



AUSSIE TRISHAKTI

Feb 2022

A Periodical of the NDA Alumni Association (Australia Chapter)

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Message from the President

Better Tidings?



Greetings from Perth – the most remote city in the world!

The Australia Chapter brings yet another periodical for your

reading pleasure.

Alas, 2021 flattered to deceive. Most of our members in Melbourne and Sydney, as indeed in the other cities of Australia, found it difficult to socialise with each other. Normal routines continued to get severely disrupted with long lockdowns.

When historians write about our times, they will probably talk about it in terms of BC and AC – Before Covid and After Covid.

With vaccination rates picking up, the year 2022 promises to bring better tidings for all of us across continents. But as I write this, war rages between Ukraine and Russia. The world is hurtling toward another crisis. I am reminded of the words written by the Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish:

“The war will end
The leaders will shake hands
The old woman will keep waiting
for her martyred son.
That girl will wait for her beloved husband
and those children will wait
for their heroic father
I don't know who sold our homeland
but I know who paid the price.”

This issue contains four articles that you will hopefully enjoy reading. The piece by one of our newest members, Col Pradeep Kanthan (39/B/J) succinctly and elegantly captures what acquiring an Australian identity might mean to an immigrant. Perth's own, Cdr Rajesh Mittal (46/A) points to the merit in using the diaspora, particularly the military veterans, as a resource for furthering India's interests in Australia. His article raises valid points.

In another contribution by a Perth-based member, Col Ronnie Mistry (18/I) recalls how he literally looked at the eye of the tiger and lived to tell the tale. I dare say that Ronnie sir has lost none of his youthful exuberance (as attested by his posts on our WhatsApp group).

The final piece is a vivid recollection by Col Misar Gundagi (65/D) of the first seven days he spent at the Academy. Reading his piece drove home the importance of socialising newcomers into any organisation. It was with good reason that we in the Gorkha battalions would insist on our newly commissioned officers spending as much time as possible with the troops.

My compliments to the Editorial team. Like always, they have done a fabulous job.

Before signing off, I would like to thank our Associate Member, Col Nishant Kaura (59/D) for offering to refurbish our website. I learn that he is also exploring the possibility of helping us raise resources with an aim to support charitable causes that our Chapter might wish to support in the future.

Do stay safe and be well!

Au revoir!

Imran Sahgal.



Secretary's Report



Another COVID affected year comes to an end. Repeated lockdowns in both Sydney and Melbourne denied us an opportunity to meet in person. Melbourne, in fact, became the city with the longest lockdown in the world!

We arranged a Zoom meeting on 5th Sep 2021 as the first quarterly meeting for the year 2021-2022. Thanks to all members who attended. The main aim was to continue with social interactions, there were no agenda points as such to discuss.

Probably, in a first for any of our Chapters, we had an ex-NDA from a friendly foreign country join us. Maj Abdul Samad (Lima/121) from the Afghanistan Armed Forces has decided to call Australia his new home. Maj Abdul has also had the distinction of getting posted as an instructor to the NDA later during his career with the Afghanistan's armed forces. Welcome Down Under, Abdul.

The Australia Chapter currently boasts of a robust strength of 58 members located in various states/cities/overseas as under:

- a. Victoria – 9 members.
- b. Queensland – 3 members.
- c. New South Wales – 7 members.
- d. South Australia – 2 members.
- e. Western Australia – 6 members.
- f. Australian Capital Territory – 4 members.
- g. Overseas – 27 members.

Signing off with best wishes and safe times to all members and their families.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rajesh Kaswan'.

Col Rajesh Kaswan (Retd), 77/D

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Service Before Self



News Round Up July 2021 – Feb 2022

Unfortunately, as the Secretary's report above mentions, there is not much to report

Quarterly Meeting Sep 2021



Some Curated Readings

Will Russia cut off European Gas?

The Atlantic

Germany has long argued that importing natural gas from Russia would help keep peace. That strategy is being tested now.

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Women aren't the problem. Standards are.

Modern War Institute (at West Point)

Changing culture takes time.

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The U.S. military has new technology on the drawing board in response to warfare trends...

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The Nomad: What's Australia to me?

Lt Col Pradeep Kanthan (Retd), 39 B/J

“The people who just came here from nations all around, that's Australia for me.”

Kamahl turned 87 in November and sings on 26 January, which is Australia Day, each year. A song that he often sings and has made popular is 'What's Australia to me'? The lyrics of the song are about people and culture (not the geography) that makes Australia special.



What is Australia to Me?

The house I live in, my neighbours down the street,
The proud and smiling faces of the people that I
meet.

The Children in the playground and Christmas in the sun,
The G'day and the handshake, that's Australia to me.

What is Australia to Me?

The town I live in, the friends that I have found,
The people who just came here from nations all around.

Those who built this country, the air of feeling free,
And the right to speak your own mind, that's Australia to me.

Words of Banjo Patterson, Mackellar, and Henry Lawson,
The style of Donald Bradman, De Castella, and Dame Joan,

There is Smithy and Ben Lexcen achievers without peers and
The dreaming of the people who've been here a million years.

This land I live in, the goodness everywhere, a place of wealth and beauty,
With enough for all to share.

I love this sunburnt country, so vital, young, and free,
With a promise for tomorrow, that's Australia to me.

But especially the people, that is Australia to me.

The Nomad is an eternal migrant. Each place offers its culture; the Nomad is there for the pasture. Some leave a large imprint.

Kamahl epitomises the spirit of the migrant. He is a legend in the Australian entertainment industry and an icon spanning several decades. I met Kamahl on a project to archive his artefacts and entertainment wardrobes. An onerous task that led me to becoming his 'spiritual' advisor and friend. That was 2012 and I had jumped the ditch a year before from Auckland to Sydney. An act of balancing the brains or IQ, as Sir Robert Muldoon, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand would say of Kiwis and Ozzies crossing the Tasman Sea.

For me, the eternal migrant, it was another 'posting.'

Australia and New Zealand are countries with migrants and indigenous populations. The culture is of an 'instant' variety. Indians, Chinese, Armenians, Italians, Turks, and Greeks came with their centuries of culture to add to what was an Ozzie culture. Some came earlier than the others, and each year more come in from all over the world.



Kamahl (Kandiah Kamalesvaran, AM) introduces himself as made in Malaysia with parts from Sri Lanka! He pledges the song to all FBAs: Foreign Born Australians, and FDAs: Fair Dinkum Australians. He came to Australia as a school student in the 1950s.

Indians more than other FBAs share a colonial past with Australians. Most of the survey work done in these new colonies were by surveyors with an Indian experience. One can see that in the Indian names of some roads. Have met quite a few whose grandparents had served in various capacities in India prior to 1947.

Major General Lachlan Macquarie (1762-1824), the Father of Australia had served in the Army of the Bombay Presidency before his appointment as the Governor of New South Wales in 1810. He brought in progressive changes that formed the idea of Australia as a country. He changed the way of doing things much to the chagrin of the Home Office.

Two aspects of shared colonial history strike my imagination.

Macquarie was the first with an army background after a series of naval and civilian governors that included Captain Bligh of the (in)famous 'Mutiny on the Bounty.' I see Macquarie's reforms, ideas, and approach to resettling convicts as a subtle influence from military service in India. There is an element of compassion that changed the way.

The other aspect is in two films that show the treatment of Australian troops in Palestine and the Boer War.

'The Lighthorsemen' was described as "...the British consent to what they think is a suicide mission." This was in the capture of Beersheba in the Sinai and Palestine Campaign of 1917.

And 'Breaker Morant' was a betrayal by Kitchener during the Boer War. (Kitchener later became the C in C in India).

These films of the 1980s bring forth aspects of Australian identity around 'Mateship' and 'Larrikinism'. The latter means a person with clear disregard for convention, a maverick. It ties into being casual and with a happy go lucky attitude. The films also portray a betrayal by the British.

Later the Anzac looked to emphasise distinctness of the Australian identity. The migration of several nationalities is important to this identity. Indians had an identity but with no voice fighting alongside the Anzacs.

Poems can inspire nations. Also inspire people to take the next step or jump off the ledge. The 'If' by Rudyard Kipling which adorned every cabin at the National Defence Academy had served its purpose to awaken something in each one of us. It stayed a part of our nostalgia.

The eternal migrant's farewell to arms was with the first few lines of Alexander Pope's: 'Ode to Solitude':

Happy the man, whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground.

It was not to be, as the first few lines coupled with the last few were more a sign of resignation undoubtedly with some contentment. The last few lines are:

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;
Thus unlamented let me die;
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie



I mentioned this to Kamahl with whom I share a love for poems and poetry recitation, and he said that it was not suitable for him as an entertainer. It should be 'Promote, Promote, Promote.' Much like the value of real estate is tied to 'Location, Location, Location.'

We need a few lines for every occasion, but some inspire more than others. An eternal migrant's course is described by Robert Frost's 'The Road not Taken.'

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
 And sorry I could not travel both
 And be one traveller, long I stood
 And looked down one as far as I could
 To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
 And having perhaps the better claim,
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
 Though as for that the passing there
 Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
 In leaves no step had trodden black.
 Oh, I kept the first for another day!
 Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
 Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
 I took the one less travelled by,
 And that has made all the difference.

We live in an identity seeking world ... home, as they say is where you pay your taxes.
 Countries are just rivers lakes and forests; it is the people who make nations.
 That is what it is to me!

(Hear the song 'What's Australia to me'? here: <https://youtu.be/PPdLxpC-nqk>)



Lt Col Pradeep Chandra Kanthan (Retd) is a second-generation army officer. He served with the Regiment of Artillery from 1971 to 1992. While in service he did his BA from AEC College Pachmarhi and a Law degree from Mysuru University. Later, two separate Diplomas in Finance and Journalism, papers in statistics, and elementary Mandarin from New Zealand. He is proficient in ORACLE and other database management systems. After being a property developer in Bengaluru, he migrated to New Zealand in 1998 and was the Manager External Relations at the New Zealand Asia Institute. Later as Director Finance of the Property Council New Zealand, till 2011 when he moved to Sydney. He moved to Melbourne in

July 2021 and currently is the director of a boutique finance company catering to property development projects. He has interest in history, IT, golf, gym, biking, swimming, yoga, and gardening. As a polyglot he is interested in linguistics.



Leveraging the Diaspora: A Case for Robust Engagement with Indian Military Veterans in Australia

Lt Cdr Rajesh Mittal (Retd), 46/A

Diasporas are said to have a unique role in international relations because they share two cultures and are invested both in their host state and their country of origin.¹ India used the influence of its US diaspora, to get the Indo-US Nuclear Agreement of 2008 approved by the US Congress.² A proactive engagement by

to continually emerge in defence diplomacy.⁵ The leveraging of the sub-group consisting of the Indian military veterans in Australia (IMV-A) may just be one such initiative that is waiting to emerge. This engagement acquires greater ballast as defence and maritime cooperation is a major component of the



the Indian government with India's expatriate community has been in evidence lately in countries with large Indian diaspora. Australia's Indian-born population is its third largest migrant community after that of the United Kingdom and China. It is equivalent to 8.8 percent of Australia's overseas-born population and 2.6 percent of Australia's total population.³ They are the second highest taxpaying diaspora, behind the British.⁴ Reflecting India's complex society, the diaspora has diverse sub-groups which complicates the engagement process. New initiatives tend

Australia-India comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP) that was concluded in 2020.⁶ Although official statistics on IMV-A are not available, the sub-group is known to be present in most major cities of Australia. The unique skills set of the Indian military veterans enables them to work across a broad spectrum that includes the state governments, academia, police force, shipping, ship building, offshore industry, aviation training, the private sector in general and as entrepreneurs. Some of these workplaces have military significance. With esprit-de-corps developed during

¹ [Diasporas and International Relations \(e-ir.info\)](https://www.e-ir.info/)

² <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/leveraging-the-diaspora-to-india%E2%80%99s-advantage-10663>

³ <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/country-profiles/profiles/india>

⁴ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/trade-and-investment/india-economic-strategy/ies/chapter-18.html>

⁵ <https://securityanddefence.pl/Defence-diplomacy-an-important-tool-for-the-implementation-of-foreign-policy-and.103330.0.2.html>

⁶ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/joint-statement-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-between-republic-india-and-australia>



their service career back in India. The veterans remain engaged with their former services. If leveraged creatively, IMV-A can be of immense value in enhancing the countries' military engagement.

Workplace advantage

The IMV-A can be the interface between the Indian and Australian industry. Austal Ships Pty Ltd develops and builds advanced naval ships and has built the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) for the United States Navy.⁷ The IMV-A employed at such Australian shipyards can facilitate these yards' cooperation with the Indian yards. Likewise, the Indian offshore defence can benefit from the Australian experience. There are likely to be several similar areas where the IMV-A can assist the India - Australia engagement. Brief visits by defence delegation or the DA doesn't have the advantage of long association accrued to a resident worker. The Indian defence establishment, after carrying out due diligence, should consider leveraging the IMV-A as a resource.

Connectivity challenges

India's Defence Advisor (DA) is based in Australia's capital - Canberra, as is the practice worldwide. Australia is a country of continental proportions with vast distances and a complex set of time zones.⁸ Perth, Western Australia (WA) is the only Indian Ocean capital city in Australia. It is also a major base of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), is home to a vibrant shipbuilding industry and is Australia's mining and resources hub. The port of Darwin, Northern Territory (NT) is Australia's gateway to the South China Sea (SCS). Australia- India CSP and mutual logistics support agreement have enhanced the salience of these two ports. Due to their remote location vis a vis Canberra and the eastern states, Perth and Darwin have enormous connectivity challenges. These challenges are compounded for the DA

because he has simultaneous accreditation to **New Zealand, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Tonga.**

Two recent examples illustrate this challenge. Military diplomatic representation and pomp are an integral part of warships' commissioning ceremonies. The RAN commissioned HMAS Stalwart on 13 November 2021 at Fleet Base West, Rockingham, Western Australia.⁹ The tyranny of geography possibly made the DA's attendance a daunting proposition and the Indian military remained unrepresented at this significant event. Earlier, in September 2021, Indian Naval Ships *Shivalik* and *Kadmatt* under the command of Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet participated in the Australia-India exercise 'AUSINDEX21'. The concluding ceremonies were held in Darwin, the base port for the exercises. The DA couldn't however attend due to travel restrictions in place at the time. Some course correction therefore is needed to address the connectivity issues. The uniformed fraternity fosters quick time bonding and kinship which isn't possible with the foreign service functionaries. The camaraderie attracts invites and courtesies that tend to be confined within those in the military.. The clink of medals, gleam of epaulettes and military jargon can break down barriers. There is a strong case for an assistant defence advisor 'west' based in Perth with accreditation both for WA and NT. The United Kingdom with an area that is 1/30th that of Australia has three military officers at the Indian High Commission, London.¹⁰ Until such time more defence officers are posted to Australia, ways could be explored to tap into the expertise of IMV-A to circumvent the tyranny of distance.

Local knowledge

During the visit of the ships of India's Eastern Fleet a few years back, this author informed the fleet commander who

⁷ [Ships|Austal: Corporate](https://www.ships.austal.com/corporate)

⁸ <https://www.timeanddate.com/time/zone/australia>

⁹ <https://www.naval-technology.com/news/ran-hmas-stalwart/>

¹⁰ <https://www.hcilondon.gov.in/page/high-commission-officials/>



was to call on the Western Australia's premier that the premier was a former naval officer. The fleet commander was astonished since he hadn't been briefed about this important aspect. The admiral no doubt would have used the information to advantage during his interaction with the premier. Local knowledge is advantageous in bilateral relations particularly in the Australian context since Australian electoral politics attract many former Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel and the politicians in Australia don't use military titles. Thus, the fact that the former Defence Minister of Australia Senator Linda Reynolds was a Brigadier in the Australian army reserve, Messrs Paul Papalia and Peter Tinley present and former members respectively of the West Australian cabinet were ADF officers, and so forth can be of immense value in military diplomacy. The IMV-A can be approached to assist the DA and carry out liaison for the visiting warships and defence delegations where appropriate.

ANZAC day

On 24 June 2020, a Tri-Service contingent of the Indian armed forces participated in the Military Parade at Moscow to commemorate the Indian soldiers who fought in World War II as allies of the Soviet Union.¹¹ It isn't well known that there were some fifteen thousand Indian soldiers who fought side by side with their Australian counterparts in the Gallipoli Campaign. One thousand four hundred Indians died and up to 3,500 were wounded.¹² The IMV-A in several states commemorate the Indian soldiers' sacrifices by participating in the ANZAC Day commemorations. There is a strong case for the Indian armed forces to participate in ANZAC Day commemorations. The IMV-A can be the facilitators.

Track 2 engagement

Diplomacy occurs on various tracks that engage different participants, from

¹¹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indian-military-contingent-participates-in-victory-day-parade-in-russia/article31907207.ece>

academics to policymakers to heads of state.¹³ In an increasingly complex global environment, track 2 engagement is a useful tool available to governments. Track 2 diplomacy brings together unofficial representatives on both sides, with no government participation. They offer a private, open environment for individuals to build trust, hold conversations that their official counterparts sometimes cannot or will not, and discuss solutions. Owing to its informal nature, Track 2 diplomacy has gained traction worldwide. It can, at times, act as an icebreaker on the more sensitive issues. It would be advantageous if IMV-A were to participate in track 2 dialogues with Australia on military and other issues. Ticklish issues such as violence against the Indian students or facilitating the return of the stranded Australian citizens in India during the pandemic are best tackled away from the glare of the press and IMV-A can help.

Seminars and Opinion formulation

The IMV-A regularly engage with influential think-tanks that enable policy formulation and create opinions at the higher governmental level. They're politically engaged as party members of major political parties, interact with the federal representatives and with Indian origin MLAs. These activities can benefit India and can be effective in shaping policies. They also can be the bridge-builders between their home and adopted countries. Incorporating them into engagements such as Raisina dialogue, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and Indian Ocean Rim Association can further enhance their contribution.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated in India on 9 January every year to acknowledge the contribution of overseas Indian community to their

¹² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-22/indias-forgotten-soldiers-who-fought-alongside-anzacs/6406086>

¹³ [A Primer on Multi-track Diplomacy: How Does it Work? | United States Institute of Peace \(usip.org\)](https://www.usip.org/publications/a-primer-on-multi-track-diplomacy-how-does-it-work)



motherland. To enable the overseas military veterans from various countries to interact with the services headquarters, representatives from the Integrated Defence Staff should consider liaising with the PBD Committee to envision a military component of the

PBD.

Indian military veterans in Australia are a strategic asset that can be leveraged for bringing enhanced benefits to both countries. The initiatives identified above suggest a way forward.



Lt Cdr Rajesh Mittal (Retd) is a Perth based marine consultant. He heads the Indian Veterans group in Western Australia. Before relocating to Australia, he sailed on board bulk carriers trading worldwide. He is a keen observer of Australian relations in the Indo-Pacific.

Looking into the Eye of the Tiger

Colonel RB Mistry (Retd.), I/18

When I received a request to write an article, the first incident that came to my mind was the one that involved me and AMAR.

The picture below is that of AMAR playing with his feeding bowl and me wearing an amused look. To my right is the zookeeper.

AMAR hailed from the Ussuri River region along the Sino-Russia border. I believe he was gifted by the Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev to the then Governor of Bengal, Shrimati Padmaja Naidu. AMAR was an offspring of a Siberian white tiger. He was unable to

bear the heat in Calcutta and had to be shifted to the Darjeeling zoo.

My unit was located in Jalpahar, not very far from the zoo. AMAR was very popular among the locals. With me too, it was fascination at first sight.



I felt strangely attracted to AMAR and found myself frequenting the zoo. The zookeeper would indulge me and allow me to pat the tiger and even feed him with my hand.

To return to the picture -- it was taken on 24 Dec 1964 around 1600 hours by a tourist who had been persuaded by me to venture inside the enclosure. I wanted some proof of my shenanigans and, more importantly, the idea was to impress the girls back in Mumbai (Bombay, those days).

The tourist took just one picture – the one above -- and lost his nerve. He handed the camera back to me and scurried away. I was a budding photographer. Having

acquired an excellent Russian SLR camera from Gangtok's Lal Bazar, I wanted to take close-ups of AMAR. I was trying to work out a good angle to take my shots when through my telephoto lens, I saw AMAR leaping at me from a ledge that was 12-15 feet away. He landed at my feet and with one swipe off the paw brought me down, pinning me to the ground. I managed to hold on to my camera, but all thoughts of taking pictures had vanished! During my fall, my flailing limbs managed to snap shut the gate of the enclosure. So running away was not possible. I do not remember where the zookeeper was. He was certainly not next to me. AMAR promptly sat with his bum on my face, grabbed my knee and started shaking it...growling. He was obviously playing with me. I was, after all, his friend who had fed him. Thank God, AMAR had an excellent memory! Moments later, the zookeeper appeared. He shoved AMAR away from me and locked him in an adjacent enclosure. The incident was over within seconds, but it felt like an eternity.

There were a few bystanders who seemed to have enjoyed the spectacle. They clapped at my narrow escape. While it did seem to me that AMAR was playing with me, I had been shaken by the sudden turn

of events. What might have happened had the zookeeper not intervened? I will never know.

Soon after this incident, sometime in January 1965, I left Darjeeling to do my Signal Officers' Degree Engineering (SODE) course at the College of Military Engineering, Kirkee. However, some six months later, I had to return to my Unit at Darjeeling for some Court of Inquiry. The trip gave me another opportunity to visit AMAR. This time around, the zookeeper would not entertain me. "Sahab, ab AMAR dhaai saal ka ho gaya hai. Abhi to woh aapko kha jayega, aur mere ko bhi....aap bahar se hi dekho!"

So I stood outside, waiting to catch AMAR's eye. Eventually, our eyes locked. Did he remember me? Again, I will never know. I sure did remember my encounter with him. I must confess that the memory sent a shiver down my spine. And yet, I would have loved to have another encounter with AMAR...



Colonel Ronnie Burjor Mistry (Retd) was an

IAF optee but failed the PABT. His next choice was Engineers, but he landed up in Signals – not that he has any regrets. He decided to put in his papers when

he missed the bus for the next rank. His last day in uniform was 25 May 1988. He leads a happily retired and full life in Perth.



Indelible Lessons from my First Seven Days in NDA Wing, Ghorpuri

Col Misar Shakeel Gundagi, (Retd.), D/65

I was just four months short of hanging my uniform for good, when, overcome with nostalgia, I began reminiscing about where my fabulous journey had begun. Memories of my lovely, albeit boisterously hectic days, came flooding back. There are so many anecdotes worth recounting, here I am penning how the first week went by in NDA Wing Ghorpuri or “Ghodpadi” as the locals would call it.

I remember it as if it was yesterday...on Republic Day, in 1981, I and my Abba boarded the night train to Pune from Solapur, my Nanihaal. My Ammi backed out at the last moment, convinced that she would not be able to bear yet another Judaii from me. It had not been easy for her when in 1973 I had left home to join Sainik School Bijapur. So, in my mother’s place, my cousin, Anwar Bhaiyya accompanied me.

We reached the Pune Junction railway station at the break of dawn on a wintry morning. The reporting time was noon, so we had time to make a few last-minute purchases from the long list of items sent with the joining instructions. We headed to the Main Street or MG road (there seems to be an MG road named after Gandhiji in almost every town in India). I remember picking up my new hockey stick and football shoes from Kukreja Sports and a trunk from the Middle Street in camp Pune. We also purchased a few items of clothing from Kolsa Galli, a lane parallel to Main Street, before returning to the railway station.

My father, a government servant with old fashioned values was a stickler for punctuality and did not want me to be late for what would be one of the most important chapters of my life. When we returned to the Railway station, we saw a crowd of expectant young fellows all waiting to head off to the National Defence Academy.

I said ‘hi’ to a Sikh boy dressed in denim jeans. He said he was Kanwar Randhawa. He spoke Hindi with a particular twang and laced it liberally with expletives. He said he was from ‘Amdavad’ and could speak-fluent Gujarati too.

At dot 1200 hrs, a slim, nattily attired military man with an Olive Green (OG) uniform starched crisp with sleeves folded above the elbows and a bristling moustache announced, “NDA waaley cadets idhar aa jao.” I felt proud on being addressed as an ‘NDA cadet.’ The man in OG started announcing names from a nominal roll. He soon came to a name that he struggled with, so he mumbled some syllables that gave me a clue. I gathered the courage to insist, “Haan Sir Woh Main Hi Hoon.” My father volunteered to come with me but was politely told “Yeh ab hamari zimmewaari hai, Sir.” Off we went with our trunk and suitcase in the OG painted military 3 Tonner vehicle with a tarpaulin cover on top to ward off the elements.

We reached NDA Ghorpuri Wing and a few civilian men (who, I later learned, were ‘cadet orderlies’) came to unload our luggage. Meanwhile, we were herded into an office and made to sign a few documents and submit a few. On stepping outside, we were ordered to stand in an organised manner and told by a Drill Instructor (or an “ustaad”) to “Bhool jao civil waalee chaal.” Standing in ‘formation’ and getting a dressing down by ustaads was to become a normal feature of my Ghorpuri days.

Across on the road, we could see a squad of cadets running in clean white shirts and shorts. One of the cadets seemed to be making signs and calling out my name. With their clean-shaven crew cut look, all in the squad looked the same. Peering more carefully, I realized that it was BS Raju, my classmate of last seven years, trying to



draw my attention. BS had joined a few days earlier and already looked so different. Scary times await me, I mused. I realised that it would be painful to become a 'new



boy' all over again after having lorded as a school senior only a few months ago.

The cadets were asked to alternately start counting ek, do, ek, do. The ustad was unimpressed with our reluctance to exercise our vocal cords. "Shout louder" he thundered. After about five tries, we got it right. "EK, DO, EK, DO..." rang the loud staccato sounds. "All who said Ek, step forward." We all did. "You go to November Squadron." The rest Do waalaha were allotted Mike squadron. The two squadrons – Mike and November -- made up the NDA Wing Ghorpuri. It occurred to me that within minutes of being NDA cadets, we had started following our orders very sincerely. The Service Selection Board (SSB) obviously got something right. Were we inherently disciplined? Or was it a case of us having no choice?! Perhaps, it was a bit of both.

We were allotted an Academy Number and ordered to run towards our Squadron barracks. The barracks turned out to be old buildings with high roofs made of Mangalore tiles, old flooring and wooden pillars painted white ('chuna') and brick red ('geru') I had been introduced to these colours earlier in the SSB Centre, Bangalore. I was to learn

that the geru-chuna combination was a favourite with the Armed forces. There was no escaping it – the combination remained a constant throughout our fauji careers.

We headed to the barrack allocated to us - - Randhawa, Suresh Babu, Prabhakar, Harishankar, Jatinder Singh, Sanjeev Kaloty and I -- and briefly introduced ourselves. We were soon visited by boys from the neighboring barrack. "Welcome, newbies," said a boy in spectacles. "Bachhu bach ke rehna," he

giggled. He introduced himself as Lalit Gairola. Hearing my name, he remarked "Gundagi hai naam tera; lekin main Gandagi hi boloonga". He continues to use the name for me fondly even to this day. A tall fair boy called himself Anthony Ranjit Singh Mendonca. I had heard of Mendonca but a Ranjit Singh in between was a first. There was Sunil Kumar, who said call me 'Springy' man. Then I ran into Paramjit Singh who insisted that we call him PJ. He always started every sentence with 'Oh fucks.' This has not changed to this day. On my first day, I also met Tony Paul Nanda, an air force cadet who went on to fly helicopters (God bless his soul, our course lost him to an accident).

We were directed to get a proper haircut before anything else. Before I could utter a word, the barber shoved my head downwards saying "Sarr upar mat uthaana." I could only hear the merciless whirring of his clipper as he gleefully went about his work. He sheared my curly locks with a vengeance and chopped off all hair right up to my crown with his menacing machine. On finishing, the barber patted my hand to signal that I could look up and see his handwork. I couldn't recognize the stranger in the mirror. "Abb achha lag raha hai,



hero,” he added to rub further salt to my wounds.

We trudged back to our barrack slowly licking our collective wounds, but not before we were waylaid by a Drill ustaad who ticked us off for slouching and not running briskly enough on the road. He made us haunch to our barracks. **Lesson No 1: Never walk casually or slouch in the Academy, you will invite trouble.**

Dinner time was a welcome relief. The cadets who had joined the NDA wing earlier than us appeared a bit surer of themselves. We sauntered hesitatingly and lined up for our dinner in a long queue with a sense of trepidation, trying to recognize a familiar face – a classmate or an SSB friend. We eight from our barrack were dressed in civvies but had on our NDA tie. The cadets who had reported earlier were in light blue shirts and grey trousers —or Muftis as I was to later learn. As we sat down, the dining room became a sea of bobbing heads, all wearing a crew cut. We were famished, so dug into the Continental style dinner -- baked beans, cutlets, bread rolls and Russian salad. I had not tasted this cuisine before, but it tasted great. I was later introduced to several dishes which were unknown to me. Mostly stuff from North India – Rajmah, Paneer, Chola Bhatura, etc.

Just when most of us had finished our pudding and were thinking that life was not so bad after all, we heard a loud shout; “All first termers fall in outside now”. A few of us were still digging into our meals when a lean person with moustache exhorted all to move out immediately. We rushed outside and stood in groups. Someone asked us to fall in three rows. We all hustled outside -- there was much murmuring, cursing, swearing, and shoving. The person who had interrupted our dinner then launched into a diatribe and in a threatening voice bellowed “All cadets to fall in for PT tomorrow morning at the PT field. The new cadets to find their way. I don’t want anyone to be bloody late; march off now to your barracks

and prepare for tomorrow.” We thought we were being primed to be on our best behaviour by a very young-looking instructor. Later, we found out that this ‘instructor’ was, in fact, our course-mate, MJS Jhala. MSJ was a ‘Brigadier’ -- a term used with a mixture of admiration and affection for those cadets who had to repeat a term (i.e., a semester) in the NDA. One dropped term equaled one star of a Brigadier, and two starts stood for a General. Fittingly enough, three stars (i.e., Field Marshals) were very rare, but one did hear of them. NDA had its unique lingo (i.e., language); never heard by anyone before, but understood almost instantly by all NDA cadets. Soon after the encounter with our Brigadier, it sank in -- I was certainly an NDA cadet at last and had to keep my wits about me. **Lesson No 2: Get used to NDA lingo as quickly as possible to stay abreast!**

The next morning, we were woken up rudely for PT. We rushed to the PT fields for some running, jumping and rolling. The PT ustaads were more interested in testing our alertness and alacrity. “Idhar fall in, Udhar fall in, Idhar fall in, Udhar fall in” they continued to throw us off balance. One Sikh instructor, Tarsem Singh, with a perpetual twinkle in his eyes, was a real threat. “Dahina chakkar go... Baayein chakkar go” he kept on and on and drove us mad and made us very tired!

After PT, we had the Drill periods that meant much foot stomping and bellowing. ‘Ek Ek Do, Ek Ek Do, Ek Do, Ek Do.’ CHM Prakash Chand, a tall handsome Dogra was our drill instructor who terrorised one and all throughout our stay at Ghorpuri. He had an almost Gestapo style personality and was awesome in his drill movements. “Gondagi,” he admonished, “Yeh kyaa chaal hai!” Phew, he made us sweat in a matter of minutes!

After rushing back for breakfast, we had to jostle for space in the community bathroom close to our barracks (Ghorpuri did not have the kind of infrastructure and



accommodation that Khadakwasla boasted of). Taking a shower ate away precious time. No sooner had we reached the mess and begun having our breakfast than it was announced that we had to rush to the Squadron office immediately. Everything at Ghorpuri was “immediately” and should have happened a moment ago. **Lesson No 3: Reach the mess and finish your meals as quickly as possible or else you will remain hungry.**

We had our first encounter with our Divisional officers (called Div Os) of the November Squadron after we assembled (or after the ‘fall in’) outside the Squadron office on the second day. MSJ, our course senior, asked us to remain quiet. But by then, we had realised that MSJ was only one of us. The murmuring continued. Just then a tall well-built swarthy Sikh Captain walked out of the office and remarked “Why are you guys standing. On your hands, down”. A few who had reported earlier instantly went down in the push up position. The newcomers, reluctantly and slowly, went down, not before MSJ berated us with his choice of expletives. Capt Nijjar went back to the office and returned after five minutes with three other Div Os -- Captains Ghosal, Tejinder Singh and SS Kumar. Capt Nijjar ordered us to get up and guffawed “Never thought you guys would be so bloody sincere and remain in this position for so long”. During our time at Ghorpuri, we heard most of Capt Nijjar’s sermons in the hands down position. Those not familiar – ‘hands down’ meant being parallel to the ground with only our toes and palms touching the ground. It was the position in which one did ‘push-ups.’ Being asked to do fifty-odd push-ups on the drop of a hat was par for the course.

A few dos and don’t’s were made clear to us. “Friends, you are in the Academy now, so don’t have any funny ideas, OK understood.” When the response from us was meek we were again asked to get in hands down position and shout back “Yes, sir!”. **Lesson No 4: Always say “Yes Sir”**

loudly and immediately even if you don’t understand what you are agreeing to!

At times the games period fall-in would be at 3 PM, leaving us no time to take a breather after lunch. An afternoon nap was out of the question. Nothing happened the first two days. Cadets mostly stood outside waiting for instructions and were asked to go for a run. On the third day, Capt Nijjar came outside and asked how many of us had played hockey. A few hands went up. “Yes, you specko, which school are you from?” On hearing the reply, he smirked. “Last term, there was a guy from your school who said he played in the Subroto Cup. He did not know shit about the difference between a football and a basketball. You stand aside. All those who raised their hands, fall outside. Ustaad, take them for a cross country run. Rest of you can go back to your barracks.” **Lesson No 5: Never raise your hand or volunteer too quickly.**

The games period eventually took off the next day, and we were all taken to the hockey ground behind our barracks just facing the Officers Mess across the road. Divided into teams randomly by the Ek Do Ek Do method, all Eks were ordered to remove their vests. It was to be a hockey match between the bare-chested and the fully clad. Some of us had hesitated to remove our shirts. The Div O was not pleased. “Fast, don’t be shy...unless you want to start rolling.” Front rolling — getting on your haunches, tucking your head between your knees, and trying to mimic a rolling ball — was another ‘on the spot punishment’ that was meted out as frequently as hands down and push-ups.

By the time we returned to our barracks following an after-dinner lecture by MSJ, we were dog tired. Those of us from Sainik Schools and RIMC somehow managed to cope, but others, not being used to any physical exercise, were at their wits end dragging themselves and their aching bodies around. ‘Lights out’ was announced and all was quiet. In our barrack,



Harishankar broke the silence playing 'Hai apna dil toh awaara' on his mouth organ! He was a musician and could play the guitar too. This physical regimen (ragda) was completely foreign to him. I joined Harishankar, humming in between. Soon, the entire barrack started clapping. We were learning to make our own happiness.

NDA had brought me together with 300 other youngsters, brimming with josh, and they came from all across India. To me, this was the most fascinating part of being in the Academy. I got to meet and hear some surnames for the first time in my life. To a small-town boy from the Deccan, it was first-hand exposure to India's famed diversity that one had only heard and read about. There were so many 'foreign' accents and dialects and even the Hindi being spoken seemed very different to what I was used to. To communicate better and make new friends, I had to adapt to the North Indian Hindi due to which my own Hindustani improved considerably. My North Indian friends tended to speak more loudly than the others and most of their sentences were liberally interspersed with good-humoured expletives. Soon, we all took to using expletives. I guess we had to do it for our conversations to make sense! **Lesson 6: Quickly learn the expletives and abuses of the native language if you want to get**

along fine with the language and its speakers!

The only respite from all the physical ragda was when we sat and dozed in the academic periods. Mr Warriar would try to regale us with PG Wodehouse's character sketch of 'Annabelle Sprockett-Sprockett.' Mr Sivaraman tried to engage us with lessons in geo-politics, Mrs Gill took pains in her Hindi classes and Capt Cheema, from the Para AEC, tried teaching us geography by linking the various continents to the age of a woman. Through no fault of theirs, our academic instructors met with limited success. The first Sunday was such a relief – there was no PT and Drill! But even as we lazed around, our Sikh friends had to attend a Pagri Parade. Soon they would master the art of tying a pagri in the blink of an eye.

Within a week, a strong bond had imperceptibly formed among new friends, new classmates, hockey mates, hobby club types and barrack mates. We found a common kinship with course-mates with whom, on the face of it, we did not seem to have much in common. It was clear though that deep down we shared the same fears, hopes and aspirations. The friendships forged in Week 1 in Ghorpuri would stay with me forever. **Lesson No 7: Friends you make in your first term at the NDA stay life-long friends!**



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