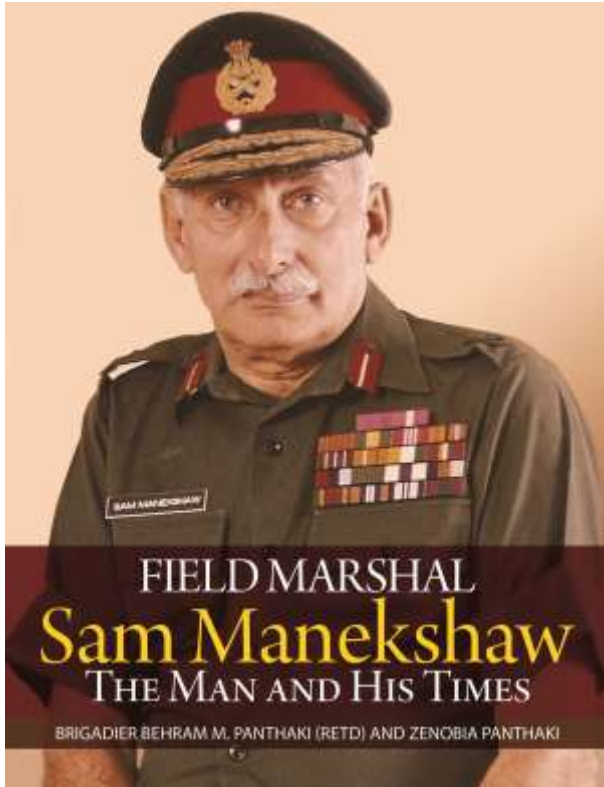


FIELD MARSHAL SAM MANEKSHAW: THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

By Brig Behram M Panthaki (Retd) and Zenobia Panthaki



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On 4 Feb, 1934 2nd Lt Sam Manekshaw passed out

from the Indian Military Academy at Dehra Dun with the first batch of Indian officers and was posted to the 4/12 Frontier Force Regiment after completing a year's attachment with the Royal Scots as was the practice at the time. At India's independence in August 1947 with the partition of the country into two separate states of India and Pakistan, he found himself rudderless as his Regiment was mapped to Pakistan while he had opted for India. That was corrected soon after when he was posted first to the 5th and a short time thereafter to the 8th Gorkha Rifles.

What made Sam stand out from the pack? With the departure of the British and a consequent shortage of officers, promotions had come quick and fast. As a young and outspoken 2-star general he had a run-in with the then Defence Minister Krishna Menon when he refused to comment on the Army Chief, General KS Thimayya, and told Menon to mend his ways. This almost brought his career to a grinding halt with Menon telling Sam to abandon his 'British ways'! In fact the Minister was determined to seal his career and ordered a court of inquiry against him with trumped up charges, accusing him of being an anglophile and therefore, by implication, anti-Indian! Fortunately, he came out unscathed. As a 3-star general he stopped Prime Minister Nehru's daughter, the young Indira Gandhi, from entering the Ops Room of his Corps HQ as she lacked security clearance. As an Army Commander, he carried the latest music LPs and playboy magazines and calendars for officers deployed at high altitudes, facing enemy lines, paying for the gifts on his personal tab. In April 1971, as Chief of Army Staff, he stood up to Indira Gandhi who was Prime Minister and offered to put in his papers rather than compromise the safety and security of his men through an untimely, unplanned war. In December that year, under his command, in 14 days, the Indian army liberated East Pakistan and saw the birth of the new nation of Bangladesh that forever changed the political landscape of South Asia. Sam was promoted to Field Marshal, a first for the Indian Army, but a 'second first' for the Royal Scots as claimed by Colonel Duncan Eykyn of the Royal Scots in his congratulatory letter to Sam (copy in the book). At the height of the war, Delhi was afloat with rumours that the Army Chief had been spied at The Tabela, a popular discotheque. True or false, we'll never know, for that was the enigma that surrounded Sam Manekshaw.

For Sam the welfare of his soldiers, his officers and their families came first, always and every time. While he ruled his army with an iron rod he knew when to temper his decisions with compassion and humour. Dressing down a young officer whose dalliance with a tribal girl had resulted in a military standoff, Sam admonished, "Boy, you had my entire Eastern Army at 'stand-to'. I hope she was worth it!" On a visit to a formation, explaining the absence of his wife he said she never traveled on Saturdays as she considered them inauspicious days, "You see, that was the day she married me!" While inspecting a unit of the Gharwal Regiment, Sam asked the CO how many STD cases had been reported in the past six months. The number was unacceptably high so he prodded a bit more and asked what punishment was meted out to defaulters. "Sir," replied the CO rather sheepishly, "we shave off their heads." Pat came Sam's rejoinder, "What, I did not know that in the Gharwal Regiment you do it with your heads!"

As much as men in uniform loved Sam, the bureaucrats dreaded him. When MOD proposed discontinuation of free rum issue to troops in high altitude areas, he returned the file with a terse comment, "Over my dead body." Chapter closed. When at a high-powered meeting, the Defence Secretary pointed at a Colonel, addressed him as 'you there' and told him to open a window, Sam brought the proceedings to a halt and admonished the Secretary, telling him that he would not stand by and have his officers addressed in this manner. The Secretary backed off, by saying he did not mean it as an insult, but Sam persisted, insisting he had not liked the words or the tone. Eventually, Sam had the politicians and the bureaucrats baying for his blood. If they thought that this could reign him in, they were mistaken for he went for the jugular with even greater glee saying, "I wonder whether those of our political masters who have been put in charge of the defence of the country can distinguish a mortar from a motor, a gun from a howitzer or a guerrilla from a gorilla, although a great many of them resemble the latter."

On relinquishing office Sam visited the UK at the invitation of General Sir Michael Carver, Chief of Imperial General Staff. Officers of the GBA hosted him at the Gurkha Pub at Windsor. At a dinner he hosted for British Gurkha officers he met one of his old Commanding Officers who asked Sam if he could address him as "Sam" now that he was a Field

Marshal. "Please do, Sir," he replied, "you used to only call me a 'bloody fool' before. At one time I thought that was my Christian name."

Many such anecdotes about Sam Manekshaw can be found in a coffee table book that Zenobia and I have written on the Field Marshal. I served on his staff from 1965-73 and was a witness to events that altered the landscape of the Indian sub-continent. My wife and I shared closeness to Sam that gave us an insight into his ideals, his military acumen, his mannerisms and his sometimes wicked sense of humour. With 200 photographs, citations, letters from eminent personalities like Lord Louis Mountbatten, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, the then British High Commissioner in India and Heads of State, the book has a lot to offer.

To celebrate Sam's centenary the book was launched on April 3, 2014 by India's Chief of the Army Staff. The book has received excellent reviews. A few follow:

[Fali Nariman, President Bar Association and former Additional Solicitor General of India:](#) "From beginning to end this delightful narrative simply races along, providing an intimate, witty and scintillating story of a superhero. Sam's humanism, his notations on official files, his colourful language and his doodles, which occasionally set off tidal waves of mirth through Army Headquarters, make this book simply 'un-put-down-able'!

[Lt Gen Vijay Oberoi \(Retd\), \(Maratha Light Infantry\), former Vice Chief of Army Staff:](#) "A delightful tale woven with great dexterity that brings out the well-rounded personality of a proud soldier, a military leader par excellence and a great human being. This gem of a book is a must for your coffee table."

[Lalit Mansingh, Former Foreign Secretary, High Commissioner to the UK and Ambassador to the United States:](#) "While chronicling his career, (the authors) present (Sam) as a family man, a comrade-in-arms, a strategist and a charismatic leader of the troops. It is a story narrated with affection and admiration but never with hyperbole. A(n) eminently readable narrative."

[Lt Gen Rostum K Nanavatty \(Retd\), former Colonel of the 8th Gorkha Rifles and Northern Army Commander:](#) "In the Indian Army stories about Sam

Manekshaw are legion. This book serves as a reference point. It authenticates conversations and incidents; and destroys myths. Importantly, the book offers the discerning reader fascinating insights into the Field Marshal's personal and professional conduct."

[Maj Gen Ian Cardozo \(Retd.\), \(5th Gorkha Rifles\)](#),
"The story of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw has been brilliantly brought to centre-stage. The anecdotes bring out Sam's love for country, for the Army, its officers and its soldiers. His sense of humour, his friendly approach, his professional competence, his forthrightness and his moral courage gave a new meaning to the word 'integrity.' His ... behaviour was the same whether he was dealing with his prime minister or his beloved Gorkha soldiers who called him 'Sam Bahadur.' The nickname stuck and Sam loved it."