

A SOLDIER FOR ALL SEASONS

A Tribute to India's Greatest Soldier

Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw, MC

Team CLAWS

Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw was born in the holy city of Amritsar, on Friday, 3 April 1914, to Hormusji Manekshaw and his wife Heerabai. It was while studying medicine at Grant Medical College, Bombay that Hormusji met Heerabai and later married her. The couple, residents of Valsad, a small coastal town in Gujarat, thereafter migrated to Amritsar, in search of better opportunities. On that pleasant April day in Amritsar when Heerabai held Sam for the first time in her life, the fifth of six children she would have, little could she have imagined that the child in her arms was destined to make history. Three months later, in July, World War I broke out, and when the war ended in November 1918, Sam still had a few months to go for his fifth birthday. He was an infant in World War I, but he was to prove his mettle as a young officer in World War II and was destined to lead his country to its greatest military victory when in command of the Indian Army in 1971.

Of the four Manekshaw male siblings, three, including Sam, went to study at Sherwood College, Naini Tal, alma mater to many an Army General. It was at Sherwood that Sam first cut his teeth in acquiring

battle skills. Speaking to the students of Sherwood in 1969, he told his enraptured audience how Sherwood had grounded him in basic military tactics! “The day would start”, he said “with manoeuvres for tooth-brush, tooth-paste, bathroom space and meals and would end with strategies to protect myself from various enemies”! A sense of humour was one of the many attributes that he possessed in abundance. On a visit to a unit, he questioned the Commanding Officer on action taken against a soldier who had contracted venereal disease. When told that the man’s head was shaved off, he roared. “Shaved off? Dammit. He didn’t do it with his head.” Sadly, many of his compatriots lacked this basic attribute and this was to get him into innumerable controversies throughout his career.

After passing his Senior Cambridge with distinction, Sam returned to Amritsar to study, much to his reluctance, at the Hindu Sabha College; his father had apparently rescinded on an earlier promise to send him to London to study medicine, due to his young age. Sam reportedly did not speak to his father for over a year on this account and in an act of rebellion, decided to join the Army! Looking back on this innocuous event, it becomes evident in hindsight that the Indian Army, and indeed the nation too, owe a debt of gratitude to Sam’s father for his oversight! In the July 1932 entrance examination to the first batch of Indian Military Academy (IMA), Sam Manekshaw was one amongst the 15 selected from the open category. Training commenced on October 01, 1932, for the batch of 40 Gentleman Cadets (GC), “The Pioneers”, three of whom would rise to command the Armies of their respective countries. Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw was to command the Indian Army, General Smith Dun, the Burmese Army and General Muhammad Musa Khan Hazara, the Pakistan Army. At the Academy, true to his nature, Sam was frequently in trouble trying to keep abreast with rules and laws! The first extra drill awarded in the IMA stands in the name of GC Sam Manekshaw! He was also the first GC to seek weekend leave to go to Mussoorie. These were but the precursors to the long list of firsts Sam would head.

On December 22, 1934, Sam Manekshaw was commissioned into 4/12 Frontier Force Regiment (FFR). In those days, the officers commissioned from the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, in Berkshire, England, were granted the Kings Commission and were called the Kings Commissioned Indian Officers (KCIOs). The Infantry and Cavalry officers commissioned as KCIOs were required to do a period of attachment with a British unit before joining their parent unit. This practice continued with the Indian Commissioned Officers (ICOs), commissioned from the Indian Military Academy (IMA). Sam was accordingly attached to the 2nd Battalion, Royal Scots at Lahore and after completing his attachment period of a year, he rejoined his parent unit in February 1936.

During World War II, 4/12 FFR was deployed as part of a force defending the Sittang Bridge. Sam was a Captain at that time but due to shortage of officers was given command of the Sikh Company of the battalion. This perhaps was because having been born in Amritsar, he could speak Punjabi fluently, and got along very well with the Sikhs. In the battle for the Sittang Bridge, from February 19 to 23, 1942, the Japanese launched ferocious attacks to capture the bridge but the defence held on with equal stubbornness. It was here, while counter-attacking a Japanese position that Sam was seriously wounded, taking all of nine bullets from a machine gun burst in his stomach. His orderly Sher Singh put Sam on his back and evacuated him to the Regimental Aid Post where the regimental medical officer Captain GM Diwan tended to him. He would probably have died had his orderly not evacuated him. Major General DT Cowan, who saw him at the Regimental Aid Post was aware of his valour in the face of stiff resistance from the Japanese. Fearing the worst, he quickly pinned his own Military Cross ribbon on Manekshaw saying, "A dead person cannot be awarded a Military Cross." However, luck was on the young Captain's side and he survived to be one of India's most popular and charismatic Army Chiefs.

In 1943, Sam Manekshaw attended the 8th Staff Course at Staff College, Quetta, and was then posted as Brigade Major to the "Razmak

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Brigade" in Waziristan in the North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP) till October 1944. He was then posted to 9/12 FFR in Burma, which was part of Slim's victorious 14th Army. During the closing days of the war, he was posted to Indo-China to supervise the rehabilitation of Japanese prisoners of war, which in his opinion was one of the easiest jobs, as the Japanese were famously disciplined! Before he could move as an instructor to Staff College, Quetta, he found himself selected to go on a lecture tour to Australia for a period of six months in 1946, to bring home to the Australians, India's war effort and the achievement of its armed forces. He was then posted to the

Military Operations (MO) Directorate as GSO-1, the first Indian to join the Directorate. In 1947, when India achieved independence, Sam was a Lieutenant Colonel in MO-3, the section that dealt with future operations and planning. Yahya Khan, who later became President of Pakistan, and Lieutenant General S K Sinha, later Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, were his colleagues. Upon partition, Sam Manekshaw's parent unit 4/12 FFR was allocated to the Pakistan Army. Manekshaw was then empanelled with the 3rd Battalion of the 5th Gorkha Rifles (3/5 GR) which he was detailed to command. Prior to partition, Gorkha Battalions were officered only by KCIOs unlike other regiments, which had their share of ICOs. Upon partition, therefore, officers were posted from various regiments to make up the required proportion of officers in the Gorkha Battalions that were merged with the Indian Army. Destiny, however, denied Manekshaw the command of 3/5 GR or any other battalion. The tumultuous events of 1947-48 necessitated Manekshaw's presence in Army Headquarters (HQ)

and as time passed, he missed the chance to command an infantry battalion, subsequently being promoted to Brigadier and becoming the first Indian Director of Military Operations. His position at this critical junction of Indian history afforded him a clear view of events, even as he accompanied political advisor and civil servant V P Menon on his historic mission to Kashmir, to get the then ruler of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh to sign the “Instrument of Accession”.

Post-independence, Sam’s career took him to Ferozpur as Commander, 167 Infantry Brigade where he devoted time to his family, his garden and social life. After a short tenure as Director of Military Training at Army HQ in April 1954, he moved to Mhow as Commandant, Infantry School, in January 1955. In 1957, he went to London to attend the Imperial Defence College Course for a year. Upon his return, he was promoted to the rank of Major General and took over as the General Officer Commanding of 26 Infantry Division. Krishna Menon, the then Defence Minister had once asked Sam what he thought of Thimayya, to which Sam replied that he was not permitted to ‘think’ about his Chief. Menon warned Sam against “a British way of thinking” to which Sam replied that it was “wrong to ask a Major General what he thinks of the Chief. Tomorrow, you will be asking a Brigadier what he thinks of me. This is not done in the Army.” Menon was more accustomed to obsequiousness in the persons he dealt with, so Sam’s retort came as a bolt from the blue. The Defence Minister’s pettiness never made him forget what he perceived to be an insult, and this was to impact on Sam’s career later.

In September 1959, Manekshaw was posted as the Commandant, Defence Services Staff College at Wellington. At this time, Lieutenant General BM Kaul was the Chief of General Staff (CGS). Kaul was known for his proximity to the Prime Minister and to Menon who was the Defence Minister. The latter, in cahoots with General Kaul, hounded Manekshaw on charges of being “too Anglicised” and initiated an inquiry against him for being “anti-national”. The Western Army Commander,

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Lieutenant General Daulet Singh, absolved Sam of all charges, but the incident left a taint on his career as Generals Harbaksh Singh and Moti Sagar, both his juniors, were made Corps Commanders before him. Sam's career appeared headed towards certain ruin. In his own words, he escaped "by the skin of his teeth, and it was the Chinese who came to his rescue"!

The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 ended in a debacle for the Indian Army. A furious opposition in Parliament forced the resignation of Krishna Menon as Defence Minister. General Kaul, removed from command of 4 Corps, later resigned. In a twist of fate, it was Sam Manekshaw's tormentors who were dishonourably consumed by the 1962 military debacle, while Manekshaw was catapulted to command of 4 Corps in November 1962. On taking charge of 4 Corps, his first address to the staff officers was a short and pithy one liner. "Gentlemen I have arrived. There will be no more withdrawals in 4 Corps, thank you". He then issued a brief order to all in the corps, which read, "there will be no more withdrawals without written orders and these orders shall never be issued". But even here, his sense of humour came to the fore. "Lucky for me", he would later say, "... the Chinese declared a unilateral withdrawal". This sense of humour laced the extraordinary confidence he exuded in public life whether dealing with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi or the soldier on the battlefield. "Whoever says he knows no fear is either lying or a Gorkha" was his favourite quip.

In the one year at the helm of 4 Corps, Manekshaw's basic focus was to restore morale and reorganise the defences of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which he did by going around the area, visiting units

and talking to the commanders and troops and taking corrective action by overcoming the shortages of clothing, equipment and accommodation. He always felt that the end-state of the NEFA confrontation could have been different but for low morale and lack of higher direction. In November 1963, he took over Western Command following the tragic death of General Daulet Singh in a helicopter crash. In November 1964, after a year as General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C) Western Command, Sam moved to Eastern Command as Army Commander. It was during his long tenure in Eastern Command that the Naga insurgency came under control. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award, for distinguished service in the field of civil service in 1968.

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When the Army Chief, General P P Kumaramangalam was to retire in June 1969, Lieutenant General Sam Manekshaw was the seniormost in line for promotion, and next in line was Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh. Given Sam's equations with his political counterparts, there were many who would have liked to see the last of him; however, to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's credit and to the luck of the Army and the nation, Sam Manekshaw was promoted to General and assumed command of the Indian Army on July 01, 1969.

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on Sam Manekshaw to immediately join the conflict. However, Sam stated that he would wait for strategic advantages, prepare and fight a war on his own terms in winter. He would rather resign than be pressurised into a war not on his terms. As he put it later, he was striding a thin line “between being dismissed and becoming a Field-Marshal.” Mrs Gandhi, however, relented and acceded to the delay. In December 1971, in a lightning campaign, the Indian Army, with the help of the Mukti Bahini, cut through the Pakistan Army like a knife through butter, taking Dhaka within two weeks, and a new nation, Bangladesh, came into being. He was reputed to be an absolute

live wire in ensuring preparations for the war – from ensuring the training and employment of the Mukti Bahini, exhorting his own Army, egging the Ministry of Defence on various issues related to the war, ensuring that the war-fighting wherewithal was in place. But, most importantly, when war was joined, Sam would ensure the lightning movement of forces, exploitation of battlefield conditions and seizure of opportunities leading to the capitulation of Dhaka. The Indian Army under its Chief, General Sam Manekshaw was set to write history and deliver to the country its greatest military victory in 5,000 years.

Early in 1972, Indira Gandhi sounded the Defence Minister, Babu Jagjivan Ram on promoting Sam to Field Marshal and appointing him as the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) on January 26, 1972, an elevation he richly deserved. However, the combined ministerial and bureaucratic fears torpedoed the idea and the decision was delayed until January 1,

1973, when he became Field Marshal but not CDS.

Except VC Shukla, who became a close friend, most Ministers of the Indira Gandhi Cabinet were suspicious of Sam and kept him at a distance. When he finally retired, the Ministry of Defence ensured there was no organised farewell at New Delhi Railway Station as his special train chugged off to

Coimbatore en route to Coonoor in the Nilgiris. Bureaucratic pettiness ensured that Sam Manekshaw was not given the pay of a Field Marshal, something he was entitled to for life. In lieu, he was given a measly monthly allowance of Rs 400. This was rectified many decades later, when Sam was terminally ill in Wellington hospital in 2008. The then Defence Secretary, Shekhar Dutt himself carried arrears of his revised pension amounting to Rs one crore. Typically, Sam looked at the cheque and told Mr Dutt: “I hope the cheque won’t bounce”.

On June 27, 2008, Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw, MC passed away in his hospital bed in Wellington. In life he was a legend. In death, the legend became folklore. Easily the most popular soldier in India, he was admired even in Pakistan. Obituaries to India’s greatest and most charismatic soldier flowed in from across the world, many of them from Pakistan. When he passed away six years ago, aged 94 years, an era came to an end.

In her novel, *The Fountainhead*, Ayn Rand states, “Throughout the centuries there were men who took first steps down new roads armed with nothing but their own vision. Their goals differed, but they had this in common: that the step was first, the road new, the vision unborrowed”. Sam Manekshaw was one of those men. This year marks the centenary of his birth. For his contributions to the country, it is but apt that Sam be honoured with the Bharat Ratna. In honouring him, we also honour the best in ourselves.

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