squadron record books, the glorious history of the squadron revealed itself page after page and I sent up a mental ‘thank you’ to all my predecessors for having carefully preserved the archives so that generations ahead can gain from the immense experience shared in these volumes. Enumerated, thus, are some excerpts from where it all began and where it is today.

The birth of INAS 561

May 1961 saw a lot of pomp and fanfare as INS Vikrant arrived in India with its compliment of the indomitable Sea Hawks. Embarked alongside were the Alouettes providing search and rescue (SAR). Since then and until 1971, the Aviation Arm of the Navy was mainly restricted to carrier-borne aircraft. Helicopter pilots were being trained on the Hughes 300 helicopter at Cambatta Aviation Ltd followed by the Alouette, or Chetak as they came to be known, based at INS Garuda, Kochi. The Navy also had on loan some MI-4



helicopters from the Indian Air Force (IAF). A need was soon felt to set up the Navy’s own Helicopter Training School (HTS) and the idea was mooted up the corridors of power. Thus was born INAS 561 at INS Garuda on 15 September 1971 with Lieutenant Commander S R Debgupta as the first Squadron Commander.

The MI-4s were soon returned to the IAF after HTS was commissioned and training was thereafter carried out on the Hughes 300 during the basic stage and on the Chetak during the advanced stage. The first conversion course comprised three pilots—Sub Lt Gyanendra Sharma, Sub Lt RHL Maini and Sub Lt US Ghura—who



successfully graduated in 1972, a milestone for the Navy indeed.

To inculcate a spirit of competitiveness among the trainee pilots, in 1971, Governor of Kerala V Visvanathan instituted a rolling trophy to be awarded to the Best All Round Pilot. Later, in 1987, Vice Admiral M K Roy instituted the FOC-in-C East Rolling Trophy for the pupil pilot standing first in the overall order of merit in flying. In 1991, the father of Sub Lt R V Kunte, who expired in a crash at the Air Force Academy, donated a grant to the Navy for a book prize to be awarded during ab-initio conversion for the pupil pilot standing first in ground subjects. These prizes are awarded to this day at HTS.

As the 1970s turned to the '80s, the course strength started increasing from three in the first batch to about six to seven. The strength of aircraft also increased from two in 1971 (one Alouette and one MATCH) to about three. The Hughes 300 helicopter was eventually phased out and training was being undertaken solely on the Chetak. Helicopter conversion was also offered to



the Coast Guard and, in 1984, A/C Sridhar became the first Coast Guard pilot to graduate from the portals of HTS. The Navy introduced the 'Best Training Squadron' trophy in the year 1989. INAS 561 was the first recipient of this trophy and also created history by subsequently retaining it for four consecutive years, from 1994 to 1997.

The Squadron operated from INS Garuda from 1971 to 1991; on her 20th anniversary came the impending news of her relocation to INS Rajali the following year. On 15 June 1992, after completing the ongoing course (37 HCC) 'on time', HTS was relocated to INS Rajali and has been operating there ever since.

A new chapter at INS Rajali

Operating from a new base with a new set of instructors and a new batch of trainees was a challenge in itself. Commander J A Royappan, at the helm during the period, spared no effort in setting up the required infrastructure while ensuring that the pace of training did not suffer. As the 1990s drew to a close, the course strength steadily increased to about 15-20 pilots a year. In 1998-99, the Squadron was adjudged runner up to the Best Naval Air Squadron, which was another feather in its cap. In 2000, HTS again created history by becoming the first training squadron to undertake training of foreign naval pilots. Commodore L S B Cabral and Commander B R E Mendis were the first two Sri Lankan pilots to have been trained at the school and later onboard INS Savitri for their deck qualification, qualifying them as day operational pilots. Many years later, in 2017, as part of 89 HCC, one pilot from the Bangladesh Navy also graduated from the portals of this illustrious school.

INAS 561 was also the first training squadron to train lady helicopter pilots as



early as 2010, though they came from the Coast Guard. A/C Bhawana Rana and A/C Ruchi Sangwan were the first lady helicopter pilots to successfully graduate as part of 75 HCC. They were soon followed by late A/C Penny Chaudhary, who graduated from HTS as part of 83 HCC but later unfortunately expired in a fatal crash on 10 March 2018 in Mumbai.

Apart from ab-initio pilot training, the Squadron also undertakes pre-QFI courses for pilots selected to undergo instructor courses as well as refamiliarization flying of Chetak pilots. In addition, consolidation

and grooming of Cat C QFIs towards Cat B grading are also undertaken as well as on job training of technical officers and sailors of the entire Chetak stream.

Each six-month conversion course comprises flying and ground training with approximately 65 hours flown by each pilot. Various phases such as the pre-solo, advance handling, instrument flying, navigation, SAR, night flying, formation flying, rough and restricted area operations, cargo operations, high-altitude flying and armament sorties are taught to the trainees. Ground subjects include

helodynamics, aero engines, avionics, instruments, aviation medicine, ATC and Met, crew/cockpit resource management (CRM) and naval orientation. Additionally, the trainees also undergo jungle and sea survival camps as well as an industrial visit to Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) in Bengaluru to give them varied exposure.

Life at HTS revolves around a trainee, who is the centre of gravity, whether a pilot or an OJT sailor. What best can be done to provide the trainee a healthy and competitive training environment remains the core focus of all officers and men. A



Flying thoughts!



Earning the wings of gold



typical day at the Squadron starts with an exhaustive morning briefing loaded with theory and questions the trainees are quizzed on. This is followed by a gruelling emergency session where the trainee is made to perform simulated touch drills and call-out actions in case of an emergency with points of engine handling, airmanship and CRM.

Meanwhile, the aircraft are prepared by the ever committed and motivated technical

team, as the aircrew finish pre-flight briefing for the sortie and pre-flight meals. The sorties then get airborne one after another, which is followed by a lengthy debrief session by the instructor. Afternoons are spent with ground classes or gen tests; the day comes to a close by planning the next day's effort.

As I left the Squadron after the change of command, I felt immensely blessed and proud to have been given the opportunity

to command my alma mater. As 95 HCC stands at the threshold of passing out, I salute the undying spirit and determination of all officers and men in their commitment to provide the finest helicopter pilots and trained technical sailors to the Indian Navy, 'on time – everytime'.



About the author

Captain Krishanu De was awarded his wings on 13 December 2002 from INAS 561 as part of 59 HCC. The officer is a fully operational Seaking pilot with over 3,500 hours of flying experience. An alumnus of the Defence Services Staff College, the officer has held various command and staff appointments, which include Fleet Aviation Officer of the Western Fleet, Executive Officer INS Mumbai and Commanding Officer INS Kirpan. Upon relinquishing command of INAS 561 at INS Rajali, he is currently commanding INAS 336, the Seaking training squadron at INS Garuda.



A large white diving support vessel (DSV) is shown at sea, lifting a large, dark, rectangular object, likely a submarine wreckage, from the water using a crane. The ship has various equipment, including a large crane and a red lifeboat. The background is a clear blue sky and sea.

SILVER JUBILEE: INS NIREEKSHAK

DAREDEVILS OF THE DEEP

By Lieutenant Mayank Anubhav Joshi

*From murky waters to the deepest blue
To my god and service I promise this true
Whenever I hear the Dolphin's distress call
I will be there to rescue them all*

*Whatever the sea, whatever the depth
Even if I have to stare down the eyes of death
My own life I would gladly give
So that who man the Dolphin may live*

INS Nireekshak is the only diving support vessel (DSV) of the Indian Navy. The Daredevils are an exceptional breed. They are different from the rest of the force because they not only rule the limitless blue but also own the unmeasured fathoms below it. Nireekshak is also a submarine rescue vessel and is

also capable of carrying out saturation dives. She was designed and constructed at Mazgaon Dock Ltd, Mumbai, as a dive support vessel. But when the Navy was looking for a replacement for the old workhorse and submarine rescue vessel (SRV) INS Nistar, this ship more than fitted the bill. DSV Nireekshak was therefore

charter-hired for an initial period of three years on 19 May 1989.

The ship was formally accepted into the Navy by Vice Admiral S Jain on 8 June 1989 and set sail on its maiden voyage under the blue Ensign and a total naval crew the very day from basin to Naval Dockyard.



Commander M M Phillipose was the commanding officer of the crew consisting of 10 officers and 90 sailors. V Singh MCPOI CDI was the senior-most sailor onboard and Dominic EMP II the junior-most. The bright orange ship surely caught every man's attention as she entered Naval Dockyard the very first day. With the induction of Nireekshak, the Diving Branch gained a flagship with the ability to carry out deep/saturation dives at sea, something hitherto restricted to simulated dives in compression chambers ashore. The hardware was now available to carry out deep dives for as long as required and thus began a new era in the glorious history of Indian naval diving.

The ship was given a makeover with the entire paint scheme being changed to the standard naval dark grey. After being in harbour for three months, the ship sailed for Visakhapatnam to replace the good old lad INS Nistar on 6 September 1989; she entered Vizag on 21 September and was received by Rear Admiral PS Das, Chief of Staff, ENC. DSV Nireekshak was rechristened INS Nireekshak on 15

September 1995. She was commissioned into the Indian Navy by Commander George Paul who commanded the ship from 10 May 1994 to 25 June 1996. Over a period of 25 years, the ship has seen many commissions and set new records and benchmarks with each passing year.



Unique with the capabilities and equipment it possesses onboard, the ship has carried out some jaw-dropping feats over the years and also has the unique distinction of serving under all three commands.

The ship has proven its capability as a potent submarine rescue platform by conducting dry mating with all known

submarines in the inventory of the Indian Navy. The ship has proved itself time and again and broken barriers and records to instill confidence among submariners for years to come. So far, Nireekshak has undertaken wet mating on numerous occasions as well as set a record for carrying out personnel transfer with a bottomed submarine at a depth of 96 m. Wreck diving is considered one of the most dangerous professions in the world, wherein no one knows what could possibly happen when you disturb huge wreckages in deep dark waters. However, against all odds, the ship has always proved its mettle and brought up the unsinkable to surface from hundreds of fathoms below the water. The ship has undertaken numerous salvage operations since the day of its commission. The 'aquanauts' performed their first salvage operation when, on 19 December 2001, the ship was caught by surprise and ordered to sail for Goa to conduct a search and salvage operation for KV587. Since then, the ship has been tasked for numerous salvage operations, including the salvage of Seaking 525, Sea Harrier, Searcher and MiG. The ship also carried out



The ship completed its Silver Jubilee at sea while returning from its longest overseas deployment to Mauritius. Over a month, the ship provided assistance to the Government of Mauritius and brought immense pride, glory and recognition to the Indian Navy. Indeed, she has lived up to all expectations in the past 25 years and will certainly continue to do so in years to come. The aquanauts have always lived up to their ideals of *Naam, Namak aur Nishan*.

*In the deepest of the ocean we thrive
Where everyone falls we rise
We dive, we rescue and promises we keep
We are the aquanauts,
The Daredevils of the Deep.*



About the author

Lieutenant Mayank Anubhav Joshi is an alumnus of the Bravo squadron, 131st course of the National Defence Academy. He completed his Sub-Lieutenant afloat phase onboard INS Khanjar and subsequently completed his watchkeeping onboard INS Magar. He is currently posted onboard INS Nireekshak as Signal Communication Officer.

a salvage and damage assessment on sunken ship ex-Prahar.

Former USS Diablo PNS Ghazi was commissioned in August 1944 and subsequently leased to Pakistan in June 1964. The submarine participated in the 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan wars. In 1971, Ghazi was tasked to destroy INS Vikrant. However, she sank off Vizag harbour on midnight 3/4 December 1971. It was the aquanauts who recovered the propellers of the sunken submarine on two

different occasions and brought on the surface the symbol of the triumph of the Indian Navy.

Nireekshak is the only ship in the Indian Navy to conduct saturation dives. The crew has carried out dives on numerous occasions, setting records for the deepest saturation dive up to a depth of 270 m and the deepest wet saturation dive up to a depth of 257 m. The ship is always ready to do the impossible and there will be no surprises when the 300-m mark is achieved.



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A VERSATILE SHIP WITH AN EVEN MORE VERSATILE CREW

By Vice Admiral S N Ghormade

On the occasion of the completion of 25 years of commission of INS Nireekshak, it is appropriate to pay due regard to the indomitable spirit of the versatile crew of this versatile ship.

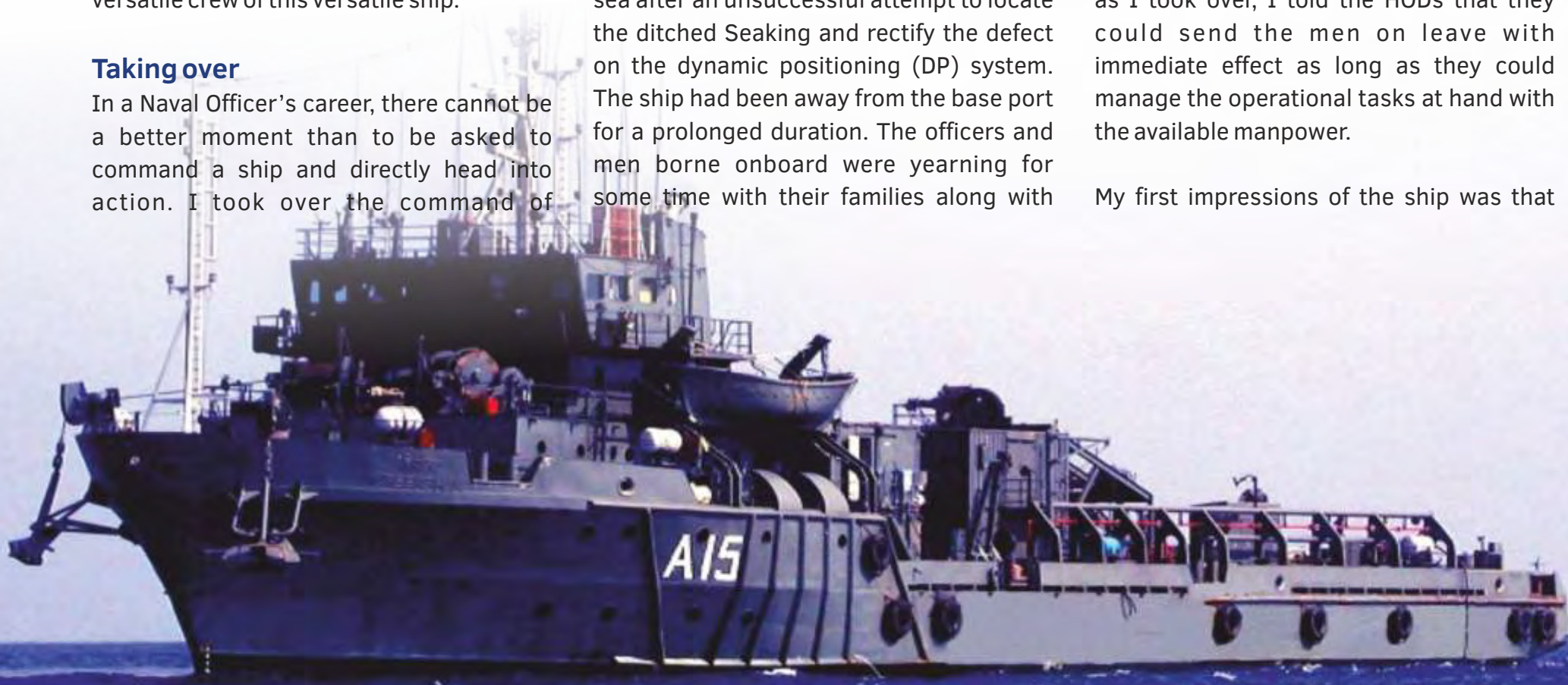
Taking over

In a Naval Officer's career, there cannot be a better moment than to be asked to command a ship and directly head into action. I took over the command of

Nireekshak on 2 April 2003 from my earlier assignment as second in command of INS Ganga at a very short notice. There were no divisions, as the ship had just returned from sea after an unsuccessful attempt to locate the ditched Seaking and rectify the defect on the dynamic positioning (DP) system. The ship had been away from the base port for a prolonged duration. The officers and men borne onboard were yearning for some time with their families along with

some leave. The ship had five OPDEFs and there were sufficient reasons for the ship to stay in harbour. Leave was a major concern for the officers and men onboard. As soon as I took over, I told the HODs that they could send the men on leave with immediate effect as long as they could manage the operational tasks at hand with the available manpower.

My first impressions of the ship was that





Nireekshak is truly a versatile ship with lots of specialised one-of-a-type equipment and the crew, mostly saturation divers, are a breed apart. Sincere, simple, honest, fit daredevils, they are also technically savvy to handle the equipment. Saturation diving is one of the most advanced forms of diving. Considerable emotional balance and professional competence are required to operate the complex diving systems on board. Owing to a tough and often perilous working environment, the team onboard bonds closely across all ranks and is highly motivated, enthusiastic and dedicated.

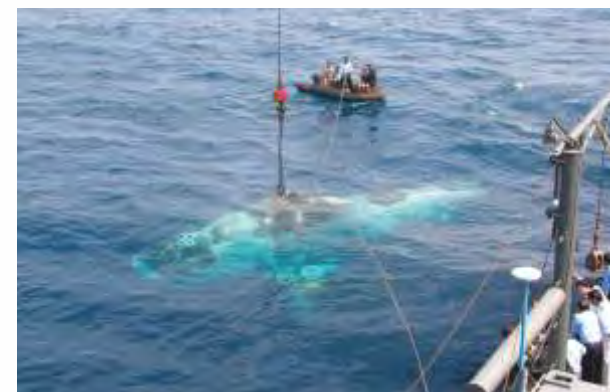
Operation Starfish

The first task for the ship was to locate the ditched Seaking. We sailed at 0815 hrs on 4 April 2003 with the minimum essential crew, four OPDEFs and the partially available DP system. The Electrical Department headed by Lieutenant Commander Xavier (now Commodore) brought the second computer on line at sea with their concerted efforts. This was a major achievement as the OEM had sought a time period of a week and a sum of Rs 10 lakh for the same. This meant we could

undertake the saturation diving; however, the DP system had to be tried out.

On reaching the area on 5 April 2003, the ship obtained inputs from the Senior Officer Search – Nirdeshak, commanded by Captain S K Jha (who retired as Vice Admiral - Chief Hydrographer), and soon stabilised on the DP. This was the first hurdle overcome. The depth in the area ranged from 70 m to 80 m. A detailed search plan was made. Every day's activity was planned and discussed threadbare with all stakeholders and participants. Even the junior-most sailor of the team participated in the planning and discussion. The search at that depth was painstakingly slow and had to be manual. Each time, the diver could only cover a circular area of about 20 m radius from the diving bell. To improve both bottom time and safety, saturation divers live and work from sealed pressurised chambers. Communication with the diver is mainly one way as the voice of the diver has a duckling effect because of the presence of helium in the breathing mixture.

By 1530 hrs on 6 April 2003, even after over 18 hours of diving operations and 5,200 sq m of area searched, there was no sight of the main fuselage. I had a quick look at the search area and decided to move upstream of the tail pylon, away from the indicated positions. The underwater camera, which had gone defective by then, was repaired onboard by the SS and lowered again.



At 1615 hrs on 6 April 2003, the main fuselage was found upstream at a distance of 110 m from the tail pylon. The diver was euphoric and as we sighted the fuselage on the TV screen, our joy knew no bounds—it was found after a sustained diving effort of about 19 hours! The ship was immediately positioned on top of the main fuselage on



DP. Based on the assessment, diving operations commenced the next morning at 0730 hrs. Underwater visibility was extremely low and due to the strong underwater currents, managing our own position as well as the position of cables running from the surface was indeed challenging for the divers: Lieutenant A H Naqvi (now Commander), K R Biju PO CD I and Himmat Singh LS CD I. To add to the trauma, there were a large number of sea snakes in the area.

The aircraft, lying on its port side, was to be connected and lifted from 70 m without any damage. With the surface salvage team headed by the innovative K S Rawat MCPO CDI (MC diver), an on-the-spot assessment was carried out and an improvised sling arrangement was evolved. The arms of the sling were disconnected and connected to the Submarine Rescue Bell (SRB) lifting strops, available onboard. This improvised sling with reduced weight was easy for the diver to handle at that depth. Initially, two strops attached together were lowered to the diver, followed by one strop. This operation was conducted very diligently and in a seamanlike manner.



The next task was to connect the rescue bell strops to the crane hook. This required placing the crane hook with a ponder ball, which weighs about 250 kg, close to the strops, thus assisting the single diver to connect up. Hence, it had to be lowered down in water exactly on top of the main rotor head of the helicopter. For this to happen, the ship manoeuvred in DP precisely in tandem with the crane operator while obtaining inputs from the diver in water. The diver connected the lifting sling to the crane hook and thereafter seized the complete assembly with additional ropes to prevent accidental slippage during hoisting. This had to be done very patiently and deliberately. The coordinated action culminated in the lifting of the main fuselage from the seabed safely without any damage.

A great team effort, application of seamanship, hands-on experience on the DP system by the bridge team with Lieutenant Baljeet Singh (who retired as Captain), the Navigating Officer, and the professional competence of the Diving Officer, Lieutenant Commander C P Sudhakar (now Commodore) and excellent command and control were key to the success.

It was an extremely challenging evolution to lower the main fuselage on the restricted space at the quarterdeck. The main fuselage did swing owing to the swell and prevailing wind conditions. The entire ship's company was involved in this evolution. On placing the Seaking onboard at sea, it appeared as if the aircraft had landed onboard.





The entire salvage operation was completed in 8 hours and 50 minutes on 7 April 2003. The ship had successfully achieved a full-fledged salvage operation of the Indian Navy, recovering up to 99 per cent of the aircraft from a depth of 70 m. This was a major achievement for the Navy as our salvage capability was proved beyond doubt. K R Biju PO CD I and Himmat Singh LS CD I were awarded NM Gallantry for undertaking the sustained diving operations under trying conditions. Two officers and seven sailors were awarded CNS and CinC commendations respectively.

Operation Sahayata

The ship continued with her feats thereafter. Before induction, she was retrofitted with the CK 59 Submarine Rescue System with an SRB ex INS Nistar, which was about 35 years old in 2003. With detailed planning, rehearsals and exercises in harbour, the first ever mating with a bottomed Sindhughosh class submarine, Sindhuvijay, at a depth of 50 m at sea was achieved on 3 May 2003.



Operation Lakshya

The ship staff continued its efforts to upgrade equipment and skills to undertake live transfer of personnel at sea. The first ever personnel transfer from a bottomed submarine under pressurised conditions at a depth of 50 m was successfully achieved by the ship on 18 March 2004. This bottomed submarine, Sindhuraj, was then commanded by Commander Sanjay Roye (now Rear Admiral). This was immediately followed the next day, 19 March 2004, by the transfer of two personnel from another bottomed submarine, Sindhushastra, at a depth of 57 m; then commanded by Commander P Ashokan (who retired as Rear Admiral). This proved the submarine rescue capability of the ship beyond doubt.

The SRB operation was headed by Lieutenant Commander Pankaj Kumar (now Captain); the Diving Officer was Lieutenant Commander Sanjay Chambyal (now Captain).

Salvage Operations - Agray

The ship was also actively involved on 4 February 2004 in ensuring that the salvage of Agray was achieved—divers from Nireekshak ensured that the forward part of the ship was salvaged by rigging up adequate dewatering arrangement at sea.

Unit Citation and other milestones

For the first time since commissioning, the ship was awarded the Unit Citation in 2003 for a high degree of professionalism, innovativeness and zeal under trying conditions. Whether it was providing assistance to the National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai, for location of the Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion mooring system off Tuticorin in the Gulf of Mannar, diving support for conduct of numerous dives of Diving School, deep diving trials of submarines, diving assistance to underwater ranges, wet



mating trials with submarines on both coasts, duck drop operations, conduct of Chariot camps at sea or various search-and-recovery operations, Nireekshak with her versatile crew was omnipresent and accomplished operational tasks with élan and finesse. The ship also undertook a very successful refit coordinated by the ND (Mb) and the ship's staff for the first time, which enhanced her capabilities. All earlier refits were fully offloaded. In addition, the ship won the Intra Command Diving Competition and contributed to the

Western Naval Command (WNC) team in winning the Inter Command Competition. She also coordinated the WNC team, which won the CinC Wheel Officers Basketball Championship, defeating the Fleet and Dockyard teams.

Spirit of the ship

As is evident, the ship has continued her accomplishments over the 25 years of her service and contributed immensely towards the Indian Navy's capabilities. I am sure the ship will continue to serve the

Indian Navy extremely well in the years to come. Nireekshak has always upheld an outstanding reputation. This recognition has been feasible through the dedication and spirit of her crew members. I am sure this spirit will live on for the life of this great ship. Indeed, the Command of INS Nireekshak was undoubtedly one of my finest sea commands.



About the author

Vice Admiral S N Ghormade, AVSM, NM, a navigation and direction specialist, was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 1 January 1984. He is a graduate of the National Defence Academy (NDA), Khadakwasla; Naval Staff College at the US Naval War College, Newport; and the Naval War College, Mumbai. During his career spanning over 36 years, he has been through myriad operational and staff appointments. His important operational appointments include the commands of guided missile frigate INS Brahmaputra, submarine rescue vessel INS Nireekshak, and minesweeper INS Alleppey, and second in command of guided missile frigate INS Ganga. As Flag Officer, he has held the appointments of Assistant Chief of Personnel (Human Resources Development), Flag Officer Commanding Karnataka Naval Area, Flag Officer Commanding Maharashtra Naval Area, Director General Naval Operations and Chief of Staff Eastern Naval Command, prior to assuming his present appointment of Controller Personnel Services. He was awarded the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal on 26 January 2017 and Nausena Medal in 2007 by the President of India, and commendation by the Chief of the Naval Staff in 2000. He enjoys reading, trekking, horse riding and water sports.

REMINISCENCES OF RAJPUT

By Rear Admiral M D Suresh

Disclaimer: Dates (and even years) could be 'slightly' in error, personalities are perfectly placed and events are as seen through my eyes. Don't reach for a baton; enjoy the spirit of Rajput while sipping the one at your elbow.

A worm's eye view

In January 1984, my course (63 NDA, 25 ICC) reported onboard the venerable, impressive cruiser Mysore, which was functioning as the Cadet Training Ship. The

ageing but proud Mysore was commanded by Captain Peter Debrass, the epitome of a 'correct' navy captain. But this story is about Rajput.

Mysore, permanently berthed on SBW 3-4 awaiting her decommissioning orders, was irrelevant to all except us cadets. Her fine lines with missing radar antennae, rusting machinery spaces, wooden quarterdeck (which we holystoned every morning and night for no apparent reason other than the

amusement of the sadistic Div Os, so we thought!) and 6-inch guns that had last belched fire in anger years ago were all history now. Bang opposite on Berths 6-7 were the spanking new, huge (as they appeared to us) destroyers, bristling with antennae and weapons, very sleek but ominous looking lines and glistening hulls lovingly tended to by proud crews.

The decks and ship-sides were inspected every morning and evening by two very





strict commanders (or captains; I remember only lots of golden stripes!) in crisp Dress No. 8s, permanently wearing haughty expressions, one of the two with a clean shaven head competing with his clean shaven jaw, a telescope tucked under the left armpit, bellowing orders to the sailors to clean out a speck of dust we couldn't see or touch up a spot of paintwork we saw as perfectly fine. They were Commander 'Sattie' Khanna and Commander M R Khan. We cadets were captivated by their demeanour and deep involvement. They were role model EXOs as far as we were concerned. We were told by

SLt Chiller, watchkeeping onboard Mysore, to not even 'look at the ships' while walking/running on the jetty as they were 'top secret'. No one but crew was permitted onboard. Awed, we followed his orders. When they started their engines twice a week, the whine was heavenly but the smoke was unbelievably acrid. They were Rajput and Rana of the 'awesome threesome'—with Ranjit joining them during our Mids time with the Fleet—that we saw on the SBW.

My course was the last to do sea cadet time on the venerable Mysore and the first to be 'Midshipmen of the Fleet'. Hence, the anticipation inevitably shifted to the next phase of our training. When the list was revealed, a few of us were selected to be on the mighty Rajput and Rana. We now looked at these course-mates with mixed emotions of envy and sympathy — lambs to the slaughter! During our Mids Board in May 1984 at the erstwhile NAVAC in Kochi

Naval Base, they had tales to tell and one among them, P K Jha, also walked away with the Sword of Honour...well worth the pain of being 'hot Mids on hot ships'.

Up close and personal

During my Long Course in 1989-90, the aspiration to navigate ships as N1 was the sole criterion that caused a lot of us to work hard as the DOP tradition so far was for the top five to be appointed as independent navigators of select Fleet ships and the last five to be N2s on the Rajput class of ships, while the remaining middle lot became direction officers on the Carrier or navigated senior ships of squadrons like minesweepers, missile boats and the dreaded (my emotions!) Petya class. The Rajput class's reputation of tough captains, cutthroat competition among specialists and high expectations from the Fleet added to their aura. Most stories about Rajput class wardrooms, unfortunately, were not flattering and, hence, there was increasing desire to avoid figuring among the last five in the course. But, despite finishing third in the Long Course, I found myself appointed as NO of



Nireekshak, a blue-ensign vessel on lease from MDL and, to top it all, in Vizag, not the favourite place for bachelors. However, DOP almost always gets it right and I enjoyed the stint, with deep sea divers and their glamorous friends visiting the ship. I had a wonderful time, experiencing a new domain: deep sea diving and salvage. But, then, this story is about Rajput.

Good times don't last—they re-emerge. DOP decided to move me to INS Rajput, the lone ship of the class in Vizag, as N2 (heavens!) in June 1990. In early July 1990, I crossed the gangway to report onboard with much trepidation. To my pleasant surprise, the 'hot' wardroom was not at all unpleasant although the bunch of specialists onboard were super-hot. Legendary Lieutenant Commander Bhatt was the Big G, having climbed the ranks of the G-string from G-6 to G-1 onboard Rajput herself. He, therefore, was the king of all he surveyed and knew every nut and bolt of not only the gunnery systems but the entire ship. The HoDs were strict, no-nonsense, just the Rajput kind of senior officers one could expect. Wardroom

decorum was fully adhered to and everyone dined in Red Sea rig, no quarters given. My N1, Lieutenant Commander Suraj Malhotra, was just the kind of senior one wanted to have when breaking into the dreaded Rajput wardroom. He was a boisterous man with a large heart firmly in place. He took me through the paces, including a tour of the 'parts of ship' (protecting which one could kill or die, an SNF legacy!), and introduced me to the department. PO RP1 Joseph, who had been the officiating N2 till then, took an instant dislike to me as he probably saw me as undeserving of a place in the Ops team. Such was the strong sense of 'team' and top-order professional rivalry that existed on the Rajput class of ships. It took time, considerable effort and 'proving' of competency before the Ops Room team accepted me as an equal. The learning was top class. The gamut of development of every kind of plot one had learnt during the Long ND Course was maintained onboard diligently

and sincerely. Specialists competed, of course, but more in proving their worth than in showing anybody down. Captain BK Gupta had taken over from Captain Sampath Gopal in August 1990 and one hadn't seen a calmer man, especially under duress. Being the unchanged flagship of the redoubtable Rear Admiral P S Das and then the fearsome Rear Admiral Bhagwat as fleet commanders sharpened our edges. The demands on Rajput were consistently very high; the ship responded, as she always did, splendidly.





Being deployed for rescue of cyclone-struck MV Najd, and the experience of keeping the 'maritime vultures' (tugs waiting to rescue stricken vessels for salvage money) away from the vessel, was first of a kind. The large number of sick and scared passengers, over 2,000, including women and children, was unnerving. Repeated desperate attempts to connect up tow with 6-inch steel wire ropes and 12-inch hawsers in heaving and frothing seas, after conducting a sea-burial of three children who died onboard from dysentery, and watching the tow rope part on each occasion...it was heartrending. Rajput could do anything but tow a ship seven times heavier in displacement whose rudder was stuck to one side; this mission was beyond her strong heart. The worsening medical situation required Najd to be handed over to the tugs that were equipped for just this task while Rajput and Magar supported the stricken passengers and crew with fresh water and *khichdi* enroute to Vizag. Despite the terrible sight of the salvage tug (captained by an ex-IN diver at that!) preventing the Najd from being brought alongside till the salvage

papers were signed and the C-in-C East's directive to remain at anchor off Vizag for 'inability to tow Najd home', Rajput was a very satisfied ship and her soul remained clean and committed, quite contrary to the reputation of being 'unnecessarily hot'.

I then found myself appointed the N1 of Rana in Mumbai in December 1991. She was single-shafted consequent to a collision but was head to head with the other three (Ranjit, Ranvir and Ranvijay) and was required to meet all Fleet requirements like them despite half their power-to-displacement ratio. But she had a stout heart and even larger-hearted captains. I was now serving on the Rajput class as a 'Specialist' and the trepidation as I walked across the gangway was huge. Captain Ravinder Singh was being relieved by Captain Sanjiv Kapoor, a wonderful human being who gave us enough rope to hang ourselves. The Rana wardroom, as I walked in, totally and completely reflected the infamous reputation of the Rajput class wardrooms: 'hot', stiff and daunting. I realised in time that it was not the wardroom that overwhelmed but the

exaggerated tales of the class of ships that awed a newcomer or outsider. We soon settled down into a warm, generous and compatible wardroom that always rang with banter and good-humoured leg-pulling. This atmosphere continued even when Captain A S Bajwa, a gunnery specialist, took over and offhandedly declared, just as we commenced our first night-fuelling run on the old Deepak, that he couldn't see a thing after sunset!

Officers of every specialisation were put through their paces by every executive and technical officer. They were never given a moment to laze around, with the sole intent to enhance their knowledge and teach them to get to the root of any issue. Rajput class ships had a strong foundation of professionalism and spared nobody, gave no one an inch, and expected none either. The sense of pride drove the officers and men to higher levels of professional competence and left those who didn't have the good fortune to belong with a sense of emptiness and foreboding—hence the unfounded repute of 'hot' wardrooms.



Heartache

Years later, in 2007, I had the occasion to receive Rajput under the command of Captain A K Jain in Abu Dhabi as the DA. The material state of the ship saddened me. She was literally and figuratively 'coming apart' at the weld seams. She was no longer 'awesome' as her age was definitely showing when I entered the ship I knew so well. I wanted her to be decommissioned at the earliest so that she went with her head held high and the grace she always exuded.

But situations and reasons, all good, prevented a timely end and she continued to meet mission needs for almost a decade after that visit. I didn't have the heart to visit her again as I preferred to remember her as I had known her, from the worm's eye onward: proud, powerful and potent.

RIP

The Rajput class defined the contours of the Indian Navy after its induction. Right from the RAJSO (Rajput Standing Orders) that became the benchmark for ship's organisation, papka, concepts of 'Sea and Action' and 'CRC' drills to the introduction

of gas turbines and GTGs to our lexicon, to name a very few, the tremendous impact of just this one class of ships on the future Indian Navy has been probably the maximum ever.

The memories of the processes within this class of ships will resonate for decades after the last of them are gone. This is highlighted by the fact that certain processes onboard the Rajput class of ships were referred to even at the last Annual Training Conference in October 2020 while discussing training and operating enhancements. They were the heart and soul of the Fleet for many decades and their sheer presence and personality permeated deep, within and without.

Au revoir, you beauties, till you are resurrected again. Your silhouette will be sorely missed by those who had the good fortune to serve onboard.



About the author

Rear Admiral M D Suresh, AVSM, NM, was commissioned on 1 January 1984. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy (63rd course), 53rd Defence Services Staff College course and 17th Naval Higher Command Course. He was a member of the first Tri-Services 'Around the World Sailing Expedition' on sailing vessel Samudra in 1988-89. He is a specialist in navigation and direction and navigated INS Rajput and Rana. He commanded missile boats Nirbhik and Vinash. He was the commissioning EXO of INS Talwar and the commissioning CO of Shivalik. He was the Defence Attaché to the Embassies of India in Oman, UAE, Qatar & Bahrain and served in NHQ as Cdr (WR) & PDNO. On being promoted to Rear Admiral, he took over as the Flag Officer Doctrines & Concepts and later as the Deputy Commandant and Chief Instructor (CI) of the Indian Naval Academy, Ezhimala. He was the Assistant Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (Int-A)/DIA at HQIDS. He took over as Chief of Staff, Southern Naval Command, on 8 January 2020.

DEINDUCTION OF RAJPUT AND RANJIT

THE END OF AN ERA

By Commodore Arun V Pandit (Retd)

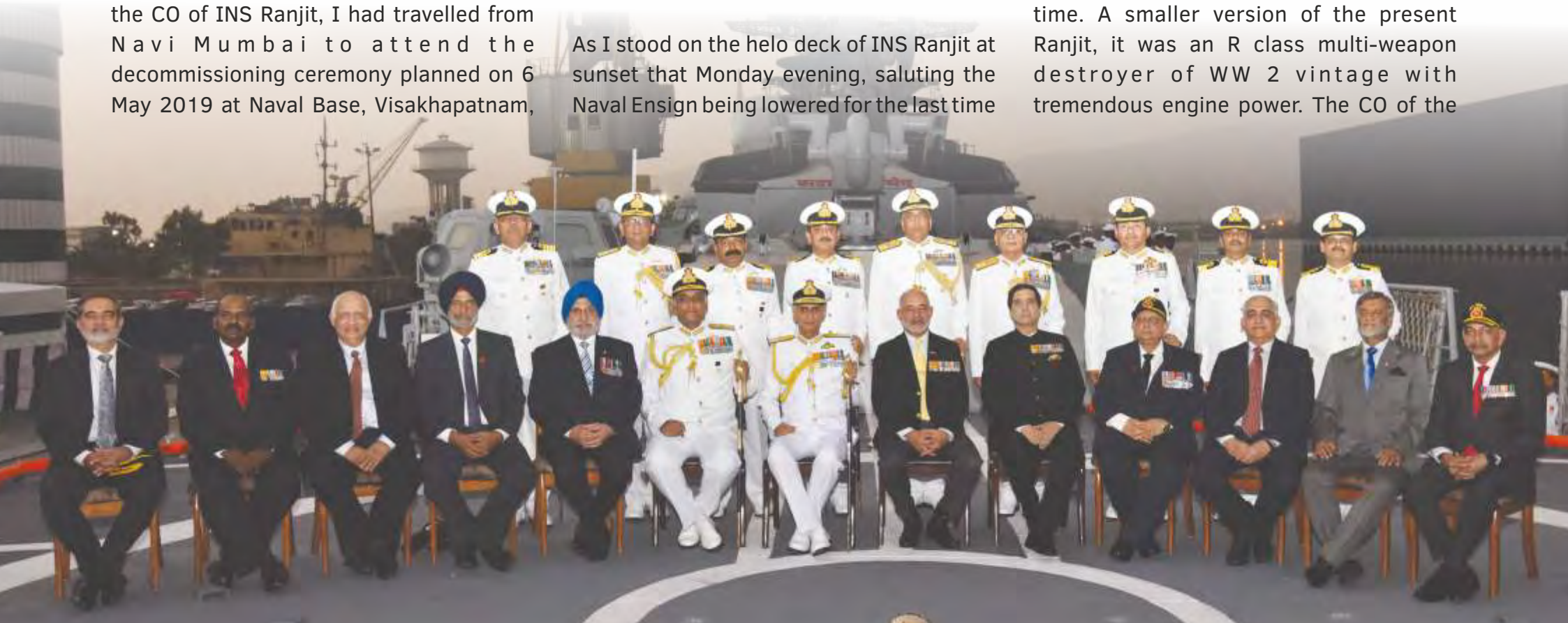
I was the fifth Commanding Officer of INS Ranjit. A glorious 18 months: 6 June 1990 to 23 December 1991. It was the most satisfying tenure in my almost 30 years of naval service.

Having accepted the invitation extended by the CO of INS Ranjit, I had travelled from Navi Mumbai to attend the decommissioning ceremony planned on 6 May 2019 at Naval Base, Visakhapatnam,

and to pay a final tribute to an illustrious and distinguished warship that had faithfully served the Indian Navy for 36 long years. At the back of my mind was the thought that this was the end of an era and our naval association, for both the ship and I, entering the eighth decade of my life.

As I stood on the helo deck of INS Ranjit at sunset that Monday evening, saluting the Naval Ensign being lowered for the last time

and the commissioning pennant being hauled down, there was an unavoidable catch in my throat. Almost unbidden, my mind went back almost 54 years to 1965, when I was a midshipman on the cruiser INS Mysore, the flagship of the Indian Fleet, and my memories of the INS Ranjit at that time. A smaller version of the present Ranjit, it was an R class multi-weapon destroyer of WW 2 vintage with tremendous engine power. The CO of the





ship was Lieutenant Commander Johri, who handled the ship in a most flamboyant manner. When casting off from alongside, there would be many spectators witnessing the evolution. The sea would churn, the stern would 'dig in', and the ship would propel ahead like a cannon ball straight out of the tidal basin. Similarly, when the Indian Fleet returned to harbour after an FXP, ships would be ordered to proceed independently to take up their anchor berths off the Gateway of India. It was a familiar sight to see Ranjit shoot ahead and be the first to drop anchor. And one would hear the 'side pipes' as the Captain's boat cast off, even while the flagship was still on its final approach to its anchor berth. I used to dream at such times of commanding a ship of my own someday, especially a destroyer like Ranjit.

It was only fitting that on decommissioning of the older R class destroyers, Rajput, Rana and Ranjit, the newer Project 61ME Kashin class destroyers (SNFs) should be named after them.

During the course of my naval career, I had

the opportunity to command three ships. The first was a Ton class coastal minesweeper, wooden hulled, in 1976—slow moving like all minesweepers. Four years later came INS Arnala, in 1980-81, a multi-weapon Petya class ASW frigate. A high-speed vessel when the GTs were buttoned up, it was a latter-day version of the old R class destroyers of the 1960s. Finally, command of the Kashin class destroyer INS Ranjit in June 1990.

It was during my tenure as CO INS Arnala that I had my first association with the SNF class destroyers. INS Rajput, under the command of Captain Gulab Hiranandani, had joined the Western Fleet. I had made my RTC to call on the CO and received an acknowledgement. At the appointed time, I went onboard and was received by the Captain at the gangway. Two other COs had also been invited on board. The CO told us that he wished to dispense with the usual 'chitchat over tea and biscuits', and gave us a personalised guided tour so that we would have first-hand knowledge of the warship's weapon and sensor capabilities. It was a privilege very few received, I think.

Later on, thinking it over, I understood that Captain Hiranandani intended to convey, in a subtle way, that priorities needed to change from ceremonials and traditions to a more professional approach towards our naval tasks and missions. The ethos of the latter-day Rajput class of ships was totally that—a very professional and task-oriented concept. INS Arnala, as part of the Western and Eastern Fleets, operated on many occasions with INS Rajput, the flagship. The destroyer always displayed very quick reactions and performed superbly in any FXP serial. With a long, low hull, a rakish bow projecting forward, a superstructure with a broken silhouette resulting in a low radar cross-section, tall masts with an array of radar aerials and sensors and tall and prominent SAM launchers, the Rajput class of ships looked warlike. They always dominated the sea horizon, dwarfing almost all fleet ships in company. INS Rajput and the other SNFs were always an impressive sight, though Ganga and Gomati were preferred as command and control platforms over the Rajput class because of better sensor fits.



My first connection with INS Ranjit occurred in 1987 when I had embarked to carry out the ship's annual inspection as part of the team headed by Rear Admiral S W Lakkhar. Thereafter, my next association with the ship was when I assumed command in June 1990 in Mumbai.

By this time, INS Rajput had changed base port to Visakhapatnam in the Eastern Naval Command. And the SNF family now had, in addition to Rana and Ranjit, two more ships: Ranvir and Ranvijay.

INS Ranjit proved to be all I had imagined and dreamt a destroyer should be—quick response to engine orders, a lot of power under the 'bonnet' because of the four GTs, an excellent fit of weapons and sensors, and a very well-trained and worked up crew. It was a very seaworthy ship, capable of taking on heavy seas without any problems. My tenure in command was a very satisfying experience and the ship performed well during fleet operations, winning a number of trophies. When I relinquished command in December 1991, the ship was just eight years old.

A few years later, I left the Navy and joined Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL), where I served for 12 years. During this time, I witnessed the construction and induction of the Project 15 ships—the follow on of the Rajput class, with a modernised weapon package, AIO, propulsion systems and increased size to accommodate two helicopters. I was present for the commissioning into the Indian Navy of the ships Delhi, Mysore and Mumbai. When I retired from MDL in December 2006, Project 15A, the Kolkata class, was on the slipways. However, these ships, with their sleek looks, enclosed bridges and modern sensor and weapon packages, appeared to me to be more identifiable as command and control platforms. Somehow, in my mind, they lacked the deadly and dominating looks of the Rajput class of warships.

The Indian Navy now has ships of world-class standards. And appropriately so, as their mission profile has become global. The surrounding maritime environment is very charged and the response and reaction time for the Indian Navy has

become minimal. The requirements of the Government for humanitarian missions have increased and the expectations of the nation are many.

In such a situation, the old must always give way to the new. The era of the Rajput and Ranjit class of 1980s vintage is over and after yeoman service, they have handed over the baton to the new generation of warships more suitable to meet today's challenges.

One hopes that INS Ranjit, the warship, has a fitting end or a dignified resting place appropriate to its stature. And I look forward to hearing news of a third-generation Ranjit—at least in the conceptual stage.



About the author

Commodore Arun Pandit was commissioned in the Indian Navy on 1 July 1966 and served on board INS Mysore as a midshipman during the 1965 operations. During his naval service, he commanded INS Cuddalore, Arnala and Ranjit. He retired in March 1995 to join Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd.

CORONA CONFUSIONS

By Commander Abhishek Pathak

Operation Samudra Setu, a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) from the countries of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), was the Indian Navy's response to the Government's call to support the Indian Diaspora around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. With

numerous successful NEOs in the past, the expertise of the Indian Navy in such missions in normal circumstances is undisputable. But this time, the 'rules of the game' were different. The conduct of an NEO amid a grave pandemic was an exceptional scenario, for which neither

was the service materially prepared nor the personnel adequately trained. INS Shardul was ordered to gear up for the evacuation of fellow countrymen from the Bushehr and Hormozgan provinces of Iran. And as her skipper, I knew that the navigation ahead was through uncharted waters.





With scary media inputs of COVID in Iran, limited time to prepare, no precedence to follow and everyone around looking equally ignorant, I comprehended the true meaning of the famous Joseph Conrad quote, “In each ship, there is one man, who in the hour of emergency or peril at sea can turn to no other man...he is the Captain.” It was time to be a torchbearer and lead the way through the ‘Corona Confusion’. Readiness of men and machinery for the action was the least of my concerns; the real challenges were material readiness and keeping my crew safe from the infection.

A ‘fog of war’ engulfed the team as we tried to solve the procurement maze. The item list for this unique evacuation operation was indeed exceptional. The featured items included PPE, sanitisers, masks and disinfectants, never procured hitherto by the material organisations, and the quantities indicated were perplexing.

Exercising emergency financial powers resolved the issue of funds but availability of the items in three days during a nationwide lockdown was a problem. The

web of quantity, quality, cost and stowage space further amplified the dilemma. However, during such times, speed was a priority over accuracy and an ‘electric fast list’ was finalised: 50,000 sets of disposables, 1,000 sets of PPE, 100 litre of sanitiser, 200 litre of sodium hydrochloride, 500 mattresses and blankets, and so on and so forth. With a ‘go ahead’ for procurement, it was time for the logistics department to burn some midnight oil and civil vendors to employ innovative techniques to circumvent lockdown restrictions. Finally, the items started flowing in. The embarkation continued till departure time and standing on the bridge wing for cast off, I was nervously watching the race—who would be the last one onboard, the mattresses or my No. 2 hawser?

Requirement to sail for a manpower-intensive mission with minimum crew to maintain social distancing was another ‘Corona Confusion’. The aim was to sail with reduced manning, but there were genuine requirements of additional hygienists, chefs and medical staff. Then,

the Command orders to embark the Seaking crew and women officers were also a priority. It was a tricky manoeuvre to maintain a balance between mission requirements, crew comfort and safety. While the arrival of women officers complicated the officers’ accommodation situation, it certainly brought some cheer to the bachelors onboard! Careful scrutiny and arduous planning not only enabled us to arrive at the optimal manning for the mission but updated our contingency plans of sailing with reduced manning.

As we shaped a north-westerly course, there were mixed feelings in the crew: zeal to perform yet a fear of the unknown. This was a mission for which no formal training was imparted to the men, the enemy (virus) was invisible and we were expected to learn as we performed. A new routine was promulgated—preparations and mock drills kept the crew busy during the day while entertainment programmes, tambola and deck sports acted as a stimulant in the evenings. The ship was deployed off Gujarat and ordered to wait for diplomatic clearance.



It was a long wait of 38 days in which the ship undertook International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) patrols, beach survey operations, ceremonial events and trans-shipment missions, prior to receiving orders to sail towards the Gulf for the NEO. This period was indeed a testing one. Defects and breakdowns, rough seas, diseases and homesickness, the crew experienced it all, but the morale never dipped. In one such incident, the port engine encountered a major defect off Muscat. The OEM was contacted and the specialists advised to return to Mumbai on a single engine as defect rectification was not possible at sea. The decision to continue or abandon the mission was given to the ship—another ‘Corona Confusion’. But my team was optimistic and we decided to give it a try. Finally, unstinting efforts by

the magicians of the engine room department ensured that the ship was mission-ready again.

As the days passed, plans regarding embarkation procedures, luggage scanning, medical check-up during embarkation, daily screening, food distribution, accommodation, discipline, command and control, and crisis management in case of an outbreak of infection during the passage started taking concrete shape. The team worked vigorously and every aspect was discussed, finalised and rehearsed. Accommodation with social distancing was the biggest challenge, but the hurdle was bypassed by creating temporary messes in the tank space of the ship and innovatively creating partitions between beds using

furniture, whiteboards, seamanship gears and berthing hawsers. Instead of following the standard procedure of food distribution at counters, we planned to provide packed hot food to ensure zero contact between the food distributors and evacuees. New procedures for rounds of magazines and fuel tanks in the tank space, division of the ship in colour-coded zones, modifications to isolate forward-section ventilation and a dedicated ‘core team’ to interact with evacuees were other methods to ensure an artificial boundary between the ship’s crew and the evacuees. Novel ideas came from my team frequently and we refined our procedures with each passing day. By the time we crossed Hormuz, we had almost overpowered the ‘Corona Confusions’.

The north of Hormuz was a sight to behold





as Iranian warships Khadang and Sabalan greeted us, with *Shamals* (local winds) displaying their full fury. Though the red tape tested our patience with a 48-hour delayed entry, we were no longer in the mood to be perturbed. As the ship negotiated the confusing buoyed channel of Bandar Abbas and entered the narrow breakwater, we knew the reverse count had started. Immediately on securing alongside, the jetty was cordoned off by my worked-up 'Corona Warriors' dressed in their flashing regalia (newly procured PPE), social-distancing circles were painted, barricades/queue managers were placed and the jetty turned into a warzone. The embarkation commenced and it was a pleasure to see the well-coordinated response of the crew, thanks to the drills, rehearsals, practices and improvisations. The temperatures were a little short of half-boiling and ruthless humidity had made things excruciating, yet our PPE-donned fighters were showing their true mettle.

Despite severe climatic conditions and not being able to hydrate themselves owing to the PPE, the crew continued the

embarkation process. But by the end, there were a few dehydration cases onboard. Finally, after a six-hour marathon, the embarkation finished and the ship cast off for the home-bound journey. As we finished our return passage and disembarked the evacuees at Porbandar, the satisfaction on their faces and gratitude towards the Indian Navy was testimony to the success of the operation.

When the whole world was locked at home and the Indian Navy was ordered to evacuate stranded Indians from a COVID hotbed, we at Shardul knew we were the first responders and the last line of defence. And though the initial orders for the operation were accompanied by 'Corona Confusions', the crew accepted the challenge to mark a safe route through the uncharted waters and worked towards formulating SOPs for a unique task: an NEO during a pandemic. Taking a cue from the famous Charles Darwin quote, "...it is the long history of humankind that those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed", the team collaborated and improvised with each

experience. Finally, the mission was accomplished safely and, in turn, a modus operandi for conducting such operations in future developed. But the biggest success of the mission was that despite embarking 233 civilians from a country heavily infected by COVID without any testing facility, and accommodating the evacuees onboard for four days, the crew remained safe from the virus. Though Operation Samudra Setu is one among many successful operations by the Indian Navy, for the crew of Shardul it will always be an event that made them 'Conquerors of Corona Confusions'.



About the author

Commander Abhishek Pathak is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy and a specialist in navigation and direction. He has served on INS Vikramaditya, Viraat, Kochi, Gomati, Kulish, Dunagiri, Kakinada, Pralaya and LCU 37. He commanded INS Shardul during the maiden NEO by the ship from Iran as part of Op Samudra Setu.

TELL THE WORLD THEY'RE COMING HOME

By Lieutenant S Paul Nicolas

Ramesh *bhai*, Haresh *bhai*, Kamlesh *bhai* and 233 other '*bhais*', all from the land of Gandhiji, were dressed in pale and crumpled shirts and dark pants. These men were holding in their hands small backpacks and a suitcase or two. One of them had bought a remote-controlled helicopter for his eight-year-old son in India. With weary eyes that endured the scorching heat of Iran's sun, rumpled hair and exhausted feet, they patiently waited for our arrival. A few of them were clearly leaders, the rest ardent followers.

Amid the deadly pandemic, they heard the news of Hope, a light in the darkness in their melancholy lives. Their people were coming to take them home. Their joy knew no bounds as they dreamt of going back to their loved ones. Most of them were fishermen who were settled in the small island hamlets along the coast of Iran. Never in their imagination would they have dreamt of this journey of their lives.

Sanitisation teams, ushering teams, team in-charges, all donning PPE, and the entire Shardul crew were ready to take on this 'call of duty' of bringing back these men from the port of Bandar Abbas. For some reason, this mission was special, as it was for our countrymen. A lot of planning, preparation and time had gone into providing the best for these unknown men; all we knew about them was that they were our brothers. And the Navy had entrusted us with the responsibility of bringing them home. D-Day was eagerly awaited. It was going to be a quick mission for Team Shardul, akin to the Operation Neptune of Seal Team Six of the US Navy when they went to hunt down Osama Bin Laden: swift, efficient and right on task. The mission was to embark these men, set sail and bring them home safely.

Ramesh *bhai* was a short man with broad shoulders and a grey beard. But his height was irrelevant when he passed instructions to the others around him. One order, 'Line





mein aajao,’ and they would follow him. The most cumbersome task was to motivate the grumpier ones to pick up their bags from the nets and arrange them for sanitisation. Their luggage numbered around 450. I was at the unloading point where the crane lowered and told them politely to take their luggage to their living spaces but, nah, they wouldn’t heed polite requests. I had to muster the senior lot to kindle a fire in them with a few lines—quickly, they were motivated to work. A few hours later, it was time for lunch. Our cooks had prepared a tasty lunch for the tired souls on this mammoth ship and they consumed every bite. We cast off and set sail back to India. A few hours later, the swaying ship put most of these men into a deep slumber.

Tring tring. “*Jai Hind* sir, this is the bridge team from tank space, code red, code red! We have a problem! Evacuees have smoked in the washroom.” We listened with our eyes wide. Then, a quick-thinking officer told them the story of the scary dungeon on the ship where people are banished and jailed for disobedience of orders, and smoking.’ No one smoked again.

Shardul's bridge is well-equipped to monitor movements with cameras in prominent places. It became SOP for officers on watch to keep a hawk’s eye on these men. In the first few days, they were curious, looking and peeking into every corner of the tank space, observing every colourful ‘toy’ around them: pumps, motors, ropes, all new curiosities. As the days passed, they realised these toys don’t come to life. They ignored their surroundings and started talking to each other, playing cards and sleeping.

Lights, camera, action! Cut, cut, cut! Over the course of the journey, we decided to speak to these men and record their experiences. A few of them volunteered to share their experiences. With Shardul's tiger in the background, we interviewed them. Shy but with faces that showed their full set of 32, they approached the cameras with innocence. Ramesh *bhai*, leading from the front, thanked the Navy for coming to their rescue with a radiant smile that showed his silver tooth. After a few days of sailing, we safely reached Porbandar with these men—men we would never meet

again. One of them must have seen a shooting star back in Iran and wished to go back home. The Indian Navy took care of the rest.

As the first line passed to the jetty, these anxious men peeked through the hatches as the sunlight shone on them. A multitude of photographers, media personnel and officials, was waiting to see them step down from the ship. One by one, all 233 got down from the ship. Ramesh *bhai*, the last one to leave, looked back one last time, joined both his hands and thanked the ship with teary eyes and a heart full of gratitude. Their Navy had done it for them. Their Navy brought them home. Shardul marks on its mission list Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation from Bandar Abbas, Iran. Check!



About the author

Lieutenant Paul Nicolas is an alumnus of the Indian Naval Academy from the 25 NOC (X) course. He was commissioned on 10 July 2017 and is currently undergoing his WKC onboard INS Shardul. The officer was part of the coordination and embarkation team during the maiden NEO by the ship from Bandar Abbas, Iran, as part of Op Samudra Setu.

NOSTALGIA

OF MESSES, NIGHTS, AND KNIGHTS

By Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan (Retd)





From that uncommon jar, labelled (in bold maroon font) 'The NDA', take a generous four-cup helping of tactical and operational-level acumen, knowledge, professionalism, wisdom, and sagacity. Add just a pinch (no more, mind you!) of flag-level foolishness, short-sightedness, stubborn cussedness. Spice it with half a cup of bemusement and two or three drops of bewilderment. Place the setting to 'Navy-High' and leave to simmer for four decades. Stir occasionally with generous swirls of the enclosed special piece of cutlery called *Punjlish Chamcha* taking care not to spill anything. Allow to cool upon the shelf marked 'Reluctant Retirement', right above 'Random Reminiscences' but well removed from 'Raunchy Recollections'....

A rare 'Ladies Night'—a formal 'Mess Night' but with a fair sprinkling of ladies (and a few lucky civilian gentlemen) being invited as guests—is in progress in the wardroom of the flagship of the Fleet. The roar of guns and missiles and the whine of torpedoes and electronic jammers are supplanted by the chimes of crystal goblets

and the restrained glint of polished teak, burnished silver and splashes of white, navy-blue and gold—colours that are the hallmarks of any self-respecting major navy. The food is all haute cuisine and served à la russe. The evening is all style and elegance—and some marginally comical 'wannabe elegance', too—as flatware, chinaware and glassware (and even 'crystal ware', from time to time, albeit only 'RCR' or Cristal d' Arques) is manfully wrestled with by be-gloved stewards from rural India, struggling with the English that the English no longer speak, except for their Queen who no longer reigns over our land and barely her own. Native Hindi momentarily wavers in the face of French wines made from grapes grown in Nashik, which don't care how they taste so long as their names and lineage are pronounced correctly! However, the Devanagari script comes to the rescue and a pale Sauvignon Blanc feels perfectly at home bedecked with an unassuming label that reads सौवियॉ ब्लॉ... the 'Bharat that is India' wins, *Messieurs et Mesdames*: Game, Set and Match, *meilleure chance la prochaine fois*. (Better luck next time!)

Truly, even as it continuously hones its fighting skills, the Navy, unlike its sister Services, refuses to abandon its 'high-street' style. A young lieutenant explains, "We might well be in the business of killing people, Sir, but we believe that if we kill them with enough style and enough panache, they might not mind being dead!"

It is an entire universe unto itself, this Navy of ours... defying time itself and revelling in the customs and traditions that have sustained it as a seagoing fighting service, since at least 1612, when the Honourable East India Company's Marine was constituted. Its deep-seated belief in understated elegance enables the Navy to smile indulgently at the Indian Army's claim to seniority as embodied in renowned regiments such as the Punjab Regiment, despite the lineage of the latter being dated merely to 1757. The indignation of young midshipmen, so proud of the newly captured 'sardines on toast' that adorn their shoulders, that the Navy is not the 'senior service' despite a head-start of over a hundred years, is assuaged by the gentle admonition that 'old money' never needs to



announce or flaunt itself and that, as Giorgio Armani famously said, “Elegance is not about being noticed, it's about being remembered.” The midshipmen smile faintly at one another, securing away this newly discovered nugget of wisdom for later use, hopefully to bedazzle some pretty young thing (PYT).

And well they might, for an officer of the Indian Navy is trained, conditioned and mentored to be ‘a man (or woman) for all seasons’, largely in the behavioural mould of the scholar and statesman, Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), of whom Robert Whittington famously said, “Of an angel's wit and singular learning. I know not his fellow. For where is the man of that gentleness, lowliness and affability? And, as time requireth, a man of marvellous mirth and pastimes, and sometime of as sad gravity. A man for all seasons.” It goes without saying that he or she excels at naval operations involving navigation and aircraft direction, communications and electronic warfare, gunnery and missile warfare, anti-submarine warfare, diving, aviation, submarining, hydrography,

meteorology and hydrology, and so forth. But what distinguishes him or her from the hoi-polloi is that he or she is equally at ease with Tagore, Kabir, Kalidas and Ghalib or, for that matter, with Byron, Poe, Shelly, Keats and Yeats (and knows that those worthies are pronounced Keets and Yates and not Yeets and Kates). An officer is quintessentially comfortable—comfortable eating *aloo parathas* and comfortable relishing an exquisite sea bass with artichokes swimming in golden caviar, comfortable with the strict sequencing and placement of a *sadhya* meal and comfortable with the course-sequence of grande cuisine gourmet dishes. He or she is, indeed, a person for all seasons—not a mere Jack of all trades but, instead, a domain-expert in multiple domains.

It has its own language, this navy of ours, one that is learnt in the old-fashioned way, through apprenticeship and a careful process of mentoring that seeks to wed the naval mind to the romance of the sea as a way of life, not merely as a profession. A ‘wardroom’ is what the army might call an Officers’ Mess. It is the sole preserve of the

officers of a warship or a naval shore-establishment, shared only with the wardroom stewards (for whom discretion is always the better part of valour). As for ‘midshipmen’, this is the rank at which life in the officer corps of the Navy begins... it is a rank that is unique to the Navy and one that owes its nomenclature to the accommodation-spaces that these young aspiring officers were given, which lay between the front part of the ship where the crew (sailors and marines) lived, and the back portion, which was reserved for the officers. A midshipman is colloquially known as a ‘Snotty’ (a term emanating from the fact that many midshipmen of the British Royal Navy were inducted at a very young age, often no more than 11 or 12, and frequently had runny noses from the damp miserable weather endemic to England).

The epaulettes worn by midshipmen comprise crisp white rectangles with a naval officers’ button sown upon upon a black field and are, hence, at least in the Indian Navy, known as ‘sardines on toast’. It is often remarked that the best rank to be



is a midshipman—all the privileges of being an officer, yet none of the increasingly weighty responsibilities that will later come with advancing rank. Many and varied are the adventures of a naval midshipman. The epitome of sartorial elegance, he is all about rakish dash and panache, quick-witted and sharp, always game for a bit of fun and some impish mischief, a lean, lithe and sinewy build, with a waist that would make a maiden sigh with envy.

The Ladies Night proceeds apace, an example of quintessential fine dining with all its ingredients in perfect place: the ambience of the wardroom itself, the table setting, with its sparkling white damask tablecloth adorned with the best bone china, silverware, and sparkling lead-crystal, the service (*à la russe*), the graciousness of the hosts that is lock-stepped with the graciousness of the guests.

The repast is done. It has been a feast for the eyes, palettes and stomachs... the diners sigh in ecstasy. The Loyal Toast has been raised and ceremonially consumed

(only water, alas). But it is now that the Navy's Toasts of the Day come to the fore. "What day of the week is it, Mr Vice?" asks the Captain (functioning as the President of the Ladies Night), with a smart and single tap of his gavel (one tap is a signal to all present to pay attention). "Saturday, Sir", comes the immediate reply from the junior-most of the full-fledged officers, a cherubic Sub-Lieutenant. "And would you then propose the Toast for a Saturday, Sir?" Loud, clear and confident comes the answer, "To Wives and Sweethearts, Sir—and May they Never Meet!" The guests dissolve in laughter. The wine goblets are charged with some excellent tawny port. The toast is raised (did you know that naval officers never clink their glasses—not ever!). One PYT turns to the only marginally older officer on her left and asks, "Are there different toasts for each day of the week, then?" "Oh yes", says he, "would you like me to recite and explain them?" "Oooh yes," says she, nodding vigorously while smiling winsomely all at the same time, "but perhaps a bit later? The night is still young." "Yes," he repeats, smiling beatifically, "this Knight is still young!"

The night suddenly seems less of a mess.

More Anon....



About the author

Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan, AVSM & Bar, VSM, is currently Director-General of the National Maritime Foundation, which is India's foremost resource centre for the development and advocacy of strategies for the promotion and protection of India's maritime interests. He has had an illustrious, four-decade-long career in the Indian Navy, with as many as four seagoing commands, culminating in his command of aircraft carrier INS Viraat. As a Flag Officer, he conceptualised and executed the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). He has been Chief of Staff of the Western Naval Command and the Commandant of the Indian Naval Academy (Ezhimala). He is a much sought-after thought-leader and a prolific writer with over 85 published professional articles and papers to his credit. He continues to advise the Government of India through his interactions with the ministries of Defence and External Affairs and the National Security Council Secretariat.

NOSTALGIA

THE QUARTERDECK

By Rear Admiral Philipose G Pynumootil





The Quarterdeck at the National Defence Academy in Khadakwasla overlooks the Khetarpal Parade Ground. A quarterdeck is the rearmost (aft) deck of a ship—this has been replicated on the parade ground, complete with a 99-ft, 6.75 inch mast from INS Delhi, the Navy's first flagship, the erstwhile HMS Achilles that was part of the Battle of the River Plate at Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1939.

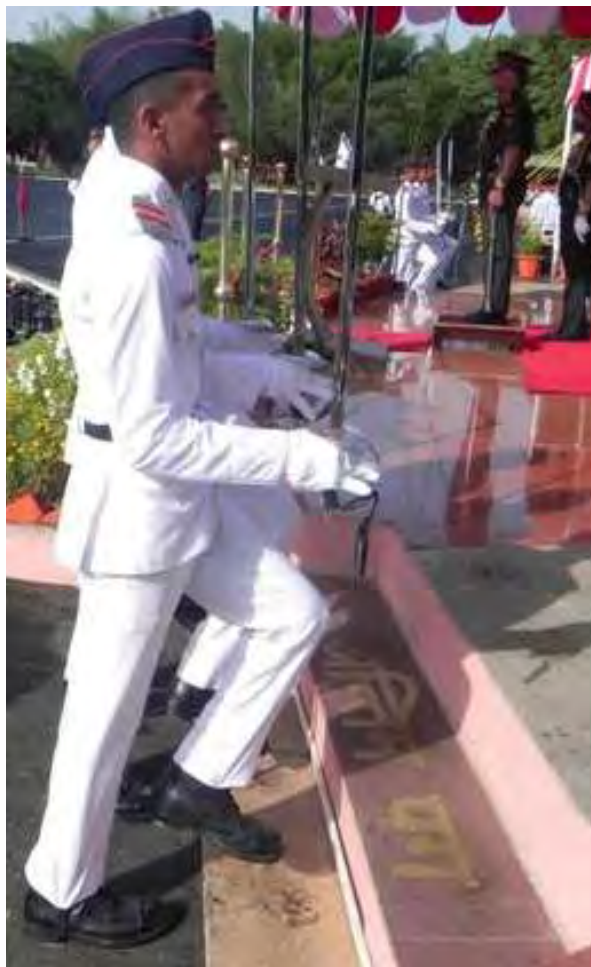
A significant amount of time is spent on the 450×150 m drill square during the three years a cadet spends at the Academy. On joining, you wear your five-digit academy number on the arm, which is replaced by the coveted red lanyard on your left shoulder on passing the highly demanding Drill Square Test (DST). You can only go out on 'liberty'—an 'out pass to Pune'—after passing the DST. Cadets undergo gruelling training almost every day on the Drill Square, wearing khakis and the regulation boots, with 13 nails on each boot. If you see a squad of cadets standing on one leg, it indicates that their drill instructor is checking the nails on their boots!

Subedar Major Darbara Singh was our Drill Subedar Major, responsible for the overall standard of discipline and drill at the academy and the Passing Out Parade conducted for the graduating course every six months. He was 6'2" tall with a turban as big as a Satcom antenna, a huge chest and a booming voice that would make Atilla the Hun scamper for cover. When I look back, I realise that this larger-than-life Senior JCO taught us a great deal about the military ethos and values. With a unique combination of tact, humour and sheer terror, he made us march tall and proud...



as if we ruled the world. As we stood long hours on the parade ground during the rehearsals for the Passing Out Parade, he would tell us about his experiences in operations and the valour of the young officers who commanded him. He spoke of how Lt Palta Singh shielded him from a bullet in the battle of Haji Pir and how he lay wounded below his platoon commander's lifeless body, too weak to move.

The parade ground itself is named after 2nd Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal of the 17 Poona Horse Armoured Regiment, who was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra (the highest award for bravery) in December 1971 at the age of 21, seven months after he was commissioned. An alumnus of Lawrence School, Sanawar, and the NDA, he died in the Battle of Basantar in the western sector while in command of a tank. When he was told to abandon his tank as it had been immobilised due to enemy fire, he refused and continued to fire its gun, which was still operational, saying, "Poona Horse never retreats." I would get goose bumps each of the 200 times I heard



Darbara Singh repeat this story. If anyone was particularly sloppy, he would scream, “Khetarpal Parade Ground *ko apmaan kiya!*” (You have insulted the Khetarpal Parade Ground.) Ever since, for all of us,

‘drill’ has been synonymous with honour, integrity and all Arun Khetarpal stood for.

The Quarterdeck assumes special significance during the Passing Out Parade, one of the most poignant ceremonies one can witness. The Tri-Service flavour is perfectly encapsulated with the two tanks and fighter aircraft placed around the drill square and the Quarterdeck bringing in the nautical element. At the end of the parade, the course marches in slow time towards the Quarterdeck to the strains of *Auld lang syne*. Each cadet marches across the Quarterdeck, saluting the National Flag. The step on the Quarterdeck is aptly marked *Antim Pag*, or the final step.

This is arguably the most hallowed 40×30m slab of concrete—Param Vir Chakra awardees Arun Khetarpal, Captain G S Salaria and, more recently, Captain Manoj K Pandey took these 25 steps across the Quarterdeck, unaware they would attain eternal glory laying down their lives for our Motherland. As did the 31 Maha Vir Chakra and 152 Vir Chakra awardees, who

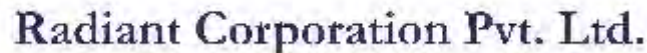
embodied the NDA motto of ‘Service Before Self’; as well as Olympic medallist Rajyavardhan Rathore, Asiad yachtsman Farrokh Tarapore, and Dilip Donde, who circumnavigated the earth solo. And so did countless of us nondescript guys who did our best at whatever we set out to do.

In a crunch situation, when push comes to shove, we will ALL deliver. *Naam, Namak aur Nishan*—values to live by and, if the circumstances demand, to die for. *Jai Hind!*



About the author

Rear Admiral Philipose G Pynumootil, a Seaking pilot, is an alumnus of the 67 Course, National Defence Academy. He has commanded INAS 330 and was the commissioning CO of INS Shikra. His surface tenures include command of Nashak, Kirpan and Brahmaputra, besides doing a tenure as Executive Officer, INS Delhi. He has undergone the Staff Course, Higher Air Command Course and the Royal College of Defence Studies course in London where he obtained a MA (International Studies) from Kings College. He is currently the Flag Officer Naval Aviation & Goa Area.



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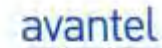
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NOSTALGIA



HURRAH, THE PETYAS ARE BACK!

By Commodore Srikant B Kesnur

Not long ago, on 22 October 2020, the Chief of Army Staff General M M Naravane commissioned INS Kavaratti into the Indian Navy. An anti-submarine warfare (ASW) corvette, the INS Kavaratti is the last of the four in the class, the other three being Kamorta, Kadmat and Kiltan. The names ring a familiar bell with old timers and veterans, of the illustrious Petya class frigates that served in the Indian Navy from the late 1960s/early '70s onwards. The Petyas

were 10—five each of the Kamorta (K) class and Arnala (A) class, the latter having some improvements over the former. It is, therefore, somewhat sad that only four have taken rebirth and Katchall will have to bide its turn. But one can still raise a toast that the Petyas are back in a new avatar.

The reason the Petyas of yore attract nostalgia are many and bear some recounting here, especially for Generation Next who may not have served on them, or

even heard of them. My time on them was only a six-month midshipman tenure (more on that later) but that was sufficient for us to earn some grudging brownie points from our peers and superiors. The Petyas were inducted in our Navy as part of our course alteration towards the Soviets in the late 1960s when the British were unable to meet our requirement for hardware. This is the time, under the visionary leadership of Admiral AK Chatterji, when we inducted our first submarines of the Foxtrot class, the



submarine depot ship INS Amba, the Osa class missile boats that carried out the Karachi attack, and the Petyas. This relationship expanded to include bigger platforms in all dimensions—aviation, submarine, surface—and write a new chapter. The Petyas were at the vanguard of a moment that signified a paradigm shift in the way our Navy operated.

As our inventory underwent a massive upheaval, it also signalled a shift in SOPs, tactics, pedagogic methods and modes of thinking. There was a cultural shift that involved learning the Russian language and understanding their approach to war. As is well known, the Ruskis had a more utilitarian approach towards operations and preferred weapon load over crew comfort. Almost all Russian platforms were austere in their crew amenities, legroom was cramped, water storage capacity was limited and space was at a premium. All switches and knobs operated in reverse directions, machinery was more heavy duty and made lots of noise, aesthetics were kept to a bare minimum and the dull yellow paint gave the interiors a drab look. While

they were impressive fighting units, they were not the best to live in, especially over a long stretch.

In some ways, the Petyas were the most challenging in this regard. First, the missile boats and submarine crew stayed in the messes ashore when in harbour; this was a luxury the Petya crew did not have. Second, the missile boats sailed for short-duration sorties and submarines sailed in splendid isolation whereas the Petyas, considered by our Navy as full-fledged ‘frigates’, sailed as Fleet ships in all Fleet deployments with the attendant rituals that accompany such endeavours: long sorties filled with 24×7 exercise programmes, continuous cycles of weapon firings, fuelling, seamanship evolutions, and so on. Third, Petyas also experienced the concomitant consequences of being seen as Fleet ships. This meant being embarked by Fleet Staff, rituals and ceremony of Fleet ships in harbour and at anchorage, excess personnel embarked for training and such like. Fourth, while their thin hull and sleek silhouette gave them a sexy look, they would roll and pitch uncontrollably in rough

seas and even the most weather beaten seadog would feel queasy with the roller coaster movement, especially given that the Bay of Bengal frequently sees bad weather and angry seas. Do remember that the Soviets had intended these ships to be close-coast ASW platforms, not blue-water combatants. But given Indian constraints as well as *jugaad* and innovation capabilities, these ships formed the mainstay of the Eastern Fleet for a long time.

In short, therefore, life on the Petyas of yore was challenging and hard. To give the uninitiated some idea, these 1,000-tonne ships were packed with two 76-mm gun mounts (forward and aft), 4 RBU 2500 rocket launchers (two each forward and aft) and one CET 53 torpedo launcher amidships. That’s quite a lot for the small, light ship it was. It also had a sonar suite and gun direction radar apart from navigation and communication suites. Compared to this heavy arsenal, water was merely 20 tonne, cabins were limited and hot bunking was the norm. The look was impressive, the armament packed a punch,



the ships sailed constantly and living conditions were very Spartan. That in essence was a Petya.

It is probably because of this aura of the rough and tough living conditions that the Petyas spawned an almost fanatical devotion and kinship among themselves. It was taken for granted that the toughest living conditions in the Surface Navy were on these ships and it was considered a badge of honour if you served onboard. I remember just a few years ago, Vice Admiral Anil Chopra, then FOCinC ENC, mentioning at a reception, “If you served on a Petya, then you are okay”— signalling immediate acceptance of your membership into an exclusive club.

Of course, they had an illustrious history too. The Kamortas had distinguished themselves in the 1971 war—Kamorta (M P Awati – P 31) and Kavaratti (Subir Paul) in the East and Katchall (K N Zadu), Kiltan (K P Gopal Rao) and Kadmatt (S Jain) in the West earning laurels for themselves. Years later, many of them participated in Op Pawan, India’s peace support operation

(PSO) from 1987 to 1990. In between and later, they took part in the many operations and missions of the Navy in constabulary, diplomacy or humanitarian assistance roles with much verve and *josh*.



**The author as midshipman onboard
INS Kadmatt circa Jan 86**

The 10 Petyas were organised into a squadron; in the mid-1980s, it was the 31st Patrol Vessel Squadron (31 PVS) with a captain as P 31 and commanders as skippers of other ships. There was both camaraderie and competition as may be expected amongst ‘hot-shot’ commanding officers. We (three snotties) were on INS

Kadmatt commanded by Commander (later Vice Admiral and VCNS) K V Bharatan (Barry), who was then the junior-most. As was the fashion then, most COs were referred to by nicknames; thus Susie, Sonu, Soldier and such like were commonplace. The ship embraced us openly and with extra vigour; apparently the previous bunch of snotties were quite a handful and the officers were eager to make sure there was no action replay. They need not have worried. The three of us were fairly sedate and workmanlike. We were known as Barry’s boys, the Captain mentored and groomed us and the other officers put us through our paces. Sailing was fast and furious, we were out from the day we joined and the pace was unrelenting till it entered refit in the far end of our tenure when we were promptly sent to sail on LST Shardul.

We slummed it out in the famous cabin No.1 where about eight of us lived at any time in a space meant for four. Undies, vests, socks were common property and rats gnawed at our feet. These are rightly taboo in the Navy of today but those days, it had a kind of romantic resonance.



Notwithstanding these hardships, we had a warm and cosy wardroom that made us feel immediately accepted. Many of the associations made continued for long and, even today, evoke much nostalgia amongst all the three midshipmen: Maxie Jose, Ranjeet Bhatnagar and yours truly.

Like all good things coming to an end, the Petyas served their time for about 25-30 years and were decommissioned. As India started building bigger and better ships, the squadron concept was given a go-by for principal surface combatants. The Petyas went into the outer recesses of memory until the Navy decided to reprise them in their new avatar. Considering the original ones were primarily meant for ASW, it is only natural that the new versions are ASW-centred. Of course, these are relatively huge behemoths: at 3,500 tonne over three times heavier and longer and broader. They are also state of the art with the latest stealth features incorporated. Thus, the powerful whine of the gas turbines of the old will be replaced by the silent diesels. And above all, they are indigenously built with the highest

indigenous component of any project so far. They give us many reasons to be proud.

I was fortunate to be involved, even if only in a ceremonial role, in the commencement of the new line. As CO INS Jalashwa and senior officer present afloat (SOPA), in the absence of the Fleet Commander who was away on deployment, I was responsible for the protocol and liaison arrangements when INS Kamorta, the first of the new class, was commissioned in August 2014. The formal banquet for the chief guest, Raksha Mantri the late Arun Jaitley, was held onboard my ship. A few months down the line, in January 2016, when INS Kadmat was commissioned, I was honoured with the commissioning mementoes even though I had only been a midshipman on the old Kadmat.

I would like to end with a poignant memory. For two consecutive years, it was my privilege to receive the Fleet Commander and conduct the memorial ceremony for the crew of INS Andaman, the Petya that went down in the Bay of Bengal on 21 August 1990. For years, the

commemoration at the Andaman memorial was led by one of the ex-Andaman Crew and so it was in 2013 with Commander Rahman, who had survived the ordeal. Next year, in the function on 21 August 2014, I was surprised to see a young lieutenant, Jishnu Potti, in the lead. Jishnu is the son of late Lieutenant Commander N M Potti, the EXO of INS Andaman, who gave up his life trying to save the ship. The grand gesture of Jishnu, who followed his father's footsteps to join the Navy, indicated a willingness to move on and look into the future even as we revere the past. On that note, let us raise a toast to the Petyas of yore while welcoming their new versions. To all my friends, I say, "Hurray, the Petyas are back."



About the author

Commodore Srikant Kesnur, a regular contributor to *Quarterdeck*, is Director of the Maritime Warfare Centre (MWC) in Mumbai and, concurrently, Officer in Charge (OIC), Naval History Project.

SEA DOGS

By Commodore A P Shaji Kutty

Every naval officer worth his salt has a few humorous tales from his days as a mid. I too have a few, including this one on how two course mates and I became 'Sea Dogs' within five months.

On completion of our sea training on Tir/Betwa, Cadets Vikas Datta, Joydeep Chakraborty and I were appointed onboard the spanking new corvette Kirpan to undergo our midshipman's phase. An eventful month followed, with sea sorties

and even plans for a (subsequently cancelled) 'cruise' to Singapore. The ship then sailed to Kolkata for the guarantee refit and after experiencing a passage up the Hooghly, we were reappointed to the venerable Nilgiri back in Visakhapatnam. After the newness of Kirpan, the conditions on Nilgiri came as a bit of a shock. The ship was in the throes of an extended AMP and the JOM looked as if it hadn't been lived in for decades. The three of us stripped down to our shorts and scrubbed it as only well-

trained cadets could. We emerged from the innards of the ship about six hours later, all spruced up in our clean 6Bs, ready for our first (soft) drink for the evening—only to be handed a signal by the OOD directing us to report to Taragiri within the next 10 minutes before it cast off for Port Blair!

Hurried packing and choice curses later, we were onboard Taragiri—already packed to the gills with under-training officers. Passage to Port Blair done, it was felt that





there were far too many U/T officers on board. That meant a move to Magar, which is where we spent our next month or so, including an eventful AMPHEX and an annual inspection. The return passage to Visakhapatnam was again in the bowels of Taragiri but, “too many U/T officers” later, we were shunted to any Fleet ship that sailed. We soon became a familiar face in many wardrooms and civilian bearers began rolling their eyes when they spotted us.

One eventful move was to Ranvir. She was an entirely different kettle of fish—hot-rod specialists looking important, only pausing to sneer at us snotties who had dared embark the Grand Old Lady of the East in the midst of an NR! This was on account of the Raksha Mantri’s visit to Visakhapatnam at the time. Snotties must be kept busy, and we had been selected for ushering duties for the ceremonial parade. Thus, we were disembarked from Taragiri (again!). Long story short, we wowed one and all with our ushering skills and were footing it back to Ranvir when a passing Chief of Staff (Admiral ‘Chotu’ Das) deemed our gait “slack” and asked us to convey to our CO

that he was invited for a chat. As expected, this didn't exactly have the CO and EXO of Ranvir handing out mugs of beer. What it did do was have the ship's GIs refamiliarising us with the intricacies of naval rifle drill. It was imperative that the fair name of Ranvir remain unbesmirched. Off we were dispatched to await the arrival of Taragiri that evening, whereupon we blurted out the good news. CO Taragiri, Captain Abhyanker, was known to us from our NDA days: as ‘Bhayanker’. Fortunately, he saw the lighter side and wriggled his way out of COS's invitation; our only punishment was no shore leave for a week.

Come the mids board and during my turn at bat, I was doing quite well until I was inundated by questions on Taragiri’s layout and weapons. I promptly stumbled and was asked by the board president why I was so singularly lacking in knowledge on my own ship. I then proceeded to relate my tale of woe. When asked to count the number of ships whose decks I had graced, it added up to 14. Their eminences were suitably impressed, whereupon I was anointed a ‘Sea Dog’.

Epilogue: Midshipmen are graded by respective ships for OLQ, journals and the like. Given our nomadic nature, no Fleet navigator would grade us. Eventually, it was the FNO and FOO who filled in our IN 707s—a rare honour indeed!



About the author

Commodore A P Shaji Kutty, an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Pune, was commissioned on 1 July 1992. A gunnery and missiles specialist, he has held specialist tenures onboard INS Mysore, Trishul, Nirbhik and Vidyut. He served on the staff of the Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet as the Fleet Gunnery Officer. He has commanded guided missile ships Kochi, Kulish and Nirbhik as well as his alma mater Dronacharya, besides serving as EXO of guided missile destroyer Mysore. He has served as Defence Adviser in the High Commission of India, Pretoria, and was accredited to South Africa, Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. He has undergone the National Defence Course and the Staff Course at Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. He is a postgraduate in defence studies and also holds a master’s degree in personnel management. At present, he is Commodore Work Up at LWT (East).

NOSTALGIA

TRAVAILS OF TRANSFER

By Commander Samir Roy Choudhury (Retd)

In the course of one's naval career, the common thread for everyone is 'going on transfer'. It always brings mixed feelings: joy with the anticipation of a new appointment, and sorrow from leaving the accustomed behind. While many transfers

are mundane, some bring unique experiences.

Having got married in the holy city of Varanasi in August 1972 as a young lieutenant with four years' service, my wife

and I travelled to Visakhapatnam just two days after the wedding through the cosmopolitan city of Kolkata, making use of the great Indian Railways. In those days of limited landline telephones, we depended on the India Postal Department for





communication through postcards and inland letters. I had written to a friend in Visakhapatnam and he had arranged temporary accommodation for us—the home of another friend who had gone on leave. He received us at Waltair Junction Railway Station and handed over the keys. Off we went, my newly wedded wife and I, in a mighty auto rickshaw to Naval Park.

For the next seven years, I shifted through various appointments in Visakhapatnam, from Headquarters Eastern Naval Command and the Dockyard to two tenures onboard ships. During this period, I also picked up my half stripe and we added two small members to our family. Life was rolling on rather smoothly and I had just about completed a year as electrical officer onboard INS Katchall when, one fine day, I suddenly received my transfer letter. I was being posted to Naval Headquarters in New Delhi and had to report in about five weeks.

When I broke the news to my wife, she expressed her happiness at moving to the capital. However, it was a big logistic

evolution to plan the move, arrange for boxes and pack the many household items we had gathered over the years. Finally, D-day arrived. I had hired a truck with some labourers to take us to Waltair Junction. When we reached the station, I discovered to my shock that the railway contract coolies would not allow the labourers I had taken to bring down the luggage from the truck. They argued that handling of luggage within the station premises was their responsibility and means of livelihood. I had to agree, albeit with slight reluctance. A friend of mine who had accompanied us took my wife and children to the compartment while I went to book the luggage in the 'brake' van. After due formalities, I went to the compartment leaving the luggage to be loaded. But then, thankfully, I decided to go back to ensure everything had been loaded properly. I found every item loaded except one box, which was lying on the platform. When I asked the train guard, he said it would be sent by the next train as there was "no space"—though there was still lots of space in the brake van. Despite my pleas,

the guard remained adamant. Then, one of the coolies standing nearby mentioned that the guard needed some 'butter'. I understood and told the guard that I didn't have any 'butter' but I would be more than willing to treat him to a tot of rum if he dropped by to my compartment after his duty shift. The remaining box was loaded immediately.

After about 36 hours on the train, we reached Delhi Main Railway Station (Old Delhi Station) near Chandni Chowk opposite the famous Red Fort at about 8 pm on a sultry summer day. As I was new to Delhi, I had asked a friend to meet us and he was waiting when the train came to a halt at Platform No. 1. Then came the discussions with the porters to unload the luggage and reload it on the transport to take us to our allotted accommodation—and what a means of transport it was! The amount of luggage we had would have taken a mini truck to fit it all in. So my friend, in his wisdom, had hired a single horse-drawn carriage: a tonga! I was quite amused that a naval officer on transfer was to make use of



a tonga to transport his family and luggage. The horse in full finery, with feather florets on his head, ornamental blinkers and metal-studded leather caparisons, looked majestic. Behind the 'coachman', there was a bench to sit five to six people, and behind that was space for luggage.

In those days, Delhi was not very safe at night especially for newcomers with family and luggage. My friend explained that these coachmen were more trustworthy than mechanised vehicle drivers; hence, this decision. The kids were extremely happy as they had never even seen an animal-drawn carriage before. So off we went with the trot of the horse and bells

jingling towards a place called Hauz Khas, which was considered the southern 'outskirts' of Delhi in the '70s. The journey was a great experience for the kids who thoroughly enjoyed the frequent neighs and snorts of the horse (and his occasional ablutions with raised tail). The area bordered the Outer Ring Road, then the outer periphery of the city.

The next surprise was the accommodation I was allotted. It was a 'hired' accommodation obtained through the CAO of the Ministry of Defence. These were in 'civilian' areas and not in cantonments or defence areas, leased by their owners for assured rents. On reaching the house, we observed it was a three-storied building with a nice frontage. So far, so good. However, when we rang the bell, the very courteous landlord took us to the rear of the building and opened a wicket gate for us to enter a small passage leading to an 'outhouse' facing the service lane! Having lived in Naval Park, Visakhapatnam, for almost seven years with all facilities, this came as a shock to the kids. But having

enjoyed the tonga ride, they were willing to postpone their worries about the house!

Thus, yours truly with family arrived for his posting to Naval Headquarters in regal style, borne on a horse-drawn carriage through the streets of Delhi, with lampposts appearing as 'Sipah Salars' standing proud with their pennant lamps! It was indeed a transfer to remember.



About the author

Commander Samir Roy Choudhury joined the Indian Navy in July 1968 in the electrical branch under the University Entry Scheme. After initial courses and sea tenures, he completed the Special Weapons Course at DIAT (then IAT) Pune in 1971. He has completed sea appointments in both the Eastern and Western Fleets (Petyas and Giris) and shore appointments at NHQ (DWE), HQENC, ND (V) and WESO (now WESEE). He took premature retirement in December 1988 to join Bharat Electronics Ltd (a PSU under MoD) to pursue the production of naval command and control systems.

ADVENTURE

LOKAYAN 2007: A VOYAGE TO REMEMBER

By Commodore Sunil Balakrishnan (Retd)





*I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and sky
And all I ask is a tall ship, and a star to steer her by.*

Join the Navy and See the World' is an enticing phrase for any impressionable mind imbued with the spirit of adventure. For me, this dream came true with the opportunity to visit about 40 countries across four continents, both onboard ships and on deputations. Lokayan 2007, the 10-month voyage of the Indian Naval Sail Training Ship Tarangini to the east coast of the US under my command, contributed handsomely towards my chance to 'see the world'.

Lokayan 2007 enabled Tarangini to proudly carry India's tricolour to 24 ports in 16 countries spanning four continents, while traversing over 22,500 nautical miles (nm) and crossing the Atlantic or 'Pond' twice. In this historic expedition, Tarangini provided opportunities to 240 Indian naval officer trainees as well as 18 naval officer trainees from 15 countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Djibouti, Eritrea, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the UK and the US.

Tarangini was welcomed to each port with much fanfare and always found an eager Indian community to shower their love on the sovereign space of India there. Our presence around the globe can be gauged by the fact that even in the remote 18 sq m island of Grand Turk in Turks & Caicos, with a population of about 3,500, there existed a small, vibrant Indian community!

A 10-month voyage provides a crucible to understand human desires, risk-taking abilities, perseverance and performance under adverse conditions. There were many instances where these aspects resonated clearly.

En route to Port Canaveral, Florida, from Grand Turk Island, Tarangini found herself in the company of the first named storm of the Atlantic for that year, 'Andrea'—it happened in May after 26 years—and kept station for 60 hours. The monstrous seas towering up to about 30 ft with heavy roll exceeding 40° on either side every 10-12 seconds with screaming winds made



Tarangini float like a cork ball. The ship was fully battened down and the crew had prepared well to face the challenge. The experience of surviving a full-blown storm definitely bolstered our self-confidence to face severe adversity with patience and perseverance. The non-stop violent motion of the ship for almost two-and-a-half days made even the most difficult rides in Orlando's theme parks seem like a cakewalk. (As an aside, a couple of days before encountering Andrea, the George Clooney film *Perfect Storm* was screened onboard and in a bizarre coincidence, the



boat in the movie was named 'Andrea Gail'!)

A near knockdown experience off Boston when winds from a gentle breeze worked up to severe gale force in a matter of minutes caused Tarangini on a broad reach with full sails set to heel to almost 55° with the gunwale getting submerged even as the crew swiftly furled all sails. The ship escaped unscathed while some other tall ships were not so fortunate. Everyone onboard instantaneously understood the meaning of teamwork and this experience will never get erased from memory.

On setting out to cross the Pond for a 23-day voyage from Canary Islands to Antigua, gale force winds had picked up as the day rolled on to a moonless pitch-dark night. Tarangini was cruising along under reduced sails with waves of over 12 ft breaking all around. Suddenly, she developed steering gear failure causing her to lie broadside to strong winds and crashing waves. The severe roll induced caused the main seawater inlet of the ship's generator to lose suction, resulting in a total power breakdown.

The crew handled the emergency with alacrity, stabilising the ship by reducing the sail area and rigging up the emergency manual steering gear mechanism to hold the head into the wind and reduce motion before attempting further repairs. It was a hair-raising experience.

The festivities and celebrations accorded to tall ship events in the American and European ports say a lot about the maritime outlook of the nation and adventurous nature of citizens. These events gave opportunities to the ship's crew to interact with dignitaries, including heads of state, governors, ambassadors,

senior military officers and notable citizens. The cities of Charleston, Norfolk, Baltimore, Newport, Boston and Halifax went into carnival mode, with the population actively participating in numerous activities connected with tall ship events. Attending the Governor's Ball in Norfolk and Newport gave the ship's crew and trainees a glimpse into celebrity functions. Indeed, the culture of using tall ships and sailships as character-building platforms for the youth is very common in these countries. Youngsters take pride in getting the experience, even if they have to pay for it. And there is no better way to gain practical experience in teamwork and shouldering responsibilities.



The young crew of Tarangini had a great lesson in understanding cultural sensitivities in Antigua. A few sailors using the hotel pool tried to befriend a toddler, as they would have done back in India. However, the parents immediately raised an alarm, claiming it was an act of child molestation, and had to be made aware that it was a misunderstanding. Cultural differences and societal



acceptable behaviours in different ports and communities had to be clearly spelled out and reiterated many times to avoid such unpleasant scenarios. This broadened the crew's outlook tremendously. One crew member learned the hard way to obey hotel rules as he lit up a cigarette in a no-smoking section and was fined \$ 400. No amount of requests to waive the stiff penalty yielded any succour.

Being at sea for such a long duration gives you opportunities aplenty to see various aspects of nature's bounty: calm and serene waters, raging and violent seas, wonderful sunrises and sunsets, moonlit nights and myriad colours in the sky. For many days, large schools of dolphins



provided company to Tarangini, frolicking around the ship. Similarly, sighting whales off Nova Scotia (Canada) and Ponta Delgada (Azores) was a priceless experience.

Interacting with tall ship Lord Nelson at Las Palmas, Canary Island, was also memorable. Lord Nelson is a UK-based ship of similar design as Tarangini and undertakes voyages across oceans. It provides wonderful opportunities, even to the physically challenged, enabling them to perform beyond their perceived limitations and integrate with society.

Looking back, Lokayan 2007 brought immense learning to everyone associated with this fabulous voyage. Tarangini triumphantly met all her objectives without major incident or accident. While the crew can proudly claim that the hard work, meticulous planning and adhering to standard operating procedures resulted in successful completion of the voyage, it would not have been possible without the support of the universal intelligence residing within each one of us and nature's

nurturing blessings. I am sanguine that the trainees who participated in the voyage would have utilised the skills picked up during the voyage as they now move to occupy the mid-level hierarchy of the Navy.



About the author

Commodore Sunil Balakrishnan NM, an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 1 January 1987. A navigation and direction specialist, he has undergone professional courses at College of Air Warfare, Hyderabad (2008-09), and the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington (2001-02). At sea, he has commanded INS Ranvir, sail training ship INS Tarangini and INS Bhavnagar. He has also held key appointments ashore such as Director, NCC Maharashtra Directorate, Mumbai, Director Naval Operations at NHQ, Head of Training Team (Navy) at DSSC, Joint Director Naval Operations at NHQ and Officer-in-Charge Ship Handling Simulator at Navigation Direction School, Kochi. He is the recipient of the Sword of Honour for his outstanding performance during initial training and was awarded the coveted Thimmayya Medal for the most spirited officer at the DSSC. He retired on 31 May 2020.

ADVENTURE

MY DATE WITH ADELE

By Captain Vinay Kumar Verma (Retd)





It was my long cherished desire to visit Antarctica—the continent described as the chilliest, driest, windiest, highest and most inaccessible of them all. The dream came true when I learnt of my selection as a member of the naval contingent in the Sixth Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica (1986-87). My main task in the expedition was to provide meteorological support for flying operations and collection of meteorological and oceanological data during the passage, and in Antarctica.

The expedition left Goa on MV Thuleland, a Swedish ship, on 26 November 1986 and reached Antarctica on 24 December 1986. The ship secured on fast ice near the old Lazarev (Soviet) station, about 20 nautical miles (nm) from Dakshin Gangotri (70° 05'S, 12°E). It was an unforgettable scene. We were in an altogether different world of white marble, a pristine paradise. I was enchanted by the presence of a few small Adele penguins who had come there, probably to look us over. I was looking for a chance to go and shake hands with these small alien creatures; the opportunity came

when we were allowed to go on fast ice in groups. Our overenthusiasm possibly annoyed the birds and they ran away. It was surprising as I had always believed Adele penguins were very friendly, providing amusement to visitors to Antarctica for generations.

With the commencement of flying operations and offloading of men and material at Dakshin Gangotri and Maitri stations (Schirmacher hills - 70°45' 52"S, 11°44'30"E), we became extremely busy for the next two days. One day, Mr Gunnar, the Chief Officer of the ship, and an ornithologist in his own right, told me there was a small rookery of 50-60 Adele penguins very close to the old Lazarev station, and that it would be a once-in-a-



lifetime experience to spend a few hours with them. After finishing my day's work, I left for the rookery along with my cabinmate Mr Nagrath, a scientist from the India Met Department in New Delhi.

We reached the spot soon and inadvertently created chaos in the rookery. The birds started squeaking and gurgling and running helter-skelter. I stopped Mr Nagrath from chasing them and sat down near the rookery. The birds stopped running and started looking curiously at us. I talked to them in my chaste Haryanvi, saying, "Look, little friends, we have come all the way from India to meet you, traversing a distance of 11,000 km. We mean no harm to you." Perhaps, they understood me and one of them started returning. He was a male and the leader of the group (as I learnt later). First, he hectorated me for our encroachment into his territory but a little later, he started smiling. He went to the biggest heap of pebbles and took up his position. That was his nest. The other penguins started returning to their nests (heaps of pebbles) and within half an hour normalcy was restored in the rookery.



It didn't take me much time to realise that the status of a penguin in the rookery was directly proportional to the number of pebbles he or she owned. Male penguins generally possessed more pebbles and were much admired. Though the pebbles were collected by these birds for nesting, they had become symbols of their prosperity and status. Some birds were stealing pebbles from others' nests, leading to fights between two birds or between two groups of birds. Normalcy was generally restored by the leader ensuring the return of the pebbles to their rightful owners. Each moment was thrilling.

After a couple of hours, the penguins started to consider us part of their group and some shared our dinner, which we ate in the rookery. When I was prostrate on the ice shelf, two of them tried to pinch my wallet and handkerchief from my pocket. I

scolded them. They apologised by rubbing their bills on my overcoat. In one case, I acted as an arbitrator of a dispute. I asked 'A' to return the pebbles belonging to 'B'. 'A' returned it and thanked me by jumping into my lap and pulling the pen out of my pocket. By then, it was 4 am and we had to return to the ship to steal some sleep.

Though we had spent almost eight hours with the penguins, it seemed like just minutes. It was a polar summer night (rather, day) I will never forget. While bidding them adieu, it was at the back of my mind that this could well be my last meeting with Adele. They might have sensed my sadness. Two of them came out from the rookery to see us off. They kept walking with us and tried to stop us by coming in our way. I had tears in my eyes. We gave our pens to each of them as parting gifts. They picked them up in their bills and went back

reluctantly. Even after a lapse of 35 years, it has not been possible for me to forget that night. Bless you Adele.



About the author

Commissioned in the education branch of the Indian Navy on 8 October 1973, Captain Vinay Kumar Verma had specialised in meteorology and oceanography. Having participated in the Sixth Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica (1986-87), he achieved the distinction of becoming one of only 300 Indians who had the privilege of visiting Antarctica till then. A graduate of Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Captain Verma also provided his services as principal of two Sainik Schools, Kunjpura (Karnal) and Nagrota (Jammu). He took premature retirement from the Navy on 15 October 2003 and thereafter worked as Principal and Director MNSS, Rai, Haryana (2003-2015). He also achieved the distinction of becoming the Chairman of Indian Public Schools' Conference (2007-2010).



ADVENTURE

THE UNTOLD STORY

By Commander K V Subba Rao (Retd)

The Navy has its share of stories of officers performing unusual acts. For instance, a pilot taking off from the deck of Vikrant without the use of a catapult. In 1969, as a cadet, I was fascinated by the story of a captain displaying sound professional knowledge and good rigging and seamanship skills—he sailed a frigate by wind power. I was waiting for a chance to repeat such an adventurous deed.

In 1982, INS Chatak was assigned to a barrier patrol off Bombay during the 'Defence of Bombay Exercise'. The ship was on the patrol, at ordered speed. I was the commanding officer of the ship. My crew and I made three sails from bed sheets, for the main, fore and mizzen sails. The exercise ended and the ship was to proceed to harbour.

This was my chance and I was charged with

the enthusiasm of a child waiting to try a new toy. We quickly rigged up the sails; the wind was from the stern. We made about 3 knots. I ordered 'stop all engines' and 'all hands on deck'. The crew were told the reason behind this trial: in case we were not able to use our engines owing to battle damage, we had proven that we could move at 3 knots in fair winds! The crew was also told not to discuss this trial.

I left the Navy in 1993. A decade later, I met a senior officer during a walk and told him this untold story. Most of my cadets heard this story during seamanship training. Even now, so many years on, the very memory of the wind propelling my ship still gives me the thrill of fulfilling a long-pending dream.

In tactical school we learned that if surprise is achieved, half the battle is won. The missile boat squadron has a history of

'surprise attacks beyond the normal thinking of strategic thinkers'—an attack on the enemy port by a small coastal defence boat. I believe this untold story will serve an important purpose: teaching future cadets to try innovative seamanship skills to move, to fight, to win. Even today, this evolution gives me the joy of a teenager who has done something clandestinely—and successfully. I wish future officers enjoy the same thrill as I did. The lesson is simple, yet significant: Seamanship cannot be neglected; it is the lifeblood of seafaring.



About the author

Commander K V Subba Rao served in the Indian Navy from 1971 to 1993. He was Commanding Officer INS Chatak from 1982 to 1984.

An aerial photograph of a shipwreck in the ocean. The ship's hull is visible, with the number '901' painted on its side. The ship is partially submerged, with its bow pointing towards the upper left. The water is dark blue with white foam from the ship's wake. The ship's structure is heavily damaged and rusted.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

FOXTROT NOSTALGIA

By Commander Vinayak S Agashe (Retd)



Soldiers in Olive Green, White and Blue fight not just in war but also in peace, compelled by strange circumstances of force majeure, unforeseen acts of God or man. In my humble opinion, none are called upon to fight daily such diverse acts with catastrophic consequences as much as submariners. This is a story of fighting fire in an enclosed, congested space of the steel hull of a submarine.

Submarines, as you probably know, are made like a cigar-shaped tube, stuffed with myriad machinery, diesel, oils, compressed gas, weapons, explosive material, sensors, controls, miles of piping and wiring in every nook and corner, even in the 'heads' toilet. So much so that there is literally little space left to stuff the submariners into a submarine! A short man can barely stand and the passages are so narrow that if a man is coming in the opposite direction, one has to reverse to get out of the way. Because submarines are beset with many immortal threats more deadly than its mortal enemies (like fire, flooding, gas poisoning, hypoxia, asphyxiation,

compression and decompression), the submarine is built with a large number of bulkheads (internal walls) with small leak-tight lockable hatches (doors) to isolate the submarine into small independent compartments from head to toe. Squeezing oneself through these hatches quickly, feet first, to go about the innards of a submarine, is like Olympic gymnastics and a callisthenic art that submariners learn through much perseverance. Custom-built batteries that drive the submarine underwater weigh more than 30 per cent of the total weight of the submarine (around 3,000 tonne). Once they are loaded in the 'battery pit', there is hardly any place for a man in there. So buddies, fighting a fire in a submarine is no mean or easy feat! It is the most fearsome nightmare for a submariner.

It was September 1979 and winter had arrived early to attack the Soviet Union. INS/M Karanj, one of the early Russian Foxtrot diesel electric submarines of the Indian Navy had been undergoing overhaul and medium upgrade/refit at Dalzavod dockyard in Vladivostok, a major Soviet submarine base and dockyard on the

eastern seaboard, just north of North Korea. Karanj was therefore popped up in a floating dry dock, which was secured alongside a mother ship, PKZ Osipov. Karanj was in the last stage of refit. All the large heavy-duty batteries (many of them in battery banks) had been loaded, using a crane, in Karanj's battery pits. The work of interconnecting them to the submarine's electrical bus was in progress. Almost all its systems (ventilation, hydraulics, integral firefighting) were in various stages of repair, refit and testing, yet to be completed, and hence not ready for use.

While the upgrade/refit was in progress by the Dalzavod contractors, Karanj was still the property of the Government of India. Therefore, the crew was stationed not far from Karanj, in Dalzavod, not only to keep an eye on the work in progress but also to ensure the security and safety of the submarine. At any given time, day or night, turn by turn, there was always a skeleton 'duty watch' crew on board, consisting of an officer of the day (OOD) with two to three sailors from each department—about 10 to 12 Indian Navy personnel—on duty.



Every morning, a few hundred dockyard workers, mostly young women, came to attend to the engineering tasks on Karanj. All the ladies could be grouped into a few names, 'Natasha', 'Olya', 'Luda' or 'Ira', many of them tall and very pretty *devushkas*. Our only source of entertainment was 'bird watching'! Despite very limited knowledge of the Russian language, our crew, especially young hurly-burly Leading Seaman (LS) Cheema, had a cordial relationship with all of them.

One such wintery bright afternoon, as a young lieutenant, I was the OOD of INS Karanj. During the standard one-hour lunch break, all dockyard workers had left the submarine. Besides me, others on duty onboard Karanj were Petty Officer (PO) Pratap, LS Cheema, two electrical sailors and one engineering sailor. Other naval personnel on duty had also been sent to have lunch on PKZ Osipov, the mother ship. Lonely and homesick in the fin of the submarine, with a salt-laden, ice-cold wind lacerating my face, munching a measly sandwich with too much mustard sauce, I smelt whiffs of smoke. I asked the control

room to send personnel to inspect all the compartments and slid down the ladder to the conning tower. After sometime, the CR watchkeeper told me that the smoke could perhaps be from the floating crane that was alongside the floating dock. Somehow, I was not convinced and immediately slid down the vertical ladder into the innards of Karanj. I started inspecting the compartments one by one, along with PO Pratap and LS Cheema.

As I opened the hatch of the second battery pit, a big puff of smoke came up and almost choked me. It was an emergency because the large, heavy-duty, fully charged lead acid batteries, when heated, emit an explosive and asphyxiating mixture of hydrogen and hydrogen trisulphide gas. This could not only choke us to death but blow up Karanj if the hydrogen concentration increased to 4 per cent by volume in the confines of the battery compartment. There was little time to waste by calling for outside help. Immediate action was required.

The ventilation flaps on the trunking were

not yet fitted and, therefore, the battery pits could not be isolated or sealed. The standard operating procedure (SOP) was to trip the circuit breaker, isolate the battery pit and seal it. However, this SOP was inappropriate in the middle of a refit. Thick black smoke had filled the pit, reducing visibility to under 2 ft. There was no time to go looking for masks. Thus, without a thought, I jumped into the dark smoke-filled battery pit to locate the source of smoke. PO Pratap and LS Cheema followed, fortunately with two emergency lights. Our eyes started burning and watering from the black smoke and we began to cough. However, uppermost in our minds was that, come what may, we had to save Karanj from blowing up. After groping about half-blind, we found a damp, thick, fur-lined overcoat lying on a large heavy-duty submarine battery that had short-circuited. The coat had caught fire and was smouldering, belching black smoke. By now, we were violently coughing and gasping for breath.

Somehow, holding the coat, I reached the battery pit hatch and threw it on the deck of



the second compartment. By then the CR watchkeeper had sounded 'Emergency Stations'. A few of the crew arrived at the battery pit hatch. We were feeling so weak that we could not pull ourselves out of the battery pit. Someone pulled out Cheema and Pratap. I remember being helped out last by Lieutenant S P Singh and Lieutenant M S Kumar (engineer officer) and being hauled to the wardroom (the messing bunker onboard that also acted as the doc's infirmary). After being stretched on a bunk and palpitated (like CPR) for about 15 to 20 minutes, I began to feel better. The commanding officer, Commander Ravi Ganesh, who had arrived onboard by then, asked Pratap, Cheema and I to be taken to the forward casing for

fresh air. We were so weak that we had to be helped to climb the ladder. I remember being helped by the EXO Lieutenant Commander Ashok Shinde (who later distinguished himself as an outstanding 'pilot' in Mumbai Port Trust) and Lieutenant S P Singh. After an hour or so, we felt well enough to return to duty.

What had led to this emergency? It seemed that one of the dockyard workers who had come to connect up the massive battery banks in the morning hours, a laborious and intricate task, had removed her damp overcoat and put it on the battery—and forgotten to take it with her when going for lunch. Fur gathers static and becomes a conductor; the fully charged battery may have shorted and set fire to the coat. Luckily for Karanj, our immediate discovery and quick reaction had thwarted a potential catastrophe. A few more minutes of delay in execution would have resulted in Karanj blowing up in a foreign port along with duty watch personnel and others in the floating dock and the mother ship. The next day, at 'both watches' (all crew onboard) top side, the CO gave the three of us a big *Shabash*

for a job well done. We felt proud to have saved the submarine from exploding—it was our tryst with destiny.

After many years of search, I met PO Pratap, who retired as Master Chief Petty Officer (MCPO). There were no words, only tears of joy and camaraderie as the whole incident of 1979 unfolded silently before us. Someday, I hope to meet LS Cheema too; he also retired as MCPO.

After taking premature retirement, I have worked all over the world in various capacities but nowhere have I found the dedication to duty as you see in a submarine.



About the author

Commander Vinayak S Agashe, VSM, commanded two submarines: INS Vagli and INS Vela. He has the unique distinction of serving on all eight Foxtrot class submarines of yesteryears in various capacities. He took premature retirement in 1994 to pursue his various passions and hobbies—he has trekked in Tibet and the Himalayas, sailed up the Amazon river and camped in the jungles.



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

GETTING DOWN TO BRASSTACKS

By Captain S S Sethi (Retd)

Operation Brasstacks, the tri-services exercise held from early December 1986 to March 1987, was one of the largest coordinated services manoeuvres after Independence. In fact, it is said to have been bigger than any NATO exercise and the biggest since World War 2. The impact of the exercise on our neighbour was so electric that it forced the country to go into high alert and redeploy its own forces into a defensive mode.

The task

One of the major objectives of the operation was to conduct a series of amphibious assault landings of an infantry brigade from our landing ships. The operational and mounting phase for the above exercise, though planned for Kochi, was shifted to Mangalore. It never dawned on me during my appointment as Officer in Charge (OIC) Navigation Direction (ND) School and Naval Officer-in-Charge New

Mangalore (NOIC NM) that I would get the opportunity to conduct an exercise of this magnitude and carry out the duties of the Theatre Commander. It was all the more surprising as I was still a commander, posted to ND School on an anticipatory appointment for donning my next rank.

This job was suddenly entrusted to me with zero logistic support in Mangalore, except for the Port Trust, for which I was the de-



facto trustee. We had to make arrangements for the 91 Infantry Brigade, comprising nearly 3,500 troops and about 450 vehicles, including tanks and armoured personnel carriers (APCs). In addition to the Army, 13 naval ships, four merchant vessels of the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), two Kiran and one Islander aircraft were to be accommodated. Not to be left out was a full-fledged requirement to accommodate a COMCEN detachment from Mumbai, Base Maintenance Unit (BMU) from Vizag and an aircraft maintenance and ground support team from Goa, with a total of over 80 naval and civilian personnel. Also, a Maritime Operations Room (MOR) had to be established from where operations could be conducted around the clock. Further, the NOIC was tasked with the local naval defence of the port and the VAs and VPs. All this had to be organised from scratch with zero infrastructure and very limited resources in New Mangalore.

A competent leader can get efficient service from his troops but first he needs to be provided with the troops! The team

available with me for this herculean task was only my staff officer, Lieutenant Commander K P Ramachandran. When the Command Headquarters was approached for resources, the curt reply was, “You have been entrusted with a job; go and do it.” General Mac Arthur’s words, “Duty, Honour and Country”, which dictate what you ought to be, what you can be and what you will be, provided me enough courage to march ahead.

Preparation

Handing over the reins of the ND School to my competent chief instructor, Commander Sam Mohammed, I came down to Mangalore. The only letter with me from Command HQ was an authority to hire a car. I took solace in the fact that I was at least mobile. Sitting in the makeshift office in the Port Trust guesthouse, with the colossal requirement in my hands, I began to come to terms with the situation.

Realising the need for early action and decisions, I decided to go around Mangalore to carry out a survey to arrange accommodation for the personnel who

would descend on the city within a few days. There were no empty schools or buildings available. The Deputy Commissioner promised to look into the requirement but I had my reservations about any support from him. The only recourse was the Port Trust and the only expediency was to barge into the Chairman's office. Fortunately my predecessor, late Captain K M S Rajan, had maintained a very congenial relationship with the Port Trust, which had been maintained by me.

Jolted by the importance and enormity of the exercise, the Chairman said, “Commander Sahib, the entire Port Trust is at your disposal; point to a facility and it is yours. Anything for a national cause; we are with you!” His reassurance boosted my self-confidence tremendously and galvanised me into becoming a fearless decision-maker for the entire exercise. In accordance with his directive, the port trust facilities and land became mine for that period, at no cost to the Navy. New Mangalore was neither a naval base, nor did it have a dockyard or ship repair and



base logistics facility. It was a busy, deep-water port dealing with large cargo ships, transporting oil, iron ore and other bulk cargo. Its ability to handle naval maritime operations by day and night was yet to be evaluated.

Setup and deployment

At the outset, a new two-storey building that was yet to be inaugurated became my office. The MOR, COMCEN, BMU office, victualling office and Aircraft Control Room were set up in this building. The COMCEN was set up by COMCEN (B). I got a young officer from Cochin to man the MOR, while the BMU facility was manned by a team from Vizag.

The Port Trust provided open land in Mangalore and Suratkal for the Army to pitch its tents and accommodate the 3,500-plus troops. In addition, there was enough space to accommodate the 450 vehicles that were awaited. A separate camouflage area for the tanks and APCs was earmarked in Suratkal. The Brigade HQ and battalion locations were identified. As the troops and vehicles kept arriving in

trainloads, they were marshalled to their designated areas. The Army cherished their location next to the sea!

The airport manager was supportive and readily allocated a zone on the dispersal to park our Kirans and Islander. Though there was no night-flying facility available in Mangalore, the airport management allowed us to light up the runway with goose necks and operate at night. They manned the air traffic control (ATC) to meet our requirements. This aspect was significant considering that the airport was open only from 0830 to 1500 hrs daily for civil aircraft operations.

Exercise phase

During the exercise phase of the operations, the following tasks and beachings at Suratkal could be accomplished:

- Beachings by day (including standoff): approximately 70
- Beachings by night (including standoff): approximately 30





- Number of vehicles/tanks loaded and transported: approximately 220
- Number of troops transported: approximately 7,200.

The landing ships would embark the troops and vehicles from the berth at Mangalore, transit to Suratkal and disembark the vehicles and troops at Suratkal beach. As the beach was only a few miles from the Port Trust, it became a win-win situation. The area in front of one of the berths was modified by the Army, enabling the vehicles and tanks to roll in and out. It was a pleasure watching the jawans manoeuvring the vehicles in the restricted space for loading the tanks. The exercise gave them a tremendous amount of confidence and over 200 vehicles were loaded without a single major accident. In fact, the nearly 100 beaching operations by day and night also went off without a single mishap, except INS Shardul losing the anchor, which was located later and secured to the ship's cable. The credit for the safe operations goes to the planning and conduct by CATF, Captain J M S Sodhi (now a retired rear admiral), and late

Captain T L Rattan and his small team.

Operational phase

During the operational phase of the exercise, the MOR had to be manned 24/7. The team included me, staff officer Lieutenant Commander Shyam Rao, and a raw young lieutenant on temporary duty from Cochin. Messages from the COMCEN next door were coming every few minutes round the clock and some of them required operational action and response on our part. The only way to run the operations was to perform in the true naval manner—not to leave the Bridge as the Captain. During this operational phase, I could not leave the MOR before 1 am, only to return at 5 am, ready for the next day. Thinking back, I wonder where the physical and mental strength came from? It was the spirit of keeping the Naval Ensign flying high with the Olive Green all around.

During the operational phase, while it was essential to man the MOR in a warlike scenario, the requirement to provide support to the 13 naval ships and four SCI vessels apart from the Army and aircraft

detachment could not be ignored. To relieve myself of administrative distractions, I called Lieutenant G B Singh from ND School, Cochin, and asked him to liaise with authorities from the Port Trust, civil aviation, civil administration, Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), the police and so on. He was also asked to take care of the logistics requirements of the 17 ships and other formations in station. I had no option but to ask him to take independent decisions and not disturb me during the Ops phase. He was true to his word, working more than 18 hours a day and never troubling me with administrative requirements. There was also a threat of infiltration, from both land and sea. The CISF was able to apprehend the infiltrators trying to sneak into the port. Later, I learned that Lieutenant G B Singh was issuing handwritten passes; nobody without the pass could enter the port.

The culmination

The highlights of the operation were as follows:

- INS Amba and the Amphibious Task Force were totally loaded with the



troops, tanks, and vehicles well in time and sailed out as scheduled. The mounting operation went off without any hitch.

- 13 naval ships and 4 SCI ships operated safely from the port during the period of the operations.
- Surveillance by the lone Islander aircraft resulted in the detection of the opposing force's Gearing class destroyer and its subsequent prosecution by aircrafts and ships from Mangalore.
- The surveillance by the Islander aircraft also resulted in the detection of the Operational Task Group (OTG) with Chariots and subsequent prosecution of the Group by aircrafts and ships from Mangalore.
- The opposing force's submarine was detected, resulting in timely deployment of forces from Mangalore for its prosecution and destruction.

This is just a summary. Suffice to say, New

Mangalore was converted into a major naval base. Mangalore and Suratkal had never seen a naval exercise of this magnitude. It seemed New Mangalore, Penambur and Suratkal had been taken over by the Indian Navy and Army—fresh fruits and vegetables became scarce and Mangaloreans would wonder what happened to all the fish on Friday, as the total catch would be picked up by our victualling department!

Thirty-two years later, it still remains hard to believe how a small NOIC organisation took on such a challenge and delivered with flying colours. In retrospect, it was zeal, enthusiasm, grit, fearless decision-making, self-belief and, above all, the aim to maintain the highest traditions of the service, which helped the miniscule organisation achieve such resounding success.

The personal signal from Vice Admiral Hiranandani, Flag Officer Commanding in Chief (South), on completion of the Ops is reproduced here:

FROM: FOCINC SOUTH
TO: NOIC (NM)
NSN (.) THE GOOD WORK DONE BY NOIC (NM) NUCLEUS ORGANISATION TO MEET THE OPERATIONAL, TRAINING AND LOGISTICS REQUIREMENT OF EXERCISE BRASSTACKS AT NEW MANGALORE HAS BEEN WIDELY RECOGNISED (.) PLEASE CONVEY MY APPRECIATION TO ALL CONCERNED (.)
2. (.) BRAVO ZULU (.) KEEP IT UP (.)
301815/MAR



About the author

Captain S S Sethi is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy (28th course) and a postgraduate in military studies from Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. He has had a remarkable career in the Indian Navy, most of which was spent at sea on various warships—he has commanded INS Prabal and INS Ranjit and was the commissioning captain of C G S Vijaya. He has also commanded Navigation and Direction School in Kochi. After retirement, he has held senior positions in various shipping and offshore companies.



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

PRACTICAL SEAMANSHIP

By Commander A B Kulkarni (Retd)

A few years ago, I had joined MV Kobe as the Master. She was originally an offshore support vessel (OSV) but the new owners had converted her to a diving support vessel (DSV), survey vessel and a 'workboat' role. She had accommodation for 40, including a crew of 15. She had two cranes on the quarterdeck and ample deck space for cargo. She was also carrying a good dinghy

(Zodiac) with an outboard motor and a proficient seaman operator.

When I joined the ship, she was at anchor in Mumbai port. Within a few days, she was chartered by Swiber Offshore for an ONGC project at Bombay High. Accordingly, I took the ship to Indira Dock. The ship was loaded with fuel, water, deck cargo and 25 personnel from Swiber. These activities

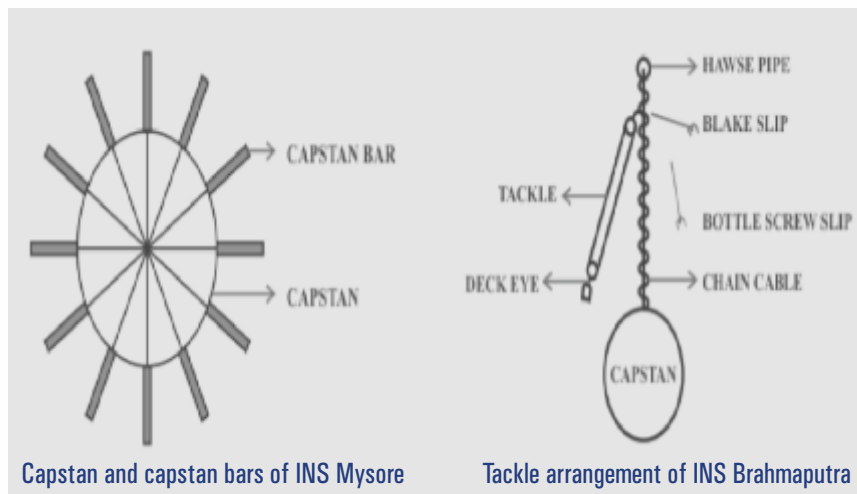
took the whole day. In the evening, the ship sailed out to Bombay High.

The ship arrived at Bombay High by noon the next day. We went to work straightaway. Part of the deck cargo was offloaded with the ship's crane. In the evening, the ship departed from the 'oil field' to anchor for the night. The ship anchored about 12 nautical miles (nm)



from our next work location. The depth of water was about 80 m and we paid out eight shackles of cable. I instructed the chief mate (CM) to start weighing anchor at 0400 hrs the next morning so that the ship would arrive at the work location by 0630 hrs. I expected the weighing anchor to be completed by 0430h. I wrote my instructions in the 'Master's Night Orders' and went to sleep.

I was awakened by the sound of the main engines and chain cable and noted that it was 0415 hrs; as there was ample time, I went back to sleep. I recalled that I had instructed the CM to give me a call at 0600 hrs in the night orders. However, he did not call me. At about 0630 hrs, I woke up and continued to hear the sound of the chain cable along with the sound of the main engines. I was confused and called the bridge. The CM informed me that he was unable to pick up the anchor. I rushed to the bridge where the CM told me he could heave the cable only up to three shackles on deck. He had paid out the cable and



Capstan and capstan bars of INS Mysore

Tackle arrangement of INS Brahmaputra

heaved in several times. He also reconfirmed that the area where we had anchored was clear of underwater cables and pipelines. The chief engineer (CE) was informed and was checking the windlass.

The Swiber team in-charge onboard informed me he was getting delayed. Time is money in a charter. He informed his office in Mumbai on the ship's satellite phone. I got a call from my company too. I reported to them that we had a problem and that the CE was looking into it.

The CE informed me that, at that time, the anchor was breaking away from the

seabed, maximum power was required and it appeared that enough hydraulic pressure was not being built up in the system. Three shackles was 75 m of cable, which corresponded with the depth of 80 m in the area. The CE was on the job with his team of two engineers and one oiler. While he was at work, I started wondering what would happen if he didn't succeed. I knew the company would not send a workshop party 100 nm away from Mumbai. That would be too expensive. I had two options: Weigh anchor by hand (muscle power?) or disconnect the cable at the joining shackle and attach a buoy and let it go.

At this point, my mind went back to 1978, when I was onboard cadet training ship INS Mysore, which was an 'Admiralty pattern cruiser'. A demonstration of weighing anchor was held for us cadets. The anchor of the ship was heaved in by the capstan. What happens if the machinery does not have power? The Brits had thought about it. The top of the capstan had 10 radial



slots in which flat long bars were fitted. Two to three sailors manned each bar and all 10 bars could be pushed at the same time. The capstan would turn and thus the cable was heaved in.

I then thought about my midshipman's training ship, INS Brahmaputra, which was a frigate by design. She was also a British ship and had a different method of picking up anchor by hand. There was a distance of about 3-4 m from the capstan to the hawse pipe. Two strong eyes were fitted on the deck, near the capstan and the hawse pipe. One fine day, a demo was held for us Mids. The anchor was dropped and the electrical power was declared 'unavailable'. A strong tackle was rigged up near the capstan and the anchor was heaved up inch by inch.

The Kobe had no such arrangement to heave in the anchor. A full 24 hours had passed but the CE could not repair the windlass. Both Swiber and my company were getting restless. The GM of my company told me to buoy the anchor and get on the job. I made a plan to disconnect the cable or cut it and lower it with a buoy

and discussed it with the CM. However, I was not happy with this as there was a chance of losing the anchor and some length of the cable.

"Seamanship is nothing but common sense," our training commander on INS Mysore would always tell us. The CM was from a Tamil fisherman family and had been skipper of a fishing trawler in Africa. Together, we decided to heave in the anchor manually.

There was an H-shaped bitt or Samson post on the bow of the ship. A chain block was obtained from the Engine Room. One end of the chain block was secured to the Samson post with a wire stop. The other end with the hook was lowered through the hawse pipe. The Zodiac was lowered in the sea with the crane. The Zodiac operator came under the hawse pipe and hooked the chain block on the cable. The seamen team on the focsle pulled on the chain block and the cable was heaved in a little! The Zodiac operator then readjusted the hook on the cable and the cable was heaved in a little more. This process was continued till the

entire cable and anchor were heaved up. I was very satisfied with this operation. We had succeeded in weighing anchor by muscle power, of course aided by the chain block—it was good use of practical seamanship. I sent a message to the company and restarted the work according to the charterer's instructions. You may think the company rewarded the crew. Actually, they were ruing the fact that they had lost a couple of days of charter money!

For the next few days, we worked at Bombay High by day and drifted outside the 'field' by night. Finally, after a few days, a new CE arrived and repaired the windlass.



About the author

Commander Anand Kulkarni was commissioned in 1979 and took premature retirement in 2003. He is an ASW specialist and has commanded an LCU and a LST. Since 2003, he has been sailing in the offshore sector and has sailed on OSVs, drill ships, dredgers, cargo vessels, passenger vessels and anchor handling tugs. He has started blogging for the past few years.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Gomati and Magan

THE MAGAN EXPEDITION

By Commodore Aspi Cawasji (Retd)



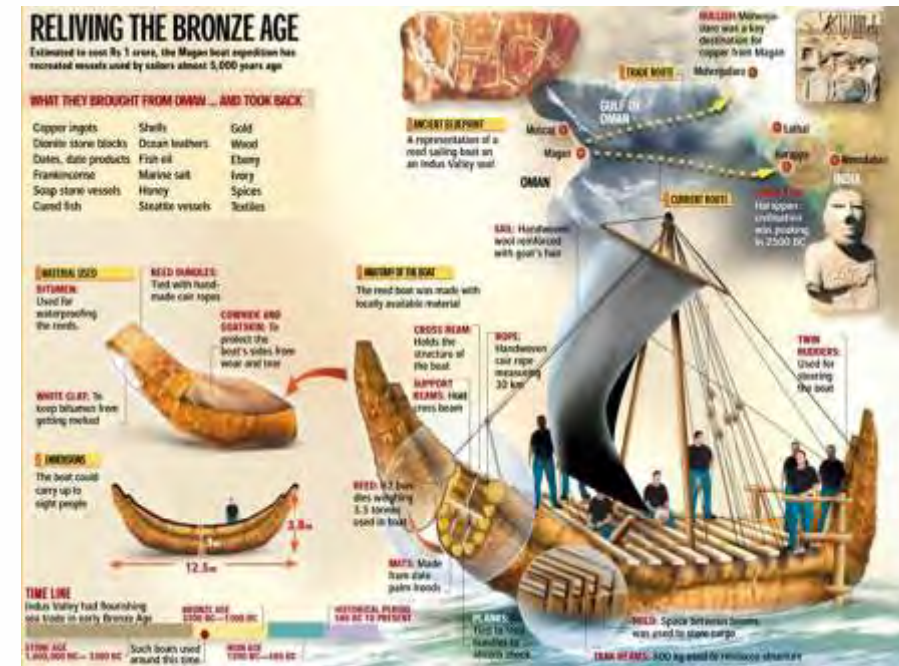


Under my command, INS Gomati, the workhorse of the Western Fleet, was dispatched from Mumbai on 4 September 2005 by Fleet Commander Rear Admiral Rustom Framroze Contractor to Sur, a small coastal port 150 nautical miles (nm) south of Muscat to support a joint maritime expedition between Oman and India.

Gomati's mission was to escort a replica of a 4,500-year-old reed boat used by traders between Arabia and ancient India. The Magan boat was to sail into Indian waters, escorted by the Sultan's royal yacht, the Fulk-Al-Salama, and INS Gomati. The Magan was to carry onboard a symbolic cargo of copper ingots, dried fish and the other merchandise of the Bronze Age just like the ancient voyagers. The names of places have changed over the millennia: Magan (pronounced Majaan) is now Oman and Meluhha, the ancient name of the spectacular Indus Valley Civilisation, is now India.

The Indus Valley Civilisation was understood to have carried on a brisk

seaborne trade with Mesopotamia, a fact established by hundreds of Harappan fragments of broken pottery uncovered there. Harappans had contact with Oman and Mesopotamia and the trade was almost entirely dependent on copper mined from the mountains of Oman, which fell midway to Mesopotamia. It is understood that nearly 1,000 years before the *Mahabharata*, flimsy boats made from reeds and straw navigated the seas of India and plied the world's busiest shipping straits in the Arabian Sea where modern day super-tankers tread. These boats were known to have carried copper ingots, dates and fish oil for the city dwellers of Meluhha. After a week's shore leave and sampling the pleasures of the city with immaculate streets and baths, the traders would return to Sur with a cargo of gold, wood, ebony and ivory. However, there was no proof of the kind of boats or ships they sailed in. Crude representations on seals showed them to be built of reed bound by rope. No boat of the era had ever been found.



Between 1985 and 1994, Italian archaeologists Maurizio Tosi and Serge Cleuzio, in a series of excavations at Ras-al-Jinz, an ancient settlement on Oman's coast, discovered 300 impressions of bitumen slabs dating to 2300-1210 BC. These slabs had the impressions of bound reeds, rope lashings and woven mats on one side and fully grown barnacles on the opposite side, indicating continuous submersion for at least three months. This was the first direct evidence of the actual



construction of early Bronze Age vessels in the Arabian Sea. An Italian-Omani team began trying to recreate the reed vessel based on the design from these excavations.

The Magan boat was made from 67 reed bundles, each as thick as a human leg, which were bound together with rope made from date palm fibre. The fibre was then lashed together with date palm ropes and formed into the shape of the boat. This frame was then covered with mats made from date palm fronds. Fresh bitumen was boiled in bathtub-sized trays and black woollen sails were handwoven with goat hair. The boat had no keel and was flat-bottomed. The absence of a keel in a boat makes it unstable and drift sideways, vulnerable to the vagaries of nature. The boat could spring leaks while at sea, be blown off course or be toppled by a whale. The crew was to wear long cloaks made from crude fibre and, to recreate ancient times, to carry only dates and water in goat leather satchels. Further, they were to use ancient navigation techniques using the sun, moon and stars to guide them and

survive on dates, fish, pulses, honey, bread and water, some of which was carried in traditional goatskins. They did not carry any modern instruments for navigation or communication. The boat was to catch the wind in its square woollen sails and head towards Bet Dwarka and Mandvi in Gujarat, India.

This symbolic voyage was to commemorate the golden jubilee of diplomatic relations between Oman, a liberal Islamic Sultanate fiercely proud of its maritime heritage, and India, an economic giant in the making. The expedition hoped to recreate the voyages made by traders using the ancient maritime silk route and to disprove the theory that ancient trade between these two countries was not just coastal but by mid-ocean voyages across the Arabian Sea.

The Magan boat was to undertake a 10-day expedition, backed and financed by Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Culture and India's Ministry of Culture. The crew was a mixture of scientists, archaeologists and seafarers drawn from Oman, Australia, India, the US and Italy, led by Tom Vosmer, and including

Alok Tripathi, head of the Underwater Wing at the Archaeological Survey of India in New Delhi. On the request of the Indian Ministry of Defence, Naval Headquarters had tasked the Western Fleet to send a warship to escort this expedition along the ancient maritime silk route. Thence, INS Gomati having sailed with dispatch was anchored off the port of Sur, Oman, on the evening of 6 September 2005, ready in all respects to undertake the mission. My task was very clearly laid out and that was to escort and render support to the Magan boat in case of any emergency over the next 10 days of her voyage.

On 7 September 2005, as the Indian warship captain escorting the expedition, I was invited to the small quay at the coastal town of Sur to witness the inauguration and flagging off. From my ship at anchor about a mile offshore, I landed ashore in my captain's cutter. I was met by numerous officials from the Omani government and Navy. On alighting ashore at the venue, I met the Indian Ambassador to Oman Mrs Atri; Captain M D Suresh, the Indian Defence Attaché to Oman; and other



diplomats and dignitaries. There was an entertainment programme arranged for the visitors followed by a visit to the Magan boat. I couldn't contain my bewilderment when I actually saw the boat made from reeds, straw and ropes with woollen sails having no metallic nails or rivets and wondered to myself how the ancient mariners had the courage to sail in similar crafts making midocean voyages. During this visit, I really felt the weight of the responsibility that rested on my shoulders, as the lives of this brave crew was in my hands.

After the flag-off ceremony, I quickly rushed back to my ship at anchor to commence my mission. The Magan boat was only capable of doing a speed of 5 knots at its best. Keeping the minimum speed of my warship of 15 knots in mind, I had thought I would maintain a respectable distance of about 3 to 5 nm from the boat, moving up and down along its intended path, always keeping it in sight during the day and circling it at a distance of about 2 nm at night. On that particular day, there was absolutely no wind at all and by

evening, at around 1700 hours, the boat had just moved about 6 nm from the coast of Sur after being at sea for nearly seven hours.

Sitting on my captain's chair on the Bridge, immersed in my thoughts sipping an evil cup of coffee made from thick condensed milk and a generous amount of coffee powder lovingly prepared specially for me by the head chef, unconsciously listening to the lookouts reporting moving objects within our safety perimeter, I was jolted out of my reverie when I heard the crisp and loud report by my lookout designated to keep watch on the Magan boat: "Bridge, Lookout, Magan boat appears to be reducing in height". As there was no method of communicating with Magan, I immediately ordered Gomati to close the boat to about a mile. In the meantime, the ship was ordered to 'Action Stations' and the crew was brought to their stations ready to render any assistance. I was carrying a Chetak helicopter onboard, which was brought to immediate standby for launch in case of an emergency in a search-and-rescue configuration. The lifeboat was launched the moment we

reached in the vicinity, which was within minutes.

By this time it was evident that the Magan boat was taking in water and sinking. The ship's lifeboat communicated on walkie-talkie after establishing contact with the Magan crew that as the boat was sinking, the crew would be required to abandon it. It was then that I realised to my horror that in the enthusiasm of recreating the exact circumstances of an ancient voyage, there were no life jackets on the Magan. By this time, the ship's lifeboat had already thrown two life buoys tethered with ropes and had most of the Magan crew holding on. Already four of the members had been taken into our lifeboat and the other four were still rummaging inside the Magan, holding on to our lifeboat from outside but still in the water. As sunset was fast approaching, I decided to launch my helicopter for rescue operations and the helicopter that was on hot standby got swiftly airborne. In a matter of minutes, all the survivors were brought onboard both by the helicopter and the lifeboat. The crew of the Magan boat were immensely grateful to my men



for having saved their lives in such quick time. As I was talking to a visibly wet Tom Vosmer, the leader of the expedition on Gomati's Bridge, the Magan sank silently with the sunset.

Having rescued all the members of the expedition, I radioed WNC and Western Fleet Headquarters for instructions on disembarking the survivors. Gomati was promptly ordered to enter Muscat on the morning of 8 September 2005. The morning had even more surprises in store. I was met by the Indian Defence Attaché and Omani dignitaries on the jetty and informed that the government of Oman was extremely grateful for the prompt actions taken to rescue the crew of the Magan boat. However, I was also told in uncomfortable hushed tones that I had incurred the displeasure of the ruler for launching my helicopter within his airspace without

obtaining his permission. On being promptly reminded by me that my sole responsibility was to safeguard the lives of the Magan crew, and that I had acted in good faith having exercised my judgement of launching my helicopter to save lives, no other words were exchanged. Gomati was refuelled and stocked with exotic food and provisions as a gesture of gratitude by the Omanis and, by nightfall, she sailed from Muscat for Mumbai, having successfully completed her mission of escorting and rendering assistance to the Magan boat.

The Omani government had spent 135,000 Riyals (about Dh1.28 million) to build the Magan boat similar to the ancient boats that sailed between Oman and India's west coast. I am given to understand that there were other attempts made. Abdul Hamid Bin Yarub Al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Ministry of Heritage, Oman, told a press

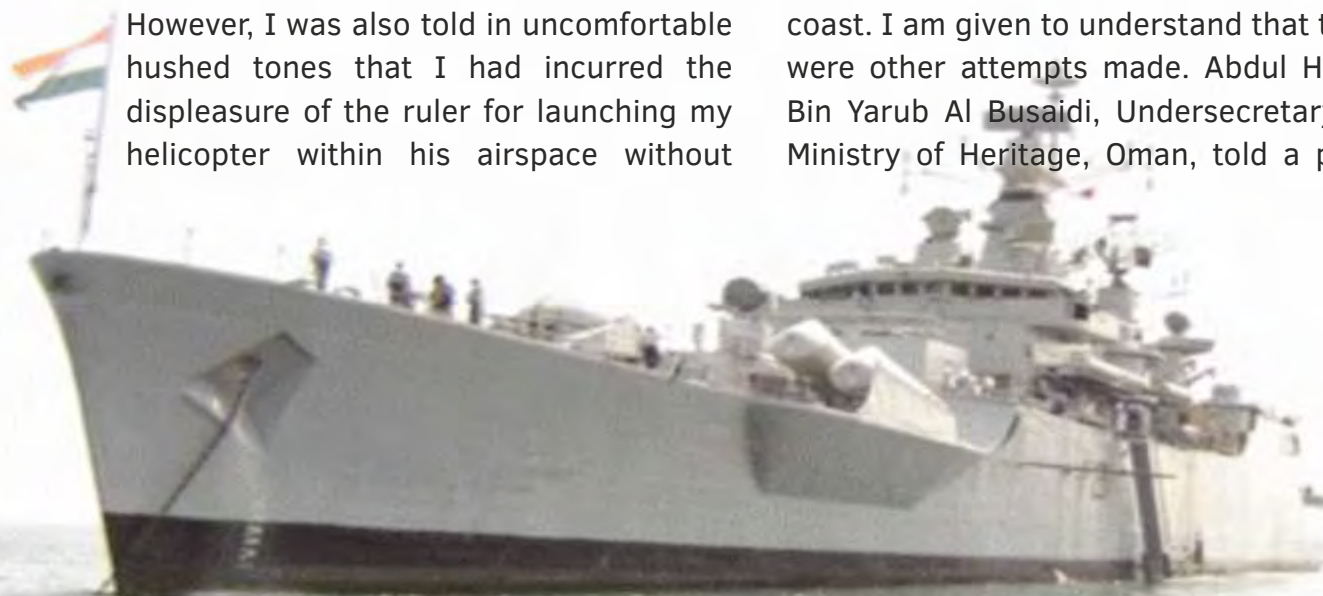
conference on 10 September 2005: "There's no doubt we will continue our research and attempt to sail in a replica of a Bronze Age boat. And Hassan Al Lawati, Director-General for Heritage and Museums, had said, "We will learn from the first attempt and plan accordingly for the second voyage." Thus ended the expedition of the first voyage of Magan that never really took off.

Upon entering Mumbai harbour, INS Gomati was commended for the exceptional professionalism displayed for saving the lives of the multinational crew of the Magan boat and for undertaking the mission assigned with such focus and dedication.



About the author

Commodore Aspi Cawasji, NM, VSM, is an experienced submariner who has held important command and staff assignments. He has jointly authored a book titled *Strategic Vision 2030: Security and Development of Andaman & Nicobar Islands*. Currently, he is visiting faculty at the New Delhi Institute of Management.



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

MINE RECOVERED, SIR!

By Commander Anand Kumar





During peace, it is seldom that a Man-of-War gets an opportunity challenging enough to test its limits and capabilities. INS Alleppey, a minesweeper of M-19 Squadron, got one such opportunity in the year 2002.

The ship entered Mumbai harbour at about 0830 hrs, after completing a gruelling 15-day deployment off the Gujarat coast. Almost every element of the ship, including men and machinery, was tested and exploited to its limit. The ship certainly needed a good break to recharge and recuperate. It was a light and sunny morning and the ship's company was looking forward to an early secure.

The commanding officer had directed the mine counter-measure officer (MCMO)—and officiating executive officer—to get the 'post-sailing' routine completed and secure the ship's company at the earliest. "Aye, aye, Sir," replied the MCMO and the ship was back to post-sailing routine activities. At about 0930 hrs, there was an announcement: "Pip-Pip,

Pip-Pip, shore call." (A traditional way to indicate there is a telephone call for the CO.) This was followed by another announcement: "MCMO requested Captain's cabin." Within no time, the MCMO was in front of the cabin where the 'Old Man' (though not old by any stretch of the imagination) informed him he had been called for an urgent meeting with Flag Officer Maharashtra Area (FOMA) and instructed the MCMO to wait for his instructions with regard to securing the ship's company. "Aye, aye, Sir," was the reply—cursing Murphy for this sudden development.

At about 1030 hrs, the ship's main broadcast blared again: "Pip-Pip, shore call." The CO was on the other side: "MCMO, a very challenging task of recovering a mine off Sunk Rock is being discussed. Others have expressed their apprehension and are reluctant to take up this challenge. Can we do it?" The reply was immediate and confident: "We will recover the damn mine, Sir."

Soon the command team was in the Ops Room with a large-scale chart of Mumbai harbour. Upon scrutiny of the depth in the area and the height of the tide, the enormity of the situation dawned upon the team. The depth around the mine's position was only 4-5 m. The ship could at best anchor within the outer limits of the channel (owing to her draft and the depth limitation) and close the mine up to a range of only 350-400 m. Everyone looked at each other; there was a palpable feeling that it was foolhardy to try this. The Old Man looked worried, the thought of forgoing the operation writ large on his face.

However, Team Alleppey rose to the occasion and with the indomitable minesweeper's spirit—'First to Go and Last to Come Back'—decided to give it a try. A detailed briefing was carried out and the following strategy was devised to surmount the challenge:

- **Step 1:** The ship will anchor at the outer limit of the channel (port side of the



channel within the limits of navigable safety).

- **Step 2:** Two 32” polypropylene ropes of 242 m length each will be joined together to make a 32” recovery rope of 450 m length.
- **Step 3:** Clearance divers from INS Abhimanyu along with the MCMO will embark the Gemini and reach the mine site, with the recovery rope under tow.
- **Step 4:** The divers will dive to ascertain the exact position of the mine and hook up the mine with the recovery rope.
- **Step 5:** Once the mine is hooked up, the recovery rope will be heaved in with the help of the minesweeping winch.
- **Step 6:** The mine will be recovered using the mine recovery davit.

This plan was discussed in detail; once satisfied with the procedure and safety aspect, the CO informed the FOMA staff that the ship was ready to cast off and recover the mine.

At about 1330 hrs, the ship sailed off. It anchored off the outer limit of the channel and the Gemini was lowered according to plan. The operation went smoothly as planned till Step 4, when the divers reported their inability to identify the mine recovery hook—implying that the mine recovery rope could be secured to the mine. The diving team was ordered to come back to the Gemini. The MCMO made a rough sketch of the mine and encouraged them to try again with a minor innovation: it was decided to tie the mine using a slip knot in case the diving team failed to identify the recovery hook. (The idea was that the slip knot would finally get stuck with the mine’s recovery hook.)

The plan worked and the recovery rope was winched in slowly towards the ship. The winching was done with utmost care to ensure no sudden jerk was experienced by the mine, or else it may have slipped out of the recovery rope. The moment of triumph arrived when the recovery rope became vertical and the MCMO could feel the

tension on the recovery rope from the weight of the mine. Soon, the minesweeping davit was swung out and the mine was secured to the davit’s hook.

“Mine recovered, Sir,” was heard loud and clear by every soul onboard the ship.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the entire evolution (right from castoff to coming alongside) was completed within three hours and the ship’s company was secured by 1700 hrs. That’s what we call the minesweeper’s spirit!



About the author

Commander Anand Kumar is a serving Indian naval officer, currently a Research Fellow and Deputy Director, National Maritime Foundation.

MY JOURNEY

A DECADE IN UNIFORM

By Lieutenant Commander
Bidisha Pandey

*All life is an experiment. The more
experiments you make, the better.*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Some people have their lives sorted right from the beginning; they know who they want to be and have a clear vision of where they see themselves after a decade or even two decades! I was never that person. I would rather call myself a restless soul aspiring to live a life full of varied interesting experiences, someone who defines life more as an exciting, unpredictable journey, without a specific destination to be reached.

As a kid, watching my father in the olive-green uniform with those glittering stars on his shoulders filled me with profound pride. Who knew I would don 'the whites'





someday! After having completed my B Tech in electronics and telecom, I was set to take on my first job. I had the opportunity to join Headstrong/Ericsson and had also cleared the SSB for Indian Navy SSC Logistics entry under the University Entry Scheme. My love for ranks and uniforms made me choose the second option.

As I transformed from Miss Bidisha Pandey to a Sub-Lieutenant, I changed tremendously as a person. I learnt to push myself beyond my comfort zone and my self-confidence was at a high. On the day of my passing-out parade at the Indian Naval Academy, I could see that my father had accepted that his little daughter had grown into an independent and fearless woman.



When I joined the Navy, I knew I had opted for a career that's anything but ordinary! Watching the Republic Day Parade was something that gave me immense joy as a child; little did I know that I would begin my journey in the Navy by marching on Rajpath soon after the completion of my orientation courses, not once but twice! I led the Naval contingent and it was a dream come true. The early morning chills, the blisters on my feet, rigorous drill practice and the final march from Vijay Chowk to Red Fort when the whole country watches you and cheers for you... unforgettable!

Later in 2016, I volunteered to be a part of the Transatlantic Cape to Rio 2017 race. Ocean sailing was new to me but I wanted to sail and know what life at sea feels like. I sailed for 33 days nonstop as part of the return leg crew from Cape Town to Goa on INSV Mhadei. Facing the wrath of nature with a smile and respecting nature as you see it in its barest form taught me to be persevering and calm even in the worst moments. Despite all the hardships, I had literally fallen for the blues; miles away

from the external chaos, my heart and soul experienced peace like never before. Swimming in the Indian Ocean while crossing the equator, baking cakes and looking at the stars all night were just a few of the many activities onboard that I shall always cherish!

I never imagined that someday I would be sharing my story and inspiring women to fight for their dreams. I have been invited as chief guest for Women's Day Celebrations at schools and colleges where I have addressed countless students—and the response has been tremendous. Last year, I was invited as the guest of honour on the occasion of the Day of the Seafarer by the National Maritime Day Celebrations Committee, where I spoke about my experiences and was felicitated by the Director General of Shipping. I was also awarded the Kashti Bhushan by Union Minister of Shipping Mansukhbhai Mandaviya for exemplary contribution to the Maritime Industry in the Field of Women Empowerment, and the Celebrating Women in Maritime 2019 award by the International Maritime Organisation.



Interestingly, the Navy not only proved to be a great career choice but gave me the opportunity to meet my life partner. I met my husband during a two-month temporary duty for recruitment of sailors at various locations such as Guwahati, Kanpur and Jodhpur. My parents were elated that I had finally found a suitable Bengali boy in the same service! My husband and I share the passion to travel and explore. Even though it is difficult to match leaves at the same time and plan vacations, we have managed to drive through all of New Zealand for a month and party in Russia till sunrise. Our last trip was to Italy and Greece where we walked through the streets and explored every corner possible!

Another significant development in my life was discovering my love for writing. I started documenting my journeys and sharing them with others. Later, I realised there are many people who have inspiring stories; this led to me to interview people in the service fraternity from different backgrounds and pursuing diverse careers. I am extremely happy that my work as a feature writer for *Fauji India* magazine and the *Forces Network eZine* is helping my community tremendously. The Forces Network is a network of veterans from the Armed Forces who have made a smooth transition to civil life, and made it big as entrepreneurs or reached leadership positions in the corporate world. I interview these individuals and chronicle their experiences and journey to the top. Today, over 50 of my articles have been published, and have proved to be extremely useful for a lot of military officers looking forward to a successful transition to the corporate world or entrepreneurship after retirement.

I will also soon complete my 10-year tenure in the Navy. Being a naval officer has taught

me a lot: Leading by example, having faith in my team, communicating effectively, taking responsibility and, most important, being fearless. I am not sure what lies ahead but with the qualities I have inculcated in service and a family that unflinchingly supports me in whatever I do, I look forward to chasing my dreams, taking more risks, being myself, making my own choices and living my life to the fullest.



About the author

Lieutenant Commander Bidisha Pandey is a Short Service Commissioned Logistics officer currently posted at Sagar Prahari Bal in Mumbai. She was commissioned on 4 July 2011 and has previously served at INS Eksila and INS Circars. She led the Naval Marching Contingent twice on Rajpath as part of the Republic Day Parade 2014 and 2015 in New Delhi. She has also participated in the Trans-Atlantic Cape Town to Rio de Janeiro Ocean Sailing Race 2017.

SANGINI – A BAND OF WOMEN

By Belina K

I belong to a band of women called Sangini. Let me share more about us!

The idea of forming a group and meeting was the brainchild of a senior citizen, Mrs Ramalakshmi. With her past experience of having got all the ladies from the Coast Guard family residing in Chennai together, in 1995, she strongly felt we should do the same here, in Visakhapatnam. She was of the view that residing in the same city as families of veterans, we must interact to

share, learn, support and grow. With that vision in mind, she put up a proposal to the President, Navy Foundation, Vizag Chapter, to allow the ladies to meet every month at the same facility used by the veterans. This was readily agreed and with the help of the secretary, a meet was organised on 8 March 2015. A small group attended and had a good time.

After this first event, there was a lull with no one taking up the initiative to organise subsequent meets. Sometime in 2016, at

one of the Navy Foundation get-togethers, Mrs Bhanu China Verriyya approached me to suggest we ladies meet and impelled me to host one such event. As I did not know most of the ladies in the city, I requested Kiranmayi (Kiran) Murthy, my husband's course mate's wife, to join me as a host as she knew quite a few of them. WhatsApp groups were just becoming the in-thing and we decided to have one for easier communication. As many ladies hadn't subscribed to the app, we struggled to get everyone onboard—we still haven't,



although the reasons are different. But we, as a group, are proud that we follow a 'no forwards' policy! A few months after the get-together, some of us thought of coining a name that would reflect us... women of different ages, yet keen to form new friendships. Quite a few suggestions came in and finally Kalpana Chauhan's suggestion, Sangini, struck a chord!

At the meet organised by Kiran and I, we proposed we get together once in a quarter and that the meet could be organised by any two ladies. Since then, we have been meeting at different venues. There is one 'enthu' group who are game for anything and attend almost all the gatherings. They believe in living in the moment, pursue their passions and celebrate life. One Sangini, Mrs Suma Sudhakar, is an avid trekker. Motivated by the photos she shared, we decided to do one too. Our first trip was to Kambalakonda Reserve forest, which is close to the zoo in Vizag. Early in the day, the green environs looked pristine and the soft sunlight caressed us, without any crowds or litter lying around. The uniquely designed dustbins placed at several points



beckoned visitors to dispose of their wrappers and fruit peels. Mrs Suma made arrangements for breakfast and tea to be delivered at the gate, after taking permission from the concerned authorities. This trek was followed by another one, a couple of months later, to Kailasagiri hill. This tourist spot is known to everyone who has been posted to Vizag; people generally go by road or use the cable car. We walked up, stopping en route to click pictures and, of course, selfies.

Not satisfied with these in-city gatherings, we decided to take a day trip to Araku, a popular hill station. The attraction was not just the all-girls day trip but the vistadome coach introduced by the Indian Railways for tourists. We had another WhatsApp

group for the ladies who opted for this trip. This was a little tricky because we all had to decide about two months in advance to reserve the limited tickets available for travelling in the coach. The time spent in the train just flew by with such a boisterous group. Everyone on the coach was entertained with our *antakshari* session and we probably put the young tourists to shame with our level of energy. The breakfast carried was a mix of various cuisines. After visiting the touristy spots, we savoured the piping hot, simple lunch at Andhra Pradesh Tourism's Haritha Resort, enjoyed the 'Dhimsa' dance performed by the tribal women and headed back to the station, only to be informed that the train was late by over two hours. After the train arrived, the vistadome coach could not be connected owing to a power failure. Not to be put off by the delay, we entertained ourselves enacting the last scene of DDLJ! Though we reached home tired and quite late into the night, the happy hormones kicked out of their cells lasted for a while.

The global pandemic has put a stop to our gatherings but, being who we are, we held



hands, virtually, during the first lockdown announced by the PM. It was taken as a 21-day challenge initiated by yours truly and our friendships have only been blooming. Each morning, a suggestion would be posted by me and everyone eagerly waited for the group notification to alert them. Like the tortoise, we started slow but picked up pace as the days went by and touched the finish line with a lot more participants than when we started. Some of the challenges helped us touch base with extended family or friends who only remained in our thoughts until then. Here is a glimpse of some of the suggestions posted:

- Message to thank at least two people you know working in the field of health/sanitation.
- Share a funny incident.
- Call and speak to at least two senior citizens aged above 65 with whom you have not spoken in the past month and share the experience here. (This activity uplifted the spirits of many, especially the ones who received the calls, as everyone was cooped up at home without any visitors.)

- Pluck flowers, leaves or both and press them between the pages of a book and leave them to dry.
- After your bath, stand in front of the mirror and just look at whom you see for some time. Next, tell that person... I love you and I am proud of you! (A Sangini queried: After wearing clothes, or before?!))
- Make face masks. (Mrs Bhanu China Verriyya made an excellent video on how to stitch one from the material available at home.)
- Be creative today and share. (Kiran created a tree innovatively using a sari, a long skirt and a bunch of bananas, and



placed it next to Sakshini, her granddaughter, for a fabulous photo op!)

Indeed, the extended lockdown kept our morale upbeat and some of us formed a subgroup for 'Living Positive' wherein we recorded affirmations to cleanse our body, mind and soul. We have started to understand each other better in this pandemic and have cemented our relationships: *is me kuch khaas hai!* I would not be wrong to say that Sangini is a gem from the 'Jewel of the East Coast'!



About the author

Belina is one of the mentors for the Internet Saathi Accelerator programme of Sheroes, which is being run in collaboration with Google. A postgraduate in communication and journalism, she was editor of *Veerangana* from 2010 to 2013. She is a life-coach, chocolatier and candle-maker. She has been mentoring women in their areas of work and counselling when necessary. Her focus has been skill development, education and integration of children with disabilities. She is married to Rear Admiral K Ravikiran (Retd).

THE LEARNING CURVE

By Commodore B R Prakash (Retd)



When I was posted as an Assessor to the Selection Centre South in Bangalore, after a long stint on ships and naval bases, I was sure the learning curve would taper off from the growth phase to a plateau phase. I had assumed that the years of sustained growth powered by various demanding appointments would fade into an exponential decay function aided by advancing age and consequent reduction in grey matter. But that was not to be. The Personnel Branch rarely allows anybody the pleasure of a diminishing learning

curve. Rather, the 'P' Branch firmly believes that as one tends to drift to the deadwood category, there is a need to jolt the individual back to reality. Individuals are put through a faculty upgrade process to avoid falling with the obsolescent obsolete category. The learning curve as propounded by Herbertson never ceases.

As an Interviewing Officer, every interview is an intense learning experience and, over a period of time, I have learnt many new concepts, been exposed to radial thoughts, and gained valuable insights in many

familiar and unfamiliar fields. Some of the lessons learnt significantly altered my understanding on many fundamental postulates held as gospel truth.

To evaluate effective intelligence and reasoning ability, two important OLQs (officer-like qualities), a few questions are asked on basic science and some in the area of specialisation (in case of engineers). Some of the answers by the candidates are worth sharing.



My understanding of physics has improved considerably after interactions with the candidates. The concept of Bernoulli's Principle was given a new interpretation by an engineer, when he extended its application to explain how aeroplanes fly. According to this budding Einstein, the wind that moves over the wing of the plane is colder than the wind below it; and as hot air is lighter, it pushes the aircraft upwards. However, he conveniently forgot to explain how the wind below the wing heats up and why it cools on top. In the background, I could faintly hear Bernoulli groan and turn in his grave.

There were some interesting interpretations of scientific principles to explain common phenomena. Some 'eminent scientists' used the Archimedes principle to explain how airplanes fly. I am still recovering from that onslaught. There was another genius who propounded that ships float due to surface tension of the water, which causes the water molecules to rush back and, in the bargain, create an upward force. He cited the example of a razor blade floating on water to prove his

theory. As per these geniuses, mass and weight, force and acceleration are all interchangeable and are used at will to explain any concept. A common perception held by the candidates was that power is what one wields and has nothing to do with work done or the time taken.

One mechanical engineer, when asked the difference between a diesel and petrol engine, looked at me with a bewildered expression and replied that one used petrol and the other diesel. Another one told me that the difference between a two-stroke engine and a four-stroke engine was that the former used two pistons while the latter used four. Not a word about the power stroke cycle. I was dumbstruck by his brilliant and simple answer and found it futile to question him on the Carnot cycle. I also learnt that heat treatment was done to shrink metals and, yes, metals contract when heated. No arguments with Mr Thermodynamics. Another brilliant engineer brought out that heat treatment processes like annealing or quenching were used to mould metal to the desired shape.

An engineer specialising in electronics and communication engineering expounded on the great strides made in the field of communication—a budding Steve Jobs with ideas to synergise music, voice and data under a single platform for seamless communication. But he was completely stumped when asked to explain how a simple radio works. Heterodyne receiver and modulation were Greek to him. Concepts of amplitude or frequency modulation were clearly beyond his level of comprehension. He advised me to just "Google it". I don't think Larry Page imagined that Google would one day be a one-stop solution to all problems when he developed his legendary search algorithm during his PhD at Stanford.

Another area where I have gained great insight is geography. My geography, which I always thought I had mastered in my formative years, was constantly challenged during these interactions. My understanding of the demarcation of the boundaries between nations was generally an extension of natural borders due to geographical features that present natural



obstacles to communication and transport. Existing political borders are often a formalisation of these historical, natural obstacles. Some boundaries were redrawn during the colonial times or, more recently, because of historic events like the disintegration of Soviet Union or the unification of Germany. However, that impression was put to rest in a short time with the candidates. Until then, I did not realise that borders could be changed so effortlessly. Many of the boys I interviewed have managed to shift countries, even continents and oceans, to suit their perceived world view. It makes tectonic shifts seem trivial.

I was made to understand that the neighbours of Syria were Russia and Ukraine. A few others also included Libya and Morocco. And the Middle East or West Asia includes Portugal, Italy and Greece. It took me a while to understand that the Mediterranean Sea had met the same fate as the Dead Sea and vanished so that these far-flung land masses could be enjoined. I have also learnt that England and Greece are neighbours. As if this were not enough,

one candidate even subsumed the Indian Ocean into the Pacific Ocean and put into motion forces that would get the world back to the Gondwana age of a single continent. These were indeed masters of illusion who made oceans disappear only to reappear at new places with new land masses. The conviction and sheer confidence while describing the globe was incredible—cartographers would have had a really tough time to produce maps at the rate by which they were redrawn. As the questions and answers are passed by word of mouth between the candidates, they assume a degree of authenticity by sheer force of majority. Invariably by the end of each batch of candidates, the world has been transformed.

It was indeed an interesting way to spend a day learning new concepts and theories. Every once in a while, an Einstein could come along to propound a breath-breaking theory, which leaves one wondering about the education system in the country. I often wonder whether youngsters ‘learn’ anything during their years at college or just study to pass exams. A common refrain

was, “This was in the 3rd semester.” Guess the ‘Store & Erase’ function of the brain to prevent an information overload is to blame for this state of affairs. ‘Control + Alt + Del’ after each semester to reboot the system after each semester is standard so that by the end of the final year, the hard disk has been reformatted so many times that it reaches the end of its service life. That’s another story for another day.



About the author

Commodore B R Prakash, VSM, is an alumnus of Training Ship Rajendra and joined the Indian Navy in 1986. He is a missile and gunnery specialist and has served on INS Ranvir as SAMCO and Gunnery Officer on INS Rajput. He commanded INS Vidyut and INS Ganga and was the commissioning CO of INS Sardar Patel. He served as President 12 SSB, Bangalore, prior to taking premature retirement in 2017.

IN A LIGHTER VEIN

HUMOUR IS NOT UNIFORM

By Commodore Susheel Menon

Stiff upper lip, ramrod-straight spine, starched uniform, inscrutable expression, stern face, orders barked out and impatience—all hallmarks of a good *fauji*. But let that icy exterior and sense of purpose not fool you into thinking that wearing the uniform excises you from a sense of humour. Military humour has a brand of its own and

just like the weapons military men wield, it strikes precisely and deep!

My tryst with military humour began in the early days at the National Defence Academy (NDA), circa 1988, where the 'official' end-of-term joke was delivered by the adjutant within the ramparts of the QM Fort as the cadets prepared to march out

for the Passing Out Parade. The jokes I heard during my second to fifth terms failed to elicit mirth but seeing the sixth termers guffaw in happiness, we were led to believe that the passing out course was more attuned than we were. Come spring of 1991, my course was in the QM fort preparing to pass out and as tradition demanded, our decorated adjutant came





and delivered his official end-of-term joke. Readers may pardon my memory and comprehension, but I only remember the words ‘Kentucky Chicken’ from that encounter. For a forever hungry cadet, that reference to a fried chicken brand was motivation enough for the magnificent and blemish-free parade—incidentally, witnessed by the three service chiefs of the time, who were batch mates and alumni of the First Course NDA.

I never did get the chance or the courage to ask our adjutant about the joke again. But more than the official joke, our course (and others who were at NDA the same time) clearly remember the adjutant asking the Subedar Major in charge of equestrian lines what he had fed the horses that morning as his valiant steed was punctuating all his commands with generous and noisy expulsions of methane—from which end, I shall leave the reader to surmise.

Thus began my journey as a willing (and often unwilling) participant, perpetrator and victim of military humour.

In early 1992, I was undergoing my mid tenure on a frontline destroyer. The common refrain during replenishment at sea (RAS) was that the tankers would connect up the water hose but no water would, in fact, be transferred. Then, warships did not have the abundance of water one has today and the CO had not succeeded in his attempts to get some water for the ship’s company through routine signals. Matters had to be taken to the next level. The mids were summoned and given directives. As the ship pulled alongside the tanker, we appeared on the Forward Volna deck clad in nothing but our swimming trunks holding a poster pointed towards the CO of the tanker with the caption: “You are Brahma – Give Us Water”. I am glad to report that my efforts (with those of my fellow midshipmen) gained us an extra 5 tonne of water in that RAS. I did hear that parading midshipmen in swimming trunks was attempted by a few others, but with not as much success.

Fast forward to many years later, I was part of the commissioning crew for the first of

the 1135.6 frigates being inducted from Russia: the Talwar class. We had been suitably trained in Russian by instructors from JNU and even had a piece of paper that declared us proficient in the language. After a few days of settling down, wherein the meals were largely mashed potatoes and eggs, some adventurous culinary experts decided to expand the menu and went to buy chicken from the local *produkti*.

Now, as all of us know, learning a foreign language is very different from using it with a native speaker. A few of us marched in together, in typical military mutual support formation, and the leader of the pack was encouraged to do the shopping. As he stepped forward, after the initial greetings exchanged in Russian, he experienced a rapid reversion to his own native tongue and could not remember the word for chicken. After a few minutes of delivering perplexed looks at the young girl behind the counter, who was unable to interpret the same, the fearless leader of the shopping party pointed at some eggs arranged behind the counter and said



confidently in Russian, “I want its mother.” The girl’s expression, the yelling by an old lady behind the counter and the menacing approach by a burly Russian man gave us the indication that either the expression had not been understood or the finger had not been pointing at the eggs. Nevertheless, we did not wait to find out. We beat a hasty retreat remembering vividly that the gulag was not a nice place to cook our chicken.

Fortunately, our language skills improved rapidly and we could soon enjoy both eggs and chicken without getting arrested or deported. A few months later, towards the end of our stay there, I had managed to gain sufficient skills to hold a sensible conversation in Russian. One evening, a senior colleague and I were summoned by the EXO designate, who had a battle to fight with the transport contractor. In the absence of the official interpreter, we were marched into the conference hall where the EXO was in conversation with the contractor. As soon as he saw us, he said, “*Perevochik zdec*” (the interpreter is here)

and then launched into a tirade about the quality, quantity and punctuality of the transport arrangements. After a five-minute angry monologue, he turned to us and said, “Now translate.” Bewildered as we were and at a total loss of words—English or Russian—we turned to the contractor and simply said, “*On ochin zol*” (he is very angry). Needless to say, our translation skills did not impress the EXO and before he got ‘*Ochin zol*’ on us, we made good our escape. That I survived to tell the tale is more a commentary on the benevolence of our EXO than my survival skills.

More recently, when I was in command of a capital ship, during an interaction with the Sub Lieutenant afloat training officers over breakfast, I noticed one of them did not have his blood group on his uniform. When I enquired about his blood group, the young officer replied in earnestness, “Sir, B positive.” My reflexive retort was, “Son, I asked for your blood group, not advice!. Well, I’m sure the young man must have felt like I did in the QM fort many years

ago when I heard about the fateful Kentucky chicken.

But that’s what we do in the military; we maintain tradition and we pay it forward. Humour in uniform is, well, not uniform.



About the author

Commodore Susheel Menon, VSM, is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy (80th course) and was commissioned in 1992. He is a gunnery specialist with specialist tenures on board INS Ranvijay and INS Talwar. He has commanded IN TRV-71, INS Kirpan and INS Kolkata. He has done his early non-specialist tenures on board INS Kakinada and INS Gharial. His other operational tenures include that of Fleet Gunnery Officer, Western Fleet, Executive Officer, INS Mumbai, and Commodore (Operations), HQENC. He is a graduate of the Naval Command and Staff College, Indonesia (2006), and Naval War College, USA (2013). His staff tenures have been in the Personnel Branch and as NA to VCNS. He has also been a Directing Staff at Naval War College, Goa. He is currently appointed as Commodore, Strategy, Concepts and Transformation, at Naval Headquarters.

GHATGE AND THE LIMITS OF RITUAL

By Commander A J B Singh (Retd)

Just out of training, Ghatge was a cheerful steward attached to the wardroom in INS Circars. This was 1966, and you can imagine that it was a different world. The route to the wardroom from his barrack ran past the officers' cabins. One evening, I heard a thud outside and, rushing out, saw Ghatge lying on the road. We took him to the small Base Hospital that was less than a hundred yards away but he was dead—and not yet 19.

I am reminded of this because COVID has forced drastic changes across the world in the conduct of last rites. I often wonder what difference it makes in the bleak or glorious hereafter, or to those that are left behind. What is it that dictates the 'right' procedure or ritual? For instance, we lost a colleague at sea one day. The Navy has SOPs for everything and so the body was readied for burial at sea. It was laid out on a stretcher, draped with the tricolour, with a

heavy weight tied to the ankles. The EXO read out the designated prayer and the body was tipped over the side and sent to Davy Jones' Locker. We held onto the flag, secured it, and went back to our duties.

To return to Ghatge, as required of his divisional officer, I mustered his meagre belongings for safe storage and helped with the telegrams to his next of kin. Meanwhile, his body had been sent to the hospital in Waltair for a post-mortem—it turned out to be a heart attack. The body needed to be preserved as we waited for the relatives to arrive for the cremation but the hospital's morgue was not working. Thus, twice a day, for some five days, I would take a slab of ice to the hospital and, with an assistant, place chunks of it in and around his skull and body to preserve his remains. Unfortunately, we had no news from his family, so the CO gave the go ahead for the cremation.



On cremation day, however, the priest bowled a googly, saying a relative was required to light the pyre. Seeing my turban, he said my doing the needful was out of the question. Inspiration prompted me to say that Ghatge's cousin had recently arrived from his village—that worked.



I nominated a Maharashtrian sailor who knew Ghatge and, without further ado, the cremation proceeded without a glitch.

The next day, we went to collect the ashes, placed them in an earthen bowl, covered it with a white cloth and took it back to the base. The duty quartermaster (QM) flatly refused to keep the ashes, saying the urn should be hung in a tree and that the guardroom was not the right place for it. I then did what I thought was reasonable and took the urn to my cabin, placing it on the study table. It was safe; nobody wanted to touch it. At least one gentleman even refused to enter my cabin. But every night before turning in, I would apologise to Ghatge for any lack of ritual shortcomings.

About a week later, Ghatge's uncle arrived. I handed him Ghatge's belongings but he primarily wanted the ashes for the immersion. When I took him to my cabin and told him the whole story, he thanked me profusely. As he did not want to take the ashes back to the village, we arranged a boat for him. He insisted I come along. So, one afternoon, we took the ashes just

outside the harbour and committed the sailor to the sea.

Death is agnostic but I suspect all post-facto prayers and rituals have something in common, derived though they are from diverse myths or practice. In many cultures, material goods accompanied the dead in years gone by but prayers and oblations for the soul continue to this day. For example, an ancient Greek myth had it that a coin be placed in the mouth of the corpse as payment to the boatman, Charon, to ferry the soul to the Underworld.

It is hard to see how any ritual is better or worse than another. The key, surely, is that every ritual is about handling the earthly remains with care. It allows those near the time to mourn the dead, with the satisfaction of having followed their faith.

So, then, what difference do rituals make? Is Ghatge less happy in heaven or do all those in COVID mass graves fare poorly in the hereafter? What of those that die alone; the mass casualties in war and natural disasters; or those that, unknown, sink with

ships at sea? I doubt very much if it makes a difference in the hereafter.

In Ghatge's case, I was surprised when his uncle expressed satisfaction with our actions, even though 'correct rituals' had not been followed. Perhaps it was because we had given the sailor the respect and dignity the departed deserve. In my own case, though, I would rather that friends and relatives ease up on rituals, remember the good times, and party hard till my well-stocked bar runs dry.



About the author

Commander A J B Singh of the Supply Branch retired after 23 years of service. In addition to assignments in ships and establishments, he was Secretary to FOCWF and COM. He did a four-year stint on the faculty at Defence Services Staff College. In 1988, he joined GRSE in Kolkata from where, as a GM, he retired in 2003. While in GRSE, he was sent on deputation to the MoD in Delhi, as Director, Defence Exhibition Organisation. During his time there, he was Nodal Officer for organising Aero India 2001, DEFEXPO 2002 and Aero India 2003. He is now Managing Partner of M/s Xhibitions & Events.

MY BRUSH WITH DEATH

By Lieutenant Commander N R Kolluru (Retd)

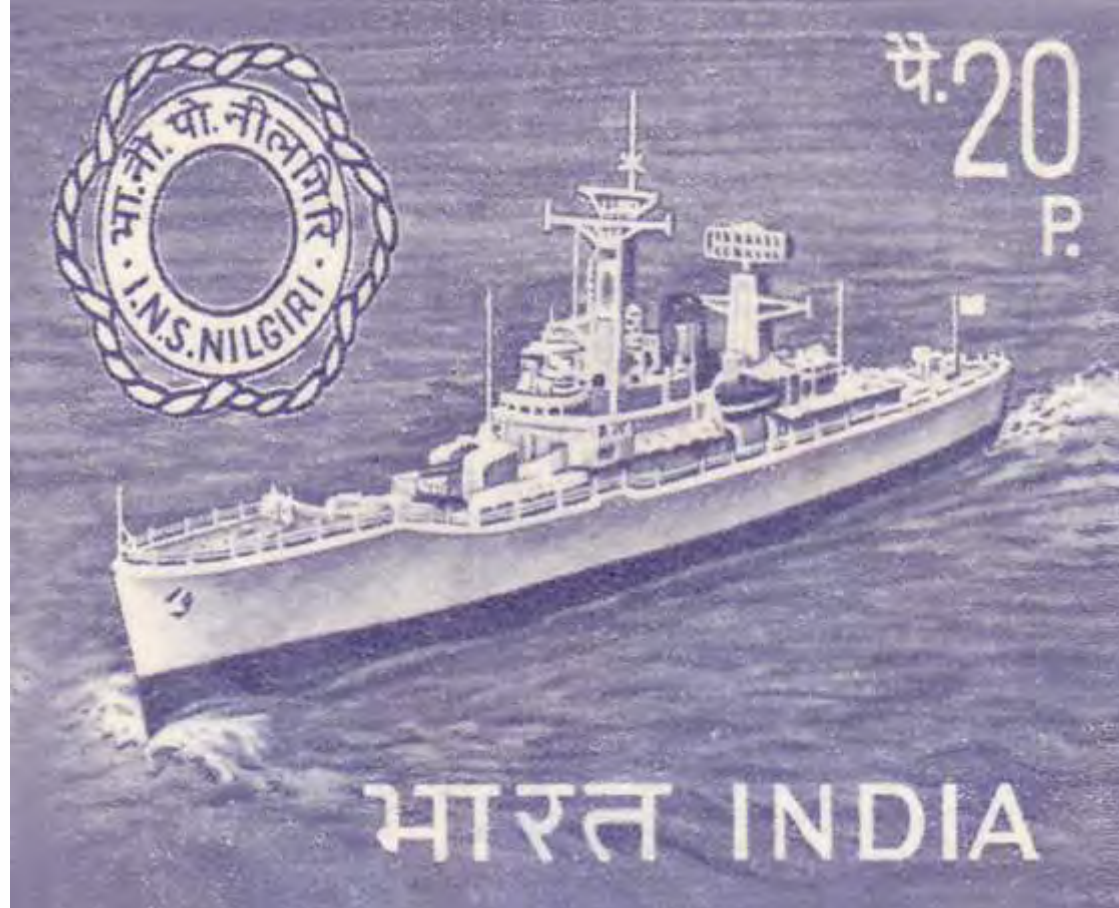
This event happened about 45 years ago. I never thought of writing about it. However, events in the recent past, mainly the illnesses caused by COVID-19, have taken me back. The symptoms were similar in my case.

I was transferred to INS Nilgiri in the Block Transfer List of 1973 as a PO (TEL). All the sailors transferred to the ship in the list were replacements to the commissioning crew. Captain O S Dawson was the commanding officer and Lieutenant Ajit Tewari was the signal communication officer (SCO). A few key sailors from the commissioning crew were retained onboard to impart on job training to the new crew for a month. During the OJT, I put my heart and soul into learning the modern Integrated Communication System (ICS), a major evolution in naval communications. Though the ship was fully air-conditioned, some compartments where sensitive equipment were installed needed low

temperatures for stability. One such compartment was the Electronic Warfare Office (EWO).

The first ship of the Leander Class, INS Nilgiri had the most advanced gadgets capable of monitoring S, C and X band radar transmissions with DF capability using two monitoring receivers. She also had two different jammers. This facility of monitoring and jamming the SHF spectrum didn't exist in the Indian Navy before the induction of these ships. The Command used to rely on the radar intercepts reported and the CO would visit the EWO to see how the radar transmissions were intercepted. The Command was the only authority to release

the jammer button fitted in the bridge. During peacetime exercises, the Command used to try the jammers on friendly radar transmissions and officers would visit the Ops Room to see the jamming effect on the monitoring screen—the radar screen would go completely blank. That was the importance of the EWO. The work was so interesting that I never wanted to leave the EWO during sailings, except to eat! At the same time, I was exposed to very cold





temperatures spending such long hours in the EWO and my body eventually got accustomed to the chilled environment.

In January 1975, the ship was directed to proceed on a mission and, as usual, I closed up in the EWO. After two days of sailing, I experienced a reeling sensation and difficulty in breathing. The communication sailor on duty escorted me to the sick bay. By the time the doctor reached, I was bordering on unconsciousness. He gave me first aid and I was able to respond for a few seconds but then I became unconscious.

The doctor diagnosed severe chest congestion and recommended evacuation to INHS Asvini as my condition was critical. I was admitted in the ICU in an unconscious state and placed on the DIL.

I didn't know I was shifted to Asvini till next morning, when I opened my eyes and saw a Surg Cdr before me. The doctor told me I had severe chest congestion and breathing difficulty due to inhaling poisonous gas and informed me that I was slowly recovering.

He also told me it was imperative to pass urine as I had not done so for the past 30 hours. My mouth covered in an oxygen mask, I signalled that I had no urge to do so. He advised me to try again, but in vain. After 30 minutes, he came back, but the same thing happened. Then, he told me a white lie—that my family would be visiting in the evening and if I wanted to see them, I had to pass urine as my life was in threat. He then instructed the duty nurse to administer an injection through the IV and left. She told me that the Surg Cdr was in ICU throughout the night just to save me.

Around 9 am, my bladder was full and I was able to do the needful. The nurse reported the news to the doctor and returned smiling, assuring me I was out of danger. The doctor visited me around 11 am and told me the danger had passed and that I was lucky to have survived such a serious episode. After four days in the ICU, the doctor recommended that I be shifted to the general ward with a special diet. After six weeks in the ward, I was discharged with three weeks of sick leave.

I came to know a week after my admission in INHS Asvini that more cases of inhaling poisonous gas were diagnosed, but with lower intensity. The ship was ordered to return to Bombay and a board of inquiry was ordered, which later found that poisonous gas from adjacent pipes had leaked into the AC duct.

All's well that ends well, as they say. But I still shudder whenever this incident comes to mind. But for the quick decision of the CO to evacuate me by ship's helicopter and the professional job done by INHS Asvini, the consequences could have been different, and dire. Rather than being known as Late KN Rao PO (TEL), I went on to become a lieutenant commander! I have also had the honour of serving as the Treasurer of the Navy Foundation Visakhapatnam Charter. I shall remain grateful to the commanding officer of INS Nilgiri and God almighty.



From the editor

The author expired on 16 October 2020, after the submission of this poignant article.

TRIBUTE

AN ODE TO A LEGEND

By Commodore Ashok Rai

*A mortal man ripens, on the stalk, like grain;
Like grain, he falls, to be born again.*

*-Katha, the Upanishad of the secret
of Eternal Life*

They say soldiers never die; they just fade away. This article is penned in memory of one such soldier, the Indian Navy's first sailor-admiral, late Rear Admiral Gupteshwar Rai, AVSM, NM, VSM, who had quite a few 'firsts' to his credit. It has been almost two decades since he departed this mortal world, yet countless naval personnel have heard of him by word of mouth. I recently met a serving captain who said that he had met the admiral fleetingly as a youngster, and that was enough to impress him—the admiral had a charismatic personality. The captain added that when he learnt the admiral was a self-made man who had risen in service from being a 'boy' entry sailor from a remote village in Uttar Pradesh to reach the flag rank by sheer dint of hard work,

professionalism and diligence, he had decided to emulate him as he too was serving in the lower decks at that point in time. He decided to keep a photograph of the flag officer in his locker to remind him of his resolve—he too cleared his commission-worthy exams and is proud to hold the rank of captain. According to him, even today, many senior sailor instructors at INS Chilka cite the example of Rear Admiral Rai in their motivational talk to young recruits who report for their boot training.

Apart from broadly tracing his career path, this article is also an attempt to reach out to the admiral's friends and colleagues with a request to kindly forward any photographs or share any anecdotes they may recall about him. His contribution in shaping the growth of the Indian Navy in various capacities was noteworthy. It's a tragedy that he left this world so young at the age of 62. Having been in the driver's seat or member of many a commissioning crew, he could have been a treasure trove of information to many a naval historian. I

Inspecting INS Dronacharya at divisions

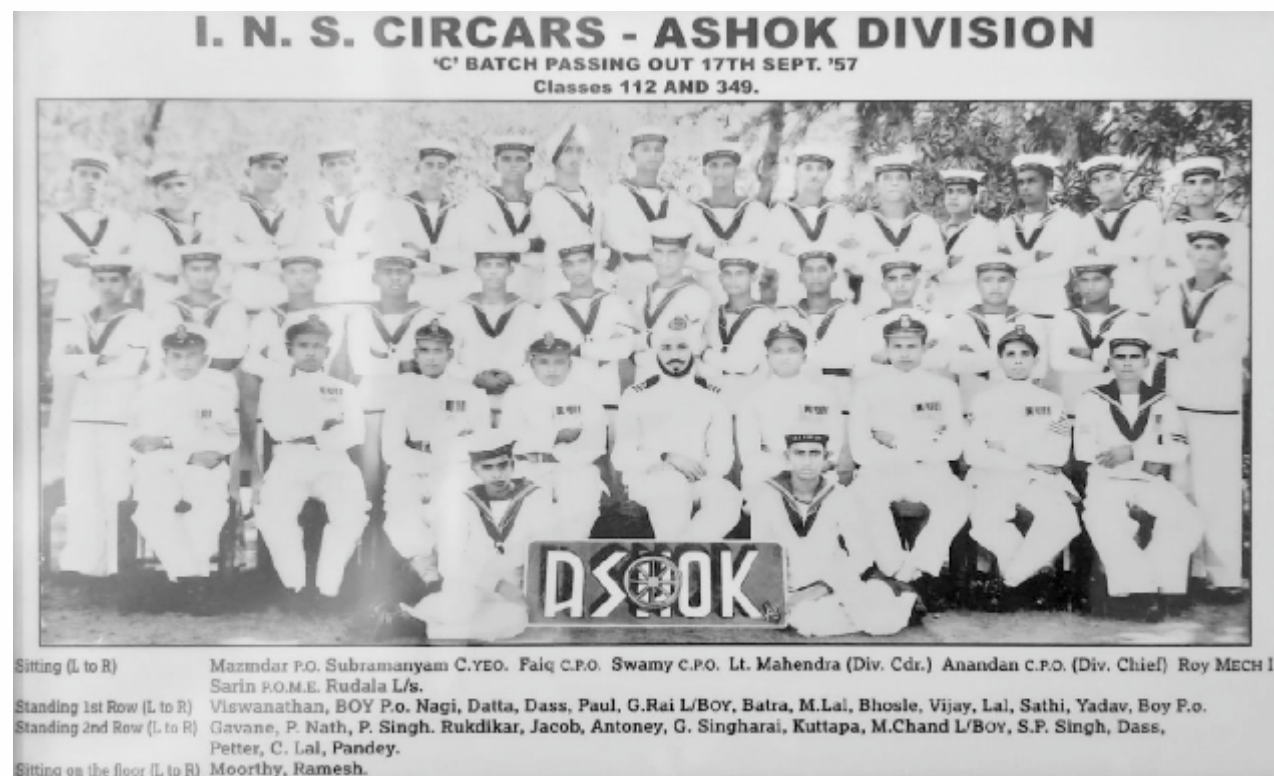




always thought, as most children do, that I would sit with him leisurely and glean some pearls of wisdom, but alas that was not to be! However, I shall try and recall some important events in his life and career; while connecting the dots, I shall attempt to build a picture of the Indian Navy's growth story from the early 1970s up to the mid-1990s.

Gupteshwar Rai was born in a village in east Uttar Pradesh on 1 August 1940. His father was a farmer. He was the second child among six siblings. The economic hardships faced by the family resulted in him joining the Indian Navy in 1957, at the age of 17. This young lad made his maiden train journey from Varanasi to Visakhapatnam. At INS Circars, he was allotted the Ashoka Division. He would

recall fondly many years later the huge Circars parade ground where the Royal Navy-trained instructors drilled them relentlessly. Little did he know then that a few years later, he would return to the same parade ground as a young divisional officer in the rank of lieutenant and command the same division—the Ashoka Division he had joined as a 'Boy'—and much later command the same unit, INS Circars, as the Commanding Officer and be the Flag Captain of the Eastern Naval Command!



After completing his gunnery specialisation from Gunnery School, Cochin, he was selected to commission INS Kavaratti, a Petya class frigate in the Soviet Union, in the late 1960s. After India's Independence, this it was perhaps the first venture of the Indian Navy to move away from purchasing second-hand British ships and go in for new, state-of-the-art Soviet ships. As these ships made their maiden passage home to India, they had to circumnavigate the Cape of Good Hope as the Suez Canal was closed. It was also the same period that the Royal Navy had decided to withdraw from east of the Suez



Canal. Against that geopolitical background, the induction of the Petyas in the Indian Navy from the USSR was indeed historic. While India was shaking hands with the Soviets, the Pakistanis clung to the American apron! With the induction of these new platforms, the Gunnery School was tasked to convert the Petya gunnery documents (written in Russian) into English manuals to be taught to the newer generation. Who could be better suited for this job than Lieutenant Rai, having completed his tenure onboard? Thus, he was posted as an instructor at the Gunnery School. The task was completed within the stipulated time frame.

Having finished his tenure as instructor, he was once again nominated as part of the commissioning crew for the second set of Petyas in 1972 (the P-31 Petya squadron had been an active participant in the 1971 India-Pakistan war). He was appointed Gunnery Officer (Designate) of INS Androth. On completion of his tenure onboard, he was transferred to the Petya Training School (later renamed INS Circars II and yet later commissioned as INS



Satavahana). During this period, the Indian Navy was on a growth trajectory and was acquiring new landing ship tanks (LSTs). Lt Cdr Gupteshwar Rai, having qualified the newly introduced Command Exam in the Indian Navy, was designated as the Commissioning Commanding Officer of INS Kesari. The ship was commissioned in 1975 at Gdynia, Gdansk, Poland.

From 1974 to 1977, a total of five new LST (M)s from Poland joined the Indian Navy's inventory and were based in Visakhapatnam. The LSTs became the workhorses of the Eastern Fleet, transporting logistics, including livestock such as goats and buffaloes, from mainland India to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. During this period, the old INS Godavari, on

an overseas deployment, ran aground on the coral reefs of the Maldives. INS Kesari, in coordination with other Indian naval ships, played a sterling role in salvaging the ship by defueling her and thereby making her light enough to be pulled out and towed safely to harbour. It is believed Lt Cdr Rai's ship-handling skills were highly appreciated by Commanding Officer INS Delhi Captain J G Nadkarni (later CNS), an ace ship-handler himself, who was the Officer in Tactical Command of the Godavari Salvage Operation, codenamed GODSAL.

Lieutenant Commander Rai was promoted to the rank of commander in 1976 and appointed Officer-in-Charge of the Gunnery School. He and his team oversaw the merger of three units—the Naval Battery, the Naval Coast Battery and the Gunnery School—to be named INS Venduruthy II. After a year or so, the unit was rechristened INS Dronacharya and commissioned on 28 November 1978 by the Governor of Kerala in the presence of Rear Admiral V E C Barboza, Flag Officer Commanding Southern Naval Area. As the



Nilgiri class Leanders were being inducted into the Indian Navy with their DS 22 systems and Sea Cat missiles at this time, one such system was installed at Dronacharya. As the systems had western origins, the Royal Navy was closely monitoring their performance and tracking the Indian Navy's growth story. During this period, sometime between 1978 and 1980, Prince Charles, then a commander in the Royal Navy, landed at the helipad of INS Dronacharya and was received by CO INS Dronacharya, Commander Gupteshwar Rai. A historic moment indeed!

Having finished this successful command, he took over command of INS Kavaratti. I still recall the night INS Kavaratti, the duty ship, was sailed with dispatch to a fast-developing hot spot between India and Bangladesh: the New Moore Islands off the coast of West Bengal. The ship continued to remain deployed away from home port for prolonged durations. However, the timely presence of the Indian naval ships certainly had a lasting effect on the geopolitics of the region. Another noteworthy operation for which the ship was dispatched was when

MOC Visakhapatnam had received a distress call from one of our Pulicat class patrol boats patrolling off Chennai. The sea was rough and visibility poor. The patrol boat had developed a crack in its hull and was taking in water fast. The engine room had been flooded and power supply lost. The Petyas were known to experience high pitch and roll, which was only exacerbated during the monsoons. Though each day was a test of endurance, they continued to search for the ship in distress. Finally, she was located and towed to harbour.

A few years later, in 1986, he assumed command of INS Rajput. During his tenure, the ship was actively deployed for Exercise Brass Tacks followed by Op Pawan. INS Rajput and INS Ranjit were among the first ships to be actively involved in the Sri Lankan operations providing requisite support for the induction of IPKF soldiers from 1987 to 1988. On promotion to flag rank, he was appointed ACOP (P&C) in 1991. Later, he was appointed as the Commissioning Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST), which he and his team set up in 1992 in Kochi. On completion of his tenure

as FOST, he assumed the duties of Flag Officer Commanding Maharashtra Naval Area (FOMA), a seagoing operational billet in those years.

The Admiral was also very fond of sports and games. When he was commanding INS Dronacharya in 1979-80, the newly commissioned unit not only won the Boat Pulling Regatta Cock but also first prize in almost all categories of the whaler boat pulling races conducted. In his career spanning almost four decades, Rear Admiral Gupteshwar Rai was bestowed three prestigious decorations: the Nausena Medal, the Vishisht Seva Medal and the Ati Vishist Seva Medal. He retired on 31 July 1995 at the age of 55.



About the author

Commodore Ashok Rai was commissioned in the Indian Navy on 1 July 1986. In his career spanning over three decades, he has held various important command and staff appointments. The author is the son of late Rear Admiral Gupteshwar Rai. He may be reached on ashok.krrai752@gmail.com

TRIBUTE

LEARNING FROM TWO STALWARTS

By Vice Admiral S K K Krishnan (Retd)

I was very lucky to have served under two professional stalwarts during my formative years. The first was Admiral Bilu Chowdhury and, immediately thereafter, Commodore Pyarelal Chouhan. Both of them passed away recently and I would like to recall the time I spent under their tutelage.

The day I got my watchkeeping ticket from Vikrant in June 1970, I was sent on temporary duty to be the engineer officer of MV Chilka, a nondescript 600-tonne oiler under the C of Y's fleet. The vessel was being sent for a salvage operation off Dwaraka and having certificated officers was mandatory for the ocean passage. Hence, two lieutenants (X) and one sub-lieutenant (E) were posted on board. The task was to assist in salvaging Ampuria, a Greek tanker, which had grounded off Dwaraka and was leaking heavy crude oil, threatening the entire western coastline.

Once we reached alongside Ampuria, I was taken to the Officer in Charge and that's how I met (then) Commander Bilu Chowdhury. He had apparently asked for a long list of tools

and tackles to be brought from the dockyard, of which I was blissfully unaware. I had my first taste of Bengali temper. Till then, I was mostly used only to the Punjabi version! What saved the day was some sketches I had made of the few engineering systems of Chilka, drawn up during the passage from Mumbai. As an under-training officer till a couple of days earlier, all I knew was that a sketch book is mandatory for an engineer officer to survive. I had a raw version on some soiled paper. Commander Chowdhury was happy to see that and set about planning to use Chilka for the salvage.

Chilka had all reciprocating machinery and the steam-driven pumps were ideal for salvage operations. Within the next couple of days, we worked out a system for pumping out heavy crude from Ampuria. Chilka had two large pumps in the forward hold and these were used to discharge furnace fuel oil (FFO) to other ships. One of these was removed from the lower decks and erected on the upper deck of Ampuria. Chilka was berthed abreast of Ampuria and steam was supplied using flexible hoses. The pump



could extract oil from Ampuria and discharge to Chilka. Once Chilka took about 400 tonne of oil, it disengaged from Ampuria and went alongside merchant ship Desh Sevak, which was anchored at some distance. The oil from Ampuria was then pumped into Desh Sevak using Chilka's second pump. This entire process of pumping out 400 tonne of oil took about two days; eventually, we pumped out more than 10,000 tonne.

Cdr Bilu Chowdhury, who had just got back from a long appointment in the UK, had volunteered to undertake this backbreaking, mind-numbing salvage operation. His team comprised yours truly and a bunch of MEs



under a burly domineering Chief ME, Roshan Lal. He must have lived on Ampuria for nearly six months, eating nothing but rice and dal. Luckily, fresh fish was available aplenty.

I returned after about four months and rejoined Vikrant. A few months later, Commander Bilu Chowdhury joined as Commander E of the ship. I was still a sub-lieutenant and the junior-most of the watchkeeping officers. The department was run by the Senior Engineer and the Commander E was the God above. I recall a couple of interactions with that God.

I was the divisional officer for about 60 MEs and used to fill their SDs and write quarterly remarks. These SDs went for the Commander E's signature at year end. He sent for me and loudly read out the remarks I had written in some of the SDs. What I had written sounded quite pathetic when read back to me. He asked me only one question: "Would you like it if I wrote about you like this in your ACR?" That really chastened me.

Another occasion to be called up to his cabin was when I volunteered for the submarine arm. Like all youngsters, I was full of *josh* and thought being a submariner would be more

challenging. My Commander E thought more maturely and explained why he was not recommending my application. First, I was too tall to be in a submarine. Then, he gave me some advice I have never forgotten: The aim in one's life is to be in the mainstream of human movement. That's where things happen, more opportunities are thrown up and one can merge with the crowd and enjoy life. By choosing to be an engineer, one has already moved a little away from the mainstream. By joining the Navy after graduation, one has moved in to another side stream. If one keeps moving away like this into narrower and narrower paths, one might land up in a blind alley. The aim in life should be to keep as close to the mainstream as possible.

When I took premature retirement and moved to the industry at the peak of my career, I recalled his words. Incidentally, he, too, left in similar fashion as a Vice Admiral. And I had his example in mind when I left. He was absolutely right. Spending some time in the industry opened my eyes to many things and I learnt a lot more than what I could have experienced otherwise.

I met him last on 6 January 2019. There's a group in Mumbai who are keen to make a film

on Vikrant's role during the 1971 war. They have completed extensive research on the subject and are in touch with me. They wanted to meet Admiral Chowdhury and get firsthand feedback of his role during the war—for which he received a Vir Chakra. I had tied up the interview through his nephew. As I was told he was very reclusive and mostly in his bed, we expected a short, 15-minute interview. The team from Mumbai took me along to Kolkata. We landed at about 8 am and drove straight to his house to catch him early when he would be fresh. We were totally taken by surprise when we met him—he was fully ready in a formal suit with his medals pinned on, sitting in front of a large model of Vikrant. He started narrating his story even before we could set up the camera for recording! The interview lasted over four hours and we left only after 2 pm. He did not recognise me initially. But when I mentioned our wartime days in Vikrant and especially Ampuria, his eyes lit up and he burst out in a mix of Bengali and English in excitement. That conversation was caught on video by the cameraman. A copy remains with me as a prized possession.

After I left Vikrant, I joined Naval Dockyard in Mumbai and was posted to the new boiler



erection shop. My manager was Commander Pyarelal Chauhan. A tough taskmaster, he practised what he demanded of others. The Leander boiler was new to me and he made me read the BR before even getting down to the shop floor. He maintained a PERT chart for the work and had a quality management system inbuilt in the production work. He was very strict with everyone, including himself, and had an admirable, no-nonsense approach to life.

He was considered the last word on boilers and specialised welding methods and many officers would come to him for consultation. Once he took me along when he went for an internal inspection of the boilers of Deepak.

These boilers were unique to the Navy and very little was known about them. When preparing the report, he showed me all the reference material he had in his office and told me something that remains fresh in my memory: There's enough published material about most technical subjects and quite some information is contained in BRs and technical publications, which are easily available. The problem is that no one reads. So whoever takes the trouble to read and assimilate information becomes an expert.

After spending a few months with him, he felt I should do something more than being his assistant. So he got me attached to the afloat fitting shop (Centre 28), which attended to marine engineering problems onboard all ships. There, I was made the project officer to correct the shaft misalignment problem of INS Talwar, a major headache for the Navy in those days. It was a great learning experience.

Apart from being such a dynamic manager in the Dockyard, Commander Chauhan also took a keen interest in developing Mumbai's Naval Officers' Residential Area (NOFRA). He created a very nice nursery near the boiler

shop to nurture healthy plants. These were then transplanted in NOFRA. Many trees you see even today in NOFRA were planted by him.

Indeed, serving with him was a great learning experience. Most seniors expect you to learn on your own. He was different. He gave you all the freedom to learn and then topped it up with the considerable knowledge he had acquired over time. He had amazing energy—the word 'indefatigable' describes him perfectly.

I was very lucky to have served under such stalwarts in the first three years of my career. They taught me how to learn—and keep my head above water.



About the author

Vice Admiral S K K Krishnan joined the Indian Navy in 1969 after graduating from NIT Trichy. He served on INS Vikrant during the 1971 operations. During his naval career, he held many key appointments, including CO Shivaji, ASD Mumbai and Controller Personnel Services. He took premature retirement in December 2005 to join MDL as the CMD, from which post he retired in July 2008.

A KEEN INTELLECT

At 6.30 am on 22 May 2020, Vice Admiral Verghese Koithara passed into history, at Military Hospital, Wellington. He was buried the same day at St Joseph's Cemetery not far from his house. For many who knew him, this was an unexpected blow. This naval officer from the logistics cadre stood tall with intellectual abilities and capability that were perhaps unique.

Admiral Koithara was born in Trichur but was brought up in Kochi, as his father was a practising lawyer and an advocate in the High Court. Perhaps it was through his father that he developed the keen intellect that was his hallmark right through his career and life. He studied at the Shri Rama Varma School in Ernakulam, a distinguished school that threw up a number of scholars. He topped his school and joined the National Defence Academy (16th course). In the academy, his course mates remember him as an intellectual giant and the most brilliant cadet of his

course. This was a significant achievement as that course produced a large number of high flyers, PSOs, C-in-Cs and even a Naval Chief. While he was inclined to studies, he was a good swimmer in his squadron (Alpha) and a promising yachtsman. He was commissioned on 1 January 1961.

One might wonder why he got logistics, or what was earlier known as the Supply & Secretariat Branch. This happened when it was discovered that he had a problem of short-sightedness. This setback, however, did not have an adverse impact on his need for achievement. He was too bright a light to be hidden under a bushel. His professional acumen was seen clearly even in his formative years.

He did the mandatory sea and shore times in his branch, prominent among these being his tenures onboard INS Krishna and INS Tir. Since early in his career, he displayed leadership traits and was appointed a Divisional Officer at NDA,



where he honed his skills in yachting. He took the NDA team to great heights and they participated in regattas even at the national level in 1969-70. In this appointment, he also played a lot of tennis.

In course of time, he did the Staff Course in Wellington. As a commander, he was appointed as DDOP (Sailors) at NHQ. Typically, he immediately settled down to computerising the sailors' records with a small band of highly competent and computer-savvy officers. It is perhaps in this appointment that he began to think and breathe HR management and even



wrote papers on the subject. His demonstrated ability in this field was recognised and he was made a member of the 'Cadre Review Committee' in 1978-79. He underwent the Higher Defence Management Course in Secunderabad, where he had a glimpse of the challenges that lay ahead in this field. As a captain, he was also selected for a diplomatic assignment as the Defence Attaché in Singapore and also accredited to the Philippines. It was here that he first became interested in international affairs and strategic studies, a subject he delved into in great detail after he retired from service.

He served as the Naval Assistant to Chief of Naval Staff Admiral J G Nadkarni, who recognised his genius. Subsequently, he was appointed to the Directorate of Defence Planning Staff. Later on, when Rear Admiral Sushil Kumar was the ACNS (P&P), he conceived the New Management Strategy (NMS). Captain Suresh Ambedkar, who was JDNP, was tasked to study the budgeting system and the delegated financial power prevalent in the Royal Navy. The NMS was an offshoot of this study,

which incorporated the IFA concept that fructified into a Navy Instruction NII/S/91, when he was Chief of Logistics (COL).

I met the admiral after he was appointed as COL and I was a Controller in the Materials Organisation (MO) in Mumbai. Before that, when he was ACOL, I did not interact with him in a serious manner. At first, his disinterest in routine logistics functions seemed somewhat odd. What the discerning observer would have noticed, however, was that this intellectual giant was looking at the far horizons. His one objective was to take the cadre to a higher plane of functioning, one that provided immediate answers and was fully computerised. Thus was born the idea of the Integrated Logistics Management System (ILMS) that would provide transparency pan-Navy. For this, he divided the functions of the MO into separate and distinct parts and objectively studied the functions of all controllerates. He then drafted and issued the manuals for each one. Appreciating that the greatest change needed to be in the Controllerate of Warehousing, he formed a team of officers

to go into the modernisation required in the warehouses, as well as the induction of modern material handling devices.

Thereafter, he monitored the procurement of material handling devices, bins, etc, and a computerised method for tracking of spares. All procurements were fast-tracked. Today, these systems are well oiled and functioning in a manner that would do him proud. He achieved all this with the help of handpicked teams of officers. Commodore B C Jayaprakash and Captain V K Janardhan were his team leaders and pioneers for the computerised ILMS and material handling equipment, respectively. His next step was to organise the formal training of storehouse staff under the able guidance of Captain V K Janardhan. Later on, many other competent and qualified officers like Commodore N K Jha would follow to expand on a wonderful system. While Commodore B C Jayaprakash was the Project Director ILMS, his successor Captain N K Jha was heading the team when the project was commissioned and he was the first CSA, ILMS. In this system,



each activity left behind a clear trail, so necessary for transparency. During his tenure as COL from 1 February 1994 to 31 January 1998, his achievements were truly mindboggling.

After retirement, being a prolific writer, he wrote on varied subjects, including papers on human resource management, where his radical views were perhaps not appreciated by many in the service at the time but are now being considered pragmatic and implementable. But most of all, he studied and became acknowledged as a fine strategic thinker. His published works on subjects affecting national security include: *Society, State and Security: The Indian Experience*; *Crafting Peace in Kashmir*; *Managing India's Nuclear Forces*; and *Nuclear Posturing*. In addition, he was a regular contributor to economic and political weeklies. Between 2001 and 2004, he was appointed as a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University. During this time, he shifted base to the US while his wife Indira held fort and managed her NGO in India. He

also studied international relations and politics at Osmania University, where he was awarded a doctorate.

After so many accomplishments, he got down to his final chapter: caring for the underprivileged. His wife and he set up from scratch an NGO in Coonoor, 'Yuvaparivartan Youth for Social Change', funded entirely by their own savings. Over 4,000 women have benefited from their self-help groups. They also set up health camps at their own expense and sponsored the education of children from marginalised families. For this, they were selected for an award by the Pro Literacy Worldwide foundation in New York.

While he had weakened over the past year and needed a walker, his intellectual abilities remained acute. Indira recalls that he was the brain behind all her endeavours. It was he who directed each and every action of their NGO. With his passing, the Navy has lost one of its finest jewels, who never ceased thinking and putting his thoughts into action. His departure has left us sadder but proud of what he has

achieved, especially for the logistics cadre. We pray that his soul finds rest and peace and Indira finds the strength to come to terms with this loss.

(I wish to thank many of my colleagues who helped me put this piece together, in particular Rear Admiral Sushil Ramsay and Commodore B C Jayaprakash and, most of all, his course mate Vice Admiral Adolph Britto.)

- **Rear Admiral Alan O'Leary (Retd)**

A PALPABLE VOID

I felt an unusually palpable void on the morning of 22 May, when a call from fellow engineer Commodore P S Teyunni in Coimbatore and a simultaneous message from Rear Admiral Sushil Ramsay brought news of Admiral Verghese Koithara's passing. The poignancy more so because in exchanges with Commodore Teyunni some days earlier, I had enquired of Verghese, as I invariably did, and learnt his health was slipping. The regret remains for not having kept in touch after retirement with a friendly and well-regarded term mate.



Verghese and I first met as Naval Wing cadets of the 16th NDA course. We were well on track to completing the final term as 'X' Branch cadets when in a medical examination for night vision, probably mandated by requirements for 'Rules of the Road' in navigation, Verghese's colour vision was found to be defective, necessitating his move to the Supply & Secretariat Branch.

On cadet training ship Tir, Verghese continued to excel—his academic brilliance was all too evident and he remained top notch in the course. It was here that we got better acquainted and our lanky frames also seemed to make common cause in many a collision with the wooden-bladed ceiling fan in the Gun Room. Before we signed off from Tir, I had opted to change branch from 'X' to 'E', and so we veered off as midshipmen to our respective training establishments.

In service, our appointments were seldom in the same station. Yet, the compact navy of our days provided many opportunities to meet. Verghese excelled in staff duties and

was acclaimed for his secretarial skills. On his temporary duty visits, often in company with visiting officers, we would find time for pleasantries and interesting exchanges. A voracious reader, he was extremely knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects and an engaging conversationalist. He possessed rare intellectual calibre and remained a prolific writer, having authored many books.

Our last appointments in service were at Naval Headquarters where Verghese served as Controller of Logistics and I as Chief of Material. The relentless pace of naval expansion of our days with acquisition from diverse sources had placed immense stresses and strains on logisticians and technocrats alike, contentious exchanges and frayed tempers being commonplace at many levels. As COM and COL, we did have our occasional sparring sessions. Verghese was difficult to dislodge from his stated 'credo' and line of thought and yet we could part without any trace of rancour or ill-will. Leaving mundane day-to-day matters to his deputy, the late Rear Admiral Suhas Purohit,

Verghese mainly kept to higher decision-making and policy matters. I understand that the excellent manuals produced on all aspects of logistics management towards designing the architecture of the ILMS for the Indian Navy are indeed the handiwork of Admiral Koithara.

Our last meeting was when he hosted us graciously at a farewell dinner just before I retired as COM on 30 April 1997. His retirement days had their share of medical setbacks, more so in the last couple of years. God has now released him from his earthly pain for a well-earned rest. I end this piece on a note of deep sympathy with warm and cherished memories of a devoted, distinguished and amiable colleague. He served the Navy handsomely. May God bless his dear soul and grant comfort and blessings to his beloved wife Indira.

- Vice Admiral Adolph Britto (Retd)

TRIBUTE

A PARAGON OF PROFESSIONALISM

Vice Admiral M R Schunker was commissioned into the Royal Indian Naval Volunteer Reserve in 1943 as a midshipman during World War 2 and thereafter into the Royal Indian Navy. After partition, he opted to migrate to India, while the family opted to stay on in Pakistan for a while, eventually migrating to the UK. The developing Indian Navy was ideal for the talents of this forthright and dynamic officer who was part of the commissioning crew of INS Mysore in Liverpool; the first course officer of the newly formed Gunnery School in Cochin; and shortly thereafter in 1960, the Commanding Officer of destroyer INS Rana. After his tenure as the Fleet Operations Officer of the Indian Fleet, he attended the Joint Service Staff College in UK and, in 1968, commissioned the submarine tender INS Amba in Odessa in the Russian winter, having put her through exhausting and rigorous acceptance trials.

Consequent to his successful tenure as CO INS Amba and award of AVSM, he was posted in command of INS Kunjali, the

provost headquarters and subsequently, in the rank of commodore, in command of INS Valsura, an electrical engineering establishment, the only executive officer to be thus appointed. There had been serious discipline issues on the base, which his authoritative and efficient no-nonsense way of administration quickly resolved. On completion of his NDC and tenure as Chief of Staff of the Western Naval Command, he was promoted to flag rank and took over as the Fleet Commander of the Western Fleet in early 1976 at the age of 51.

It was as a watchkeeping sublieutenant that I first observed the effect of his charisma and the impact that it had during the annual inspection of our ship, INS Kirpan, in late 1976. The Admiral had a formidable reputation for an eagle eye, exacting standards for professionalism and indefatigable stamina. Miraculously, during the inspection, every equipment and system seemed to work to designed perfection including the wilful sonar. In early 1978, he was appointed as the Flag



Officer Commanding in Chief of the Eastern Naval Command.

In late August 1978, a small naval platoon was tasked to extricate sailors from a civil area in Visakhapatnam, where they had been caught up in riots. The platoon went in with arms and without ammunition, and rescued two families. A couple of years later, having been on his staff subsequently, on enquiring about his thinking for not authorising ammunition in a situation fraught with danger, he stated that he anticipated that it would not be needed and that he did not want any



accidental casualties. His humane approach and perception were exceptional and the incident was a lesson in successful mob-handling.

Navy House in Visakhapatnam was a tasteful and elegant residence, with well-manicured lawns. Both Admiral and Mrs Anne Schunker took exceptional care in its upkeep and, in particular, found the time to nurture the garden. The Admiral was fastidious about the menu for functions and always selected one appropriate for the guests, but within the reach of the marvellous culinary skills of the cooks.

The Admiral travelled widely in his Command, from Indira Point to Calcutta and Chennai, and oversaw all operations, exercises and major evolutions. Memorable were the calling-on events and the meetings with the Rani of Nancowry, as well as iconic chief ministers Shri Jyoti Basu and Shri M G Ramachandran. Constant companions during the Admiral's tours were the Bible, which he read regularly, and a travelling iron to ensure the creases remained in the right place.

In 1980, he took over as the Vice Chief of Naval Staff and, a couple of years later, was appointed as Director General of the fledgling Indian Coast Guard, an organisation he drove with his typical flair and pizzazz. The Coast Guard entered the air age with the commissioning of No. 800 CG Air Squadron, and grew with the induction of five ships including the first patrol vessel built by GRSE and launch of the first of the indigenous OPVs to be built by MDL.

The Admiral retired in 1982 and settled into a cottage-like home, 'Anchorage', in Defence Colony, Goa. One of his creative habits was carpentry and he made some of his own furniture. In late 1985, the Admiral and Mrs Schunker were our guests at our little flat, 4B Meena, in NOFRA. Mrs Schunker had been diagnosed with cancer and they had come down to Bombay for further diagnosis and treatment at Tata Memorial Centre, trips they made using the efficient public transport. During their stay, we observed the resolute manner in which he went through the hard days. When the reports came in, it was an indelible sight as

he hugged his wife and, with tears in his eyes, said that all was well!

In the 36 years since, he went through the loss of his spouse and the simultaneous replacement of two knees. He doted on his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We called on him and met him in Goa many times; he was always in good health, gracious and in great spirits. We would come away refreshed, listening to him speak with candour, humour and no rancour. He picked up the newer technologies and was quite adept at using the Internet.

The Admiral was a fine officer and warm-hearted gentleman, forthright, impartial, virtuous, and a great mentor who led by personal example. He drove his own car and remained clear-headed till he passed away after a brief illness at the age of 96. It was an honour to have known him and his wife. He left a lasting imprint on the Navy and Coast Guard with his service-oriented focus, integrity and fine qualities of head and heart—a paragon to emulate.

- **Rear Admiral Vineet Bakhshi (Retd)**

TRIBUTE

NOBLE SOUL, CHERISHED FRIEND

A true friend is never truly gone. Their spirit lives on in the memories of those who loved them.

-Amy Hoover

Commodore Vinod Kumar Thakur was born in Durg, Madhya Pradesh (now Chhattisgarh), on 7 September 1945 to Jugal Kishore Thakur and Dulari Bai Thakur. Jugal Kishore Thakur was a Royal Indian Police Officer who later rose to become Deputy Inspector General, Indian Police. Vinod's schooling was mostly in convent schools, especially at Christ Church Boys School, Jabalpur. He later graduated from St. Aloysius College, Jabalpur, in 1965. In those days, NCC training was compulsory during college and Vinod joined the Officers' Training Unit wing of the NCC. He joined the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in June 1965 and was integrated with the 28th NDA Course. Unfortunately, owing to compelling family circumstances, he had to pull out of IMA during the final term in 1966.

With his never-say-die spirit, Vinod decided to go back to academics to study law at Jabalpur University for a year. He changed tack and became a medical representative at pharmaceutical company Sandoz for a very brief stint until the end of 1967. In 1968, he set course for the destined journey of his life. Vinod was commissioned as Acting Sub-Lieutenant into the Supply & Secretariat (S&S) Branch of the Indian Navy and joined the Basic & Divisional School, Cochin, in September 1968. And the rest, as they say, is history.

On my second appointment, I reached Port Blair sometime in early 1970 to join the Naval Garrison. That's when I met Vinod for the first time. Being contemporaries from the same branch, we hit it off from day one!



Affable and helpful, Vinod always exuded charm and endeared himself to everyone—seniors, colleagues, juniors, men, civilian staff—all through his career. He held varied appointments, almost all of which were connected with personnel management. These included Captain Secretary, Drafting Officer for S&S Sailors, Naval Pay Office, Assistant Director of Personnel, a training assignment in Nigeria, Staff Officer to the Eastern Fleet Commander, Base Victualling Officer, Logistics Officer-in-Charge Naval Pay Office, Chief Staff Officer (P&A), Western



Naval Command, Director Personnel Services & Naval Provost Marshal and General Manager, INCS. For his meritorious service, he was bestowed the VSM.

After retirement, Vinod continued to render yeoman service to the Navy through his meaningful contributions to the Navy Foundation, Mumbai Chapter. Social service was always very important to Vinod. After settling down in Noida, he became the chairman of the RWA of Sectors 21 and 25 and did a lot to improve the appearance and maintenance of Jalvayu Vihar in these sectors. At Navy Foundation, Delhi Chapter, his contributions, first as secretary and then vice-president for over a decade, were significant and substantial.

Vinod picked up golf rather late when he was a senior commander in Visakhapatnam but the bug bit him hard and he soon became an avid golfer. Within the very first year, he graduated to competitive golfing and soon became a champion player. At one stage, he won the Navy Golf Championship. He loved playing at different courses and became a popular

figure wherever he played. His best game emerged when the stakes were high!

He was not just a follower of the game but studied it keenly. And all through his life, he loved organising events with aplomb. This amazing trait led him to become Golf Captain at the prestigious US Club in Mumbai. Once he and his wife Kanchan made Noida their permanent residence, he lost no time to acquire membership of the Noida Golf Course (NGC). Vinod and Kanchan became an extremely popular couple with their regular visits to the card room. It was not long before he was elected to the Management Committee, where he set unprecedented records by winning elections with huge margins. Ultimately, he became Golf Captain for two back-to-back tenures. Till the very end, he worked relentlessly for NGC and even presided over the prize distribution ceremony of the Diwali Cup, which turned out to be his last golfing event.

On 29 November 2020, there were curtain calls through ardent prayers for a loving and a noble soul who, by then, was too

feeble to respond. Adieu my friend, rest in eternal peace!

- Rear Admiral Sushil Ramsay (Retd)

FAMILY, NOT FRIEND

I first met then Commander Vinod Thakur in 1987 when I arrived in Visakhapatnam as Chief of Staff at the Eastern Naval Command; he was the Base Victualling Officer. My vibes with him began soon thereafter when my staff officer, then Lieutenant Commander Ramesh Reddy, told me an interesting story. It appears that on receiving the monthly quota of rations, the Fleet Commander had rung up Vinod and asked why there were only two chicken legs. Pat came the reply that the chickens in BVY had only two! I knew then that Vinod was a special kind of person.

Through the next two years, I came across him at the East Point Golf Course where he showed his prowess without ever flaunting it even as I double-bogeyed more often than not. When the ENC held its annual golf championship at the Royal Calcutta Golf Club in Calcutta, Vinod was the runaway



winner. When my wife held a Karva Chauth puja gathering of ladies at Staff House, his wife, Kanchan, touched her feet—and from that day became my sister.

In April 1994, when I was posted in Port Blair, we passed through Madras and met a lovely girl, the daughter of NOIC (Madras). We wanted her for our son, who was then serving as a lieutenant in training ship INS Tir. As luck would have it, his ship was to visit Madras in a few days and we were keen to have the usual boy-meets-girl meeting. I had only one person to call upon and that was Vinod Thakur, then posted as Commandant Embarkation Headquarters in Madras. He was directed to commandeer Lieutenant Das from the ship as soon as it berthed and arrange for him to meet the girl, which both he and Kanchan arranged with great delicacy at their home. That marriage is now in its 26th year and blossoming.

We have been living in Noida for nearly 23 years and the Thakurs for a few years less. Kanchan has come to our house every Raksha Bandhan and tied the *rakhi* on my wrist.

I last spoke to Vinod the day before he went into Base Hospital. I had sent him a message on hearing of his encounter with the disease, but he called back to tell me not to worry. Ten days later, he was gone. For me, he was not a friend, but family. RIP Vinod Thakur, wherever you might be.

- **Vice Admiral Premvir Das (Retd)**

THE EFFERVESCENT VINOD THAKUR

I first met Commodore Vinod K Thakur when we were shipmates on Amba in early 1971 when he was a bachelor sub-lieutenant and I was a junior lieutenant, having joined the ship a year earlier, and also the senior watchkeeper onboard. We were soon deployed in the Bay of Bengal for both patrolling and training for the impending war. He was always on the Bridge and very inquisitive to see how operations and training were going and I joked with him that he should have been an executive officer. I then learnt that he had first joined IMA and was there for some months before he got a call from the Navy and was happy to jump ship for the good of the Navy. Onboard, we often played bridge

together when free; he was an expert and often milked me. Besides being professionally sound and on the ball, he was a versatile sportsman and proficiently played several games, including hockey, badminton and squash. He was an all-rounder who excelled in everything he attempted; this continued till the very end.

I encountered him again when he was Director Personnel Services and we then met intermittently. Finally, we were destined to renew our friendship when he decided to settle down in Noida soon after I retired. The old friendship was reinvigorated and he soon joined our golf four ball, couple's kitty party. He was a golfer of repute having won the Navy championship on more than one occasion and became my golf mentor—I improved my game considerably with his advice. Many years later, he was rightly elected Golf Captain of NGC and, in four years, turned it into a respectable golf course where people vie to play, with lush greens, good fairways, signage et al. On the course, he was often accosted by many golfers with cribs and advice. Even in the face of some rude



members, I never saw him lose his temper, raise his voice or be un-officer like; he was just cool. This was a tremendous quality I and the other members dearly appreciated and admired.

He was an immensely popular individual, had a large array of friends he had cultivated over his lifetime, and his table was always well laid out with many takers. He had green fingers too and his garden was perhaps the best in his sector; he loved it like his child.

When I was elected President of the Navy Foundation, Delhi Charter, having known his penchant for hard work, his nature and capabilities, without a second thought I requested him to join the team, first as a secretary and later as vice-president. We continued together for about 12 years. Here, too, he made himself indispensable to the cause of veterans and had a wonderful and memorable tenure. It was indeed a loss to the veterans community and a personal loss to see him go so quickly, in the pink of health with so many unfulfilled dreams. He lived life king-size, was extremely popular,

helpful to the extreme, effervescent, and jolly. RIP.

- **Vice Admiral Harinder Singh (Retd)**

THE VINOD THAKUR I KNEW

I think it was 1969 when Vinod came to Port Blair on his first appointment. Cheerful and energetic, he arrived with a box of sweets that was finished sooner than his mother may have imagined. With a weekly Air Force courier, fortnightly trips by SCI vessels and rare visits by naval ships, life without good friends could be tiresome. But with Vinod as a neighbour in our sparse living conditions, our little world came alive. We played badminton and cricket, imbibed to excess, and swam happily at Corbyn's Cove putting back gin and coconut water—long before it became a tourist attraction. It was a happy time.

That said, you could be sure that by 7.30 am, we would be in office, slaving away in the service of the nation. Vinod was quick on the uptake and could be relied upon to get things done, professionally or socially. He was soft-spoken, exuded charm and

had a very likeable quality that made him exceedingly popular, then and since. At work, he and Commodore V G Honnavar helped save my neck more than once when my rather cavalier ways sometimes landed me in trouble. And his affable ways helped get me a tete-a-tete with a charmer who came back for her holidays during a college break on the mainland.

Vinod and I bonded well and our friendship, which I valued immensely, lasted over the years even if I could never beat him in golf—a generous grant of strokes notwithstanding. He was a devoted family man, yet managed to keep up with friends. It is hard to come to grips with the fact that he is no more. The joyous, too-numerous-to-mention incidents, big and small, which made our friendship valuable flash through the mind. It is saddening but I consider myself lucky to have known him, Kanchan and something of Saurabh and Vicky who I knew as little kids long ago. Farewell Vinod, it is a lesser world without you.

- **Commander A J B Singh (Retd)**

TRIBUTE

AN OFFICER AND GENTLEMAN

Commodore Kambrath Madhavan hailed from Payyannur, Kannur (district), Kerala. Born on 13 May 1943, he joined the Indian Navy as a sailor in early 1961. Soon, his attributes and qualities were noticed by his superiors.

Commodore K N Venugopal (Retd), a fellow Commission Worthy (CW) candidate and a shipmate onboard old INS Delhi, fondly remembers this endearing colleague. Commodore Madhavan was hard working and focused. His perseverance paid off and he was commissioned, under the then Upper Yard Man scheme, into the Supply & Secretariat Branch on 16 September 1967.

His initial appointments were at INS Kunjali, Magar, Hamla and Talwar before he returned to Hamla for the Supply & Secretariat Advanced Course in 1975-76. He later proceeded for the Long Defence Management Course at the College of Defence Management, Secunderabad. His important appointments at NHQ included Staff Officer to COM and, later, Staff Officer

to CNS Admiral O S Dawson. After tenures at NHQ, he took over as Commander, Naval Pay Office, Mumbai. Upon promotion to the rank of captain, he did a tenure as Commandant, Embarkation Headquarters, Madras. He introduced many progressive measures to reduce transit losses during shipment of provisions from Madras to Port Blair.

Commodore Madhavan's last appointment was GM (Personnel), Naval Dockyard, Mumbai. His analytical mind and innate ability to understand people and find practical solutions contributed to maintaining harmonious labour relations at Naval Dockyard. He was also involved in setting up a civilian staff residential colony at Kanjurmarg, Powai. He took premature retirement to look after his family and settled down in Virar, a Mumbai suburb.

Commodore Madhavan was a total family man; a devoted husband to his late wife Lalitha and a loving and caring father to his three adorable daughters. A doting



husband, he took good care of his wife after she took ill until she passed away.

The Commodore preferred to lead a reclusive life after his retirement and followed his passions: music and painting. An officer and gentleman to the core, he was humble and down to earth. During his career in the Navy, he was a role model and mentor for his subordinates: officers, men and civilians alike. He was easily approachable, gave a patient hearing and offered practical solutions. He made rich contributions to the profession and left an imprint wherever he went.



The tributes received from veteran logisticians are testament to his persona:

- **Commodore P K Goel:** “My first interaction with Madhavan was in late 1961/early 1962 in INS Garuda where he joined as a writer in the ship’s office. In my service career, I initiated only one CW form and that was Madhavan’s. He made us proud.”
- **Rear Admiral S S Rao:** “I remember Commodore Madhavan was a thorough gentleman and a sound professional with a positive attitude. I first met him when he took over as SO to COM from me. Rouble saving of officers and sailors in the former USSR used to take years to reach their pay account via a long chain of MEA and different CDAs. As DNA, Moscow, I proposed that the saving deposited with the chancery and converted in Indian rupees be directly entered in IRLAs. As Commander, NAVPAY, he readily agreed and personnel on ships and submarines leaving different ports in the former Soviet Union started receiving their savings before they reached India.”

- **Lieutenant Commander G K Balaji:** “He was a charismatic leader who always had things in control. In an instance involving reconciliation of cash through computers at NPO, there was a major issue. He corrected the same manually and singlehandedly in two days and saved the career of an officer. He was equally adored by both the service and the civilian staff at NPO.”
- **Vice Admiral Krishna Raina:** “I am deeply saddened at the news of Commodore Madhavan’s death. I have known him over the years—every inch an officer and gentleman of the finest, rare qualities. One to whom you could turn for guidance and advice, professional and personal, which would be given in a forthright, unbiased way, always with a human touch.”
- **Commodore D R Acharya:** “His gentleness was so infectious that even the most aggressive of his colleagues were tamed in his presence. We have lost a great human being of the erstwhile Supply Branch.”

- **Commodore V K Vaid:** “He was an officer and a gentleman. I took over from him thrice: in February 1971 as Supply Officer, INS Magar; in July 1972 as Supply Officer, Hamla; and as Command (P&A), HQ WNC, in 1988. There was always a smooth handover as he prepared notes and briefed me well.”
- **Commodore Suresh Kumar:**
*“Golden heart and gentle soul
Was dear Madhavan on the whole
Always remember your soft voice
and smile
Guiding me to be calm and agile
Straight forward and honest to the core
Brightens my fond memories of the yore
Heavens enriched with your presence
Rest in peace in fragrance essence.”*

Indeed, COVID-19 snatched away a gem from the logistics fraternity on 15 October 2020. Some arrive in this world for doing good to humanity and prefer to remain unseen and unsung, leaving their noble deeds to speak for themselves.

- **Captain K N Surendran (Retd)**

TRIBUTE

FROM BOY TO COMMANDER

A stalwart, Commander Devinder Kumar Dogra left for his heavenly abode on 30 October 2020.

He was born in Udhampur on 22 October 1932 to Amar Nath Dogra and Gopali Devi. When he joined the Royal Indian Navy on 8 April 1948 as a 'Boy', he was not even 16 years old. Soon he was selected to be an electrical artificer and after his initial training and serving on various ships, he rose to become Chief EA of INS Mysore.

He was married to Shashi Dogra on 3 October 1962. It proved very lucky for him; he was commissioned soon after on 31 October 1962. He was a very conscientious and upright officer who was always hands on, never afraid to get his hands dirty. While posted at INS Valsura as an instructor, he became an expert in the FPS 5 system (the newly introduced fire control system for 4.5" guns). The concept of 'fly plane' was difficult to comprehend but he made it very simple for the trainee officers and sailors. Even staff officers used to attend his classes to clear the cobwebs. This also

earned him the nickname of 'Guru' among the teaching fraternity. He did the normal round of appointments, including INS Valsura, Naval Dockyard, Mumbai, INS Talwar, the minesweeping squadron and, finally, INS Mysore.

He retired on 22 October 1988 at the age of 56. The very next day, he joined ABC shipping company on the behest of Vice Admiral Menon who wanted him to look after all the harbour tugs and boats—always a perennial problem. To his credit, within a short time he got all of them up and sailing. But his heart was in Jammu, where he wanted to settle down. Shortly after moving there, he got a call from his old friend, Commander R S Agarwal, to take over the yarn factory he had started in Surat. After much persuasion, he moved to Surat, where he worked for six years. He then moved back to Jammu, where KC Chemicals requested him to run their factory. Finally at the age of 74, he called it a day. After that, he spent his time reading and keeping in contact with his numerous friends.



Shashi and he have a daughter Neeru, an ophthalmologist (and cancer survivor), who is settled in Jammu with her husband, and son Ashish, who is based in Singapore with his family. He and Shashi made an excellent couple—he was a fabulous host, helped in no small measure by his gracious lady. Any one visiting them, apart from the evening *chotta*, would be asked to stay for dinner. Cheers, my friend!

- Captain P K Jindal, NM (Retd)

TRIBUTE

THE BON VIVANT

The passing of Commander Krishna Kakkar is very sad news indeed. Being course mates (SS 3), I have very fond memories of him as we did our Supply & Secretariat initial training together, way back in 1968-69.

Kakks, as he was commonly known to his friends, was a gentleman and happy-go-lucky officer. He was very fond of music, dancing and eating. To give you a glimpse of his lively lifestyle, he was a member of Taj Hotel (Disco Club) in Colaba, Bombay, when we were trainees and our salary was a pittance. He used to get a regular supply of delicious sweets from home, which we enjoyed—sometimes when he shared, and at others with the connivance of his roommate late Commander Navin Sharma. He always let it pass without a fuss! Together, they made the training days brim with fun and laughter.

He was the decommissioning supply officer of INS Dharini and served in Headquarters Western Naval Command, under Commodore Arte (CSO-P&A). I am sure he would have held many other important logistics assignments and contributed greatly as he served his full service tenure. However, regrettably, I don't remember these as our career and social paths never converged. After the initial training, we met only occasionally. But I always found him in good humour—his happy-go-lucky mien never faded away.

Dear Kakks, I will miss you. As a course mate, it's a big loss. Even more personally, as you always tickled my funny bone and made me laugh. I pray that you keep enjoying music, dancing and culinary delights in your heavenly abode. I also hope you fetch up with our course mates Commander Navin Sharma (NK) and INS Khukri martyr Sub Lieutenant Sapra; our



training officer Commodore Pinkie Jain; and the many other wonderful souls out there and keep them laughing in the spirit of beautiful and everlasting naval camaraderie. RIP my friend.

Your course mate and friend,
Lamboo

- **Rear Admiral S S Rao (Retd), NM, VSM**

THE KARMAYOGI

Commander Ashok Kumar Sharma left for his heavenly abode on 25 February 2018 at the age of 70.

He was the eldest son of a renowned mathematician father and prominent BJP politician mother. After attaining his BSc, he joined the Executive Branch of the Indian Navy in February 1971. He was a navigation and direction specialist and served the Navy with distinction in various capacities, both at sea and ashore. He commanded mine countermeasure and minesweeper vessel INS Bedi in the rank of lieutenant commander and landing ship tank (medium) INS Kumbhir as a commander. During Exercise Brass Tacks in 1987, he was the Fleet Navigation Officer in the Eastern Fleet. He held several staff appointments at Headquarters Western Naval Command, Eastern Naval Command and shore establishments with equal zeal and distinction. His stints at Naval Headquarters included Deputy Director

Naval Operations, Deputy Director Naval Intelligence and Deputy Director Naval Plans. He was a thorough professional who earned the full confidence of his superiors. A very confident and conscientious performer, he served with diligence, sincerity and pride.

After naval service, he took assignments at sea as chief officer and subsequently master mariner in the merchant navy until his health permitted. Not happy at rest, he took up the assignment of assistant general manager of Sheela Foam, a large manufacturing unit in Greater Noida, till 2009 before his failing health denied further activity.

A realist karmayogi, he decreed that on his death, the Army Hospital R&R could use his organs for transplantation to needy defence veterans and their families, after which his full body be donated to Army Medical College, Delhi Cantonment, for



anatomical research and medical education, a request the bereaved family complied with.

He was a loving husband to Mini and caring father to Bhavna and Namita. Indeed, he was an extremely helpful person, which his juniors, colleagues and superiors all vouch for. True to his profession and principles, he lived by his ideals to the end. May the good and kind soul of Commander Ashok Kumar Sharma rest in eternal peace.

- Commander P K Sinha (Retd)

OBITUARIES

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>NoK</u>	<u>DoD</u>	<u>Address</u>
Cmde	Prodyot Kumar Mitra	Mr Promit Kumar Mitra (Son)	02 Jan 20	14-1B, Beltala Road, Kalighat, Kolkata 700026, Mob 9830108717, Email: mitrapk1@rediffmail.com
Cdr	V K Sahny	Mrs Sushila Sahny (Wife)	04 Jan 20	J 125, Sect 25, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, UP 201301 Email: sureshsahny@gmail.com
Capt	Madhusudan Kondath	Mrs Konath Sarojam (Wife)	17 Jan 20	Lakshmi Niwas, 1206, Kattocherry, Kanchangad 671315, Mob: 9447728607, Email: sarojam.kondath@gmail.com
Cdr	Ashok Kumar Dixit	Mrs Meera Dixit (Wife)	26 Jan 20	Flat No. 408, Phase III-A, Susheela Sea Wind Apts, Vaddem, Vasco da Gama, Goa 403802, Mob: 9421157176 Email: sunaina_3018@rediffmail.com
Lt Cdr	V K Paradkar	Mrs Shobhana Paradkar (Wife)	30 Jan 20	A2, 107, Florida Estate, Keshaw Nagar, Mundhwa, Pune 400036 Mob: 9890013817
Surg Capt	D K Thappa	Mrs Dhanwanti Thappa (Wife)	13 Feb 20	205/206, B Wing, Vishnu Shivam Tower, Thakur Village Kandivali East, Mumbai 400101, Mob: 9833906864 Email: rawal.niv@gmail.com
Cmde	Vijay Prasada	Mrs Sheila Prasada (Wife)	13 Feb 20	Flower Dale Farm, Vithalwadi Vilage, PO Paud Distt, Pune 412108 Mob: 9422526857, Email: oopra@yahoo.com
Cmde	Krishan Kumar Garg	Mrs Prem Pyari Garg (Wife)	15 Feb 20	No.1 Varuna, Defence Office Cooperative Society, Linking Road Extension, Dada Bhai Cross Road No 1, Santa Cruz West, Mumbai 400054, Mob: 9927833866
RAdm	B R Vasanth, VSM	Ms Amitha Vasanth (Daughter)	18 Feb 20	G003, Nishant Regency 235, 6th Cross, Defence Colony Indiranagar, Bangalore 560038, Mob: 9845090427, Email: amithavasanth@gmail.com
Cmde	Vijay Kumar Bhansali	Mrs Kamal Bhansali (Wife)	20 Feb 20	Flat No C 114, Jalvayu Towers, Sect 56, Gurugram, Haryana 122011 Mob: 9560452124, Email: bhansali.vk@gmail.com
Cdr	T S Srinivasan	Mrs Latha Srinivasan (Wife)	23 Feb 20	H No. 319, Jalvayu Vihar, Kukapally, Hyderabad 500085 Mob: 9381028258, Email: lathasrinivasan4@gmail.com
Cmde	Swapan Kumar Dutt	Smt Kaveri Dutt	02 Mar 20	Flat No 1D, 74/1 AK Azad Sarani, Kolkata 700054 Mob: 9836070623
Capt	Indar Kumar Erry	Mrs Uma Erry (Wife)	06 Mar 20	801, Jamuna Sagar, 59/60, SB Road, Colaba, Mumbai 400005 Mob: 9381028258, Email: arjun.erry@gmail.com

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>NoK</u>	<u>DoD</u>	<u>Address</u>
Cmde	Prithvi Raj Vij	Mrs Kiran Vij (Wife)	13 Mar 20	31st/ 29 East Patel Nagar, Ground Floor, New Delhi 110008
Cdr	Kehar Singh	Mr Ravinder Singh (Son)	16 Mar 20	Mob: 9820323098, Email: ranminder_carriers@hotmail.com
Cmde	Krishan Lal Chopra	Mrs Santosh Chopra (Wife)	17 Mar 20	306B, Aakansha Towers, Panch Marg, Versova, Mumbai 400061 Mob: 9869355787, Email: neeshama28@yahoo.com
Cmde	Pyarelal Singh Chauhan, VSM	Mrs Tripta Chauhan (Wife)	20 Mar 20	401, Dunnock, Nyati Enclave, Mohammadwadi, Pune 411060 Email: billooc@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	D N Ghosh	Mrs Maya Ghosh (Wife)	27 Mar 20	C 67, Jalvayu Vihar, Salt Lake, Kolkata 700064 Mob: 9830464370, Email mayaghosh098@gmail.com
Cdr	Kshudi Ram Jana	Dr Mrs Banashree Jana (Wife)	04 Apr 20	71 Jalvayu Vihar, Sect A, Kammanhalli Main Road, Kalyan Nagar, Bangalore 560043, Mob: 9741129170 Email: banashree_jana@yahoo.co.in
Lt Cdr	Bhajan Singh	Mrs Harbhajan Kaur	05 Apr 20	B 503, Sect A, Jalvayu Vihar, Hiranandani Garden Mumbai 400076, Mob: 9552599555, Email: jash7979@gmail.com
Cmde	K S Subramanyam	Mrs Vani Subramanyam (Wife)	11 Apr 20	310-A, Maruthamalai Road, PN Pudur, Coimbatore, Mob: 9440201490
Cmde	Chaman Lal Sachdeva, AVSM	Mrs Sunita Sachdeva (Wife)	11 Apr 20	C 64, Kailash Apts, Lala Lajpat Rai Road, New Delhi 110048 Mob: 9810216764
Cdr	B R Venkatesh	Mrs Chikkaballpura Laxmana Rao Meenaxi (Wife)	18 Apr 20	201, Gangothri Presidency, 10th Cross, 5th Main RK Layout 1st Phase Padmanabhanagar, Bidarhalli, B S K I Stage Bangalore 560080, Mob: 99086012609
Capt	Dunstan Basil Culas	Mrs Lyla Culas (Wife)	20 Apr 20	20, Jalvayu Vihar, Sect A, Kammanhalli Main Road Kalyan Nagar, Bangalore 560043, Mob: 9886546188 Email: lylaculas@gmail.com
Cdr	V P A D'Souza	Mr Senan D'Souza (Son)	26 Apr 20	Mob: 9820604942/ 9082695597 Email: lyselledsouza@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	Mohan Chandra Dabral	Mr Rajesh Kumar Dabral	26 Apr 20	B 101 Kshitij Tower, GE Link Society, Ram Mandir Road, Goregaon West, Mumbai 400054 Mob: 9833023506, Email: rkdabral@gmail.com
Cdr	Manoj Kumar	Mr Anima Kumar (Wife)	26 Apr 20	Tower F, Falcon View JLPL Sector 66A, Mohali 140306 Mob: 986973190, Email: kumaranu27@yahoo.co.in
Cdr	Om Prakash Sharma	Mrs Pushpa Sharma (Wife)	27 Apr 20	F7/7, Salunke Vihar, AWCHS, Pune 411022 Mob: 8956461807

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>NoK</u>	<u>DoD</u>	<u>Address</u>
Capt	Gopal Krishnan Pillai	Mrs Sushma (Wife)	28 Apr 20	P128/11, Jamuna Building, Army Maidan Camp Balllygunge, Kolkata 700019, Mob: 8850628265
Cdr	Kalliat Chali Mahesh Giri	Mrs Mallika Mahesh Giri (Wife)	06 May 20	A2401, Gokul Concorde, Thakur Village, Kandivali East Mumbai 400101, Mob: 9821283268 Email: mansi.girl9@gmail.com
Cmde	Subodh V Purohit, NM (G), VSM	Mrs Neela Purohit (Wife)	08 May 20	12 Archana-Aboli Apt 850/8, Shivaji Nagar, Near BMCC, Pune 41104, Mob: 9511712914, Email: neelaspuhit@gmail.com
Surg Cdr	Satish K Khanna	Mrs Neelu Khanna (Wife)	16 May 20	5416/1 Moder Housing Complex, Manimajra Chandigarh 160101, Mob: 8239249181 Email: dikshapandey121@yahoo.com
Cdr	Liaquat Ali	Mrs Atia Ali (Wife)	21 May 20	150A, Surya Vihar, Deenpur, Najafgarh, New Delhi 110043 Mob: 9771819692, Email: ali0754@gmail.com
VAdm	Verghese Koithara, VSM	Mrs Indira Koithara (Wife)	22 May 20	2 Wellington Greens, PO Box No 4, Wellington 633231 Mob: 9443213958, Email: indirakoithara@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	Gurcharan Das Sharma, VSM	Mrs Kaushalaya Sharma (Wife)	24 May 20	A5-B/25 (SFS) Shanti Kunj Apt, Gate No 1, Paschim Vihar New Delhi 110063, Mob: 9311992816 Email: yashomiraj@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	Minal Patil	Capt Rajiv Tandon (Husband)	28 May 20	Office of NOIC (MAH), C/o FMO, Mumbai 400001 Mob: 8108692960, Email: yashomiraj@gmail.com
Cmde	Anil Kumar Dhir	Mr Meenakashi Dhir (Wife)	08 Jun 20	G 79, Sector 25, Jalvayu Vihar, Noida 201301 (Uttar Pradesh) Mob: 9871765909, Email: anyutad@hotmail.com
Cdr	B P S Jolly	Mr Manik Jolly (Nephew)	18 Jun 20	539R, Model Town, Ludhiana, Punjab 141002 Mob: 9357216626, Email: manik00005390@yahoo.com
Cdr	Partha Dutta Roy	Mrs Neeta Dutta Roy (Wife)	21 Jun 20	H 1478, 2nd Floor, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi 110019 Mob: 9871411722, Email: nitaroy@hotmail.com
Cdr	Ashok Kumar Anand	Mrs Renu Anand (Wife)	23 Jun 20	L-3/30, Ground Floor, DLF-II, Gurugram, Haryana 122002 Mob: 8527423562, Email: tatvakmusic@gmail.com
Cdr	P Damodaran	Mrs Vanija (Wife)	24 Jun 20	Darshana, Kannadikkal, Vengery PO, Kozhikode, 673010 Mob: 9792709376, Email: babyvanja7@gmail.com
Cdr	Anurag Chhetri, NM	Ms Akansha Chhetri (Daughter)	06 Jul 20	8/101, Swethambari, 5th Road Extn, JVPD Scheme, Juhu, Mumbai 400049, Mob: 8451018206 Email: chhettrisinddhant@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	J P A Noronha	Mrs Teresa Bernadette Marie Noronha (Wife)	08 Jul 20	42/2, Behind CSI Colony, Kothanpur, Bangalore 56000787 Mob: 9025300632, Email: alfteresa@gmail.com

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>NoK</u>	<u>DoD</u>	<u>Address</u>
Capt	Sukumar Vishwanathan Nair	Dr Sudha Nair (Wife)	21 Jul 20	Plot No 9, First Floor, Sai Nagar Colony, St Anthony's Road Chembur, Mumbai 400071, Mob: 9821354102 Email: 77nita@gmail.com
Cdr	V B L Gupta	Mrs Asha Gupta (Wife)	22 Jul 20	201A, Nilgiri Apartments, Sector 2, Vasant Nagri, Vasai East, Dist Palghar, Maharashtra 401208, Mob: 9619676563 Email: kanineegupta11@gmail.com
Cdr	Amar Chand Singal	Mrs Kanan Singal (Wife)	25 Jul 20	House No 1116, Sector 34 C, Chandigarh 160022 Mob: 7355055211, Email: dsingal@gmail.com
Cdr	R M Nair	Mrs Saraswathi Nair (Wife)	31 Jul 20	Nayathu House, Mannanam PO, Kottayam, Mob: 9810231798 Email: anair28@hotmail.com
Cdr	Ram Avtar Malik	Mrs Reva Malik (Wife)	01 Aug 20	Flat No 103, Block No 1, Nav Sansad Vihar, Plot No 4, Sect 22, Dwarka, New Delhi 110077, Mob: 9818059510 Email: rahulmalik7654@gmail.com
Cdr	M Nirmal	Mrs Prema Nirmal (Wife)	05 Aug 20	Mob: 9480065734
Cdr	Darshan N Pajithaya	Shraddha	22 Aug 20	09 Chitra, Naval Park, Gandhigram PO, Visakhapatnam, 530005, Mob: 9952001762
Cdr	Eshwar Reddy	Mrs Lakshmi Reddy (Wife)	25 Aug 20	71 Mani Enclave, JJ Nagar, Yaprul, Secunderabad 500087 Mob; 9969942696, Email: gajjala1945@yahoo.co.in
Cdr	R B S Gill	Mrs Pritpal Gill (Wife)	31 Aug 20	38902 Jalvayu Vihar, Sector 20, Panchkula, Haryana Mob: 9872009311, Email: pritpalgil2010@yahoo.co.in
Capt	S C Maini	Mrs Suman (Wife)	01 Sep 20	793, Defence Colony, Sainikpur, Secunderabad Telangana 500094, Mob: 7675997948/ 984953681 Email: satish_maini@yahoo.co.in
Surg Lt Cdr	Gurdeep Jaggi	Mr Anish Jaggi & Mr Gaurav Jaggi (Sons)	02 Sep 20	E903, Jalvayu Vihar, Hiranandani Garden, Powai, Mumbai 400076 Mob: 9769773241 (Son), Email: anishjaggi1204@hotmail.com
Cdr	Shri Krishna Gupta	Mrs Ursha Gupta (Wife)	07 Sep 20	A200, Sec 31, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh 201303, Mob: 9818060614/ 9810565215 Email: udaykrishna@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	Mela Singh	Gp Capt Birender Singh and Cmdt Shubhinder Singh	09 Sep 20	Flat No B, Mount Everest Apartments, Sector 9, Dwarka New Delhi 110088, Mob: 9940506258 Email: shubinder@yahoo.co.in
Lt Cdr	Padmakar L Thatte	Mrs Manik Padmakar Thatte (Wife)	10 Sep 20	4/2, Archana Nagar Housing Society, Erandavana, Pune 411038, Mob: 9922996256

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>NoK</u>	<u>DoD</u>	<u>Address</u>
Cdr	Anant Balu Chalke	Mrs Anita Anant Chalke (Wife)	12 Sep 20	21, Shree Datta Apartments, 3rd Floor, Rameshwadi, Kulgaon Badlapur West, Thane, Maharashtra 421503, Mob: 7304410439/ 9090494925, Email: rchalke800@gmail.com
Cdr	G V Rao	Mrs Krishna Kumari (Wife)	13 Sep 20	302, A-Block, Greenpark Apartments, Yapral, JJ Nagar Secunderabad 500087, Mob: 9440607282 Email: cdrgvrao@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	Basant Singh	Mrs Usha Basant Singh (Wife)	27 Sep 20	E121, Jalvayu Vihar, Sect 21, Gautam Buddha Nagar Noida 201301, Mob: 7042429904 Email: ushabasantsingh1940@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	R N Batra	Mrs Asha Batra (Wife)	30 Sep 20	52, Alaknanda, Gulmohar, Cross Road No 10, JBPD Scheme, Juhu, Mumbai 400005, Mob: 9323471301/ 9324200419 Email: 52alaknanda@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	Ved Prakash	Mrs Kanta Prakash (Wife)	30 Sep 20	VPO Nautana Distt, Mahendragarh, Haryana 123028 Mob: 9461778311, Email: vedprakash02@yahoo.co.in
Cdr	Krishna Prasad Kakkar	Mrs Seema Kakkar (Wife)	30 Sep 20	J2, Sector 25, Jalvayu Vihar, Noida UP Mob: 9811896386, Email: rachnakakkar019@gmail.com
Capt	B S M Reddy	Mrs Mamatha C (Wife)	02 Oct 20	Chennamma 903, Naval Base, Karwar, Karnataka 581308 Mob: 9573879537
Lt	Rajeev Jha	Mrs Manisha Jha (Wife)	04 Oct 20	G-81, Jalvayu Vihar, Mundamveli, Kochi 682507 Mob: 9869731058
Capt	Tejinder Pal Singh Gill	Mrs Mahender Gill (Wife)	07 Oct 20	5234/5, The Dat, Passey Road, Patiala, Punjab 147001 Mob 9464687072, Email: praveergill@gmail.com
Surg Capt	Prabhakar Patro	Mrs Usha Patro (Wife)	10 Oct 20	603, Kamal, Jalvayu Vihar, Phase 1, Sector 20, Kharghar, Navi Mumbai 410210, Mob: 8698459426
Cmde	Narindra Singh	Dr (Mrs) Inderjeet Kaur and Ms Jasjot Kaur Vermani (Daughters)	12 Oct 20	Kothi 132, Phase 7, SAS Nagar, Sector 61, Mohali, Punjab 160062, Mob: 9915025831
Cmde	K Madhavan	Ms Shermila Shetty, Ms Sangeeta Singh and Ms Seema Khan (Daughters)	15 Oct 20	B Wing, Flat No 709, Sonata Tower, Off Marwe, Road Jankalyan Nagar, Behind Jay Nagar, Malad West, Mumbai 400095 Mob: 9860550303, Email: srenterprise.blue@yahoo.com
Lt Cdr	N R Kolluru	Mrs Sailabala Kolluru (Wife)	16 Oct 20	Flat No 203, Krishna Residency, Dasapalla Hills, Near Navy House, Visakhapatnam

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>NoK</u>	<u>DoD</u>	<u>Address</u>
Capt	S J Contractor	Jer Sohrab Contractor (Wife)	16 Oct 20	11/4 Rustom Baug, Sant Savata Marg, Byculia, Mumbai 400027 Mob: 9769214125, Email phiroze72@icloud.com
Cdr-At-Arms	Jerome A Rocque	Mrs Marcella J Rocque (Wife)	23 Oct 20	B 101, Jalvayu Vihar, Powai, Mumbai 400076 Mob: 9819458959, Email: m.rocque27@gmail.com
Cdr	Devender Kumar Dogra	Mrs Shashi Dogra (Wife)	30 Oct 30	154A, Gandhi Nagar, Jammu 180004, Mob: 9419233140/ 9796203684, Email: dkdograshashi@gmail.com
Lt Cdr	M M Nair	Ms Vilasini K (Niece)	02 Nov 20	Shree Krishna Bhawan, Kaipassery, Tirivallur P O, Chelannur, Kozhikode, Kerala 673616, Mob: 9446907428 Email: rkvipin1@gmail.com
Capt	Rakesh Raman	Mrs Alka Raman (Wife)	07 Nov 20	Flat 2104, Tower No 14, Purvanchal Royal City, Sector Chi-V, Greater Noida 201310, Mob: 9819956203 Email:captanrakeshraman@hotmail.com
Cdr	Daya Nath Rai	-	08 Nov 20	V & P Shri Kant Pur, Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh 27620 Mob: 9869508237 (Nephew) Email: vinaykr_55@yahoo.co.in
VAdm	J T G Pereira, PVSM AVSM	Mr Michael Pereira (Son) and Jennifer Fernandes (Daughter)	16 Nov 20	701A, Bakhtavar, 7th Floor, Opp Colaba Post Office, Mumbai 400005, Mob: 982125187/9820145215 Email: nantara@gmail.com
Capt	Gulshan Rai Sarna, VSM	Mrs Kiran Sarna (Wife)	19 Nov 20	H No, 1068, Sect 15, Faridabad 121007 Mob: 9873813299, Email: captainsarna@gmail.com
Cdr	S K Chakraborty	Mrs Deepali Chakraborty (Wife)	20 Nov 20	Flat No 17, Maitryee Apartments, 28 Jogen Roy Road Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal 7000123 Mob: 9433849284/ 900183547 Email: ahkrpl@yahoo.com
Cdr	Sarjeet Singh	Mrs Bimla Yadav (Wife)	22 Nov 20	T2-1503, Tata Primanti, Sect 72, Gurugram, Haryana 122101 Mob: 9620751439, Email: vinayyadav.iitd@gmail.com
Cdr	Solomon P Das	Sherwin and Gavin (Sons)	22 Nov 20	Mob: +141 52054548 Email: sherwindas@gmail.com, Gdas1@yahho.com
Surg Cdr	K L Malhotra	Mr Mannu Malhotra (Son)	23 Nov 20	A40, New Friends Colony, New Delhi 110025 Mob: 9810018422, Email: mannumalhotra1@gmail.com
Cmde	Suresh Chandra	Mrs Suman Chandra (Wife)	24 Nov 20	H-84, Ashok Vihar Phase-I, Delhi 110052 Mob: 9811173445, Email: varunichaudhary@gmail.com
Cmde	Vinod Thakur	Mrs Kanchan Thakur (Wife)	29 Nov 20	L 175, Sect 25, Noida, UP 20130 Mob: 9818993858, 8800022560

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>NoK</u>	<u>DoD</u>	<u>Address</u>
Lt Cdr	Gandharv Singh	Mr Rajesh Kanwar (Sons),	29 Nov 20	H. No. 1064, Tower 1, 6th Floor, ATS Golf Meadows, Lifestyle Dera Bassi District, Mohali, Punjab 1450507 Mob: 7087629164, Email: rakeshkanwar1961@gmail.com
Cdr	S K V Rao	Mr. S N Chakravarthy (Son)	12 Dec 20	B 502, Jalvayu Towers, Lower Tank Bund, Elaichi Guda, Hyderabad 500080, Mob: 6301930442 (Son) 8462004500 (Daughter), Email: Snaveenc@outlook.com
Cdr	Nishant Singh	Mrs Nayaab Randhawa (Wife)	13 Dec 20	J-23 B, B Block, Jalvayu Vihar, Mumbai 400076 Mob: 9867752157
Capt	Manish Sondhi	Mrs Sapna Sondhi (Wife)	14 Dec 20	132, Sainik Vihar, Pitampura, New Delhi 110034 Mob: 9990921639, Email: sondhisapna0602@yahoo.com
Cdr	T R Mogul	Mrs Susan Mogal (Wife)	15 Dec 20	Mob: 9886311061, Email: susan.mogal@gmail.com, shiraz.mogul@gmail.com, firdaus@checkaninvoice.com
VAdm	Srikant	Mrs Sudha Srikant	16 Dec 20	42 Lodhi Estate, New Delhi 110003
Lt Cdr	A K Rajagopal	Mrs C Malathi (Wife)	21 Dec 20	2/3365A, "Rama", Sadanam Road, Civil Station, PO Eranhipalam, Kozhikode, Kerala 673020, Mob: 7403334533 Email: rm_prakash@ymail.com
Cdr	N D Prasad	Mrs Sheela Prasad (Wife)	26 Dec 20	Mob: 9539183146, Email: sheelapcpe@gmail.com
Cdr	V S Renganathan	Mrs Akila Renganathan	26 Dec 20	Villa 173, The Empyrean, Off NH 207, Near BP Petrol Bunk Anche Muskur, Chikka Thirupathi (Post) 563160 Mob: 9986423921, Email: akilrenga@yahoo.com
Lt	Fred A Rajarathnam	Gershon Rajarathnam (Son)	30 Dec 20	AG 32, Shanthi Colony, Annanagar, Chennai 600040 Mob: 9940647744/ 044- 26211689 Email: graja100@yahoo.com
VAdm	M R Schunker, PVSM, AVSM	Mrs Donna Suares (Daughter), Colin Schunker (Son)	05 Jan 21	14, Defence Colony, Alto Porvorim, Goa 403521 Mob: 9970564022, Email: donnasuares@yahoo.com (Daughter) & keithsuares@gmail.com, Colinschunker@yahoo.com.au (Son)
Cdr	Sachin Rohilla	Mrs Shivani Rohilla (Wife)	08 Jan 21	L 1/16, MDDA Colony, PO Defence Colony, Dehradun Uttarakhand 248001, Mob: 9474247264
Cdr	Anil Kumar Gulati	Mrs Anju Gulati (Wife)	10 Jan 21	34, Urban Chimes, Prakruthik Vihar, Phase 3, Yapral, Secunderabad 87, Mob: 9970803012, Email: gulati65@gmail.com
Capt	Ved Prakash Duggal	Mrs Nina Doctor (Daughter)	11 Jan 21	1105/14, HKMP, Model Colony, Pune 411016 Mob: 9420220450, Email: ninadoc@gmail.com

NAVY FOUNDATION

BENGALURU CHAPTER

The fourth Admiral Pereira Memorial Lecture (APML) was held on 15 February 2020 at Para Regimental Training Centre Auditorium, Bengaluru. Vice Admiral S C S Bangara (Retd) was the guest speaker and delivered a talk on “Civil-Military Relationship”. Flag Officer Karnataka Naval Area was the guest of honour for the event. The event was attended by about 225 guests, including serving officers from the Indian Navy, Air Force and Army, along with 125 naval veterans and ladies. On completion of the

guest lecture, cocktails and dinner were hosted by the Flag Officer Karnataka Naval Area at the Naval Officers’ Mess.

During the period of COVID-19, Navy Foundation Bengaluru Chapter (NFBC) has taken proactive steps to regularly update all members through email regarding various advisories and protocols issued by ECHS HQ, Government of India and Government of Karnataka. Necessary help and information was also provided to needy members through online and mobile



modes. Further NFBC get-togethers and the AGM have been postponed until the situation normalises.

CHENNAI CHAPTER

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, regular get-togethers (GTGs) are conducted on a virtual platform, which include cultural programmes by members and their families as well as online tambola.

GTGs conducted include the first virtual meeting on 16 May 2020; a virtual farewell to the outgoing FOTNA and an AGM on 21 June 2020; a welcome to the new FOTNA, cultural programme and tambola on 25 July 2020; a cultural programme and

tambola on 27 September; and a special event on 4 December 2020 on Navy Day where members who took part in the 1971 operations shared their experiences.



➔ DEHRADUN CHAPTER

On 4 December 2020, all distinguished NFDNC members, veteran officers and Veer Naris were invited for a function at DSOI Dehradun to commemorate Navy Day.



Further, the NFDNC team participated in the Vijay Diwas celebration held on 16 December 2020 at State War Memorial (Shahid Smarak), Gandhi Park, Rajpur Road, Dehradun, to commemorate the 1971 victory, pay homage to the martyrs and felicitate awardees, decorated soldiers and Veer Naris. On this occasion, President NFDNC Vice Admiral AG Thapliyal, AVSM, BAR (Retd), paid tribute to the brave soldiers by laying a wreath at the War Memorial at Dehradun

Cantonment, on behalf of the Indian Navy (*in pic*), while Secretary NFDNC Lt Commander Deepak Khanduri (Retd) laid a wreath at the State War Memorial.



➔ DELHI CHAPTER

The Armed Forces Veterans' Day was commemorated on 14 January 2020 at the National War Memorial with the customary wreath-laying ceremony. Vice Admiral R Hari Kumar, CISC, IDS Headquarters, was the Presiding Officer. On completion of the ceremony, a Veterans' Rally was held at Manekshaw Centre, Parade Road, Delhi Cantonment.

"It is an honour and a proud privilege to record my personal highest tributes to our Nation's Martyrs for their unmatched bravery, valour and unflinching loyalty to our Country. May the supreme sacrifice made by our valiant Warriors be always cherished with reverence in our hearts. *Jai Hind*," wrote Rear Admiral Sushil Ramsay, YSM, President, NFDC.





Annual naval veterans' reunion lunch, 2020

The annual interaction with the Chief of Naval Staff and Retired Naval Officers' Reunion Lunch was held on 2 February 2020 at Manekshaw Centre. The event went off very well with enthusiastic response from many naval veterans.

29th Admiral RD Katari Memorial Lecture

Professor K Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India and the Chairperson of the Prime

Minister's Science, Technology & Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC), was scheduled to deliver the 29th Admiral R D Katari Memorial Lecture on the theme, "Shaping the Future: The World and India in 2050", at Dr D S Kothari Auditorium on 27 March 2020. While all arrangements for the lecture were made, the event had to be cancelled owing to the Corona virus pandemic.

The pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic, which struck the world in March 2020, brought with it

severe restrictions, regimes and protocols in our lives. It still continues to dominate our mindset and psyche with no signs of a let up. Consequently, several mandatory actions and activities could not be complied with. Hence, a statutory AGM could not be held. To overcome such constraints, the help of virtual devices was taken to obtain the requisite approvals from the General Body for the audited balance sheet, statement of income and expenditure, and independent auditor's report of NFDC.

HYDERABAD CHAPTER

On Navy Day, 4 December 2020, a commemorative service was held at the War Memorial, next to Parade Ground Secunderabad, under the

aegis of DMDE, Secunderabad. The Navy Foundation was represented by Commodore A Madhava Rao (Retd) ED, BDL.





KERALA CHAPTER



Veterans' Day wreath-laying ceremony was held at the War Memorial, Naval Base, Kochi, on 14 January 2020, followed by breakfast at the Sailors Institute. The President of NF Kerala Chapter laid the wreath on behalf of naval veterans.

Reef Knot

The President, NFKC, formally released the 2020 edition of the NFKC magazine, *Reef Knot*, online on 15 August 2020.

Boat cruise and get-together

A daylong houseboat cruise was organised at the scenic Kumarakom backwaters for

members and spouses on 18 January 2020. A sumptuous lunch was served onboard and various games were played.



Outreach activities

Outreach work is undertaken with funds donated voluntarily by members during the year. This year, the following items at a total cost of Rs 89,865 were donated to nearby destitute homes by the President, NFKC, on 5 February 2020. The Chairman Outreach and other management committee members were also present:

- Dosa Bathi was procured and donated to the Government Old Age Home, Thevara
- Medicine trolley, trolley commodes and

three-seater chairs were donated to the Home for Destitutes, Perumanoor

- A crate of fruit was presented to the Government Old Age Home, Thevara, and Home for Destitutes, Perumanoor.



AGM 2020

An online AGM was held on 26 September 2020 through Google Meet. The President of the Management Committee, Vice Admiral M P Muralidharan, AVSM & Bar, NM (Retd), Vice President Commodore P Suresh, VSM (Retd), Secretary Commander KB Jalesh (Retd) and Treasurer Commander PT John (Retd) were re-elected for another term.



KOLKATA CHAPTER



On New Year's Day 2020, over 30 veterans enjoyed a picnic at a scenic locale on the banks of the Ganges situated within the premises of

Hoogly Service Officers Institute in Barrackpore Cantonment. The occasion was made more lively with the presence of the families, beautiful ladies and lively children, mostly grandchildren, indulging in fun and frolic. Utterly delectable snacks complemented the high 'spirits'. This was followed by a gourmet spread of local delicacies for a sumptuous lunch. The picnic was graced by the presence of senior veterans, including Vice Admiral B Guha and Vice Admiral P K Chatterjee.

The Kolkata Chapter of the Navy

Foundation also participated in Vijay Diwas and Veterans' Day organised by the Headquarters Eastern Army Command in Kolkata.



MUMBAI CHAPTER

In the past year, Navy Foundation Mumbai Chapter (NFMF), had planned to celebrate Veterans' Week on a grander scale. To create awareness among Mumbaikars about Veterans' Day, 35 banners were manufactured and displayed in various locations by MDL; with the

assistance of the INS Vajrabahu team, for a week from 7 to 14 January 2020. Captain Rakesh Agrawala and Commander Raj Dutta, Honorary Secretary, NFMF, were interviewed on AIR FM Rainbow Radio.

Further, the C-in-C XI vs. President NFMF

XI Cricket T-12 tournament was held on 5 January, which was won by the veterans by seven wickets. A J-24 yachting race between the veterans and serving officers of the Western Naval Command (WNC) was also conducted on 8 January 2020, which was won by the serving officers



CinC XI Vs Veterans XI lined up for toss

team—rolling trophies for both events had been instituted by NFMC. The veteran officers had also imparted motivational lectures in Mumbai schools in early January. What's more, *Fauji India* magazine had dedicated the January 2020 issue to the veterans and published articles by them.

Veterans' Day Parade: 12 January 2020

The first ever Veterans' Day Parade was held at Marine Drive on Sunday, 12 January 2020. Over 600 veterans from the three services took part in the parade from the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) to Princess Street flyover, a distance of about 3 km. There was great bonhomie at Nariman Point from 7 am on the morning of the parade. Hon. Commodore (SCC) Rabi Ahuja was present with his smart contingent of 150 SCC boys

and girls. The veterans started flocking in proudly with their ceremonial blazers with medals along with their good ladies in their best attire. The contingents were formed behind the SCC/NCC cadets.

At 8.30 am sharp, Lieutenant Commander Farokh Tarapore, VSM, Hon. Treasurer, NFMC, ordered the start of the parade amid loud cheers from the onlookers, who had gathered in large numbers. In front were two long columns of 150 SCC and 50 naval NCC cadets on the flanks. They were followed by 36 well-attired cadets forming the SCC band. The parade was led by NFMC President Commander Vijay Vadhera along with octogenarians Rear Admiral Arun Auditto, AVSM, NM(G), and Captain Raj Mohindra on wheelchairs (both former presidents of NFMC). The first contingent behind them comprised gallantry awardees of all three services followed by NFMC committee members and the NFMC veteran officers contingent. Behind them were veteran officers of the Army and Air Force and veteran sailors of the Indian Navy and jawans of the Army and Air Force.

A contingent of 50 masked police commandos carrying their arms marched behind the veterans. Republic TV interviewed President NFMC, while two drones filmed the maiden parade of veterans.

When the parade reached Princess Street flyover, the Police Band played melodious numbers and patriotic songs and breakfast packets were distributed to all. FOMA Rear Admiral Rajesh Pendharkar, AVSM, VSM, the chief guest for the occasion, congratulated the veterans and participants. President NFMC addressed the gathering and thanked all the agencies instrumental in the grand success of the event. He highlighted that the aim of the parade was to create awareness among





Indians about the role of veterans in the service of country and society.

Wreath-laying ceremony: 14 January 2020

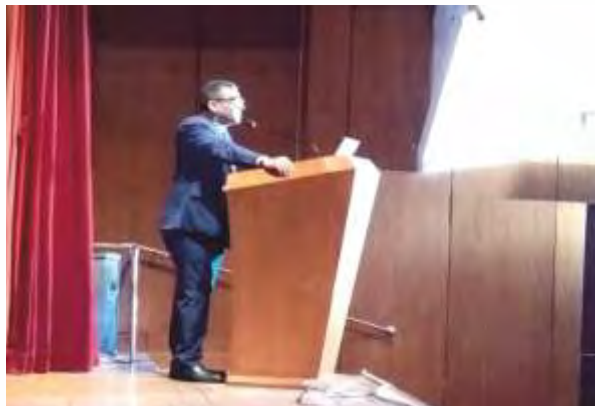
The festivities and gaiety of Veterans' Day commenced with a wreath-laying ceremony at Shaheed Smarak War Memorial in Colaba, which was attended by a substantial number of serving and retired personnel of all three services. Wreaths were laid by AVM Rajeev Hora, AOC MAO, Lt Gen S K Parashar, GOC (M&G) Area, Vice Admiral Ajit Kumar, FOC-in-C (West), Commander Vijay Vadhera, President NFMC and Shripad Yesso Naik, Raksha Rajya Mantri (RRM). The Last Post was



played by the service buglers. This was followed by high tea at the Air Force Officers' Mess close by, where all veterans and serving personnel of the three services assembled and interacted with the RRM.

17th Soman Memorial Lecture

The wreath-laying was followed by the 17th Soman Memorial Lecture in Asvini



Auditorium for all veterans where strategic affairs analyst Nitin A Gokhale spoke on the topic, "The New Great Game in the Indo-Pacific", with special reference to the Indian Ocean Region and the South China Sea. This was followed by beer and lunch for the veterans and invitees. The chief guest for the function was Vice Admiral R B Pandit, Chief of Staff, Western Naval Command.

During the lockdown

A video conference meeting of the committee members of NFMC was held on 31 March. This was followed up with regular video conferences twice a week. Government/ ECHS letters continued to be promulgated regularly to naval veterans via Whats App.

A virtual AGM of NFMC was held on 9 August 2020 over video conference. The AGM began by paying tribute to the 27 members of NFMC who had passed away since the last AGM.

After the opening address, President NFMC welcomed 93 new members. The balance sheet of FE-2018-19 was passed by the General Body as well as the previous minutes and the New Working Rules 2020. The agenda points were discussed.



PUNE CHAPTER



The past year began with a lunch for the veterans hosted by Rear Admiral S K Grewal, NM, VSM, Deputy Commandant NDA, at his residence Torna on 19 January 2020. The lunch was attended by many veterans and spouses.

Wreath-laying ceremony

NF members laid a wreath at Seafarers' Memorial in Pune on 20 February 2020. The Seafarers' Memorial is an anchor of old frigate INS Kistna, dedicated to sailors of merchant and naval fleets, fishermen and other seafarers who lost their lives at sea. The Naval Prayer was solemnly recited and President NFPC and other members placed a wreath at the memorial, and a period of

one-minute silence was observed in honour of the martyrs.



Honouring Commodore Rajan Vir

Some veterans from Pune hosted a luncheon on 27 February 2020 at Royal Bombay Yacht Club in Mumbai. Amitabh Kumar (IRS), Director General of Shipping, and Vice Admiral R K Pandit, Chief of Staff, Western Naval Command, graced the occasion. Commodore Rajan Vir was also felicitated for his contribution to the

maritime world and was presented with a plaque jointly by Mr Kumar and Vice Admiral RB Pandit.

Lectures to students of SP Univ.

Members conducted lectures on oceans and marine environment and maritime security for fourth-semester MA students from August 19 to March 20, an annual practice. Commodore Rajan Vir, Captain Anand Dixit, Commodore Ajay Chitnis and Commander M N Yeolekar gave lectures.

Other highlights

NFPC would also like to acknowledge:

- Commander R W Pathak for helping veterans and Veer Naris with their pension-related issues
- Commodore A Chitnis, SC, NM, and his association with Rotary Club in various social fields
- Team NFPC for helping Veer Naris during lockdown.
- And the veterans of NFPC spearheading the clean-up of river banks.

READY RECKONER

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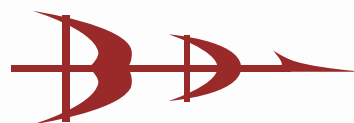
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