

Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC

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"If anyone tells you he is never afraid, he is a liar or a Gurkha!"

Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw was India's first Field Marshal who led the Indian Army to victory in the 1971 war against Pakistan, touted as its finest hour. Ever since 'Sam Bahadur' as he was popularly known became a household name in the country. A Field Marshal never retires and his aura and personality continues to transcend every institution of the Indian Army. Sam was gifted with an incredible sense of humour and his wits continue to abound even today.

Sam was born to Parsi parents on 3 April 1914 in Amritsar. Sam's grandfather Framroze was a teacher based in Valsad (Gujarat) and had taught Moraji Desai who later became the Prime Minister of India. Sam's father Hormusji was a practicing doctor who had also served in Egypt and Mesopotamia during the Great War and was conferred the rank of a Captain in the Medical Services. Hormusji and his wife Hilla had six children, three sons and three sisters all born

in Amritsar. The three boys went to school at the prestigious Sherwood College in Nainital. The siblings reunited with their parents in Mumbai and later Amritsar during vacations from December to February.

Hormusji was fond of music and gardening a hobby which Sam naturally took to. When his father refused to send him abroad for Medical studies, Sam rebelled and joined the first batch of the Indian Military Academy at Dehradun. 'The Pioneers' as the first batch came to be known has the distinction of producing three future Army Chiefs, Sam Manekshaw of India, Smith Dun of Burma and Mohammed Musa of Pakistan. While at IMA, Sam had many other 'firsts' to his credit. He was the first GC to ask for weekend leave to Mussoorie. He also holds the record for being awarded the first extra drill at the IMA. Sam was stripped off his Corporal rank and 'gated' for 15 days for failing to report back to the Academy on time after a weekend getaway to Mussoorie.

Later, Sam was destined to be the first from the IMA's alumni to join the Gorkhas, become a General and Field Marshal. Only 22 cadets from the first batch were able to complete the training and were commissioned on 22 December 1934. However, to keep them junior in rank from KCIOs their date of seniority was fixed to 4 February 1934. Sam was commissioned into the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Scouts and later to 4/12 Frontier Force Regiment. After partition he was transferred to 8 Gorkha Rifles. In 1942, Sam was commanding a Sikh company serving in Burma. He took nine bullets in the lung, liver and kidneys during the battle for Sittang Bridge. No one thought he would survive. It is here that Sam was awarded the Military Cross. The MC was conferred on him by Maj Gen Cowan, the Deputy Commander of the British forces on the spot as he thought that Sam would soon die of his wounds. On regaining consciousness the Australian surgeon asked Sam what had happened to him he said, "A bloody mule kicked me". The surgeon told him, "By Jove, you have a sense of humour. I think you are worth saving."

In 1943 Sam attended the Staff College at Quetta and was later posted as the Brigade Major of the Razmak Briagde. He then joined 9/12 FFR in Burma and was supervising the surrender of 60000 Japanese soldiers. On return to India, he was selected by Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck, the C-in-C to go to Australia. His job was to educate the Australians about India and her armed forces. He was then posted to Military Operations as GSO 1, the first Indian Officer to be posted to MO. As a Lt Col in MO-3 Sam oversaw the division of military resources between India and Pakistan. He got his posting to command 3/5 Gorkha Rifles but could not leave MO as Pakistan had launched the invasion in Kashmir. Sam could never

command a battalion owing to the crisis in Kashmir and then Hyderabad. He was promoted to the rank of Colonel and then Brigadier in MO itself. He was the DMO during the 1948 Hyderabad operations.

In April 1952, he commanded 167 Infantry Brigade at Ferozpur. In 1954 he was posted as the Director of Military Training at Army HQ. After a short tenure he became Commandant of the Infantry School at Mhow. He commanded a division in Jammu & Kashmir and 4 Corps in the North East, with a tenure as commandant of Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) in between. As Commandant of the DSSC he narrowly escaped a personally motivated inquiry ordered by the then CGS, Lt Gen BM Kaul. Three generals junior to him in seniority were promoted as Corps Commanders. By his personal admission, the 1962 War with China came to his rescue. He was promoted as Lt General and took over the reigns of 4 Corps at Tezpur after the debacle. With his personal acumen and leadership qualities he soon restored the fledgling morale of his staff officers. His first order upon taking over was, "Gentleman, there shall be no more withdrawals." In 1963, he was appointed as GOC-in-C Western Command and after a year assumed command of the Eastern Army. As GOC-in-C Eastern Command, he handled the tricky problem of insurgency in Nagaland and the grateful nation honoured him with a Padma Bhushan in 1968.

During this Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, Manekshaw as the eight Chief of the Indian Army showed uncommon ability to motivate the forces, coupling it with a mature war strategy. The war ended with Pakistan's unconditional surrender, and the formation of Bangladesh. In 1971 India achieved a decisive victory over Pakistan. A new nation was born and Sam, as the prime architect of the victory became a national hero. 90,000 Pakistani troops surrendered before the Indian Army in Dhaka. Some hundred square miles of Pakistani territory were also occupied in the Kargil region.

However the military gains were frittered away in diplomatic and political negotiations with Pakistan. After the war Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wanted to appoint Sam Manekshaw as the Chief of Defence Staff but opposition from the bureaucracy torpedoed this move. After the war, Sam commanded immense prestige at home and abroad. He was mobbed wherever he went. He was even invited at the Filmfare awards as the Chief Guest. His car was surrounded and mobbed. Even the film stars were ignored, a novel experience for most of them ! His popularity even crossed the western borders. At a reception hosted by the Governor of Punjab in Lahore, a turbaned person had touched his feet. When Sam asked him the reason he said that five of his sons were in the Prison camps

and had written letters to him describing how well they were treated and that all of them were given the Holy Koran. Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw retired from active service on 15 January 1973.

Anecdotes and wise-cracks of the great Sam Bahadur are countless but perhaps his most famous one had been:

'the man who neither drinks nor smokes, nor dances nor philanders, who preaches and occasionally practices piety, temperance and celibacy, is generally a saint or a Mahatma – or more likely, a humbug – but he certainly won't make a leader'

Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw was a charismatic and outstanding military leader who led the army in its first major decisive victory post-Independence. His exploits and yeoman service to the nation will continue to inspire the rank and file of the Indian Army for generations to come. Though the Field Marshal breathed his last at the Military Hospital in Wellington on 27 June 2008 his legend lives on in the illustrious hall of fame of the Indian Army.

Reference: Leadership in the Indian Army: Biographies of 12 soldier, Maj Gen VK Singh (Retd), Sage Publishers, 2005.

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