

A Soldier Remembers – A Memoir

At 93 years of age retired Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal has the same intellect, wit and tenacity that he has had his entire life. Born in the village of Johal, District Jullundur, India around the year 1920, Pritam Singh caught glimpses of military life as a young boy and slowly grew up with the notion that serving one's country was a great privilege and not a burden. It is this philosophy that Pritam Singh has held his entire life, from his thirty eight years of service for the British and Indian armies to his more recent life in Canada.

In the 1970's Canadian society was struggling with issues of race and racism based on a general ignorance among its citizenry. When Pritam Singh emigrated to BC, Canada in 1980 he felt shock and disbelief that a man of his caliber and military ranking would have to face a barrage of blatant racism. This discrimination reached its climax during the Remembrance Day ceremonies of 1993 when Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh was denied entrance into the Surrey Newton Legion Branch because he was wearing a turban. True to his convictions and his Sikh faith, Pritam Singh waged a long and difficult struggle for Sikh veterans to be allowed to wear this key article of their faith in the Legion.

This is the story of Pritam Singh's struggle with the Legion in 1993, but it is also much more than that. This book chronicles the struggles and accomplishments of an immigrant Sikh-Canadian, and the lifelong service he has given to his community. Pritam Singh is a true role model and his story needs to be shared.

A Soldier Remembers

Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal

World War II Veteran

A Memoir

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL PRITAM SINGH JAUHAL AND
SHARANJIT KAUR SANDHRA**

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A Soldier Remembers
Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal
World War II Veteran
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Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal with Sharanjit Kaur
Sandhra

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of my late loving wife Harjit and my late beloved daughter Balwinder. I cannot find suitable words to express all they have done for me. They made my life what it is and took care of me in every possible manner. Without them, I feel that my life would have been incomplete. I would also like to dedicate this book to my son Sukhdev and daughter Varinder, who have taken care and looked after me with such loving devotion and continue to do so.

Pritam Singh Jauhal

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Foreword

August 28th, 2013:

Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal's memoir is an inspirational tale of soldiering both in and out of uniform. In World War II, Lt.Col Pritam Singh selflessly served the British in the fight against Nazi tyranny. He fought proudly as a soldier and as a Sikh. Like his brethren, his wartime service broke down racial barriers. He was decorated with medals that are a testament to his selfless service. However in his senior years when he should have been honoured for his sacrifice, he had to face a new battle against ignorance and racism when he was denied entry into a Legion Lounge in Canada because of his turban. Like the battles Lt.Col Pritam Singh fought in war, he faced this new challenge with steadfast professionalism, courage and with the utmost humility and grace.

I had the pleasure of hosting Lt. Col Pritam Singh and two of his Sikh veteran colleagues at my Regiment's Annual Battle of St. Julien Officers' Mess Dinner shortly after his battle with the Newton Legion. I remember how proud I was to have them at our dinner because they looked so distinguished with their medals and turbans. The veterans from my Regiment were equally honoured to meet Lt. Col Pritam Singh. They shared stories from their time during World War II and as current serving officers we listened with great interest. Little did we know at the time that some of us would be facing the challenges of combat in Afghanistan years later.

Lt.Col Pritam Singh's story is an example of service; service as a soldier and as a member of the community. His distinguished career as a soldier is an inspiring tale. He fought in World War II with the British Army in battles that we read about in history books. This included many famous and difficult battles during the Northern African Campaign that included the Battle of El Alamein. He witnessed the ferocity and cruelty of war and earned his right to be called a combat veteran. Lt.Col Pritam Singh earned this right as a soldier from India serving the British, but he did this as a Sikh wearing his turban proudly.

The British Indian Army's contribution of men in World War I was over one million and the contribution in World War II was 2.5 million. In total, the Indian Army lost 160,000 soldiers in the two wars. The Sikhs comprised a large percentage of the Indian Army. As Lt.Col Pritam Singh outlines in his memoirs, all Sikh soldiers with the British were required to be baptized. My reasoning for this decision is that the British wanted to harness the honour of baptism that a Sikh holds so dear. The British knew that Sikhs were brave soldiers because they were required to fight for justice and defend those who could not defend themselves. The large number of Victoria Crosses earned by Sikhs alongside the other bravery medals is a testament to their courage and bravery.

Even with the brave history of the Sikhs with the British Army, the Newton Legion did not allow Lt.Col Pritam Singh to enter their building because of his turban. I was a young Lieutenant in the Canadian Army at the time and I too felt hurt and ashamed for the dishonour bestowed on Lt.Col Pritam Singh. How could they refuse entry to a decorated soldier like Lt. Col Pritam Singh who had served in World War II? The reasons given still baffle me to this day. Lt.Col Pritam Singh could have just gone home and tried to forget the insult but instead he readied himself for another battle; a battle that he fought with his wits by attacking the ignorance with education. He achieved his mission and in doing so created greater awareness in Canada about the turban and what it represents.

I read an article in a newspaper while I was visiting Toronto during the height of the Lt.Col Pritam Singh's fight. The article was a letter to the editor from another World War II veteran with a European name. The synopsis of his letter was that any soldier who served on the front line would have seen a Sikh with a turban in the thick of the battle. This statement spoke volumes. During my visit of the battle fields in Northern Europe, alongside the gravestones with crosses were gravestone of Sikh soldiers. Combat breaks racial barriers because a soldier in war does not look at the ethnicity or faith of another soldier. They only care about one thing; 'will you be there for me when the bullets start flying'. Lt.Col Pritam Singh was there in combat proudly wearing his turban serving alongside Allied soldiers fighting the Nazi's.

I have had the privilege of serving Canada on many over-

seas deployments that included Bosnia and Afghanistan. I am Commanding Officer of a Canadian Regiment today because of the legacy and sacrifice of Lt. Col Pritam Singh and other Sikh veterans before him. We both know that there is no greater honour than to serve the nation you call home.

Harjit Singh Sajjan, OMM, MSM, CD
Lieutenant-Colonel
Commanding Officer
The British Columbia Regiment
(Duke of Connaught's Own)
Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada

Acknowledgements

In 2011 the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley featured a short story in its newsletter on Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal's story and his struggle to wear his turban inside the Royal Canadian Legion. Touched by his valour and strength, we felt that Pritam Singh's life story needed to be shared as a critical historical moment that changed the landscape on the acceptance of the turban in Canadian society. We would not have been made aware of the full extent of Pritam Singh's story if it were not for the efforts begun by Ms. Navneet Kaur Sidhu, Coordinator of the Centre for Indo Canadian Studies. We thank Navneet for starting us on this journey.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the office of Research, Engagement and Graduate Studies at UFV for providing us with financial support towards publishing this book.

Each time we visited Pritam Singh in his home, we were greeted by his daughter Varinder, who with the effervescent warmth that many Punjabi families have, plied us with hot samosas, sweets and deliciously brewed chai. In addition, Varinder was always on hand to provide support and advice on the book for which we are very grateful.

On a personal note, I would like to thank Satwinder Kaur Bains, the editor of this book for her continuing support, guidance and encouragement. She has given invaluable assistance throughout the process of writing and publishing this book.

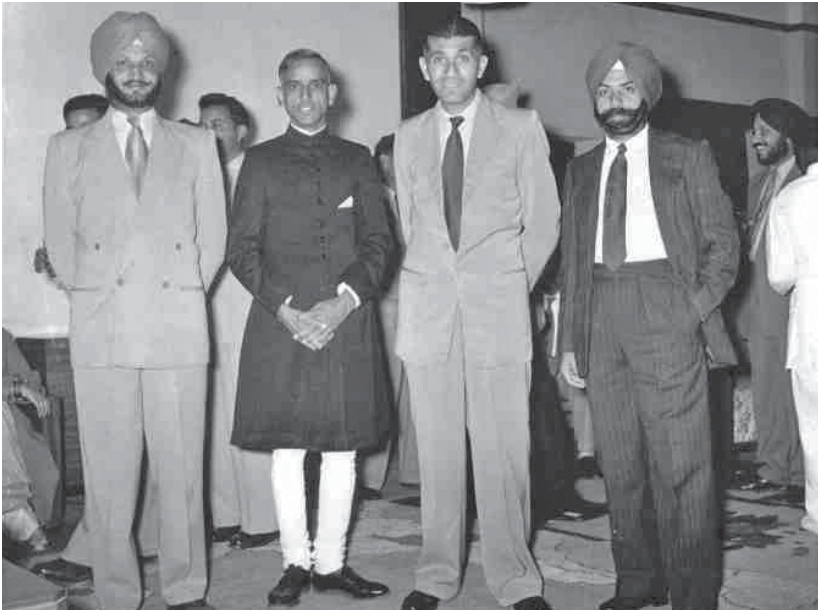
Finally, we would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal. The majority of the writing that you see in this book is in his voice and through his words. Over the past twenty years Pritam has written numerous articles of the many journeys he has had in his life, whether they were during his service in the British and Indian Armies, or whether they were the stories of his life in Canada. These articles were published in a number of Indo-Canadian newspapers and online and they have been stored securely in Pritam Singh's many files. These writings form the substantive

content of this book. The story that you are about to read is in Pritam Singh's voice. We thank Pritam Singh for his patience, kindness and assistance in documenting his story. We acknowledge his courage, tenacity and positive spirit throughout his life. He is truly an inspiration to all of us. This is a unique soldier's story.

Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra



In Major's uniform while serving in No. 5 Infantry Division Signal Regiment at Jalandhar (Punjab) as No. 2 Company Commander during 1956.



In Officers Mess of the 5 Indian Infantry Division Signal Regiment at Jalandhar, Punjab, India with the most Senior officers. Left to Right. Pritam as Major Commanding the 2 Company of Signal regiment, Major Kroshnamoorthi Second- in- Command of the Signal Regiment, Lieut. Colonel S.N. Antia Commanding Officer of Signal Regiment and Major N J S Sethi Commanding the 1 Company of the Signal Regiment.



1959-1960, Colonel Jauhal with Colonel Prem Singh, Commandant and Football team of the No. 1 Signal Training Centre in Jabalpur, India.



As a Major in Vietnam, 1961.



Vietnam, 1961.
Colonel Jauhal with
his Vietnamese
driver.



Mrs. Harjit Kaur
Jauhal as a young
woman in 1961.



As Commanding Officer of the
Communication Zone Signal
Regiment Alwar (Rajasthan) receiving
Trophy from Area Commander Jaipur
for winning Area Drill competition
by his Regiment in 1968. Pritam was
also Station Commander in Alwar in
charge of over 5,000 Army Officers
and men of seven different units.



On transfer on deputation from the Communication Signal Regiment Alwar (Rajasthan) to the No. 2 Signal Battalion Central Reserve Police Force Rampur (U.P) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, during Special Send Off when his Jeep was pulled by Officers and Junior Commissioned Officers of Pritam's Regiment using ropes in 1969.



Pritam taking over the 1 Area Formation Signals at Palam, 1966.



Pritam with the AOC-in-C staff at Palam, 1966.



Pritam receiving a trophy for best in air command, 1966.



In CRP Uniform and as Commandant of the No.1 Signal Battalion Central Reserve Force at Jaroadha Kalan, New Delhi in Police uniform in 1974.



Pritam and Harjit, 1980.



1981. Standing left to right: Ajit Singh Mehat, Pritam's son-in-law, Varinder Bains, Pritam's second daughter, Harjit Kaur Jauhal, Pritam's wife and Balwinder Kaur Mehat, Pritam's first daughter. Resting on the sofa: Balwinder Kaur Mehat's two daughters' Jenny Mehat and Robyn Mehat. Sitting on the sofa: Perminder Bains, Mandev Jauhal, Harpaul Jauhal, Maninder Bains, Sanjit Mehat. Forefront: Ravinder Kaur Jauhal, Pritam's daughter-in-law.



Pritam in conversation with Queen Elizabeth II in 1994.



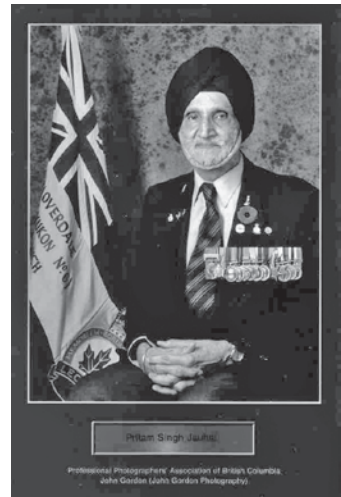
As President, Indian Ex-Servicemen Society of British Columbia, Canada carrying the Society's banner during a Remembrance Day Parade at Whalley Legion, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada in 1996.



At Victoria, B.C on May 4, 2004, the Honourable Gordon Campbell Premier British Columbia presenting Pritam the British Columbia Community Achievement Award in recognition of his outstanding Community service and for contributing to the spirit, imagination, dedication and distinguished participation of British Columbians in their Community life.



2004. Pritam receiving the BC Community Achievement Award presented by Lt. Governor Iona Campagnolo.



Cloverdale Legion, 2006.



Pritam's grandchildren at his daughter Balwinder's house at White Rock, Surrey, British Columbia in 2009. Left to right: Mandev Jauhal, Sanjit Mehat, Maninder Bains, Jenny Mehat, Robyn Mehat, Perminder Bains and Harpaul Jauhal.



Pritam receiving the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012.

Prologue

November 11, 1993 - Remembrance Day

Remembrance Day - the day, when I along with people from all walks of life in Canada mourn the loss and pay tribute to those brave soldiers who risked and lost their lives and limbs in order to preserve the peace and sanctity of millions around the world. I am one of those soldiers.

I retired as a Lieutenant Colonel after thirty eight years of meritorious service in the British and Indian Army and was awarded thirteen medals and stars for my brave efforts. And so it was with great honour and pride that I read the Remembrance Day public invitation in the local newspaper by the Newton Legion Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in Surrey, British Columbia. The invitation was extended to all veterans to attend Remembrance Day ceremonies on Nov 11, 1993 to remember, honour and respect those brave men and women who had contributed their efforts in battle.

On reading the public invitation I decided to take part in the Remembrance Day Ceremonies as a decorated and proud veteran. When I reached the assembly area in Newton on Nov 11, I met four other World War II turbaned Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO's) and Other Ranks (OR's). Proudly wearing my medals and stars I marched along with fifteen hundred other veterans to the cenotaph where prayers were offered for the war dead, wreaths were laid, last post and reveille were sounded and two minutes of silence was observed. The parade then marched to the Legion lounge, but as soon as I attempted to march inside the lounge, two attendants posted at its doors stopped me and said, "Sir you cannot go in because you have a turban on your head." I was told that I could enter the hall as long as I removed my turban. For me this was just not possible.

As the parade continued to march inside the Legion lounge, my fellow Sikh veterans and I stood outside feeling utterly humiliated. Even though prior to the ceremonies I had visited the Legion and

obtained clearance to wear my turban, now my pleas explaining that I was an invited guest were completely ignored. The Legion President at the time, Mr. Frank Underwood was called who told me point-blank, "As per the Legion Bylaws you cannot go inside the Legion with a turban on your head." Despite my best efforts to explain the special importance of being an invited guest and the symbolism and significance of the turban for a Sikh, the President did not budge from his position. Some elderly Legion members who were listening to my arguments with keen interest asked the President to take the invited guests inside the Lounge with respect, but their pleading was also to no avail. As soon as word of what was transpiring outside the door spread inside the lounge, many members of the Provincial Legislature, Cabinet Ministers and Surrey City Councillors who were in attendance to make speeches inside the Lounge walked out in protest.

As a veteran and a retired Lieutenant Colonel I could not tolerate such a public insult. There were so many valid reasons which should have permitted my entrance into the Legion. But foremost, I had come on invitation to attend the ceremonies and I should have been treated as a guest with respect and decency and allowed to complete the ceremonies inside the lounge. For a Sikh the turban is not merely a head-dress to be removed at will, it is a religious symbol, a sign of my identity and something I could never remove in public on demand. Sikhs invited to Buckingham Palace over the years have never been asked to remove their turbans. They have joined the King and/or Queen for banquets and dinners with their turbans intact proudly on their heads. Even upon death a Sikh man is cremated with his turban on his head. And yet here I was, a decorated war veteran invited to attend Remembrance Day ceremonies being shunned away as if my presence brought disgrace instead of dignity to the commemoration. I was dismayed beyond belief.

All of these and many other explanations fell on the deaf ears of the Newton Legion President. Ignoring us he went inside the lounge leaving four Sikh veterans and myself standing outside the Legion doors. Was it for this moment that I had served in the British and Indian armies loyally and outstandingly for thirty eight years? I had never for a moment imagined that I could be insulted, embarrassed and humiliated in public in this manner and that my religious beliefs could be trivialized by being asked to remove my

turban and that too at the hands of fellow veterans. I never realized that after my thirty eight years of loyal service in the army, having suffered physically and emotionally in Africa, Vietnam, India and Pakistan, that the fight for my rights as a Sikh was to be the greatest battle of my life.

In this book, you the reader will see that my fight to wear a turban in the Legion was my most public fight, but I have been a fighter my entire life. Upon immigrating to Canada and as a Canadian citizen I continued to fight for those in Canada who were unable to do so for themselves. I am a firm believer that my service to humanity has been my greatest calling and it is something I will live by until the end of my days.

Before I explain my battle with the Legion I would like to share with you my beginnings. You cannot begin to understand how a man could take on the Royal Canadian Legion unless you share in the journey of my life. This is my story.

Pritam Singh Jauhal (Retired Lieutenant Colonel)

PART ONE

Early Life

1 Early Village Life

Historically speaking it was believed that from ancient times members of Pritam's family were called "Bhai kay" meaning brethren. They were said to be religious minded, with simple living standards and were always seen as publicity shy people. They did not poke their noses in others' affairs and most of the time they worked diligently on their farms so that they could support and feed their families. It was for this reason that they were also known as workaholics. But at the same time the Jauhal families were easy going with a 'take it easy' mentality. This was the family Pritam was born into.

Carrying the blood of his father Ram Singh, a World War I soldier in his veins, Pritam was born in the village of Johal in Jullundur District in the province of Punjab which had been annexed into the British Empire in 1849. Although his school records show his birth to have occurred on October 4, 1920, that date is problematic and uncertain. The population of Johal was approximately 2,500 consisting of 150 *jat* Sikhs, 40 scheduled castes and 5 *brahmin* families. Although the world's largest Empire ruled over India for almost 200 years precious little was done to improve the living conditions of its villages, and Pritam's village was no exception. The village lacked all modern day facilities with no paved roads, buses, canals, tube wells, toilets, sewage, electricity, generators, running water, cars, motorcycles, trucks, or brick houses. Horse-

driven *tongas* and bicycles were used for all means of travel and villagers who could ill afford bicycles or *tonga* fares, had no alternative but to walk on the rough tracks and footpaths irrespective of the distances involved. They used water drawn from wells for irrigation, drinking, cooking, washing and cleaning and used the stars in the sky to judge the time of the night and the sun for the time of the day. Bullocks and camels were used for farm work and kerosene oil lanterns provided light in the homes. Houses were made of mud, which as one can imagine required frequent repairs and plastering. In those days conditions were quite primitive and no better than those of the Stone Age period, thanks to the reign of the world's largest Empire. It seemed that these conditions persisted because the British Empire did not want India to progress in any way, so that it would always (or they hoped) remain dependent on its rulers. Pritam's village had no schools for boys or for girls, with the nearest school for boys being two miles away, as was the post office where mail was delivered once a week. Even the most essential institutions such as the hospital, the police station and the railway station were located two to four miles away. These were the village conditions that Pritam was born into and yet everyone somehow managed to function and thrive, perhaps because it was the norm of the time.

The largest proportion of families in the village were farmers, however the ancestral farmland holdings of most of the villagers were small. The farming profession therefore was not financially viable for entire families and young men were subsequently forced to work outside the farming profession and many young men in Punjab joined the army.

Before Pritam was even born his father Ram Singh enlisted in the Indian Army's Punjab Regiment in 1913 in the lowest army rank of sepoy at a meager monthly pay of fourteen *rupees*. However, soon after his military training was over, World War I broke out and his battalion moved lock, stock and barrel to Iraq for operational deployment in the war. Since he held the lowest army rank he was detailed with the forward most troops of his Battalion, facing the enemy full on and where life was often a matter of touch and go. Ram Singh put his life on the line in the war zone from 1914 to 1918, telling Pritam much later that, "Life in Iraq during the war was hazardous and extremely hard. There were not many comforts of life and no beds to sleep on, forcing everybody to sleep

on the rough ground if we were lucky enough to find a chance to get sleep." Service in the army ran in Pritam's family – his father's brother Hazura Singh was also in the Indian Army. Hazura Singh took part in the agitation at Jaito during the Sikh *Gurdwara* Reform Movement in February 1921, where he was severely wounded in his leg. Because of his disability, he did not marry and remained a bachelor for his entire life, living with his mother – Pritam's *dadi*.

Pritam's father went on to detail his experiences in the war recounting how, "The continuous barrage of heavy enemy fire during the operations of war was so frightening. But with the passage of the time and in the presence of my comrades my fear disappeared, my morale continued to remain high and I fought with the greatest of determination and courage. We killed many enemy soldiers and lost a number of our brave best friends." It was hearing these sorts of stories which piqued Pritam's first interests in the army although his father did and said everything to dissuade him from such a profession. He did not paint a very glorified picture of the army at all. Since he did not qualify for pension Pritam's father was paid a gratuity for the period he spent in the army. With that small amount he renovated his mud house in the village. Pritam's memories of his father are of a selfless and loving man who was especially gentle towards him.

Pritam's mother Hukam Dev Kaur was like no other woman that he knew or would know in his life. She had lost one eye after marriage when she suffered a serious eye ailment but to him she was the most beautiful mother in the world. He has many endearing memories of his mother and her care, love and affection for him. One instance he remembers from his childhood is his mother helping him comb his very long and curly hair. After every hair washing his hair would get tangled so badly that it created quite the task for his mother to comb it. While combing the hair in small sections it used to get pulled and tugged, causing Pritam considerable discomfort and pain. While combing it, Pritam's mother would get a little tired and loosen her grip slightly on his long hair and he would take the opportunity to run away from her. Instead of getting angry at him or growing impatient she always brought him back by using affectionate and playful tactics.

When Pritam would return from school, his *Chacha ji* Piara Singh would want him to work on the farm, but his mother would give

him a glass full of rich and thick milk and enough snacks to nourish his growing body and tell him to go and play with the other school-going boys and to keep away from his uncle. So Pritam would go to the opposite side of the village and play games like *kabaddi*, long jump, jumping up and down trees and running. If he ever asked her for anything she produced it without delay and when he grew up his mother once told him that as a little boy at times he placed impossible demands on her, for example, by asking for a 'star from the sky' or asking her to 'pull a cart.' When he heard this Pritam felt ashamed of himself and begged her for her forgiveness. She was struck with so much emotion when he apologized to her that she embraced him tightly in her arms and said that his simple apology had touched her deeply. Pritam loved his mother a great deal and considered her to be a most endearing, determined and capable woman. He never had a doubt in his mind that his mother had more power than most women in those days. It was she who made all the decisions with respect to Pritam pursuing education, although his uncles and even his father (after immense pressure from his brothers) would have preferred that Pritam work on the farm. Village women from all around the area would come to his mother and seek her advice because she was so well respected for her wisdom and gentle nature.

In 1920 when a touring medical team came to Pritam's village to give vaccination shots against small pox to all new born children, his mother fearing that he might contract some unknown disease from the shots did not allow him to be vaccinated. Unfortunately as a consequence when he was two years old he ended up having a severe attack of small pox and since there was no hospital in their village his parents were at a loss as to what to do for his immediate treatment. They decided to call Narain Singh, a naturopath who lived close to their house for advice and upon his advice Pritam was placed on an ash spread on the mud floor in order to prevent the constant itching. However his condition went from bad to worse and his parents lost all hopes of him surviving the disease. Since he was her first child and because of her unlimited love for him, Pritam's ailment had an adverse effect on his mother's health as well. She was completely at a loss to know what to do for his speedy recovery, but realizing she had committed a grave mistake by not allowing him to receive the small pox vaccination, her alternative was to pray to God Almighty wholeheartedly and non-stop. After a month or so of contracting the disease her prayers

kindled some hope in her because Pritam started showing a slight improvement. Seeing this, his parents heaved a sigh of relief and thanked Almighty for His kind blessings. With His grace and as time passed Pritam's health improved and after two months he started walking. Though he fully recovered from the small pox it left many permanent marks on his body, perhaps Pritam thinks as reminders of his mother's faith, courage and love.

When Pritam was about five years old his mother unknowingly dropped a silver coin on the mud floor of their house. Pritam knew that his mother would often drop coins because of her inability to see out of her right eye. This time he picked up the *rupee* and headed straight to the village grocery shop and handed the coin to the shopkeeper saying, "*Pundit ji* please give me some sweet *patasay*." The *Pundit ji* gave some to him in a small paper bag and said, "This is all you get for the coin you gave me." Pritam started on his way back home eating the sweets and devouring them with much pleasure. When he walked into the house, but before he could say anything to his mother about his shopping experience the *Pundit ji* arrived at the door having followed him home very quietly. *Pundit ji* narrated the story to her in detail, handed her the silver coin and Pritam's mother burst out laughing. When she thanked *Pundit ji* for his kindness and honesty, Pritam felt ashamed of himself and promised never to repeat such a stupid blunder again. However, Pritam remembers that even then his mother never reprimanded or scolded him, knowing that he was learning from his mistakes.

Pritam was the first born, followed by his sister Sampuran Kaur, a brother Sohan Singh and youngest sister Mohinder Kaur. Pritam's mother used to attend to all the household work and was also responsible for milking the buffalo, converting milk into ghee, picking vegetables and cotton from the farm, spinning cotton into yarn, taking care of her children and grinding wheat as and when needed. Sometimes Pritam would carry a bundle of wheat on his head to the nearby village in order to get it ground at a generator run mill, saving his mother much valuable time from grinding it with a stone mill. While picking vegetables or cotton his mother used to leave his younger sister Sampuran with Pritam to take care of and he would carry her on his right hip around the house.

While his mother attended to household chores his father and

uncles spent their entire days working on the farm or trying to sell farm produce. On a number of occasions when he was a little child Pritam accompanied his father and *Chacha ji* Piara Singh when they took a cart-load of wheat or maize for sale to the grain market in the neighbouring town of Phagwara. To save time they always followed a shorter route which happened to be a very rough track full of pebbles and ruts. There were so many jolts on that bumpy road that it was hard for Pritam to hold tight and sit still on the cart. The amount paid by the grain dealer for the entire wheat or maize was close to twenty five *rupees*. Out of that amount his father and Piara Singh purchased stocks of salt, match boxes, tea, kerosene oil and any other commodities that were not readily available in the small village grocery shops. They were lucky if they took home even ten *rupees* each from the sale of the produce. After keeping wheat and maize for the use of their families normally they had three cart loads for sale out of each season's crop. The sale proceeds of wheat or maize were used to meet all their domestic needs as well as their children's school fees. This was the financial state of a village farmer - they were far from wealthy.

2 Education

Pritam's mother and father knew full well that even with their combined family land holdings they were just able to make ends meet so they decided that farming would not be a good profession for their eldest son when he grew up. Instead they decided to send him to school so that he could get a good education all in the hopes that it would result in a well-paying government job. *Chacha ji* Piara Singh on the other hand wanted Pritam to help with the family farm and refused to see the value in education. Sometimes he was able to pressure Pritam's father into thinking the same, but through his mother's sheer determination and will Pritam's education always remained in the forefront. It was understandable why Piara Singh and even his father could not foresee the value in education because in those days everyone's efforts were put towards providing the basic necessities of food and shelter for their families. That is what made Pritam's mother's persistence in ensuring that her son got an education that much more amazing and forward thinking.

Sometimes when Pritam used to see his relatives using their thumb impressions to 'sign' all their papers and official documents, he found it hard to believe that none of his father's and mother's ancestors ever attended school. Pritam was at a loss to understand as to why this chain of no schooling was left for him to break.

For the most part it was not common in rural Punjab to send boys to school during the early twentieth century because farming was considered the only suitable profession for them. When Pritam used to go to school his grandfather's elder brother would say, "Why is he wasting his time by going to school? Does he think he will become a Patwari, the lowest post in the Revenue Department"? That was how school going boys were mocked in those days since it was believed the rewards for education were minimal. Although Pritam's younger brother Sohan Singh and cousin Mohan Singh also went to school they quit despite the best efforts of their parents after passing the fourth class. Pritam would become so frustrated with his younger brother's lack of enthusiasm for school that he remembers one day grabbing Sohan by the ankles and hanging him down the well, threatening to drop him until he promised he would attend school. All of this was to no avail because Sohan ultimately quit school much too early.

When it was time for Pritam to begin his education and register for pre-primary school, his *Nana ji* took him to the Chak Desraj village for admission. The school official asked his *Nana ji* for his date of birth but he realized that he did not have the foggiest idea. So he guessed and said, "He is five and a half years old." The school official made some calculations and said that in that case Pritam's date of birth worked out to October 4, 1920. From that day onwards October 4, 1920 was recorded in all of Pritam's service records and private documents as his official date of birth. The true date may never be known.

Due to the lack of educated people in his village many villagers used to approach Pritam and other school going boys with requests to read or write their telegrams and private letters. These included letters to wives from husbands serving in the army and it made Pritam proud that even in this early stage of his life his education was being put to good use.

Pritam always enjoyed his days in school learning Urdu which was the official language of Punjab at the time, and the language medium used for education in the schools. He used to walk a mile using the available tracks or footpaths to and from school and luckily for him it was not too far away from the village farm. He remembers as a young boy what he looked forward to most was when the sugar cane and corn had ripened and after school he

would make a dash to the farm, pick up a few sugar canes and corn before making it home. Nothing could compete with the sweetness of biting those juicy sugar canes and the flavor of roasted corn.

After pre-primary school, Pritam was admitted into Dhadwar primary school, two miles away from his birth village. But regardless of it being pre-primary or primary the school conditions and his routines were the same. Since there were no desks, benches or chairs in both pre-primary and the primary schools, the students sat in lines on mats spread across the room. They used ink in small glass/earthen containers and pens shaped from elephant grass. Every morning Pritam carried his lunch wrapped in a piece of cotton cloth which he consumed during the school lunch breaks and drank water from a common water hand pump which was located in the front yard of the school. Since the school did not have any proper sports grounds they did not play any organized sports. When he came home from school, his mother would ask him to do his homework rather than make him work on the farm and since there was no electricity in the village he used a kerosene lit lantern to do his studies late into the evening.

When Pritam was in grade two he had a chance meeting with a young man wearing an army uniform. He looked very smart and Pritam immediately liked him, asking him a number of questions regarding the conditions of army service, the pay, uniform, leave and pension. He told him that that he was on two months annual leave with pay and he also answered all of Pritam's questions in complete detail and the way he answered made an impression on Pritam. He was very pleased with the information he gathered on the army service and all his answers about army life appeared positive to young Pritam. As a result, Pritam was so impressed that he thought that it would not be a bad idea to join the army especially if nothing better cropped up for him after he completed his education. Although he was very young at the time Pritam still remembers this chance meeting because it ignited his desire to join the military.

After passing primary school Pritam was admitted to middle school in the village Bara Pind which was two miles from his village. From this point on he had to take English as a subject and unlike the pre-primary and primary schools before, the middle school actually had a sports ground. It was here that Pritam found that he

loved to play volleyball and football. He also vividly remembers his class teacher asking him how much farm land his father owned and he told him that he did not have the faintest idea, but he guessed nevertheless and said that it was 100 *ghumaon*. When Pritam told his mother later that day about his estimate she had a hearty laugh and said if that were the case why would his father have taken land on lease from other farmers? She put Pritam wise on the subject and he realized how little he knew about his family's economic condition at the time because both his mother and father had never let Pritam or his siblings feel the weight of their economic burden.

While Pritam was at the Bara Pind School one morning his parents sent a servant to fetch him immediately because his youngest *Chacha ji* Hazura Singh had been murdered by his three best friends in broad daylight. The servant was directed not to bring Pritam via the direct route to the village because his family feared that the three murderers might waylay and murder him too. He was especially instructed to bring Pritam back using a lengthy zigzag route through various villages. The servant obtained permission from the teacher and took Pritam from the school immediately.

When Pritam arrived home he was shaken to the core and frightened to hear loud cries coming from all over the place. His mother immediately embraced him tight in her arms and heaved a sigh of relief that he was safe, telling him that the murderers were looking for his *Chacha ji* Piara Singh because they had declared that they would murder him too. The villagers had locked Piara Singh in his house despite his shouts to take revenge for the murder of his younger brother. The three murderers were real brothers, were all unmarried and lived with their aged mother in the village. Apparently they had kidnapped a girl from another village as she walked by their home and committed unheard of atrocities. When the young girl's family members came looking for her, it was Hazura Singh who had revealed where his friends were and freed the girl. It was for this reason that Hazura Singh was murdered. When the local villagers recounted the incident afterwards they said that as the three men approached Pritam's *Chacha ji* who sat alone under a tree he challenged them and the other men did not have the courage to fight him. However, when Hazura Singh charged at them they proceeded to mutilate him using their swords. Hazura Singh's only weapon was a simple stick so there was no chance of his survival against the other men.

The police carried out a thorough investigation including recording statements of all available witnesses for a number of months. Only one man was charged and hung immediately, while the other two were never captured. This tragedy affected Pritam deeply because *Chacha ji* Hazura Singh had always shown great love towards him and his murder has always remained on Pritam's mind as a sad and tragic event.

After passing his middle school examination from Bara Pind, Pritam's parents admitted him to Jawahar Singh District Board (JSDB) High School in Banga, which was more than 12 miles from his village. For the sake of convenience Pritam moved from his village to his maternal grandparents Harnam Singh and Daya Kaur's village Khanpur. Here he started to learn a new language - Persian and he also practiced pole vault at school and attained substantial success in it. There were no watches or clocks in his grandparents' home, so every morning his *nani ji* used to judge the time by looking at the position of certain stars, calculating what time she should wake him up so he could get ready for school. Like his mother his maternal grandmother used to feed him rich milk, butter and a heavy breakfast and also give him lunch wrapped in a piece of cotton cloth. After Pritam left for school he used to walk five miles alone following footpaths or tracks to get to school so he could reach there before the morning bell rang. After school he followed the same route back that he had taken in the morning.

While walking to high school Pritam had become good friends with a boy named Shiv Singh a student of Khanpur who used to go to school on his bicycle. Although he was older than Pritam by a year, he always offered him a ride on his bicycle. About a month after going to the new school when Pritam's father realized that his son walked to the school ten miles both ways, he went to Ludhiana and with the help of a friend purchased a new Phillips bicycle for him. Since he did not know how to ride it he walked it all the way to Banga which was a distance of twenty five miles. Pritam was so grateful to his father for all that he went through just to get him that bike. Shiv Singh eventually taught Pritam how to ride his new bike.

Pritam was very proud of the fact that was he the third matriculate (ie. high school graduate) from his village and this further allowed his siblings to follow suit in his footsteps as well. When a primary

school for girls was opened in the village of Kot Grewal about a mile and a half from Pritam's village, his youngest sister Mohinder Kaur attended that school and many years later a primary school for boys was also opened in Pritam's village (Pritam later donated funding for a classroom with a verandah for students of that school).

3 Marriage

In India during the early twentieth century betrothals of boys and girls were formalized by the parents when they were very young. Pritam had hardly turned twelve years old when negotiations for his engagement with Harjit Kaur, daughter of Bawa Singh Gill of Landra village, District Jullundur, Punjab, began through a third party. Harjit was born on August 14, 1924 into a Sikh family. As the first child, Harjit was raised exactly like a son and her mother and father did everything possible for her upbringing. It was evident that all of Harjit's needs were met by her parents and that she was going to be well versed in all the duties that were needed by a strong Punjabi woman. Harjit Kaur was only nine years old when her grandfather came to their village to make inquiries about Pritam and his family status. He had a lengthy discussion with Pritam's father and he asked Pritam a few questions about his school and the class he was attending. Since education for boys those days was so uncommon, it was considered a great asset for any young man to be attending school. After the initial hectic discussions between both sides, a date for the engagement was fixed with the ceremony taking place in Pritam's home in the presence of a number of people of the village. No date for the wedding itself was discussed or fixed because it was customary that it would take place a few years down the road once both Harjit and Pritam were older. Pritam remembers his mother being so excited that she dished out brown sugar to the villagers.

Although his engagement occurred while he was only in middle school, it was in 1935 while Pritam was a student of Banga High School that the wedding-date was fixed. After taking a few days leave from school Pritam's maternal grandparents and Pritam proceeded to his village where wedding preparations were already underway. On the given date a wedding party consisting of about eighty members of Pritam's family, relatives and friends left for Harjit's village on bullock-driven carts, while the groom was provided a horse to ride on. The wedding party stayed at Landra village for two days during which the wedding ceremonies were solemnized as per Hindu rites. During that time a Hindu priest had immense influence in his fiancé's village, and it was he who performed the marriage ceremony. This was not seen as anything unusual as the role that Sikhism played in everyday life was sometimes viewed as minimal. People were so busy barely making ends meet that there was never much emphasis on being a 'Sikh' and analyzing what that entailed. Even trips to the village *Gurdwara* were rare other than on days such as *Sangrand*. At the time of the ceremony Harjit Kaur and Pritam were twelve and fifteen years old respectively and they were not allowed to speak or meet with each other. After the ceremony the wedding party left for Pritam's village accompanied by Harjit Kaur who was seated in a specially made palanquin which was carried by four men of her village on their shoulders. Harjit was accompanied by a maid from her village to take care of her during her brief introductory stay at Pritam's village.

The wedding ceremonies at the Johal village went on for two days and when Harjit Kaur arrived at Pritam's village she touched the feet of the men of his family who were older than her by bowing low and keeping her face covered with her headdress. This gesture was seen as a sign of the respect that she had for them. She also touched the feet of the ladies of the family who were older than her and then she embraced the boys and girls of the family who were younger to her. Even now, after arriving in the village the newly-weds were not permitted to meet and talk with each other. After the ceremonies in his village, Harjit Kaur and her entourage went back to her village. Although their wedding ceremony had taken place in 1935 their married life would start five years later in 1940, when both of them were a bit older and more mature. After the wedding ceremony Pritam returned to live with his maternal grandparents to complete his high school education.

Later in 1935 both Pritam and his maternal grandfather were hit with the unbearable shock of his dearest grandmother's death. She had taken care of him just as his own mother had done and now it was only his grandfather and him alone in the home and neither he nor Pritam knew how to cook and were at a loss as to what they should do to solve their problem. Luckily for them a couple of days later a family friend of Pritam's maternal grandmother very kindly volunteered to help the two of them by cooking their meals for them in her own home. Expressing much relief, the two men thanked her profusely. Pritam used to go and fetch cooked meals for his grandfather and himself and in return his grandfather gave the family some bags of wheat. This arrangement worked to their mutual satisfaction. Once Pritam passed the matriculation exam in 1936, he moved back to his own village leaving his maternal grandfather to continue on with the help of his friends in his village.

After completing his schooling Pritam returned to his village and realized that as the son of a farmer he should have some knowledge about the family business, so when his father purchased two bullocks Pritam started trying his hand at all sorts of work. In a short period of time he had learnt almost everything except the leveling of the fields for which he had to seek his father's help. Pritam prepared a couple of acres of land and sowed wheat on it and was pleased to see it growing very well.

Pritam vividly remembers the second time in his life when he had a hankering for army life, when in 1936 some boys of the village decided to go to the Jullundur Cantonment in order to enlist in the Indian Army. Pritam asked his parents if he could also go and try his luck to enlist but his mother immediately retorted that he should not even talk about joining the army. She told him that he could do anything else of his choosing saying, "Your father joined the army and he was sent to fight in the First World War. Ask him how hazardous and tough life in the army was for him." So at that time Pritam accepted his mother's advice and gave up the idea of joining the army, but then as will be seen this budding ambition of his slowly began to grow.

4 Delhi

After having successfully completed his matriculation exams Pritam's parents seeded a long-standing desire that he should take up a well-paying job. His mother spoke to her cousin sister Bhag Kaur to help in this matter. Bhag Kaur had married Chanan Singh of Sunnarh village who was running a firm known as "Chanan Brothers Architects, Engineers and Building Contractors" in Connaught Place, New Delhi which hired over twenty five employees. Pritam's Auntie Bhag Kaur promised to find Pritam a job in New Delhi and from that point on Pritam moved and stayed with Auntie Bhag Kaur's family. She treated Pritam like her own child and Chanan Singh suggested that Pritam learn typing on his own by using the office typewriters. After some time Pritam got fairly good at typing and was expecting that Uncle Chanan Singh would find a job for him, but he was so busy with his business that he had no time to help Pritam.

In a nearby house lived a New Delhi Police Constable named Pakhar Singh, who used to be on day patrol duty in the area. One day during Pritam's discussion with him, he said, "In case you want to join the New Delhi Police, I can help you." But the way in which Pakhar Singh used to treat the poor vendors selling odds and ends was beyond Pritam's capacity and conscience. Pritam felt that he could never take up a job which enabled abuse of its authorities so blatantly. He knew that this was not his calling in life and

he declined his offer and continued living with his Aunt's family. Aunt used to give him twenty *rupees* as monthly pocket money and because of his mother's close relationship with her Pritam did not like to pressure her constantly to look for jobs for him.

One day a man named Hazara Singh who was enlisted in Jullundur in the Indian Signal Corps (known in Hindi as *Seesa Jhandi*) was traveling by train to Jabalpur. He broke his journey at the New Delhi railway station so that he could visit Chanan Singh's business in order to meet some of his friends. Pritam met him and asked him whether on completion of his training he could write to him in detail about the service conditions in the Indian Signal Corps. Upon his return, as promised Hazara Singh wrote to Pritam saying that the Indian Signal Corps is an excellent division of the Army because one could learn many technical things, qualify in a technical trade and get a much higher pay and allowance than those serving in the non- technical trades. Furthermore, if one did well in service there was a good chance of being promoted and being selected for commission into the army. The monthly pay and allowances of a Commissioned Officer were the same as a British Officer serving in the Indian Army. It was many times more than a Subedar Major, Subedar, Naib Subedar, Havildar, Naik and Signalman. As luck would have it Pritam's advisor Hazara Singh never made it to the Commissioned ranks and retired from the Indian Signal Corps with the pension of a Havildar (Sergeant).

During his stay in New Delhi from 1937-38 many dealers visited the Chanan Brothers office and once Pritam spoke to a visitor who was having his bicycle fitted with a small engine. It could be used as an ordinary bicycle with its peddles with or without engaging the engine and Pritam was under the impression that its rider did not need a driving license. When he asked the owner if he could take it for a ride, the man agreed quite willingly. With the owner's permission Pritam rode on the bicycle around some close by roads, but when he was returning and as he approached the last intersection, the traffic police on duty stopped him and demanded to see a driving license. It was obvious that Pritam did not have one and despite all his pleas that he used it only as a bicycle without engaging the engine the police man took Pritam to the New Delhi Police Station. The police there told him that only a licensee can ride such a bicycle. The policeman on duty phoned Chanan Singh

who came and brought Pritam back home, and Pritam was greatly embarrassed for causing them all so much trouble.

In another instance, a friend of Pritam's was drinking beer and he offered him a bottle although Pritam told him that he had never drank any alcohol. On his advice, as a beginner Pritam mixed some lemonade into the beer to change its taste, but when he tasted the concoction he did not like it one bit. He passed both the beer and lemonade to his friend to consume. Four years afterwards, during a short break from operations in WWII in 1941, Pritam and three of his musketeer friends went to an Armed Forces canteen in Cairo, Egypt and drank eight bottles of beer each. Those two instances were the only times in his life when Pritam ever consumed alcohol.

Pritam's correspondence with Hazara Singh meanwhile continued amicably. Upon reading some encouraging news from Hazara Singh regarding the Indian Signal Corps, Pritam faced a dilemma because his parents had advised him against joining the army and had even left him with one of their close relatives in New Delhi to arrange a suitable employment for him. But for Pritam being in Delhi without a job for almost a year was a cause of concern and he was against spending the rest of his life at the mercy of a relative. He wanted to stand on his own two feet and was becoming frustrated, finding it enormously hard to decide on his future ambitions and actions. After mulling over the most difficult problem of his young life for days, he finally came to the decision that he would try his luck to enlist in the Indian Signal Corps. He did not consider it appropriate at that stage to disclose his intentions to Auntie Bhag Kaur or even to his mother through a letter because he knew his parents' decision was against him joining the army. So a week later after having made up his mind, Pritam went to the Recruiting Office Delhi Cantonment to enlist in the Indian Signal Corps. An official there advised him to go to the Jullundur Recruiting Office because their office enlisted people only who were permanent residents of the Delhi area. He said that instead of going there in person, Pritam should send an application to the Recruiting Office Jullundur by mail requesting him to transfer a vacancy for him out of their Indian Signal Corps quota to the Delhi Recruiting Office. Pritam immediately mailed his application as advised to the Recruiting Office in Jullundur. A couple of weeks later he received a reply from the Jullundur Recruiting Office with information copied to the Recruiting Office Delhi Cantonment,

transferring a vacancy as requested. Pritam took the letter and showed it to the officials of the Recruiting Officer in New Delhi. His dream was about to come true.

Upon being called in for admission into the Signals Corps, Pritam was asked to remove his clothes except for his underwear and stand in a line along with the other candidates. After being found to be physically fit and educationally sound, he was enlisted as a recruit in the Indian Signal Corps on June 3, 1938 on a monthly pay of sixteen *rupees*. Pritam was paid a month's pay in advance and issued a Movement Order with instructions to report to the Signal Training Centre in Jabalpur. He was also given a railway warrant for free travel from New Delhi to Jabalpur. After successfully enlisting as a recruit in the Indian Signal Corps Pritam had to break the news to Auntie Bhag Kaur, who was dumbfounded and hurriedly asked him if he had obtained prior permission from his parents. Pritam told her that he had not and she worriedly retorted, "But your mother had left you with me to find a job for you. How will I respond when she asks me about your enlistment in the army and about you going away to Jabalpur because you did not even consult me before getting yourself enlisted?!" Pritam promised her that he would write to his mother explaining the entire matter in detail immediately upon his arrival in Jabalpur. Auntie Bhag Kaur had heart of gold and quickly she gave Pritam an additional thirty *rupees* for his train journey and wished him good luck in the Indian Signal Corps.

And so it was that Pritam entered the next great phase of his life in the military, which would span a total of almost forty years. Looking back Pritam says that if there was only one thing that he could attest to from his early life, it is the understanding that he was blessed. Not blessed with wealth, property and possessions; but rather, blessed with immense love and devotion. Love from his mother, his father, his uncles (father's brothers), his grandparents, and his aunt (mother's cousin sister). If it were not for these supportive people his education, health and career would never have flourished, and in turn he would never have been able to make the changes in the world that he so desired.

PART TWO

Military Career

5 Training

On June 3, 1938 Pritam left New Delhi for Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh for recruit training at the No. 1 Signal Training Centre. Initially he was put through the basic military training which included physical training, drills with and without rifles, learning the use of rifles, sten guns and light machine guns as well as the throwing of hand grenades. Physical training was so tough that after forty minutes when he squeezed his vest he found almost half a pound of sweat poured out. Living in barracks with a common bathroom and kitchen, using pan-type terribly stinking *latrines*, with sweepers standing by who would be cleaning them all the time, was no better than primitive living standards. Pritam regretted joining the army at that point but it was too late because this had been his own choice. However, as time passed he got used to military training life and continued training wholeheartedly.

Once five months of military training were completed, a swearing-in ceremony³³ took place where each recruit would swear on his holy book. Placing his hand atop a *Gutka* which was held by a *Granthi*, Pritam swore that he would be faithful to his country, make it proud and go wherever he was directed to by his superiors. After the swearing-in ceremony he became a Signaller where his technical training began. Pritam was selected for the Visual Operator training - a training that included other trades such as Telegraph Operators, Signal Fitters, Radio Mechanics and Cipher

Operators. Pritam's Visual Operator training included learning the use of Morse code and using it to transmit and receive messages on a signaling flag with binoculars. Recruits were also trained in cable laying, cycling and horse riding. For horse riding Pritam was allotted a horse and was charged with the duty to feed, groom and walk the horse. At the end of this training there was a test for Pritam and his horse, which included an obstacle course involving jumping over high bars. He was also allotted a mule that carried signal equipment to use in the field and Pritam had to look after it just as he did with the horse.

The trades allotted to Indians were for very low paying jobs because the British thought that the Indians were not capable of handling higher technical assignments. Pritam felt that this smacked of a sense of superiority and racism. It was not until World War II erupted on September 3, 1939 and the British were in desperate need of Indian soldiers that Indian recruits were finally allowed the opportunity to seek higher paying trades and ranks. It was around this time that Pritam was selected for Telegraph Operator training which included electrical, magnetic and wireless theory, and the use of wireless sets and battery charging engines that were used in the army. During the Morse code reading classes, Major Beastanbell, a British officer commanding the technical school often came to Pritam's class of six Signalmen to send Morse codes as fast as he could for the recruits to read. Pritam got used to this routine and he and his colleagues would challenge the Major to do his best, sending messages as fast as possible to see what would happen. Ultimately Pritam had attained the Morse sending and receiving speed of 40 words per minute which was considered very fast. Pritam excelled so much in the field of Telegraph Operator that he was selected for the Radio Mechanic course whenever it would be offered next. A Radio Mechanic's duties consisted of repairing all types of signal equipment for use in the army during war and peace.

Training for the military did not solely involve battlefield tactics, signal communications but education as well. At the Central School all trainees were required to attend classes in Roman, Urdu, English and Map Reading. Pritam passed the Roman and Urdu Class I, English Class III and Map Reading Class I during his stay in Jabalpur.

The trainees had access to places of worship while in training as there was a Temple for Hindus, a *Gurdwara* for Sikhs, a Mosque for Muslims and a Church for Christians. They attended their respective religious institutions every Sunday - in fact, this was a mandatory requirement. In addition, all Sikh trainees were required to be baptized. There was no question of 'ifs' or 'buts,' it was a step that all the Sikh soldiers took and never questioned. Pritam was also baptized without a single thought to the contrary.

Upon completion of training as a Telegraph Operator Class III, Pritam was transferred to the Peshawar District Signal Regiment in Peshawar, which is now in present-day Pakistan. The Regiment was officered by the British while Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO's) and Other Ranks (OR's) were Indians. From November 1939 until May 1940 Pritam was detailed for duties in the Signal Centre which served all units located in the Peshawar cantonment. His duties involved receipt and registration of all messages received in the Signal Centre and delivery of messages to the representatives of local units. After doing these ordinary clerical duties for two months, Pritam told his British shift Sergeant, "Sir, can you detail me on one of the wireless nets in the Signal Centre [where only British operators were working] because I have a very good speed of Morse code sending and receiving?" The shift Sergeant looked at Pritam with surprise, and said, "You think you can operate a wireless set?" Pritam replied, "Yes Sir, I think so." The Sergeant scoffed and said, "I don't think you're fit for that." But Pritam told him he was prepared to compete with the British operators working on the sets. Pritam was very confident in his own abilities and upon requesting the British Sergeant repeatedly he was detailed on one of the wireless sets and shortly after proved himself to be very capable.

In 1940 Pritam went on a few weeks annual leave to his village so that he could spend time with his new wife Harjit. Although Pritam and Harjit were married in 1935, they didn't have their *muklawā* ceremony until he went on leave in 1940 as was the custom of the time. After the marriage ceremony in 1935, Harjit had stayed with her parent's family in their village until 1940. When Harjit came to Pritam's village in 1940 to start her married life, Pritam remembers being in awe of her youth, innocence, health, beauty and overall glamorous nature. Though uneducated in the traditional schooling sense Harjit was very intelligent, always willing to learn

more and well versed in housekeeping duties and responsibilities. She was a wonderful cook and made delicious Punjabi meals to everyone's delight. During this special time in their lives, Pritam discovered Harjit's loving and faithful nature because she always put all her efforts and energies into taking care of Pritam and his family. Not only was Harjit highly respectful to Pritam's parents and looked after them to the best of her ability, she also immediately adjusted to Pritam's two sisters and brother. In Pritam's eyes Harjit was the ideal life partner. Although it was difficult for both Pritam and Harjit when he had to leave to re-join his military duty, they both came to realize that as time passed both he and Harjit would become so close to one another that being apart would only strengthen their bond. Furthermore, Pritam had prepared Harjit ahead for the life they would share by making her mentally aware of the separations which would eventually occur. Such was the nature of military life and being married into a military family.

In May 1940 Pritam was dispatched back to Jabalpur in order to attend the Radio Mechanic course for which he had been selected, but when he reached the Kohat Railway Station he was stopped and told to return to Peshawar. Upon returning he was informed that the British were going to send an all Indian (Sikhs) Signal Section of 42 Other Ranks with 3 British Sergeants to take part in World War II for the first time on a trial basis, with a view to see how they would perform under the pressure of war. Pritam would form part of that Signal Section and he was moved to Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh in May 1940 where his newly formed Signal Section had assembled in preparation for war. From May 1940 to August 1940 Pritam stayed in Lucknow where vehicles, signal equipment and other stores required during war were issued to them and they were given training in driving trucks 15 cwt (hundredweight truck).

6 World War II (1940-1942)

Once the Signal Section was ready in all respects, it moved to Bombay to join the 29 Indian Infantry Brigade. After a few days of preparations the entire brigade was loaded on ships and sailed for the Middle East in August, 1940. Two men from the Signal Section had run away from Bombay fearing for their lives when thinking of the war ahead.

Pritam voyaged on one of the fifty ships loaded with tanks, artillery guns, vehicles, British officers, and Indians of all ranks. The convoy was escorted by a number of war ships including a cruiser. Pritam felt terrified as they sailed in the Indian Ocean because he had put his life on the line on his own accord, without regard for those he had left behind including his aged parents and very young wife after just five weeks of real married life. But the deed was done and Pritam was ready to face what lay ahead.

The sea was very rough and there was hardly a person on the ship who was not affected by the rolling and pitching of the ship and who did not suffer sea sickness. This prevented them from eating anything for days. There used to be a stand-to in the morning and evening for all the soldiers with their weapons. The soldiers were issued life belts which were worn on the body during the stand-to. Standing orders were issued that if the ship was bombed and they had to 'abandon ship,' the officers would try and arrange boats

so that they could stay afloat. If boats were not available they had to jump into the sea. The idea was that the life belts would keep them afloat and alive for 24 hours and during that time somebody would hopefully come and pick them up.

They had been at sea for four to five days when the enemy (German) bombers appeared and attacked their convoy. Those first few days at sea had been such a haze for Pritam that when the enemy bombers began their attack, only then he realized that they were nearing the Middle East. When Pritam saw a bomb fall into the ocean it created what looked like a mountain of water rising very high into the air. At first he was amazed, but after some time it became quite routine. The enemy's low flying aircraft continued to fire on the ships and bomb them. Life was very uncertain Pritam was never sure at any given moment if another day would ever dawn and he prayed to God Almighty for his safety.

Sudan

The 5 Infantry Division of which Pritam's 29 brigade was a part of arrived in Sudan in September, 1940. The first task was to ensure the security of Sudan against any offensive by the Italians from Eritrea. Nevertheless, the Italians had captured a few border towns in Sudan but there after they stayed dormant and no fighting ensued.

Eritrea

The 5 Infantry Division went on the offensive in November-December 1940 and after throwing the Italians out of border areas advanced into Eritrea. By February, 1941 the division had captured considerable area in the plains. There was only one road leading to the Capital Asmara which passed through Keren at a height of 4,300 feet. It had to be captured before advancing further. Initially the 4 Infantry Division was tasked to capture Keren. However, they could not make much headway due to very rugged terrain and the stiff fight put up by the Italians. It was therefore decided they should attack with two divisions - the 4 Infantry Division on the left and the 5 Infantry Division on the right. Keren fell on March 26th after 53 days of stiff fighting in which Pritam's 29 Brigade played an important role. By the end of April 1941 the entire country of Eritrea including the Capital Asmara were captured.

According to Pritam they suffered a number of air raids by the Italian planes, during which Pritam would jump into a trench that had been dug in advance. At times like this Pritam used to feel that he shouldn't have joined the Army but he also realized that it was too late and the situation had really reached a point of no return.

Pritam also vividly remembers a time in Eritrea when the enemy had occupied positions on the Keren Mountains, and therefore all their movements could be seen as they were on much lower flat ground. Enemy artillery shells used to fall on them constantly and Pritam was thankful that his wireless truck was parked by the side of a huge rock providing some protection. At times enemy shells fell on the rock itself, but they got deflected and burst 100-200 yards away.

Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia)

Pritam's 29 Brigade and the rest of the 5 Infantry Division turned southwards after capturing Eritrea and launched an offensive into Abyssinia. The main objective was to capture the high mountain of Amba Alagi, which was captured on May 16th after very stiff fighting in which the 29 Brigade played a prominent role. As a consequence, the Italians surrendered. Pritam provided the crucial wireless communications during this battle.

Soldiers from many of the Commonwealth countries fought alongside each other, but Pritam's contact was mostly with those in his Indian Brigade and their higher ranked British officers. Pritam's duty during the battles was to be with one of the battalions to operate the wireless set. Battalions are the forward most troops and have about 800 personnel, whereas a brigade comprises of about 3,000-4,000 made up of soldiers from all ranks. Using his wireless set Pritam provided two-way communication between the Brigade Commander/Headquarter and the Battalion Commander so that they could pass information and coordinate the operations. If the distances increased, they used to put up wire aerials on two poles which could cover long distance communications. But during battle they mostly used rod aerials which could be fixed on the wireless set or the vehicle. No successful operations could be launched without good communications between the commanders at all levels

The North African Desert

On September 8th, 1940 the Italians advanced into Egypt and within a week reached Sidi Barrani, which was 300 Miles West of Alexandria (Egypt). General Archibald Wavell counter-attacked on December 9th, 1940 and the Italians started to pull back. Allied Forces followed up the Italians and captured Tobruk and reached El Agheila deep inside Libya and thousands of Italians surrendered.

The famous German General Rommel arrived in Libya in mid February 1941 as did reinforcements from Germany and Italy. Wavell had to send four divisions to Greece and Rommel took advantage of this weakening of the Allied Forces opposing him in Libya. In mid-March 1941 he attacked with force and pushed the Allied Forces all the way to Egypt by the end of April. Here a stalemate took place creating a deadlock situation in which no progress could be made and no advancement was possible.

This was the situation in June 1941, when the 5 Infantry Division was moved to the desert to train in desert warfare and also prepare defensive positions on the El Alamein Line, though the war zone was further west. However in mid-August, the Division minus Pritam's 29 Brigade was first sent to Iraq and then to Cyprus. The 29 Brigade stayed on and came directly under command of the 8th British Army.

Libya

From October to November 1941, the 8th British Army including the 29 Brigade in which Pritam was serving as a wireless operator advanced into Libya to link up with the Garrison at Tobruk which became the 8th British Army. The 8th Army troops then advanced further West to El Aghela by January 1942.

Pritam remembers the nearly 200 miles long advance made by his brigade through the desert, far south and away from the coast, which included the capture of the Fort at Giallo. Pritam recalls how as per intelligence reports the allied troops were told that the Giallo Fort some 300 miles away from the Suez Canal was occupied by an enemy Battalion. The 29 Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered to attack and capture Giallo. The brigade advanced scores of miles through the desert and captured the Fort with hardly any opposition, taking one hundred prisoners of war.

Pritam also remembers his brigade going to Benghazi and Tobruk, both strategic ports on the Mediterranean. According to Pritam, while the Allied troops advanced, the German fighter bombers used to attack, forcing them to lie flat on the ground. Their orders were that when they saw these aircraft they were to lie flat with their face down on the ground till it was all clear. The aircraft used to come so low that the roar of their engines felt very threatening and terrifying. But as soon as the aircraft left the troops would get up and start to perform their duties again.

Counter Attack by Rommel and Battles at Gazala Line

The 8th Army had long supply lines and the Germans and the Italians had received reinforcements. The Allies therefore took up defences on the Gazala Line. Rommel counter attacked the Allied defence line at Gazala in June 1942. Pritam's 29 Brigade was deployed at El Adem and although initially the Germans attacked towards the South and after a few days the 29 Brigade position was also assaulted.

Pritam remembers that one day he was told to deliver two fully charged batteries in a tracked vehicle called a Bren Carrier to the forward most battalion for use with wireless sets. A Bren Carrier was a lightly armoured tracked vehicle but it had no cover on top like a tank has. The Bren Carrier was a very versatile vehicle and was used to move across the country with 5-6 soldiers and a Bren Gun, to provide covering fire. It could undertake reconnaissance missions and also carry mortars, stores and ammunition to beleaguered troops and casualties could also be evacuated in it. The Battalion had been ordered to put in an attack on the enemy the next morning. It was a very hot summer day with the sun beating down mercilessly. Pritam was seated in a crouched position on the terribly hot Carrier. During this move he saw many of his colleagues being hit and fall due to continuous enemy shelling. Pritam has never been able to forget that scene and the bodies he saw lying all around him.

Retreat to Mersa Matruh and El Alamein Lines

The 29 Brigade was ordered to pull back from the Al Adem defences on June 16th, 1942. This was a running retreat and the chasers and the chased at times even drove on parallel lines.

Pritam's truck with its wireless set had no spare wheels left as one of the wheels had been cut up by the stones in the desert. Pritam could see 40 to 50 German tanks coming in a line towards them with their guns blazing. They could clearly see the flashes of the tank guns, but the troops continued retreating for a number of days, stopping for the night and the next morning pulling back again as the Germans were upon them in no time.

The next defence line was at Mersa Matruh which was approximately 100 miles behind the Gazala Line. Pritam's brigade took up defences inland away from the coast. From June 26th, 1942, the Afrika Corps launched attacks on Pritam's brigade. As the British Forces did not want to be encircled, they withdrew to the more defensible line of El Alamein which was another 100 miles east.

Pritam's 29 Brigade conducted a fighting withdrawal and held a number of delaying positions so that other troops could withdraw. However, the 5 Infantry Division suffered serious losses in men, equipment and armaments. Providing wireless communications under such dangerous and mobile conditions was not easy, but Pritam was a dedicated and experienced wireless operator and he rose to the occasion.

The Battle of El Alamein

There were two famous battles of El Alamein which changed the course of WWII in North Africa. Pritam was in the thick of the first of these battles. The 5 Infantry Division including the 29 Brigade was holding defences to the south away from the coast. Pritam's brigade experienced its share of enemy attacks with the aim of breaking through in the south and encircling the 8th Army. The Brigade also participated in offensive action to do the reverse on the enemy.

Rommel put in determined attacks along the coast and then towards the south. The Allies also made dogged efforts not only to stop the Germans but also to break through German defences. The well-known British General Montgomery, popularly known as Monty took over the command of the 8th British Army in North Africa on August 15th, 1942. This 8th British Army included the 4th, 5th and 10th Divisions which were all Indian divisions. The Germans greeted Monty with more attacks but did not succeed in breaking

through. By then both the Allied Forces and Rommel's troops were totally exhausted and decided to dig in, to rest, regroup and wait for reinforcements and supplies.

The 5 Infantry Division was pulled out from El Alamein on September 9th, 1942 and moved to Iraq via the Suez Canal. However, at this time Pritam was ordered to be repatriated to India where his war experience could be utilized to train new soldiers. Those remaining in Pritam's brigade could only be repatriated once other reinforcements arrived.

Pritam operated the wireless Set 19 and wireless set 62 in the Middle East during the Second World War with which he provided wireless communication to battalions and the attached troops of the 29 Infantry Brigade. These two wireless sets were master pieces of design for mobile wireless communications, especially considering the electronic technology available in those days. Both these sets were used by the Indian Army extensively even after Independence and continued to be the backbone of tactical communications until the 1970's.

Wireless Set 19

The wireless set 19 was designed to be used in tanks and contained three sets; the wireless set 'A' a High Frequency set for longer distances. The wireless set 'B' which was a VHF set giving the line of sight for shorter ranges of communications for working within a tank squadron and troop. And the third was an intercom set, which enabled the tank crew to talk to each other within the tank. The Corps of Signals Indian Army used the wireless set 19 at the division and brigade levels very effectively. However, the set was heavy and could not be man-packed.

Wireless Set 62

The wireless set 62 was a High Frequency and it was much lighter and could be man-packed. Both wireless sets could provide RT (Radio Telephony) and CW/MCW facilities for Morse code. Also both the sets had a Flick facility, which enabled the sets to be pre-tuned on two frequencies so that the frequencies could be changed speedily to avoid jamming or other interference.

According to Pritam, there was no competition amongst the Allied combaters because they were fighting with a common purpose for a common cause. They faced many difficulties like sometimes running out of rations, and quite often because the advance was so fast that sometimes they used to run out of ammunition, but still they survived. When they ran out of rations their rations were halved and if the supplies still did not reach, it was halved again, but still they survived. To make matters worse they never received the letters from back home for months at a time, but still they survived. They faced enemy bombardment, there was strafing by the air, and artillery shelling on the ground but still they survived. Pritam feels this was because although the troops belonged to different countries, different religions and different castes, all the allied forces grouped themselves into a perfect family. And this family not only respected each other but they would have died for each other. There was great respect and much affection for each other that they would do anything for their fellow soldier whether he was an Indian, British, Australian, French, New Zealander, Canadian, and South African or of any other nationality. Such was their commitment to the war.

7 Service in India

From his service in World War II Pritam was repatriated back to Sialkot (now in Pakistan) after a short spell at Jabalpur. Because of his seniority and service during World War II he was promoted to Lance Corporal, Corporal and Sergeant in quick succession. He was also detailed as a senior instructor with a Lance Corporal as his assistant to train recruits as wireless operators. During this time he represented his Signal Battalion in football and he also played field hockey, basketball and volleyball. Overall, Pritam was very athletic and focused a great deal on staying fit.

Early in 1943 Pritam brought Harjit along with him to Sialkot where they lived in a one room family government home. Both Pritam and Harjit rejoiced in being able to spend some time together after being apart for so long during Pritam's tumultuous time in the World War. Pritam's unit was about three miles away from his residence and he used to go to work on a bicycle. During Pritam's service in WWII he had contracted malaria which re-emerged every year. One morning Pritam felt a sudden cold spell followed by a high temperature. While on his way to his home Pritam suddenly collapsed and fell off his bicycle in an unconscious state. When he gained consciousness he started moving again but when he entered his home he collapsed once more. Harjit came to Pritam's aid immediately, resting his head on her lap and applying a cold compress to Pritam's forehead. Pritam was eventually evacuated

to a Military Hospital where his temperature had risen to 105.5 degrees celsius. Harjit stayed by his side and cared for him diligently day and night, worrying constantly about his poor health. A few days later Pritam recovered enough to be discharged from the hospital but he knew much of his recovery was due to Harjit's tender nurturing care.

In 1944, a preliminary selection team visited their Regiment to select Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO's) and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO's) for emergency commission into the Indian Army. Pritam and another thirty five recommended individuals were produced before the team. Out of the entire batch Pritam and nine others were selected to appear before the Army Headquarters Selection Board in Rawalpindi. The selection tests included psychological tests, general knowledge, group discussions and an obstacle course. One of the most vivid memories Pritam has during this time was of the obstacle course. It had eight different obstacles, some of which were very difficult to navigate. Three and a half minutes were allowed to complete all eight obstacles. During briefing, the Group Testing Officer told them that no one had ever completed the course in the time allotted. Pritam, being confident of his physical strength and ability asked him, "Sir, what should I do in case I complete the obstacle course and still have time to spare?" With a scoff, the Officer replied that if completed before time, Pritam could start from the beginning and would in turn get extra points for obstacles covered a second time. To the Officer's complete amazement, Pritam not only completed all eight obstacles in the allotted three and a half minutes, but he also went over four more obstacles and completed a grand total of twelve. This showed quite clearly how fit and able he was as a young man. As a result, although Pritam had not asked for Infantry as his choice of posting, he was selected for the Infantry by the Selection Board. After the tests Pritam returned to Sialkot and was given the rank of Sergeant.

On receipt of orders from Army Headquarters in New Delhi, Pritam left Sialkot and reported to the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun in April 1945. Here he trained to be commissioned into the Indian Army as a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry. At this point Harjit returned to live at her parent's village, Landra. In Dehra Dun all the instructors were of British background and they were very good leaders. During the drills Pritam and his colleagues

could not even move an eyeball without being spotted by the instructors. Pritam was an all-round sportsman but he particularly excelled in football. Pritam wanted to play for the academy team so he asked the academy football team captain if he could join. The captain told him to bring his boots and to come join the team on the ground, where they were playing against the 8 Gorkha Centre. When Pritam came to the ground, the team captain asked him what position he played. Pritam told him he played in the left half position. The captain then told the British player who played as left half to give his jersey to Pritam so that he could take a turn at it in his place. After playing for half the game, Pritam went to the team captain and asked him if he should return the jersey. The captain replied immediately- "No, not at all, you are now a permanent member of the team!" Thus, Pritam was the only Indian and Sikh (he played with a handkerchief on his topknot) to play for the Indian Military Academy Team. He also represented the academy during the Fifth Dehra Dun District Olympic Games in 1945 and was awarded a certificate for winning first place in the 200 yards sprint in the open section. Pritam was awarded Academy Colours in football and athletics for representing the academy.

Having represented the Indian Military Academy in football and athletics and also showing excellence in all aspects of training, Pritam's Platoon Commander, an Irish Captain appointed him as a Cadet Platoon Commander over 40 cadets of his platoon. It was his responsibility to take all the cadets of his platoon to training venues as per the designed programs. The cadets were required to take orders from Pritam, which he used to write on a blackboard fixed in front of his room. He could even award minor punishments to fellow cadets for disobedience of orders, although this rarely ever happened, as the cadets were hard working and dedicated to the military training.

Pritam was commissioned into the Indian Army on January 20, 1946 and posted to the Dogra Regimental Centre at Jullundur, Punjab as a Second Lieutenant. He was appointed as Company Officer and Centre Signal Officer. Six months later on July 20, 1946 he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. At this time Pritam applied to transfer to the Corps of Signals and was sent for an interview with the Chief Signal Officer, a Brigadier stationed at Rawalpindi. He was selected immediately and sent to the School of Signals where he attended the Signals Conversion course from

January 1, 1947 to July 27, 1947. Upon his successful completion of the course he was posted to the No 1 Signal Training Centre at Jabalpur in the end of July 1947. After just a few months, on October 16, 1947 he was transferred to the 16 Field Regiment Signal Section Regiment at Deolali, near Nasik. In December 1947 when the Jammu & Kashmir War started, the 16 Field Regiment Artillery along with his Signal Section was moved by a special train to Pathankot, then by road to Naushera in the Jammu Sector in order to take part in the operations of war. Pritam remained in this war zone from December 1947 to March 1949.

8 Independence and Partition-1947

In 1947, India was dealt both a devastating blow and the much desired blessing of Independence. Alongside the joy of freedom came the unbearable tragedies of partition as the nation was divided into two countries – India and Pakistan. Pritam's family was blessed in that they were not directly affected by the upheaval of partition. Prior to the partition of India he had been posted at Jabalpur from July, 1947 to October, 1947. Pritam had taken a short leave from his posting at Jabalpur in September after Harjit had given birth to their first daughter Balwinder at Harjit's parent's home on August 7, 1947. As was the custom, Harjit had returned to her parental home for the birth. Pritam had gone home and planned to bring Harjit and his new baby daughter Balwinder with him to Jabalpur.

During this time in September, just as Pritam was making preparations to return to duty and to his cantonment with his family, news reached him about an eruption of violence in Harjit's village. It turned out that Harjit's village had been shelled with gunfire between *Jat* Sikhs living in the village and a platoon of the Indian Army Infantry. Most of the villagers had fled to Pritam's village as well as to other nearby villages. Many were injured, harmed or even killed during the sudden raid and attack. Harjit's grandfather's elder brother was one of those unfortunate souls who was shot and killed in the crossfire. Luckily, Harjit and a now one month

old Balwinder were safe in Pritam's village. Before Pritam, Harjit and Balwinder could leave for Jabalpur he had to return to Harjit's village and gather their belongings because when Harjit had fled from her village, she had not had the chance to bring anything with her. Pritam remembers that rain was lashing with great force that day, but he still managed to get a hold of somebody's horse in order to reach Harjit's village. He asked two military men to join him on their bicycles so that he would not be alone. All along the ride to her village, people warned them, saying, "Don't go there, they don't spare anybody, you'll be killed." But they persevered and when they reached the village, Pritam was met by one of the sentries, guarding the road leading into the village. Luckily, Pritam was wearing his Dogra Regiment uniform with the badge rank of Second Lieutenant (Dogras refers to the caste of soldiers who were often Hindu). So when the soldier saw Pritam, he gave a salute. Such was the rule within the armed services, you didn't salute the person, but you saluted the badge of rank that person held. Pritam told the sentry that he wanted to speak to the person in charge. The sentry told Pritam that the person in charge was on a tour so Pritam then asked to speak to the person who was second-in-command. When Pritam was taken to the second-in-command, he saw that his people had captured about fifteen people or so and were interrogating them. He asked why they were holding those people captive and told them that they should be released because they were of old age. The response Pritam got from the second-in-command was that they wanted the help of these old men to get the villagers who had gone away to return to the village and that they meant them no harm. Pritam indicated that he wanted to take one old man with him to help him get his daughter's clothes from his wife's parent's home. The soldier said "that's absolutely no problem, you can take him." Pritam hurriedly collected the clothes, went back to his village and took his family via Jullundur to Delhi and then from Delhi to Jabalpur. Since Pritam's parents were safe in his village, they remained in their home. Pritam never forgot the slaughters they witnessed along the way to Delhi, as a mass exodus of humanity occurred across the two borders.

It was now October 1947 and Pritam had brought Harjit and Balwinder to the Jabalpur cantonment where he was stationed. After a few weeks in Jabalpur, Pritam and his family were required to move to Deolali for Pritam to take over command of the 16 Field Regiment Artillery Signal. In December, Pritam's Regiment was

put on notice to proceed to Pathankot for operational service in Jammu and Kashmir. Amidst all these incredible changes, Harjit and Balwinder had to be escorted back home to Pritam's village by Pritam's batman (personal attendant), who worked as his assistant to provide support for them in order to reach home safely. They eventually reached Pritam's village and Harjit was re-united with Pritam's parents.

The immediate effect that Independence had on Pritam was the changes within the army structures. For example, there was a massive transfer of power and quick promotions were handed out in order to replace the departing British officers. With the exception of the top British Commander-in-Chief who stayed on in order to ensure smooth transitions within the army, all the other British officers left India permanently.

While partition separated whole communities of people, on a personal note there was immense sadness amongst the military brotherhood because they had been friends with those Muslims who were now leaving India to go and start a life in Pakistan. Everyone was sad to see them leave but due to political reasons the separation of peoples and land was inevitable and had to be accepted.

9 Chhawa Riddge-1948

Very shortly after Pritam took over command of the 16 Field Regiment Artillery Signal Section at Deolali in October 1947, the regiment was ordered to get ready to move to Jammu & Kashmir. The actual move to Jammu for operations took place in December 1947. During that time there were no railroads or good roads between Pathankot and Jammu. The pebbled road connecting the two cities was devoid of any bridges on the major river Ravi and a number of streams overflowed as a result of winter rains. Despite their best efforts, the Regiment still took fourteen days to reach Jammu. Its guns, vehicles and equipment were in such a deplorable condition and the men so exhausted that it took another fourteen days of rest at Jammu for the regiment to get ready for operational tasks. Eventually the Regiment moved to its destination at Naushera, and being the only Artillery Regiment available in the Jammu Division, it covered all operations conducted by Indian troops in the area.

In May 1948 Major R. N. Sawhney, Commanding Officer 19 (Independent) Infantry Brigade Signal Company also located at Naushera came to visit Pritam. Major Sawhney's request to take a ten day casual leave to attend his sister's marriage had been turned down on the grounds that there was no other Signal Officer available in his company to officiate in his absence. He made a request to Pritam to look after his Signal Company for those ten days, to which Pritam agreed. In order to obtain formal permission, Pritam

met the Commanding Officer of the Artillery Regiment who unhesitatingly gave his nod to the arrangement. Then Pritam accompanied Major Sawhney to the Brigade Major who asked Pritam, "Will you take full responsibility for providing 100 per cent of the Signal communications for the brigade during Major Sawhney's absence?" Pritam unhesitatingly replied that he would and Major Sawhney was finally given his leave.

As luck would have it, two days after Major Sawhney left, the Brigade Major called Pritam to his office. Pointing to a large map on the wall he said, "Chhawa Ridge is a part of these very high mountains and it is occupied by a battalion of the opposing forces. It is reported to be heavily fortified; however, the Brigade Commander has decided to capture it." He briefed Pritam on the brigade attack plan and emphasized the importance of Pritam providing excellent signal communications for the Operation. Pritam felt a lot of pressure on him at this point as the sole Signals Officer.

Calmly and seriously looking over the signal communication requirements of the Brigade and Artillery Regiment, Pritam prepared a Signal Plan and called the senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO's) of his Signal Section in for a briefing. As Pritam finished the briefing a number of the NCOs hesitatingly told Pritam that the Signal communications provided the 19 Brigade Signal Company for operations in the past had never worked to the satisfaction of the Brigade Commander and Brigade Major. Pritam was taken aback to hear this at such late a stage of his planning. After considering the NCOs observations, Pritam cancelled his original Signal Plan and prepared a new one, eventually decided to combine the resources of both the Signal Company and his Signal Section and then detail operators according to their expertise. The Brigade/B1 Net was the most important Net for the success of the Operation. Accordingly, Pritam detailed his Signal Section's best Naik (corporal) Operator on its Control Station and his three best Last Naiks (Lance Corporals) on the three Battalions Stations. They were augmented with equally good Operators from the Signal Company. Before the start of the operations, Pritam made sure that signal communications of both the brigade and artillery regiments were working perfectly. As per the brigade plan, the 4 Dogras Battalion under Colonel Davies was to launch a frontal attack on Chhawa Ridge, while the 4 Kumaon Regiment under Colonel Dhillon was to provide covering fire from the left. The 25

pounder guns of the 16 Field Regiment were to pound Chhawa Ridge continuously.

The Brigade Headquarters included the Brigade Commander, Pritam and the control wireless station with its two operators. These headquarters were located on a hill-top from where the movements of the 4 Dogras and their advancements through dense shrubs were clearly visible. After setting up the operations, the Brigade Commander wanted to speak to the Battalion Commanders of the four Dogras on R/T (Radio Telephony). Pritam's Naik Operator got him on the set and asked the Brigade Commander to speak. Their conversation lasted a few minutes. As the Brigade Commander finished speaking Pritam told him that he would make sure the nets were re-netted because the 4 Dogra's sets had gone out of net (the wireless sets, too heavy to be carried by men were loaded on mules and as a result could go out of tune due to their movements). Pritam's Brigade Commander was quick to say "No," and not to touch the sets because he was very happy with the signal communications. As it turned out, the comments by Pritam's NCO's were true in this case.

The Dogras then launched a frontal attack on Chhawa Ridge. After some very fierce fighting, including hand to hand combat they captured their objective, inflicting very heavy casualties on the opposing forces. They also captured hundreds of prisoners of war (POW's). The Dogras suffered casualties too because the terrain they mounted the attack over favored the enemy. Their wounded were evacuated to the nearest hospital for treatment.

The Brigade Commander appeared very pleased by the successful completion of the operation and highly commended the Commanding Officer of the 4 Dogras because they had successfully captured their objective. He also especially commended Pritam for providing excellent signal communications during the operations. Pritam gathered both the Signal Company and Signal Section men and told them that the Brigade Commander was very impressed with their signal communications provided during the operation. Pritam told them to keep up the good work and to always provide good signal communications in the future. When Major Sawhney returned from his leave and learned about the success of the signal communications during the Chhawa Operation, he thanked Pritam for all he had done for his Signal Company

in his absence. He especially appreciated Pritam's new experiment of combining the manpower of his Company and Pritam's Signal Section for the operations. A few months later, the following edict appeared in the Western Command Order No 386 dated July 30, 1948:- "Lieutenant Pritam Singh Jauhal brought to the notice of GOC-in-C (General Officer Commanding in Chief) for gallantry and devotion to duty in the Operations in Jammu and Kashmir."

10 Rajouri-Punch Link-Up - 1948

Shortly after the capture of Chhawa Ridge in 1948, Brigadier Yadonath Singh, the Commander of the 19 (Independent) Infantry Brigade moved his Brigade Tactical Headquarters from Naushera to Rajouri. He then called a conference with a number of Majors, Lieutenant Colonels and Pritam. Pritam was ordered to take part in the briefing because the signal commands he had provided for the brigade during the Chhawa Operation had been so successful.

During the briefing the Brigade Commander told them that according to the latest intelligence reports the opposing forces had set up a large training centre in Mendhar between Rajouri and Punch which needed to be destroyed. To achieve this task a Column of 1/2 Punjab Regiment and 4 Kumaon Regiment with a Signal Element, were ordered to move on foot as no road existed. The Column was to be commanded by Colonel Dhillon of 4 Kumaon and Pritam was ordered to be the Column Signal Officer. They were told that only guns, signal equipment, and the barest of minimal stores were to be carried on mules over the treacherous terrain.

The Brigade Commander also ordered that another Column of 1 Kumaon Regiment under command of Col Pritam Singh, commander of the Punch Garrison would move on foot from Punch. Both Columns were to rendezvous 5 kilometers south of

Mendhar and form into a brigade under Col Pritam Singh. The Brigade would then attack and destroy the Mendhar Training Centre. After completing the task they would all move on foot to Punch.

Major Sawhney and Pritam worked out a Signal Plan for the operation. They decided to establish a wireless net with a control station at the Brigade Tactical Headquarters and two out-stations with the Punch and Rajouri Columns. The control station was to be supervised by Major Sawhney and the out-stations were Pritam's responsibility. In order to erect the Wyndom aerials the out-stations carried two 16 foot telegraph poles each.

Whenever the Column halted for any reason Pritam ordered his wireless operators to erect the Wyndom aerial in a certain direction as guided by his handy compass, which he carried on him all the time. Incidentally, because Pritam had worked as a Telegraph Operator Class 1 during his Service in ranks, he sometimes transmitted the messages himself on the set to help the tired Column Operators. Because of continued resistance by the opposing forces, the Column speed was slow. Furthermore, as this attack was in the summer, the bright sun made life very difficult. The most sought after commodity by every person of the Column was cold water to quench his thirst. Without potable drinking water soldiers drank fresh water that flowed from a nearby spring. Despite the resistance created by the opposing forces both the Rajouri and Punch Columns kept advancing steadily. They finally met at the rendezvous point and formed a brigade under Colonel Pritam Singh's command.

As the planning for the intended attack was underway, 30 or so very young Dogra girls most of whom were pregnant suddenly appeared. They were in great distress as they complained to Col Pritam Singh the Commanding Officer that the nearby Muslims had kidnapped them and were keeping them against their will. They were often beaten and assaulted mercilessly. The girls had luckily found an opportunity to escape from their captors and had come running to the Column for help. They begged the Brigade Commander to unite them with their families. As the Indian troops had arrived in the area, their captors had run away from their houses leaving the girls behind.

These Dogra girls created a big problem for the Brigade Commander. Uniting them with their parents was out of the question, so he decided to evacuate them to Punch, from where they could be flown out by Dakotas. On the orders from the Brigade Commander a small patch of land was leveled alongside a stream for a small aircraft to land. A small single-engine two-seater aircraft called a Harvard was kept at Punch for emergency use. The Brigade Commander ordered the use of that aircraft to evacuate the girls to Punch. The Harvard pilot made three trips and managed to evacuate a few girls. However, shortly afterwards a much bigger aircraft - a Dakota appeared and started circling over the small landing area. On seeing this, Brigadier Pritam Singh asked Pritam to order the Dakota pilot to stop as it was too dangerous for it to land in the small leveled patch. Pritam got in touch with the pilot on radio and passed the Commander's orders, which he acknowledged immediately. Nevertheless, the Dakota kept circling and started descending and reducing speed. After landing, the pilot came uphill to meet the Brigade Commander. Brigadier Pritam Singh was furious at the pilot for disobeying his orders and threatened to put him under arrest. He was so angry with the pilot that he continued with his outbursts in Punjabi. He said that the Dakota now had to be written off and he asked the pilot if he had enough money to pay for the cost of the Dakota.

The Pilot kept quiet, listening very attentively to each of the Brigade Commander's outbursts with his eyes fixed to the ground. When the Brigade Commander's anger subsided somewhat the Pilot requested his permission to say a few words. Upon receiving the Commander's permission, he said, "Sir, I have a family and in case the Dakota were to crash while taking off from here, I too shall die and my family too shall suffer. That is the last thing I would like to happen. I have a very long service in the Indian Air Force and a lot of experience in flying Dakotas. If I had the slightest doubt in my mind about being able to take off, I would never have decided to land. Sir, please trust me and permit me to take all the remaining girls to Delhi in the Dakota. I am positive that I shall succeed in this mission." After careful consideration, the Brigade Commander agreed to his request. All the remaining Dogra Girls were loaded in the Dakota while the pilot took a detailed look at the surrounding hills. He found a saddle between two hill-tops and decided to fly the Dakota above that saddle. He warmed up the aircraft engines for a long while. As the Dakota started moving

the pilot pushed the throttles full forward and took off through the saddle, leaving everyone anxiously waiting and praying for his success. As soon as the Dakota flew past the saddle, the pilot reported "all clear" on the radio telephone. Pritam passed the pilot's message to the Brigade Commander who breathed a sigh of relief. It was later learnt that the Pilot in question was appropriately decorated for that brave deed.

The newly formed brigade launched its well-planned attack on the Mendhar Training Centre and destroyed it completely. Brigadier Pritam Singh was extremely pleased with the two successes. The Brigade then moved to Punch on foot where the Column had a week's rest in Moti Palace and the adjoining buildings. After the short rest the Column started its move to Rajouri following the route it had mapped out for its onward journey. After successfully clearing repeated resistances it faced en route it finally reached Rajouri one sunny hot day. Pritam was on his way to see Major Sawhney to discuss the Signal Column's working for the Operations when he saw Brigadier Yadonath Singh. The Brigadier called Pritam to stop and see him. Pritam saluted smartly and stood waiting to hear him say something. The Brigadier simply started looking at his face curiously, leaving Pritam a little perturbed and wondering what was coming next.

The Brigadier firmly grabbed Pritam by his arms, leaving him a bit stunned. Pritam tried to get away from him, but the grip tightened further and he squeezed his arms. Finally the Brigadier said, "I know what you have done for the Column. I was receiving up to the minute information about the Column's activities on your wireless set. I know it was only made possible by you. I never had such good signal communications in my entire service. Thank you very, very much. You look completely tired and you need sleep." Pointing with his right hand, he said, "That is my bed, go and sleep on it."

Pritam expressed his sincere thanks and gratitude to the Brigadier for his very kind and warm praise. But he told him that he would not sleep on his bed and that sleeping on the ground was good enough for him. The next morning, the Brigade Commander called a meeting of all the Commanders and expressed his great satisfaction that they had successfully destroyed the Mendhar Training Centre. He also mentioned that he had received up-to-the minute

information on the wireless from the Column. For that he especially commended Pritam and his men for their good work. He further asked Pritam to convey his special *Shabash* to his men in appreciation of their work. Pritam in turn most sincerely thanked him for his kind words. Pritam with his men of 16 Field Regiment Artillery Signal Section then rejoined the 16 Field Regiment Artillery at Naushera. The Regiment then moved to the city of Ranbir Singh Pura, South of Jammu to take a well-deserved rest.

11 Attack on Rajouri Surroundings in Jammu & Kashmir-1948

After the capture of Chhawa Ridge and the first link-up of Rajouri-Punch in 1948 conducted under the command of Brigadier Yadonath Singh, the Headquarters of Jammu Division along with its Signal Regiment moved from Jammu to Rajouri. At this point, Brigadier Yadonath Singh was appointed as the officiating General Officer Commanding. Intelligence reports indicated that the areas surrounding Rajouri were occupied by the opposing forces. The General Officer Commanding decided to clear the opposing forces by capturing areas under their occupation.

The General called his subordinate commanders to his headquarters at Rajouri for a briefing. During the briefing he shared all available information about the opposing forces and laid out his plan to put on a division attack on all opposing forces locations, capturing them and driving them from their positions. At this meeting, he also announced that Lieutenant Pritam Singh Jauhal of the 16 Field Regiment Signal Section would be his Signal Officer for the division's Operation.

The General flew in his small plane from Rajouri to Ranbir Singh Pura where the 16 Field Regiment Artillery and its Signal Section had moved for rest. He met Major Mittal, the officiating Commanding Officer of the Regiment and said that he had come

to take Lieutenant Pritam Singh Jauhal to be his Signal Officer for the forthcoming Division Operation. Major Mittal sent for Pritam and when Pritam entered his office, to his surprise he saw General Yadonath Singh sitting there. Pritam saluted him and he asked Pritam to take a seat. As Pritam sat down, the General started talking about his plan for the divisional attack on the areas surrounding Rajouri, which was currently occupied by the opposing forces. He then repeated that he had come to take Pritam to act as his Signal Officer for the Division's Operation. Looking at Pritam he said, "Get ready. Let us go in my aircraft to Rajouri."

Pritam was shocked and didn't know what to say. After thinking very seriously and weighing over the pros and cons of the issue and gaining some strength and courage, Pritam responded: "Sir, I would never say no to you for anything you want me to do, because you have been extremely kind to me in the past. But most respectfully, I submit that I have to serve in the Corps of Signals for a long time. If I were to accompany you and command the Jammu Signal Regiment during the operation, over the heads of my Commanding Officer, as well as all the majors and captains of the Signal Regiment, I would definitely make them all my enemies. I also would not expect any loyalty from the Officers, Junior Commissioned Officers and the men of that Signal Regiment. I am bound to fail in my mission that may affect your operation adversely and I would be the last man to ever want to see that happen."

Pritam further submitted to the General that he would volunteer to coordinate the signal communications of all the Artillery Regiments taking part in the operation and would make sure that they work to the entire satisfaction of everyone. The General who gave Pritam a patient hearing agreed to his suggestion and said, "Alright, you coordinate the Signal Communications of all the Artillery Regiments." He then boarded his plane and left feeling very disappointed. Although Pritam wondered at that point in time if there was anything else he could have done to help the General Officer Commanding, he still heaved a sigh of relief after the General left for Rajouri. Shortly afterward, Pritam received a telephone call from his Commanding Officer Colonel R.N Sen from Rajouri. He asked "When are you coming to take over the Signal Regiment from your own Commanding Officer?" Pritam's reply was prompt, saying, "Sir, how can I take over the Signal Regiment from my own Commanding Officer who is a Colonel

whereas I am only a Lieutenant? “ He replied, “But that is what the General wants.” Then Pritam narrated to him all that had transpired between the General and himself and his decision to decline to take on this role. It was certainly an honour that the General had made such a personal request of Pritam, but at the end of the day it would have caused animosities amongst his colleagues and this was not something Pritam wanted.

12 Uttar Pradesh Area Independent Signal Company Lucknow

After a very successful and hectic tenure in the Jammu and Kashmir Operations from December 1947 to March 1949 as a Lieutenant, Pritam was transferred to the Uttar Pradesh Area Independent Signal Company at Lucknow which was commanded by Major S. S Jones. Brigadier Yadonath Singh was the Sub Area Commander at Meerut. When Pritam told his Officer Commanding Major Jones about his association with Brigadier Yadonath Singh during the Jammu and Kashmir Operations, he sent Pritam to Meerut to command his Signal Detachment there. Pritam called on Brigadier Yadonath Singh to pay his respects who was very pleased to see Pritam there.

After a few months, Brigadier Yadonath Singh received orders from higher authorities to go to Tehri Garhwal State to prepare and submit a comprehensive report by a certain date for the merger of its armed forces into the Indian Army. He called Pritam and asked him to accompany him as his Staff Officer to prepare the report. Pritam admitted that he was not a staff college qualified Staff Officer and he did not know about staff duties. Pritam suggested that he should take one of his qualified Sub Area Staff officers with him for the job. Due to his long association with Pritam during the Jammu and Kashmir operations, the Brigadier had built so much

confidence in Pritam that he said, "You don't worry, I shall guide you on how to do the job." Pritam accompanied him and made his notes as per the Commander's guidance and he also made his own notes. On return from Tehri Garhwal the Sub Area Commander put the entire clerical staff of the Sub Area Headquarters at Pritam's disposal to prepare the report. After working many long hours the report was submitted on time.

Around this time Pritam's second daughter Varinder was born - on December 11th, 1949. To celebrate, Pritam distributed sweets to all personnel under his command. In October 1950, Pritam was moved from Meerut to Lucknow to take over the duties of Second-in-Command of the Signal Company and was promoted to Captain. In addition, the newly appointed Captain Pritam was detailed to look after the Signal Centre at Lucknow. During his stay at Lucknow, Doctor Rajendra Prasad, who was the first President of India paid a visit to Sirojani Nagar near Lucknow. Captain Pritam Singh was selected to command a Guard of Honour of 100 all ranks for the President who was very pleased to inspect the Guard of Honour.

While Pritam was stationed in Lucknow he got news that his wife had given birth to a son (Sukhdev) who was born on December 22nd, 1951. To celebrate this occasion the family had a celebration in their village during Pritam's next home visit.

In November, 1952 Pritam was transferred to command the 166 Indian Infantry Brigade Signal Section in Agra. From there he was sent to attend the Signals Company Commanders course at the Signals School Mhow from June 26th, 1953 to October 31st, 1953. There were three captains and 12 majors undergoing the course. During the course Pritam represented the school in football and hockey. In the final test, Pritam along with a major topped the course with B grade while all the others received a C. After the course Pritam returned to Agra and it was during this time that the 166 Indian Infantry Brigade moved to Dalhousie in June 1953. The brigade was under the 5th Indian Infantry Division. During an annual Signal Regiment training exercise, his Brigade Signal Section was ordered to move to Jullundur at night using side lights only. The drivers of the vehicles had to use great caution while driving their vehicles from Dalhousie to Pathankot over the hilly terrain. They were also later pleased to know that the 166 Indian

Infantry Brigade Signal Section was judged as the best Signal Section during the annual training exercise by their Commanding Officer Lt. Col S. N. Antia (who later became a Major General). In August 1956, Pritam was transferred from Dalhousie to Jullundur on promotion to the rank of Major where he took the command of 2 Company. In November 1957 Pritam was transferred to 1 Technical Training Signal Regiment Jabalpur and took over the Other Trades Wing consisting of Motor Vehicles Company, Lines Company and the Despatch Riders Company.

13 Vietnam War-1961, Pakistan War & China Wars

The other very active role Pritam played in the Indian Army occurred during the Vietnam War in 1961. He was chosen to be a part of the Indian delegation which chaired the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam and Pritam worked in Vietnam from March 5, 1961 to December 30, 1961. The International Commission for Supervision and Control Headquarters was located in Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam. India was chosen as Chair country of the Peace Mission with the other two delegations coming from Canada and Poland. However, from time to time Pritam was transported by air to North Vietnam as well. Pritam's responsibilities were to provide signal communications for the Peace Mission. He provided these signal communications to the International Commission for supervision and control while in Vietnam and he received great cooperation from the other two delegations.

The partition of Vietnam had torn apart large numbers of families with no end in sight to the sorry plight of its people. Pritam remembers one time in particular where he had to go to a hospital for some knee problems he was suffering from. The nurse attending to his knee began to tell him her heart-breaking story. She told him how when Vietnam split into North and South she was separated

from her parents while being told that she would unite with them very quickly. That had been seven years ago according to the poor woman and as she shed tears the only thing she requested of Pritam was to send her parents in Hanoi a letter she had written to them. Pritam's heart went out to this woman but he could not do much for her and he told her the furthest he could take her letter was to the Hanoi airport. This was because his Company headquarters was in Saigon (under Western rule) with a Platoon at Hanoi, which was under communist control. Situations were very tense in North Vietnam and under the communists' control. One evening Pritam was invited to dinner at a South Indian family's house that was living in North Vietnam. When the family saw the sad condition of the communist worker who accompanied Pritam as his assistant (he wore tattered clothing and was obviously in need of help), they offered him money. The worker looked at the family, looked at Pritam and then looked out the window to see if he was being watched. And with a motion of his thumb moving across his neck from left right, the worker said in his broken English, "If I accept this, I will be slaughtered." Such were the conditions of North Vietnam during its communist rule. Although at one point, Hanoi had been called East Paris for its lavish shops and beautiful cities, under communist rule, the city became nothing better than a slum according to Pritam. Although the communists were required to look after Pritam and his men in all respects, their men always followed them closely in Hanoi to watch their every movement. The North Vietnamese were extremely distrustful of their motives knowing full well that they had once been under British rule. Even the driver of the jeep provided by the communists to the Indian Captain was directed not to change the route so that their whereabouts would be known all the time. After Pritam's Signal Company left Vietnam in March 1961 the Commission continued to do the work they had begun. Overall Pritam considered their mission in Vietnam successful because they were able to maintain peace between the two warring nations of North and South Vietnam.

Besides fighting in the 1947-1949 war against Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir, Pritam also took an active part in the 1965 war in West Punjab where he was positioned as a Deputy Chief Signal Officer at Pathankot from September 1965 to March 1966. He was transferred to Phuentsholing in Bhutan to take over command a Signal Regiment on promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

During the 1971 war against East Pakistan Pritam was serving with the Central Reserve Police Force and took part in action in Tripura which is a state in Eastern India.

On June 24, 1966 Pritam was posted to the No. 1 Air Formation Signal Regiment (AFSR) located in Palam, New Delhi. The role of the Regiment was to provide land line communications at a number of Operational Airfields facing Pakistan. Upon arrival, Pritam was not happy to see the old World War vintage barracks in which the Regiment was housed. After Pritam was very confidently and successfully interviewed by his new boss, Air Marshal Shivdev Singh, he still continued to ponder how he would be able to provide a better standard of living for his Regiment. After discussing matters with Air Commodore S.P Singh, Chief Signal Officer (CSO) of the Western Air Command, Pritam decided that he would invite the Air Officer Commanding in Chief (AOC-in-C), Air Marshal Shivdev Singh to visit his Regiment which would be followed by lunch in the nearby mess tent hall. For two weeks, Pritam's Regiment prepared for the AOC-in-C's visit which included a thorough clean up. On the day of his arrival, Pritam was honoured to give his smartest salute to the AOC-in-C. Air Marshal Shivdev Singh went on to inspect Pritam's Regiment, which included demonstrations in Cable Laying, Road Crossing, the use of ACT 1+3 and S+DX, the working of Tele-printers as well as viewing the Unit Lines, stores, the recreation room, the cook house and , the dining hall, the MT Park, the officers mess and all the single officers living accommodation in dug-outs.

Following lunch, the AOC declared that he was so impressed with Pritam's Regiment, that he would be happy to provide anything as a reward. Pritam took this opportunity to request that their Regiment accommodation be refurbished to which the AOC-in-C readily agreed, and added "But that is not enough, you deserve more than that." And so Air Marshal Shivdev Singh presented Pritam a trophy, who proudly accepted it on behalf of the entire Regiment for their accomplishments and hard work ethic. Some years later after Pritam had migrated to Canada, he would receive a letter from the Indian Army's Signal officer-in-Chief and Senior Colonel Commandant of Corps of Signals saying "It may interest you to know that the accommodations of the 1 Air Formation Signal Regiment has improved considerably with the excellent start given by your dedicated efforts. I hope during your next visit

to India, you will spend some time in the Regiment's Officers Mess to see for yourself how the baby you nurtured has grown."

Col Pritam Singh commanded the 1 Air Formation Signal Regiment for two years. From there he was posted to the 'P' Communication Zone Signal Regiment at Alwar, which was his last command in the army.

In 1969 Pritam was sent on deputation to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, as Signal Battalion Commandant. In 1970 Pritam reached the age of 50 and as per military regulations retired from the Indian Army with meritorious service. Following his retirement however, Pritam continued to serve in the CRPF until 1976.

From January 1971 to January 1973 Pritam served in Hyderabad where he was in command of a Signal Battalion of about 1400 officers and men. His role was that equal to a first class magistrate because he had the judicial authority to jail or punish a soldier for up to three years for misconduct if necessary. However, he was not the type to abuse such power and in fact the opposite was true as he was so soft hearted that he often found it difficult to reprimand anyone. Once in particular, a young man approached Pritam wanting to be discharged from service and Pritam told him to be patient and that he would try to assist him as best he could. This young man became impatient and thinking that Pritam was not going to assist him took matters into his own hand. In an attempt to bring matters to a head, the young man caused a raucous in the mess hall where dinner was being served. He purposely came late and when he saw there was little food left for him he began fighting with the poor man serving the food. As a result of his actions, Pritam had to dishonourably discharge the man from service. In addition, he was paraded in front of all his fellow soldiers in a dishonor parade. This was an extreme case where Pritam had no other option but to dishonourably discharge the young man from military service. It was however the one and only time Pritam did so. To him it was a drastic step to take because when a soldier was dishonourably discharged he lost all rights to his pension. This act would leave his family in a very difficult state and it was they who would suffer the most. In every other instance if the soldier would admit his error to him, Pritam would be more than happy to accept his apology and not take further action.

It was while Pritam served in Hyderabad that his dear father passed away on August 28, 1969. He was unable to go home and attend his father's funeral much to his dismay and sorrow. Soon after, he brought his mother to live with him in Hyderabad and a few years later she too passed away on October 5, 1971. Pritam arranged for her last rites and spread her ashes in the river Godavari, which is near *Gurdwara Hazoor Sahib* at Nanded in Andhra Pradesh. Pritam will never forget how despite all the initial fears both his parents had, that they never reprimanded him about his major life decision to join the Indian Armed Forces. The only time his mother ever feared for him was during WWII when she used to hear updates from her village friends. All the women used to talk to each other while standing atop the flat rooftops of the village homes, each house nestled close to the other. It was here the women of the village would discuss which country the Germans had occupied and how many soldiers had been killed. And it was the only time that Pritam's mother had become physically ill because of her fears and worries over him.

14 Retirement

From the Police Signal Battalion, Pritam moved to Chandigarh in December 1976. On the day Pritam retired from the Central Reserve Police Signal Battalion in December 1976, a special ceremony took place to mark his extraordinary career and service. This was the end of his long journey in uniform.

During Pritam's entire thirty eight year span in the military there were only less than a handful of times where he truly regretted joining the service. Once was during training where there was only one *latrine* which was used by all the training recruits. The stench from the *latrines* used to be so putrid that soldiers would wrap layers of a towel around their faces to avoid the odors. The other time he regretted joining the forces was also during training. The physical aspect of training was so strenuous and difficult that when a trainee took off his vest, he could literally wring out the sweat from the clothing. And the third time he ever regretted his military decision was during the German air raids in WWII, where he trembled with fear. These were but rare cases of a military life Pritam is immensely proud of and to this day has no other regrets. Pritam was always thankful that he never had to worry about how Harjit and his children were in his absence because Harjit was the most capable and loving woman. She never let their children feel the void of Pritam not being home. Pritam's children to this day credit so much to Harjit, saying that whenever Pritam was trans-

ferred to a high risk Military Station, Harjit stayed behind with Balwinder, Varinder and Sukhdev essentially as a single parent and took care of all their needs, schooling, clothing, and extracurricular activities along with all the household work.

During Pritam's service in the various wars, life was most uncertain. He sometimes imagined tomorrow would never come and through this agony he used to die and become reborn every day. It was during these vulnerable moments when life was so uncertain for Pritam that he would miss his wife and children the most. Pritam believes that Harjit's and their children's prayers always helped to bring him back home safe and sound. Pritam felt such dire situations from August 1940 when he embarked at Bombay for North Africa to take active part in war against the Germans and Italians along the Suez Canal until he was repatriated in December 1942 to India. Similar circumstances prevailed during wars India fought against Pakistan and China and his nine years of service in the Central Reserve Police Force because of the insurgency in India's Northern States where his men were deployed. Due to the insurgency, many a time Pritam was provided with armed escorts. In Calcutta as he was travelling with three armed Constables and a Deputy Superintendent of Police, five handmade bombs were thrown at the jeep. Luckily the bombs fell right in front of the jeep due to a miscalculation and they all survived. The Director General of the Central Reserve Police Force sent Pritam a message saying, "Heartiest congratulations for a miraculous escape, God is great." After Pritam's retirement from the military he lived a peaceful life in Chandigarh from January 1977 to April 1980 with Harjit. By this time, his three children, Sukhdev, Balwinder and Varinder had married and immigrated to Canada, where they had had all settled. In 1980 Pritam's children had a heartfelt discussion with Pritam and Harjit saying that they needed the support and love of their mother and father in Canada, and that with them being so far away in Chandigarh, it was difficult for both sides. And so Harjit and Pritam left their home in Chandigarh for the next great phase in their life to move to Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. And although Pritam thought that the battles in his life had ended with his service in the military, he would actually end up fighting battles of a different kind in his new home.

PART THREE

Canada

15 Arrival & Fight for the Widows of War Veterans

In April 1980 Pritam and Harjit left their home in Chandigarh to build their new lives in Canada with their children. Leaving India to be with their children in Canada was not a difficult decision. In fact, it was the easiest decision for both Pritam and Harjit. Pritam recalls that in Chandigarh the postman used to come three times a day to deliver the mail and everyday Pritam awaited the postman three times a day to see if there was a letter from one of his three children in Canada. Both Pritam and Harjit yearned to be with their children and so, when their middle daughter Varinder sponsored them, they readily packed up and left India for Canada. As he left the land of his birth, Pritam pondered on the life he had lived thus far in India and wondered what sorts of new adventures waited for him in Canada. When Pritam and Harjit arrived at the Vancouver airport all three children and their families greeted them with open arms. Their eldest daughter Balwinder held back her tears when she saw her father's beautifully tied turban rise proudly above all the others' heads. Pritam and Harjit quickly settled into their new home and surroundings, supported by the love of their children.

Before his arrival in Canada Pritam had been told by his children that Sikhs sometimes do not wear turbans in Canada, because of

racism and told of how other Canadians made fun of them. Often people used disrespectful and derogatory language towards their Sikh identity and called them racist names. He also learned that although Canada's Human Rights Act of 1971 forbade discrimination based on race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief and religion, Sikhs continued to be discriminated against. Racially motivated hate incidents including scribbling insulting and derogatory phrases on walls on the homes and cars of Sikhs, throwing rocks, burning their houses and other properties, were not uncommon. Not only this, Pritam also heard that there were reported incidents of death threats uttered against Sikhs.

Having worn a turban all his life including during his service during World War II alongside Canadians, Pritam was shocked and taken aback to learn that incidents of racism continued to occur in a modern multicultural, multiracial and multi-religious country such as Canada. It was surprising that this was occurring even when UN sanctioned "The International Day to Eliminate Racism" was marked during the last week of March every year all over the country.

After arriving in Canada and seeing all the racism he himself had to deal with, Pritam had half a mind to return to India. As a respected Lieutenant Colonel who had served so bravely and nobly in the military, it was shocking and upsetting for him to see all the insults he was berated with when he ventured out. Pritam and Harjit decided to sit their children down and tell them their decision to return to Chandigarh. All the children; Balwinder, Sukhdev and Varinder sat in front of Pritam and Harjit, and they had this to say: "Mom and Dad your own blood is sitting here right in front of you. Will you choose those bricks sitting there in Chandigarh, or will you choose us?" Hearing them, Pritam and Harjit realized that they had no other option than to bear what might come their way and stay in Canada with their children.

That day of reckoning came much sooner than expected when one day, during his evening walks on a sidewalk east of the intersection by King George Highway and 100th Avenue in Surrey, Pritam noticed an old blue car coming towards him from the opposite direction. The car occupants yelled at him from a distance, shouting, "Hey Paki! Go back to your country." They repeated this a number of times, each time a little louder than the last. As the

lights at the intersection turned red, the car came to a halt. Pritam also stopped, nearly ten metres away from their car.

Seeing Pritam stop, the two male and one female teenager stepped out of the car and came towards him. When they came closer, Pritam asked them simply as to why they were yelling at him. One of the boys speaking calmly simply replied that he wanted him to go back to his country. Pritam responded that Canada was also his country.. They retorted that they were Canadian-born, whereas Pritam had come from some other country. Pritam replied that while this was true, their elders like him had also come to Canada from other countries. The arguments from both sides continued for a few more minutes in the same vein. Suddenly, the girl took a fully grown German shepherd dog out of the car and ordered it to attack Pritam. Despite their repeated orders the dog did not move even an inch towards Pritam. It was obvious that since Pritam had done no harm to the teenagers or their car, the dog did not obey the girl's instructions. Seeing this Pritam told them firmly and unhesitatingly that he had seen enough blood during World War II and other wars and that he was not scared of their dog or them.

As they were getting back into their car Pritam approached them and asked them to take a personal message from him to their forefathers. Pritam told them to tell their family what they had done, or at least tried to do to a retired Indian Army Colonel. He also challenged them that if their families left Canada, he would also pick up his entire family and leave Canada. He said that except for the Aboriginal communities everyone was an immigrant to Canada in one way or another. The youngsters took off in their vehicle without another word. To be on the safe side, Pritam reported the matter to the Surrey RCMP immediately.

On another occasion, while on a morning walk Pritam was hit with a half-eaten apple on his right shoulder. In pain and as he turned to look back, he found two school boys running into the nearby heavily wooded area. Even though Pritam and his son searched for them they could not be found. Pritam had many experiences of racism, including incidents of name-calling and shouting from ignorant Canadians dozens of times, sometimes on a daily basis since his arrival in Canada.

Even though Harjit and Pritam came to terms with the fact that they would be staying in Canada with the support and love of all three of their children, Pritam still realized very quickly that he couldn't sit still in his retirement. He wondered that surely there was something more productive that he could accomplish. That need for a greater accomplishment manifested two-fold. The first was through his desire to help the widows of Indian ex-servicemen to receive their family pensions. He had heard that several such widows in Canada were facing difficulties in receiving family pensions from the Indian Government because of their lack of resources and knowledge. One such widow was Mrs. Pritam Kaur Basi, wife of the late Major Paramjit Singh Basi. Major Paramjit Singh Basi and Pritam had served together in the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade Signal Section during World War II where Basi was a Signals Fitter and Pritam was a Telegraph Operator. They had also later spent some time together after they connected once again in Canada. Pritam wanted to personally handle this pension case so that he could help the widow of the man whom he considered to be like a brother. Pritam felt that it was part of his moral duty to help Major Basi's widow.

The late Major Paramjit Singh Basi, Signals fought in World War II in North Africa as a part of the 8th British Army under the world famous Field Marshal Montgomery from June 1940 to December 1942. Basi did not fight for himself or his family, but to defend the Commonwealth and preserve democracy so that people all over the world could live together and enjoy their freedom in peace. Basi had served with the forward-most troops and faced hostile bombing, strafing and artillery/small arms fire thereby making his life very tenuous. While hundreds of thousands of his comrades lost their lives or limbs, he was lucky to survive and return home. After serving his country, Basi retired and immigrated to Canada with his wife to spend their golden years with their children. Due to old age, both husband and wife developed a number of ailments and Major Basi passed away on March 25, 1989 after suffering a cardiac arrest.

Unfortunately, Major Basi's family pension was not recorded in his Pension Payment Order and his widow Mrs. Pritam Kaur Basi had to apply for her widow's pension. With instructions from the higher pension authorities in India, Mrs. Basi completed numerous forms attested by a Notary and the Consul General of India in

Vancouver. To receive her pension through a bank in India she opened a savings bank account with the Bank of India in Jullundur. Mrs. Basi's pension case required correspondence over a long period, creating an uphill and time-consuming task for her. Her banker in India, on receipt of her Pension Plan Order instructed her to appear in person at the bank with the necessary documents to receive her first pension. Mrs. Basi's health by then had taken a turn for the worse and she had been declared medically blind. She had many other complications as well, as a result of which and because of her very old age she was declared unfit to travel to India. She therefore requested her banker in India to credit her pension to her bank account as a special case but the bank authorities regrettably refused to budge. Consequently she approached the Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (CDA) in Allahabad to direct her banker to pay her pension without her personal appearance. The CDA sent her banker a letter on the Government of India letterhead authorizing her as a pensioner living abroad to receive her pension without her personal appearance in India.

When Mrs. Basi approached her bank to credit her pension as per instructions from the CDA, the Bank wrote back that her case had become time-barred and the payment would now require a sanction of the competent authority i.e. the CDA. She was sent numerous forms and papers for completion and return, paying the many fees out of her own pocket - something she could ill-afford and returned them to her banker for further action. The back and forth correspondence moved at a snail's pace. After many long years of waiting Mrs. Basi became frustrated, disappointed and dejected and gave up hope of receiving her late husband's family pension during her lifetime.

As a last resort on Mrs. Basi's behalf, Pritam wrote letters giving comprehensive details of her case and prevailing health to all conceivable concerned authorities beseeching their help. Most of the recipients of her letter felt pity for her and wrote to her banker to be considerate and pay her the pension on compassionate grounds. Some of them also wrote to the CDA in Allahabad to intervene in the matter.

Finally Mrs. Basi received a letter from her banker in March 2003, informing her that Rs 2, 12,000 (approximately \$3,900.00 CDN) had been credited to her bank account. Mrs. Basi suffered financially

for fourteen long years without her pension through no fault of her own. She felt that a great injustice was done to her by the pension authorities in India. During this fourteen year-long battle and delay in getting Mrs. Basi's pension case resolved, Pritam could not help writing about it to the President of India and Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed forces. He wrote comprehensive details of the case and expressed his great concern with the manner in which a widow of a World War II veteran had been neglected by the Indian pension authorities. Pritam was delighted to receive an email dated June 26, 2003 from Mrs. Padmaja, Under Secretary (NRI-I) to the President of India, Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed Forces. Its contents were as follows:

Please refer to your letter dated April 30, 2003 addressed to the President of India regarding the pension case of Mrs. Pritam Kaur Basi. To enable us to coordinate with the Controller General of Defence Accounts, will you please send us the relevant details of the pension case including copies of the correspondence made by Mrs. Basi with concerned authorities.

Responding to this email Pritam compiled a comprehensive and detailed case of Mrs. Basi's pension consisting of some 107 sheets bound properly in a binder. The binder was forwarded to the President of India, through the Diplomatic Bag of the Consulate General of India, Vancouver on July 16, 2003.

Pritam also assisted with another widow's case, that of Mrs. Swarn Kaur, beginning in 1997. Subedar Sohan Singh (Signals) put his life on the line during WWII in North Africa to support the war effort. Many years after his retirement Subedar Sohan Singh and his wife Swarn Kaur migrated to Canada. Unfortunately, Subedar Sohan Singh died on November 27, 1993 and it took three years of back and forth correspondence before his widow Swarn Kaur's family pension was officially sanctioned. Mrs. Swarn Kaur was asked to report to the Defence Pension Disbursing Officer (DPDO) in Hoshiarpur with her pension book in hand so she could draw her first pension.

Unfortunately, the 79 year old Swarn Kaur was admitted into the Burnaby Hospital on February 19, 1997 due to a sudden attack of paralysis, leaving her left side paralyzed. Medical reports issued by her doctor deemed her unfit to travel unless she made some recovery, which was highly unlikely. Pritam forwarded a copy of her medical report to the Defence Pension Disbursing Officer (DPDO) in Hoshiarpur who transferred Mrs. Kaur's pension file to the State Bank of India, Jullundur, as Mrs. Kaur had opened a savings bank account in the State Bank of India, Banga which falls under the jurisdiction of State Bank of India, Jullundur.

A copy of the medical report on Swarn Kaur was forwarded to the State bank of India, Jullundur with a request to credit her pension into her savings bank account without her personal appearance in India, as she was unfit to travel on medical grounds. Unfortunately Mrs. Kaur's condition took a turn for the worse and she became bed and wheelchair bound and unable to feed herself. She had been told clearly and unequivocally by her doctor that she would never leave the hospital. While she was lying in this precarious condition in the hospital, all activities on her family pension case were brought to a grinding halt by the officials dealing with it.

Pritam had personally dealt with the family pension case of Mrs. Swarn Kaur from the very start. After many years of his tireless efforts he became so disappointed that he decided to write personal letters to many serving and retired friends asking them to help the poor, bedridden widow on the grounds of extreme compassion. He also wrote letters to the Army Headquarters requesting them to intervene in the matter. Since the banks in India fall under the Ministry of Finance, he also wrote a letter to the Finance Minister giving him complete details of the case and requesting his intervention. Sitting thousands of kilometers away from India there was precious little else Pritam could do.

Eventually, Pritam was pleased that the State Bank of India and other officials dealing with Swarn Kaur's pension case buckled down under the intense pressure from Army Headquarters and the Finance Minister. As a result, the widow's family pension file started moving and picking up speed. Ultimately, on August 12, 2003, the State Bank of India, Banga informed Mrs. Kaur that her family pension from November 28, 1993 had been credited to her

bank account and the same effective January 8, 2002 onwards was being regularly credited.

After such good news Mrs. Kaur was faced with another dilemma. The State Bank of India refused to issue any cheques because Mrs. Kaur was unable to sign her name. She was illiterate, and could only provide a thumb impression. All pleas from Mrs. Kaur and Pritam to the State Bank of India, Banga requesting them to issue a cheque book to the widow fell on deaf ears of its officials. This amounted to nothing short of disservice by the bank not only to the widow of a WWII veteran, but also to the military pensioners at large. This callous behavior on the part of bank officials could not be accepted under any circumstances. Both Mrs. Swarn Kaur and Pritam were so disgusted with the despicable attitude of the bank officials, that Pritam wrote another personal letter to the Finance Minister by name, requesting his personal intervention in the matter one more time. Finally under direct orders from the Finance Minister the State Bank of India, Banga dispatched a cheque book to the widow. The tragedy of all this was that Mrs. Swarn Kaur could not even physically receive and use her long awaited cheque book as she breathed her last on April 24, 2004.

Pritam could not even begin to convey his distress and annoyance that it took ten full years of constant correspondence to get the family pension of a WWII veteran's widow into her bank account. Pritam thought what good was that pension to her when she could not draw it in her life time? Is this the reward Mrs. Swarn Kaur received for what her husband put his life on the line during WWII? Pritam began to wonder how many more widows of World Wars veterans were suffering like the late Swarn Kaur in Canada and other countries of the world, where military pensioners have settled permanently. Remedial measures need to be taken at the highest level to prevent such cases from occurring in the future. That is why Pritam continued to help the families of war veterans. In doing so, Pritam was able to have over thirty five cases of Indian Ex-Servicemen (or their widows) pensioners finalized by the Indian authorities.

16 Forging the Indian Ex-Serviceman Society of BC

While fighting for Mrs. Basi's and Mrs. Swaran Kaur's cases during those fourteen plus years, Pritam realized the need for an organization which could serve the Indian Ex-Servicemen and their families. These cases and many others were eye-openers for Pritam. Seeing how much these poor, undeserving women and families suffered, Pritam realized that the Government of India needed to take appropriate action to ensure that no widow or family of Ex-Servicemen suffered the pain, stress and financial loss that Mrs. Basi and Mrs. Kaur suffered. This was the impetus Pritam needed to create the Indian Ex-Servicemen Society of British Columbia on May 13th, 1995. Before he could formally begin the work on creating the Society, Pritam needed to speak with Harjit regarding his new found commitment. Pritam cautioned Harjit that when formed, this Society would mean many phone calls coming to their house as well as an untold amount of work would be required on Pritam's part. As always, Harjit was full of support and compassion for all the people who needed assistance.

The Indian Ex-Servicemen in Canada (or their families) had been facing numerous difficulties with respect to issues such as military pensions, the general welfare of their families, dealing with properties in India, as well as a number of other personal problems

while living in Canada. Pritam realized that there was no official or private organization which could help resolve their problems in both Canada and India. With a view to help solve these problems a group of Indian Ex-Servicemen living in Surrey and Delta met at the Grand Taj Banquet Hall in Surrey and collectively founded the Indian Ex-Servicemen Society of British Columbia. This was the first society of its kind formed on a provincial basis and he was honoured to be elected as the first President. Pritam's first task as President was to make Captain Lakha Singh Mann his Secretary. The one hundred and twenty Indian Ex-Servicemen who attended this initial meeting were overjoyed when the Society was formed and they all became members for an annual fee of \$10.00. For those members who could afford it, they also donated additional funds to the Society or helped by donating furniture. The space for the Society was provided by a local businessman who also provided the Society with a telephone connection free of charge. Much to Pritam's credit, this initial group of 120 Society members would grow to another 400 in the coming years. To help gain press and promote the Society, Pritam went on a South Asian television show hosted by Shushma Dutt and offered his services to any Indian Ex-Servicemen or their families who needed help. As soon as the interview was aired, Pritam's home phone began ringing incessantly, with scores of Indians requiring assistance.

The society name was officially approved and incorporated by the Government of BC. In its incorporation papers, the Society's mandate was stated as such:

To alleviate numerous difficulties faced by Indian Army, Navy and Air Force ex-servicemen regarding their pensioner matters, service medals, property and legal matters in India and regarding settling down in Canada due to language problems, citizenship, employment and unemployment insurance, a Society named 'Indian Ex-Servicemen Society British Columbia' was formed on May 13, 1995.

One of Pritam's official acts as President was to send letters of information to the Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chretien, Federal Ministers and select MLA's in Victoria, as well as local Mayors and Council Members all over the Lower Mainland. He also sent a letter to the Prime Minister of India, P. V. Narasimha Rao, The High Commissioner of India in Canada, the Consul

General of India, Vancouver, the Indian Military Attaché in Washington and the Indian Naval and Air Headquarters in New Delhi. In the very first year alone Pritam was able to get a policy implemented through the Indian Consulate that Indian Ex-Servicemen living abroad over the age of 65 would not be required to pay the fee for an Indian visa required to travel to India. Pritam was able to achieve this feat when he and his Society members met the High Commissioner of India in Canada, Mr. Prem Kumar Budhwar in June, 1996. During a reception in honour of the Commissioner, Society members led by Pritam discussed their experiences living in Canada as well as pleaded for the Indian government to do away with visa fee charges for all Indian Ex-Servicemen living in BC. Mr. Budhwar, without any hesitation, agreed to Pritam's and the Society's request.

Pritam also tried his very best to break down cultural barriers by having the newly appointed society members take part in the Remembrance Day ceremonies at the Whalley Legion Branch, Surrey. Fifty society members marched behind the society banner - a march which was accorded great praise by the spectators. A *shalok* by Guru Gobind Singh Ji was also translated in English and included in the prayers read out by the Branch Chaplain. During Pritam's first few years as President he also arranged for members to take part in dialogue with Delta Police officials in order to discuss how the community and police force could work together to combat alcohol abuse, drugs, domestic violence, and prevent young offenders from becoming involved in criminal activity. A few years following its founding, the members of the Society were honoured during India's Republic Day celebrations hosted by the Indian Consulate, Vancouver on January 26th, 1996. The Society and Pritam certainly did not shy away for any criticisms or controversies either. For example, following their invitation and presence during India's Republic Day celebrations, there was some community backlash and anger over the Sikh veterans saluting the Indian flag. Some community newspapers attempted to stir controversies by claiming that members of the Society accepted their mistake and were apologetic for attending the ceremonies. This was false and Pritam followed up with an open letter sent to the South Asian media which included sixteen detailed points as to why the newspapers were in the wrong for spreading lies. Pritam was certainly not one to shy away from a debate. In another incident, a caller speaking on a South Asian radio show spoke disrespectfully

about Sikh veterans. Pritam alongside a delegation of his Society members appeared at the radio station and demanded an explanation for them allowing such hateful words to be propagated. The radio station hosts and management in turn immediately apologized and reiterated the respect they have for Sikh war veterans, even showing Pritam and his colleagues a picture of a Sikh war veteran displayed proudly in the studio.

Along with fifty Society members Pritam also took part in a march held in Surrey which raised funds to work on the eradication of racism. He was in turn interviewed by news stations such as the CBC and BCTV. He wanted to make sure that by forming such a society, they would become involved on all aspects of the community and would remain engaged with the community. In another community event, Pritam and his Society members were invited to attend the Indo-Canadian Senior's Workshop in 1997. The workshop was organized through the National Indo-Canadian Council, thus showing the importance that the Society had amidst other major South Asian organizations. Pritam was very proud to say that during his two-year term as President many goals were accomplished and bridges were built within the community. For fourteen years, Pritam worked from home, on his typewriter, advocating for many Indian Ex-Servicemen, their wives and their families. He continues to remain an active member of the Indian Ex-Servicemen Society of British Columbia to this day.

PART FOUR

Battle for my Turban and my Faith Denied

17 Faith Denied & Correspondence with the Queen

While Pritam was fighting for the widows of Indian war veterans and while he was managing and participating in the many activities associated with the Indian Ex-Servicemen Society of BC, he did not realize that he would soon be facing the greatest battle of his life.

The battle was fought on Canadian soil against an iconic Canadian organization, but it showed remarkable strength of courage and character on Pritam's part. This remarkable story unfolded on November 11, 1993 when Lt. Col Pritam Singh, along with fellow WWII Sikh veterans: Flying Officer Harbhajan Singh Minhas (Ret'd), Subedar Puran Singh Saran (Ret'd), Sepoy Waryam Singh Bains (Ret'd), and Subedar Major Honorary Captain Mehar Singh Baring (Ret'd) were denied entrance into the Newton Legion Branch by its President Mr. Frank Underwood during the annual war veterans Remembrance Day ceremonies.

A few weeks before the November 11 Remembrance Day ceremonies in 1993 Pritam had read a public invitation by the Newton Legion Branch in the local community newspapers for veterans to gather to pay respect to fallen soldiers. Five Indian veterans decided to attend the Remembrance Day ceremonies and on November 8th, exactly three days prior to the ceremony, Pritam

visited the Newton Legion Branch and received clearance from Mr. Arni Bayless, the Parade Commander to wear his formal army jacket displaying all his medals and his turban.

On November 11th, 1993 the proud Indian veterans wore their formal army jackets and joined the ceremonies at the Cenotaph in Newton, Surrey. After the formal commemorative event, they joined the parade of veterans as they marched to the Legion hall for speeches and refreshments. But as the Indian veterans approached the door, they were refused entry by the Legion President, Mr. Frank Underwood, while others continued to stream by into the hall.

Pritam and the veterans were shocked and humiliated when they found that they were not going to be allowed to enter the Legion hall. They stood outside pleading their case to the President but it was to no avail. What was the cause of this humiliation? It was their turbans - they were told the turban had to be removed in order for them to go inside the Legion hall. No headdress was allowed in the Legion Hall as it was considered disrespectful. As proud and practicing Sikhs they naturally refused to remove their turbans considering their lifelong commitment to the honour of their sacred symbol. Under these circumstances Pritam thought how could he even begin to convey his dismay, humiliation and frustration to those who were standing in front of him – his fellow veterans? The four other veterans were also completely baffled, as they wondered how when every veteran was given an open invitation to attend the ceremonies that these few men could still be denied entry. They questioned how was it that Pritam had received prior approval to join the ceremonies knowing full well he was a turbaned Sikh, and yet he and the other veterans were still denied entrance as invited guests of the Legion? The contradictions had become endless.

Six senior female members of the Newton Legion who heard Pritam's arguments outside the door with Mr. Underwood were considerably upset. They told Pritam and the others with folded hands, "Gentleman, we are extremely sorry for the manner in which you have been insulted as a guest by our President. We apologize to you on behalf of our Legion." But their apology held no weight to remove the ban on turbans within the hall at that moment. Even more shocking was that there were women coming

into the Legion hall with berets on who were being allowed in. When Pritam asked why the law was not restricting them, he was told that women have been wearing such a head-dress for seventy years and so it was acceptable. For the Indian veterans the hypocrisy of the rules was reaching incredulous limits.

As a result of what was happening at the door Ms. Penny Priddy, MLA for the Surrey-Newton constituency and a Minister in the British Columbia Government, walked out of the lounge in protest against the way the veterans were being insulted in public. She had been scheduled to deliver a speech which she never gave. Councillor Bruce Ralston and a few other dignitaries also walked out of the ceremony. This unfolding real life drama inevitably brought the national and international media on the scene.

Baffled and upset, yet determined to find resolution, Pritam drove back to his house where he found news crews with two TV trucks waiting for him. They asked him to accompany them to the very doors of the Newton Legion where he was denied entrance. They wanted to interview Pritam at the spot where he had been refused entry to the Newton Legion. Pritam agreed and accompanied them. When he arrived at the Newton Legion there were over fifty media crews waiting for him. He was bombarded with questions by a throng of media. Seeing that so many of them wanted to talk to him, he told them that he would not return home until all the interviews were done and his voice was fully heard. He stayed there for nearly an hour and a half giving interviews, knowing that through the media the case of these veterans could be made known to the entire world. It would turn out that the various forms of media would end up serving as Pritam's greatest allies. Many members of the Newton Legion there were sympathetic toward Pritam and they promised to go alongside Pritam in the battle of rights and respect that Pritam promised he would wage.

The next day on Friday, November 12, 1993 - Pritam's story was featured in the main headlines of both The Vancouver Province and The Vancouver Sun. The Vancouver Province's headline exclaimed "No Sikhs allowed," and the Vancouver Sun's headline exclaimed "Legion slams door in Sikhs' face."

Pritam was so distraught and upset by the humiliation he had faced, that he wrote the following letter to the Newton Legion,

Surrey branch a few days after November 11th. This is an extract of that open letter:

On April 15, 1944 Abdul Hafiz was ordered to attack a strong position. He led the assault across a bare slope and up a steep cliff, killing several of the enemy himself. He pressed on regardless of machine-gun fire. He received two wounds, the second of which was fatal, but first he captured a critical position and routed an enemy vastly superior in numbers.

Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.

On Sep 23, 1918, while charging a strong position on the River Jordon, Badlu Singh realized machine-guns and 200 Infantry men were inflicting heavy casualties on his cavalry Squadron. With the entire disregard of danger, he charged. He was mortally wounded on the summit while capturing one of the machine guns, but all the guns and infantry had surrendered to him before he died.

Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.

On Nov 22, 1944, in East Mayru Arakan, Burma, Bhandari Ram's platoon was pinned down by machine-gun fire. Wounded and in full view of the enemy, he attacked a Japanese machine-gun. Wounded again, he crawled to within five metres. He then threw a grenade, killing the gunner and two others. This inspired his platoon to rush and capture the enemy position. Only then did he allow his wounds to be dressed.

Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.

In the early hours of Apr 20, 1943, at Djebel Garli, Tunisia, the advance of a battalion was held up by machine-gun and mortar fire. Chhelu Ram dashed forward with a tommy gun and killed the occupants of the post. He then went to the aid of his wounded Company Commander and in turn he was wounded. Regardless of his wounds, he took command, and led his men in hand-to-hand fighting. He was again wounded

but continued rallying his men until he died.

Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.

On March 2, 1945, on the road between Kamyé and Myingyan, Burma, where the Japanese were strongly positioned, Gian Singh alone kept firing his tommy-gun and rushed to the enemy fox holes. In spite of being wounded in the arm he went on hurling grenades. He attacked and killed the crew of a cleverly concealed anti-tank gun and then led his men down a lane, clearing all the enemy positions. He went on leading his Section until the action had been satisfactorily completed.

Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.

On March 10, 1915, at Neuve Chapelle, France, during an attack on the German position, Gobar Singh Negi was one of a bayonet party who entered the enemy's main trench. He was the first man to go around each traverse, driving back the enemy until they surrendered. He was killed during this engagement.

Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.

On April 10, 1921, near Haidari Kach , North West Frontier, India, Ishar Singh was No 1 of a Lewis gun Section. Early in the fighting, he was severely wounded. All the officers of his company became casualties and his Lewis gun was captured. He recovered the gun and went into action again although his wound was bleeding profusely. When ordered to have it dressed, he went to the aid of the medical officer, carrying water to the wounded. While the medical officer dressed wounds, Ishar Singh used his own body to shield the medical officer from enemy fire.

Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.

In the early hours of Dec 16, 1944, in the Kaladan Valley, Burma, Umrao Singh was in charge of a gun in an advanced

Section of his Battery. He repeatedly beat off enemy attacks. In the final assault, he struck down three of the enemy in hand-to-hand fighting. After the fighting when found exhausted he was found wounded beside the gun, as number of enemy men lay dead while his gun was still in action.

Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.

Pritam truly felt that at this moment in time his battle to legally protect the Sikh turban had begun. What commenced for the next year was a barrage of newspaper, television and radio interviews, filing a case with the BC Human Rights Council against the Newton Legion Branch #175, letters to the Queen of England, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of BC, local MLA's and politicians, and the World Sikh Organization.

Pritam was asked to speak on various national TV Channels and radio talk shows to give detailed accounts of the incident. He also received numerous telephone calls from many countries for interview requests. A television team came from Australia to interview him. Journalists from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) interviewed him on the phone many times. Journalists and reporters called Pritam from all across North America. As a result, Pritam was kept occupied around the clock. During this ordeal Pritam had the full support of his family including Harjit and their three children; although the children feared for Pritam's very life at times. In the end they all decided that this was a fight that Pritam had to pursue and they encouraged him to never give up.

At times during the ordeal because of the very real physical threats he faced, there was a point in time that Pritam thought that he would not be able to fight the Legion policies. It was here that he was reminded of the story of Sant Baba Nidhan Singh. Nidhan Singh was the only turbaned Sikh doing *seva* at Nanded (earlier in Hyderabad State, India and now in Andhra Pradesh) and was often ridiculed and tormented by people around him. Feeling much hurt, he decided to return to his home in Punjab. While waiting at the railway station he experienced the *darshan* of the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh Ji who asked of him, "Bas, ho gayee *seva*? (Is that all? Have you done your service)?" Overcome by this vision of the tenth Sikh Guru and his challenge filled question, Nidhan

Singh returned to Nanded and built the *Gurdwara Sachkhand Sahib*, where millions of devotees come to worship and take part in its *guru ka langar*.

Like Nidhan Singh, Pritam was among the few turbaned Sikhs who have faced ridicule and verbal torment and done something about it in a very public manner. One day as Pritam prayed to Guru Gobind Singh Ji, he also heard a voice telling him to not worry and advising him not to keep his turban in the front during his battle with the Legion, but to advocate behind the narrative that he came to the Legion as an invited guest and was still denied entrance. By remembering these words of advice and the strength from the voice he heard very much like what that the tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh Ji imbued into Baba Nidhan Singh, Pritam also forged on with his battle. And forged on he did, not in malice or in anger, but with formidable strength and courage. This was because when Pritam first saw himself on television being interviewed immediately after being denied entrance into the Legion he saw himself full of anger. Pritam realized that if he was to fight an honest fight and with his *ek pagh* as his strength, he should remain calm and straightforward and simply let the Canadian viewers/listeners be the judges.

Miss Reeta Sharma, a reporter from for the Tribune, Chandigarh India, travelled to Canada to interview Pritam. She had seen his name and photographs in a number of Indian newsprint and electronic media and decided to come to Canada to interview him. Her interview lasted over two and a half hours and her beautifully worded story was published in the Chandigarh Tribune on July 29, 1994. Here is a brief excerpt from her article:

Once offended and humiliated, he fought the battle of his *pagh* symbolic of his honour and religion, like a warrior. There is not a weapon in his arsenal which he did not put to use. "I had to restore the honour of my turban" he says, looking back. "During all interviews with national media I overemphasized that I went to the Newton Legion on an invitation. In case I was at fault the listening public is my court. Any penalty awarded to me by it I shall accept unhesitatingly. But in case the fault lies with Newton Legion officials, the listening public should deal with them as considered appropriate. This policy helped me enormously to win the hearts of Canadian people."

While the national media (television, newspapers and radio) gave the issue a constructive, analytical and appropriate airing, Pritam was to fight the battle of his honour and turban on many other fronts. Pritam started by writing letters giving details of the incident and explaining the symbolic significance of the turban to all related authorities and figure heads. He wrote to every Member of Parliament of Canada, all organizations dealing with religious discrimination, Canadian justice agencies, the Governor-General of Canada, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of BC, and even the Queen giving his point of view. Pritam also wrote to the Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion at Ottawa to keep them informed of the developments.

On December 9th, 1993, Pritam wrote a letter to the Queen of England at Buckingham Palace to share his story and his distress. He thought surely she would understand this plight of a Sikh soldier.

To:
Her Majesty the Queen,
Buckingham Palace,
London,
England

Madam,

I have the honour to state that my father fought under the British Empire, during the First World War and I in the second. I served in the 8th British Army under world famous Field Marshall Montgomery. I took an active part in the very famous battle of El Alamein. I saw thousands of my comrades laying down their extremely valuable lives. I was lucky to survive.

I retired from the Indian Army as a Lieutenant Colonel after over 38 years of meritorious service in the British as well as Indian Army. I was awarded 13 medals and stars. I immigrated to Canada in 1980 and am a Canadian Citizen.

I read an invitation from the Newton branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in a community newspaper on November 03, 1993, to immigrant veterans, inviting them to attend Remembrance Day services on November 11, 1993. I decided to attend.

On November 11, 1993, wearing my 13 medals and stars I marched along with 1500 veterans to the cenotaph where some speeches were made, prayers were offered, last post and reveille was sounded and one minute silence was observed. The parade including four other Sikh veterans and myself marched to the Newton Legion branch building. I was stopped at the door of the Legion Hall and not allowed to enter, unless I removed my turban. I was told that a 1946 by-law bans head dress inside the Hall, I tried to reason with the President explaining in detail, some of which were as under:-

(a) I came on invitation to attend the services. I should therefore, be treated as a guest with respect and decency and allowed to complete the ceremonies inside the hall.

(b) A turban for a Sikh is not merely a head dress, but a religious symbol and a Sikh never removes it in public.

(c) Many Sikhs invited to Buckingham Palace over the years were not asked to remove their turbans. They joined the King/Queen for banquets and dinners with turbans on their heads.

(d) A Sikh pays his respects by saluting a dead body with the turban on his head.

(e) A Sikh dies and is cremated with a turban on his head.

I regret to state that all my explanations fell on the deaf ears of the Newton Legion branch President. He went inside the hall leaving four other Sikh veterans and myself standing outside the hall door.

I never for a moment imagined that when I retire and at 73 years of age, I shall be insulted, embarrassed and humiliated in public and my religious feelings will be hurt by asking me to remove my turban and that too at the hands of fellow veterans. I felt completely distressed and have been placed on medications by my physician.

I most respectfully request for forgiveness in case this letter causes any inconvenience whatsoever.

Thanking you and I have the honour to remain.

Your Majesty's faithful and obedient subject,
Lt. Col Pritam Singh Jauhal (Ret'd)

Pritam did not know if he would receive a response however, on January 13th, 1994, he received the following response from Buckingham Palace:

Dear Colonel Jauhal,

I am commanded by the Queen to thank you for your letter of the 9th December about the wearing of turbans in Canadian Legion buildings on Remembrance Day. I apologize for the delay in replying.

Her Majesty has noted the content of your letter and understands the concern which prompted you to write. I am directed to forward your letter to the headquarters of the Royal Canadian Legion so that they may be aware of your approach to the Queen.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Gimson

The question now was whether the Legion would heed the concerns of Her Majesty, The Queen - sovereign of Canada. Unfortunately, as you will see the Legion's response to the Queen became convoluted because the Branch shared a very different opinion from the Legion Headquarters.

18 Racism in its Ugliest Form & National Legion Vote Against Turban

When Pritam decided to take a stand against the injustice and discrimination of the Newton Legion, he knew that being from an ethnic minority, the repercussions from the vast European origin majority of Canadians against his family and himself would be overwhelming. He knew that he would perhaps have to face damage to his properties, constant name calling and endure threats to the lives of his family members as well as his own. Instead of leading a discontented life in Canada however, Pritam chose to fight it - come what may.

While Pritam was occupied dealing with the local, national and international media, a number of individuals kept mailing him life-threatening anonymous letters. Some even made phone calls using abusive and filthy language to disturb his peace of mind. One letter for example, said:

You have all gone too far this time, just shut up and for good. You must stop at once this vendetta against the Legion. It will only bring about more hate for you and your people who at best, are trouble makers and you know it. You knew the requirements of the Legion Hall before you went there with your little

gang to stir up trouble. We are not going to change our rules in Canada to suit you bloody East Indians, so get that in your heads, we've had it up to here with you lot. You don't like it? Then bloody well go back to India. You and your kind are the trouble makers, not the vets, or any of us true Canadians. Just shut up.

Another hand written letter spewing anger and venom said:

Lots of barbers around, ready to give all those Sikhs a haircut, and at the same time cut off those filthy rags on those heads. A good place - a nest for lice and bugs and cockroaches. I do not respect a turban-it's not Canadian and to say it's religious that's plain bulls**t. And all turbans can go back where they came from.

Letters to the editors also ran foul letters during this period, expressing sentiments such as this:

Editor,

The Leader, Surrey:

I too am tired of the turban episode. Hasn't anyone heard of the saying "When in Rome do as Romans do?" I'm disgusted that the RCMP changed their headgear rules and now the Legions are to change their rules. We have lived by these rules to respect the Legion's beliefs and I for one will be absolutely fed up with our whole system if these rules are changed. It isn't asking a lot if you can't live by it, go where you can wear turbans and let the no headgear policy remain.

Another writer to the editor of a Surrey newspaper wrote:

Editor,

The Leader, Surrey:

Once again the turban raises its head and the news media fall for it, hook, line and sinker. They, the media, are the racists if anyone is.

They give better coverage to a half-dozen old guys trying to gain entrance to a branch of the Royal Canadian Legion without respecting the Legion's regulations.

Most East Indians have melded into our Western way of life and have become good Canadians and excellent citizens. They are happy to be in Canada where they can enjoy their own culture or ours as they wish.

Our gutless government saw fit to change the dress of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, one of the few things we have in Canada that is truly Canadian. I don't see many turbans in the RCMP ranks. They received enough publicity for a thousand.

There is no racism in the Royal Canadian Legion. You may find people of every colour, race, religion or creed socializing in the club rooms.

This one guy who says he was a Lieutenant Colonel and risked his life fighting the Nazis, which he may have done, but I'll bet his men were a lot closer to the Nazis than he was. Most of these men are quite happy to live here in Canada and adopt the ways of their own country or practice their own culture as they wish.

I think the message that came down from Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion was that we must be tolerant of new Canadians. What about the old Canadian and their rights? I don't think this attitude does much for the membership picture.

Stick by your guns Newton Legion. I am sure most Legion members favor the no headgear regulation in the club rooms and if a turban isn't headgear, I don't know what it is.

The news media should find something worthwhile to report and stop inciting racism in Canada at every drop of the turban.

Another letter sent to Pritam said:

NEWS FLASH: Pacific Command about to sell Newton Legion

Hall and land. Thanks to trouble maker Jauhal and his little band of followers. We hope you are satisfied Jauhal, you have done your dirty work, now, just shut up before you cause more trouble, or you may regret what you have done. Need we say more? Get the picture Mr. We have had it with you and your kind.

PS. The turban is not a religious requirement. Next time, take it off.

Taking this last racist letter very seriously, Pritam reported it to the local Police. The Police visited him and took his finger prints because he had opened all the anonymous letters. They also took nine other letters he had received for investigation. They also monitored Pritam's residential telephone for three months to try and catch the perpetrators. As could be imagined however, it was very difficult to trace such letters and phone calls and so no one was ever caught.

During Pritam's battle against the discriminatory Newton Legion Branch policies he was faced with one surprise after the other. Immediately after Pritam and the four Sikh veterans had been denied entry into the Newton Legion Branch, the Royal Canadian Legion National Headquarters in Calgary, on November 13, 1993 issued this statement, writing:

"The Dominion Command sincerely regrets this incident took place and a formal apology will be made to those veterans concerned."

In a dramatic turnabout, On December 1st 1993, Mr. Frank Underwood, President of the Newton Legion who was responsible for not admitting Pritam and his comrades to the Legion Lounge went live on air on the BCTV 6 pm news. He apologized to the five Sikh veterans who had been denied entry to the Legion because they refused to remove their turbans. Mr. Underwood also apologized to the Sikh veterans on behalf of the Executive Committee of his Legion. Following that on January 20, 1994, Pritam received a letter from The Royal Canadian Legion Dominion Command which said the following:

Dear Lt. Col Jauhal:

Your recent letter to Her Majesty the Queen has been referred to Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion for reply.

You may not be aware that the Legion's Dominion Executive Council reviewed the requirement for a national policy governing the wearing of religious head-dress in Legion branches. The results of that review are embodied in the document which is enclosed for your information.

Yours Sincerely,
Greg Hogan
Secretary
DOMINION COMMAND
PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMAND

Encl.

c.c. Simon Gimson, Buckingham Palace, London, England

The attached documents which Mr. Greg Hogan had enclosed entailed the following statement: "As a result, effective immediately religious head-dress of the Jewish and Sikhs faiths, is not considered to constitute head-dress in the traditional sense. Therefore, once a person who is required to wear a head-dress by these faiths has been accepted as a Legion branch member or invited as a guest to a Legion branch, they are to be authorized admission to all areas of that branch that are normally open to the general membership or invited guests."

All matters were finally coming to a close with The Legion's Headquarters letter as well as Mr. Underwood's very public apology. However, this was not the case as on Sunday June 4th 1994, a large number of Legion delegates voted against the wearing of religious headgear inside Legions (1,959 to be exact), and only 629 voted in favour of allowing turbans and the Jewish yarmulke into Legions. But this was a local vote and they had disregarded the Dominion Command issued in Ottawa. For Pritam, the Legion dispute came to an end when the Dominion Command ordered that all Sikhs and Jewish peoples would be allowed to enter Legion Halls wearing

their turbans and yarmulkes respectively.

It seemed that *kismet* also had a hand to play as only a year after denying Pritam entrance into its Branch, the Newton Legion Branch had to close its doors officially in June, 1994 due to apparent financial difficulties. Realizing that the Branch had officially closed its doors Pritam withdrew his complaint against the Branch with the BC Council of Human Rights.

So much had occurred in Pritam's life during his battle to wear his *pagh* in the Royal Canadian Legion. And in the month of December 1993, just as the year was ending his dear wife Harjit fell ill. On Christmas Eve in 1993 Harjit went into cardiac arrest and had heart failure. The ambulance arrived some nine minutes later; however in that time Harjit went into a coma. For forty days Harjit remained in this condition in the intensive care unit of the Surrey Memorial Hospital. Pritam stayed by his wife's bed side day in and day out, but tragically on the fortieth day just as Pritam had stepped out of the hospital room he suddenly heard the sharp sounds of alarms. A nurse called Pritam back and sat him down on a chair only to tell him that Harjit had gone into another cardiac arrest and this time the doctors were unable to revive her. She was only seventy years old at the time of her passing and Pritam was devastated at the loss of his wife and his life partner. She had always been by his side and had provided him with her unconditional support and encouragement. Pritam never fully recovered from the fact that his battle with the Legion had added to the turmoil on Harjit's heart. In fact, Pritam believes that the threatening phone calls and letters took such an immense toll on Harjit that it caused her eventual cardiac arrest by aggravating her already enlarged heart and high blood pressure.

To Pritam as well as all three of his children, the sacrifices that Harjit had made her whole life could not be underestimated. It is without a doubt that Harjit sacrificed her whole life for Pritam, Balwinder, Varinder and Sukhdev. In Pritam's eyes, it is because of Harjit that all three of his children had turned out to be such wonderful human beings. She imbibed all the good and generous qualities that a mother can imbibe in her children. Her selfless nature was so unique that all three of Pritam's children remember one time in particular when a lady admired Harjit's cardigan and commented on it. Harjit, without hesitation took her cardigan off

and gave it to the lady. This was exactly the way Pritam and his children remember Harjit's spirit. For Pritam, Harjit was truly an elegant woman inside and out. Pritam cannot help but reflect on his wife with a smile as he admires how she always liked to dress herself well; she certainly liked to shop and she had plenty of clothes to prove it. However, her generous spirit was undeniable; she always distributed clothes to her relatives and she also donated to the needy.

Even at this pivotal turning point in his life, Pritam was still receiving interview requests from the Toronto CBC Primetime TV news, UTV, the Washington Post, BCTV, and CBC TV, but he declined all these because his mind and heart were both in turmoil. It took him a considerable time to find some equanimity in his life to continue his commitment to justice and rights.

19 Love, Compassion and Support & Open Letter to Media to Close the Issue

Although Pritam faced blatant racism, threats, and discrimination during this tumultuous time in his life, he also unequivocally says that the support, encouragement and kindness he received from all Canadians easily superseded the negativities. In fact, for every discriminatory policy, every blatant racist letter to the editor or editorial comment, Pritam found public support, media support, and support from senior Canadian officials and politicians.

Letters of support were numerous. One example of support was a letter from Reverend Bryan Colwell, a retired United Church Minister. Reverend Colwell wrote:

‘I am a Legion padre who is deeply upset over the events of the past days. Twice during the past two years, at monthly meetings of the Legion I have stated my view that Sikhs who served in the Commonwealth Forces were distinguished by their courage and loyalty. I am convinced that there have been no braver companions, comrades, and the fact that Sikhs gave their lives for the freedom of others makes their actions even more meritorious. I am deeply sorry that you had the embar-

rassment which you suffered. I am convinced that one of the most important needs in today's world is the understanding and respect for all religions and that includes their sacred symbols.'

Another letter was sent by Captain Keith E. M. Sollitt, who wrote:

'The undeserving insult that you must have felt as a veteran and member of the Sikh faith is unforgivable and should not have happened. I know that Canada has its own share of 'red necks' but I never thought for a minute that they would be found in such an honourable organization as the Royal Canadian Legion. I cannot speak for the Legion or the branch that insulted you but from one veteran and human being to another, I most sincerely apologize for the insult you suffered on last Remembrance Day. I hope that you will not judge all Canadians by your treatment at the hands of fools, but rather know that there is no disgrace in being judged by fools because fools can only ever be fools.'

Mr. Prem Kumar Budhwar Indian High Commissioner to Canada wrote:

"The Sikhs do not wear turbans only as a head-dress but as an important and fundamental symbol of their religious faith to remember their fallen Comrades, pay respect to their elders and seniors and even pray to God. These brave men, who fought many battles with courage and distinction to defend liberty and freedom all over the world should not themselves be denied the basic and cherished freedom of living by their fundamental code."

Mr. Mike Harcourt, Premier of British Columbia wrote:

"The Royal Canadian Legion by-laws denying entry to orthodox Sikhs wearing turbans are archaic and should be changed. Her Majesty has made it very clear that she feels no discomfort whatsoever when Sikh wearing turbans appear before her at Buckingham Palace."

Mr. Sergio Marchi, Canada's Immigration Minister said:

"Sikhs fought alongside our men and women. At that time, I suppose no one asked them to check their turbans at the doors. So, I hope common sense would prevail."

The World Sikh Organization, in a letter to Mr. Frank Underwood, wrote:

"In both World Wars Sikhs have fought alongside Canadian, Britain, and Indian allied forces wearing their turbans. In both World Wars Sikhs sacrificed their lives to defend the freedoms that all Canadians cherish so dearly. They were laid to rest wearing their turbans. It is an outrage that an organization such as the Royal Canadian Legion would deny their members the basic rights and freedoms embodied in the common law of Canada for which soldiers sacrificed the ultimate price. To deny your own compatriots their right to freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom of association, (as set out in the Individual's Rights Protection Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, etc.) is a disgrace to all Canadians."

Mr. Hal Joffe, National Chair of the Canadian Jewish Congress wrote:

"Clearly, to deny entry to Sikh veterans, who wanted to pay a tribute to our war-dead, while also honoring their mandatory strictures of their religious code, is outrageous and discriminatory. I call upon the Command of the Royal Canadian Legion to take action to ensure that the Newton Legion's anti-turban rule is abolished. Any by-law or regulation demanding removal of religious garb is contrary to the principles of religious freedom."

Mr. David Collenette, Canada's Defence Minister wrote:

"I have vowed to boycott any Legion Lounge in Canada that refuses admittance to Sikhs and Jews wearing their religious head-coverings."

Ms. Mary Ann Burdett, of the Pacific Command, Royal Canadian Legion laid this ultimatum on behalf of the Legion's National Executive:

"either change the anti-turban policy or face having the Charter revoked."

Major (Retd) M. F. Thurgood wrote:

"All Canadians who served in the Armed Forces during World War II should be embarrassed by the conduct of the Newton Legion and its President by their ill-treatment of our comrades-in-arms from India. I apologize to the five Sikh veterans and their country-men who marched with me in British 8th Army."

Patricia Cheung of Vancouver wrote in a letter to the editor:

"I was appalled by the treatment Sikh veterans received when they attempted to enter the Newton Legion after participating in the Remembrance Day Parade. This has nothing to do with Legion's rules and everything to do with blatant racism."

Reverend Jim Manly of Vancouver wrote:

"I was saddened and disgusted to hear that the officials of Newton Legion had denied entry to their lounge to a number of Sikhs because they were wearing their traditional turbans. Such bigoted action denies Canada's cultural diversity and insults the memory of the very people the Legion claims. Newton Legion officials owe an apology not only to the Sikh community, but to all Canadians who honor the sacrifices of our war-dead believing it gave us one more chance to build a decent society."

Mr. Greg Hogan, Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion wrote:

"We have repeatedly stressed to members for being flexible and using common sense, especially when you invite people to your place. If the Archbishop of Vancouver were to visit the Newton Legion in his ceremonial garb he would certainly be allowed to keep his Mirte on."

Mr. Paul David Spill of Port Moody spoke to Pritam on the phone, declaring that he would pick up Pritam right away and go to the Port Moody Legion where Paul would then sponsor Pritam's membership. Paul went on to say that he and Pritam would have a few beers together, and then take that Port Moody Legion membership card and go to the Newton Legion. Paul declared, "Let me see who on earth has the guts to stop you from entering their lounge."

Mr. Peter Johnson, a writer for the Vancouver Province wrote the following statement:

"On a 100 hectare site of Vimy, France, stands a monument to Canadians - the site that many historians claim to be the very place that Canada became a nation - on April 9, 1917. Providing covering fire that cold Easter morning to Canadians were turbaned Sikhs from the Lahore Heavy Field Artillery. This fact alone should make the Newton Legion Members hide their faces in shame, but doesn't. These guys not only managed to insult the "Glorious Dead" of the Great War and the living veterans of the Sikh community, they also managed to insult The Queen three times in one day."

Fellow Legionnaire J.D. Dickson Gibsons wrote in a letter:

"As a World War veteran and long-time member and executive of the Royal Canadian Legion I would like to extend to Colonel Jauhal my most sincere apologies for the disgraceful treatment he received from Newton Legion. It was my privilege and honor to serve with the Sikhs during war and post-war. They always conducted themselves with utmost bravery and panache, earning the respect of those with whom they served. I would be proud to accompany Colonel Jauhal to our Legion. What a shame a few red necks have to tarnish the reputation of an honorable Institution on Remembrance Day."

Wing Commander (Retd.) B. Burnett of Delta wrote:

"As a veteran of World War II, I am totally shocked that - highly respected Sikh veterans have been rejected admission into the Newton Legion Lounge because they wanted to be faithful to their religion by wearing turbans. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives to everyone in Canada among other

things the freedom of conscience and religion.”

Mr. Fred Hannington Secretary of the Dominion Command Royal Canadian Legion wrote:

“We have little sympathy for financially beleaguered Newton Legion as it faces a pending Human Rights complaint from Colonel Jauhal. We do not feel particularly sorry for them. We denounced the headgear ban already. We are supporting Jauhal’s complaint. The more power to him.”

In response to the overwhelming support Pritam issued the following open letter to the media on the successful completion of the Newton Legion battle. The following is an excerpt:-

I would like to thank all those who supported me and four other Sikh veterans in connection with the events which occurred at the Newton Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion on 1993 Remembrance Day. Without their support:-

- a) We would not have received the unconditional apology from Mr. Frank Underwood, President of Newton Legion on BCTV news channel.
- b) We would not have received a formal apology from the Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion.
- c) The Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion would not have amended its by-laws to treat the head-dress of the Sikh and Jewish faiths as religious, permitting Sikhs wearing their turban admission in all areas of their 1720 branches across Canada.

I would especially like to thank MLA Penny Priddy who stood with us throughout this ordeal. I would also like to thank other politicians, hundreds of thousands of Canadians, majority of Newton Legion members and above all the media that played a pivotal role in support of my fight.

I cannot find suitable words to express my gratitude and sincere thanks to Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II for her immediate intervention in the case on receipt of my personal

letter. I also thank the people who worked with me tirelessly to get the discriminatory by-laws changed by the Dominion Command Royal Canadian Legion - the highest authority of Legions in Canada.

Through this experience, I learnt that the vast majority of Canadians are wonderful and tolerant people. From the heart of my hearts, I have all praise for them.

Yours truly,
Pritam Singh Jauhal
Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal (Retd)

20 Mending Fences

In January, 1994 Pritam was inducted into the Downtown Vancouver Branch Pacific Command Legion under special invitation by the President of the Command. It was with great pride that Pritam joined the Legion - truly putting a symbolic end to the 'Newton Legion Battle.'

To improve relations between Surrey Sikhs and the Legionnaires the BC Government organized four workshops on November 1st, 2nd, 28th and December 12th, 1994 at the Sheraton Hotel in Surrey. The people who attended these workshops included: BC Government Ministers, local MLA's, Surrey City Councillors, community leaders, Sikh war veterans and many Legionnaires. With a suggestion from the Director of Multiculturalism BC, Pritam provided the opening and closing address for which he received warm applause from the attendees. Though the healing process could not occur overnight, the workshops were a step in the right direction towards healing feelings of hurt and humiliation.

During this time, Pritam was also offered a very interesting proposition by his closest ally during the Legion episode, Miss Penny Priddy. In 1994, Pritam was encouraged by Penny to join politics as an MLA. Penny went on to say that Pritam would have the support of the entire NDP government. Although it was a very sincere offer, Pritam had to decline, saying: "I am not a politician. I

am a military officer and I would like to remain so.” And with that powerful statement, Pritam quickly ended any outside encouragement for him to join politics.

It seemed that viewpoints changed quickly once matters were brought to a close in early 1994. For Pritam it was a time to heal and overcome those feelings of disillusionment that he had felt so intensely. For a number of years afterwards he was invited by many to attend and join their Legion Branches. For example, Mr. Reg Selvae and others who transferred their membership from the Newton Branch to the Crescent Beach Legion in White Rock invited him to attend their Legion. They told Pritam that they had decided to invite him to their new Legion to show him that they still honor him and to show him the respect he deserved.

At first Pritam was reluctant to accept their invitation because of the treatment he had endured by the Newton Legion in 1993. However when Madam Donna Krieger, President of the Crescent Beach Legion personally called Pritam and said that she would be honored with his presence at the Remembrance Day ceremony, he gladly accepted her invitation. During the ceremony Pritam was provided a seat at the podium along with the Legion President. A Corporal in ceremonial uniform stood near his chair. During the ceremony Pritam was asked by President Madam Krieger to address the gathering and he spoke about his experiences during Second World War in which he fought to defend the Commonwealth. Pritam also read ‘A Soldier’s Prayer.’ His very presence on the occasion and the address he delivered sparked a thunderous standing ovation by everyone in attendance. Madam Krieger then asked him to place a wreath which he proudly placed on behalf of the Indian Corps of Signals at the Legion cenotaph along with other dignitaries. The manner in which he was treated during the celebrations of the Remembrance Day by Madam Donna Krieger, the President and members of the Crescent Beach Legion was indeed remarkable and praiseworthy and Pritam felt very honoured.

During the entire ceremony Pritam was overcome with emotion as he reflected on the extreme humiliation and racism he had dealt with in 1993 and the immense respect and dignity he received on this day. He remembers thinking, what a change a few years can make.

21 Triumph and Tea with the Queen of England

A year following Pritam's battles and struggles and after hundreds of interviews, after writing hundreds of letters, and after receiving many threats, he received an invitation to meet the Queen of England. During her official visit to Victoria, British Columbia for the opening of the XV Commonwealth Winter Games Pritam was pleased to receive an invitation from the Right Honourable Mike Harcourt, Premier British Columbia to attend Tea with The Queen on August 20, 1994 at Beacon Hill Park in Victoria. To have an audience with The Queen in Victoria Pritam put on his best clothes, wore his navy blue turban and jacket, grey pants and Corps of Signals tie. Pritam also wore his thirteen hard-earned war medals, which attracted the attention of the Queen when she did her stroll at the park. As she came face-to-face with Pritam they engaged in a very interesting conversation. Amazingly she was aware and still remembered his battle to wear the *pagh* in the previous year. The following is a brief excerpt of the conversation between The Queen and Pritam:

The Queen: You have many medals. They look really good. Pleased to see them shining so brightly on your chest.

Pritam: Five of my 13 medals have your late Father, King George the V's picture engraved on them.

The Queen: I am delighted to know that. That is really great. Was it you who got into trouble with the Legion for not allowing you to enter with a turban?

Pritam: Yes your Majesty, it was me who was not allowed to enter Newton Legion with my turban even though I was an invited guest. I felt humiliated. I, therefore, wrote a letter to you regarding that incident. I am extremely sorry in the case my letter disturbed you.

The Queen: No. You did a wise thing by writing to me. What is the situation now?

Pritam: With your kind intervention, the matter was resolved immediately. The Royal Canadian Legion changed its dress code, allowing Sikhs to wear turbans in all its 1720 Legions across Canada. Many thanks for your intervention.

The Queen: I am glad the Legion amended its dress code. But they should not have denied you admission in the first place.

After this brief discussion with the Queen, Pritam was once again questioned by the media. Although this time it was certainly nice to have a positive setting as opposed to the entire emotional trauma he had experienced in the previous year. Pritam told the media the details of his conversation with the Queen and that he felt proud and honoured to have spoken to her face to face for those brief four to five minutes. It was a dream come true for Pritam who had always admired the Queen and he found her to be an extremely graceful person in real life. Above all, her intervention in the Newton Legion debacle proved to be a turning point in ending the injustice and discrimination against Sikhs wearing turbans in Canada. According to Pritam the Queen's intervention would without an iota of a doubt be written in gold in the history of Canada. To Pritam, all Sikhs should be grateful to her for that.

Although Pritam thought that this first meeting was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity, he did not ever think that some eight years later he would once again be meeting the Queen during the Queen's Golden Jubilee Year visit to Vancouver, British Columbia. In October 2002 Pritam was delighted to receive an invitation from the Right Honourable Jean Chretien, Prime Minister of Canada and his wife Mrs. Aline Chretien to attend a luncheon in honour of Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edin-

burgh on October 7, 2002 at the Fairmont Hotel. This second time around Pritam was invited and seated at a table facing the Queen. Although on this occasion Pritam did not get the opportunity to strike a conversation with the Queen for him it was still certainly an honour to be in her presence a second time.

It seems that Pritam's affiliation with the Queen would come full circle when on February 1, 2013 Pritam was honoured on the occasion of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. To commemorate the 60th Anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the Throne as Queen of Canada, 60,000 outstanding Canadians of all ages and from all walks of life were honoured for their contributions or distinguished service to their fellow citizens, to their community and to their country. Pritam was one of those truly deserving 60,000 recipients. When he received the honour, Pritam was particularly struck by the writing on the plaque he received, which stated:

QUEEN ELIZABETH II DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Dear Recipient,

On behalf of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, I am pleased to award you the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, created to mark the 60th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the Throne.

In granting you this honour, I thank you for your dedicated service to your peers, to your community and to Canada. The contributions you have made to our nation are most commendable and deserve our praise and admiration.

I wish to convey to you the heartfelt congratulations of your fellow Canadians, to which I add my own.

Governor General of Canada
1 Sussex Drive, Ottawa

PART FIVE

Conclusion

22 Trajectory of Pritam's Life – Writer's View

Each time I visited Lt. Col Pritam Singh Jauhal in his home to interview him, I was always struck by his immense presence, his innate kindness and his enduring intellect. It was my duty to convey my respect to an elder by calling him Uncle ji at every visit and with every phone call, in emails, etc. As I wrote his biography I found myself wanting to write Uncle ji in reference to him, but that would divert the reader's attention to a relationship rather than the man. Keeping this in mind, I used Pritam, while acknowledging my respect to his status.

Pritam has certainly lived a remarkable and full life, punctuated time and time again by momentous events that shaped the man that he is. He has lived a life full of honour, dedicated to service to his country, his family, and to his fellow human beings. Above all, he has no regrets. He has been awarded 13 medals for his service in the army (both British and Indian), he has met the Queen of England, been awarded the British Columbia Achievement Awarded and most recently the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. He has also been asked to speak at Remembrance Day Services innumerable times as a decorated war veteran. Even today, Pritam continues to fight a number of struggles for Indian War Veterans; including assisting Indian Military pensioners to receive their

due benefits. This is because Pritam Singh is not one to sit down idly when he sees that someone needs his help, he comes forward because he is a true fighter and a true soldier at heart.

Throughout his life Pritam has continued to imbibe a positive spirit, immense kindness towards people and a high degree of intellect. He says that he has no regrets and only hopes that that his life can serve as an example to others. He wants to impart the importance to serve one's communities, one's faith, and to fight for one's rights.

Pritam's life story can be placed within the historical trajectory of the history of India and the history of Empire. And like all other Sikh migrants, part of his story finds its place in another historical movement of Sikhs who have created a vibrant Indian Diaspora in Canada.

The history of India is a rich one; it is a history of invasions from its surrounding regions, different rulers with different beliefs over the millennia. A country which constitutionally recognizes 23 official languages and is home to Hinduism, the largest religion in India (81.5%), followed by Islam (13.4%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.9%), Buddhism (0.8%), Jainism (0.4%), Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and the Bahá'í Faith. India has the world's largest Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Zoroastrian, and Bahá'í populations, and has the third-largest Muslim population and the largest Muslim population for a non-Muslim majority country.

For almost three centuries India remained under the rule of the Moghul Emperors. It was during Moghul rule in the 15th century that the religion of Sikhism came to be with the birth of its first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev. The next 239 years saw a succession of Sikh Gurus up until the final living Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh Ji declared upon his death that there would be no living Sikh Guru and from that point in time all Sikhs would follow the path as written in the Sikh scriptures, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. The relationship between the Moghul rulers and the first five Sikh Gurus was that of relative peace and harmony. Moghul rulers such as Akbar for example accorded religious freedoms and even engaged in conversations with the Gurus and other Sikhs. By the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev ji's time however, religious tolerance was overtaken by intolerance on part of the Moghuls.

When Guru Arjan Dev ji was tortured and martyred in 1606 by the Mughals, his successor and son, Guru Hargobind Ji took up the Guruship and militarized *Sikhi* through the symbolic gesture of *miri-piri*, referring to the maintenance of a balance between spirituality and temporal authority. From 1556 - 1707, many Sikhs were persecuted and often tortured by treacherous rulers such as Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. During this tumultuous time, Gurus such as Guru Hargobind Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji not only forged and fought for their rights to practice *Sikhi* in peace, but they also defended the rights of other faiths to practice their faith as well.

To fully understand the significance of the *pagh* in Sikhs history one must look back three hundred plus year ago. The tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji created the *Khalsa Panth*, initiating a 'baptism' of Sikhs by including five elements or *kakar's*: *kara*, *kanga*, *kirpan*, *kachera*, and *kesh* into their identity. Each article of faith carries immense weight, significance and symbolism; however, the keeping of one's *kesh* is meant to signify the human being as he or she was brought into this world, without any desecration to the body in any form, including unshorn hair. The long hair is then tied into a knot on the head and covered with the *pagh*. A Sikh's hair can never be unkempt, untidy, uncombed and unshorn, producing a discipline and rigour to this element that is to be upheld at all times. When asleep, a baptized Sikh must always cover his or her hair with a smaller looser *pagh*. Whenever a Sikh ties the *pagh* he or she is reminded of the historical religious persecution, violence and torture that some of the Sikh Gurus had to endure under Moghul rule and the discipline of straightforward thinking and steadfastness of character. They undertook a fight for individual rights so that all people could practice their chosen faith. This is why the *pagh* is so important to a Sikh and this is why Pritam took up the battle to wear his *pagh* when his faith was being denied.

During the Moghul Empire, the British arrived to trade under the British East India Company in the mid-18th century. Steadily, the British administrators in India moved beyond trade and were able to take control of India and all of its assets, adding it to the vast British Empire.

Following the first Indian War of independence in 1857 when Indians unsuccessfully made their first real collective attempt to expel the British out of India, it was in 1858 that India was offi-

cially placed under the Crown's control. A few years later in 1877, Benjamin Disraeli the Conservative Prime Minister proclaimed Queen Victoria as the 'Empress of India.' This title was a gesture to link the monarchy with the Empire and bind India more closely to Britain. Pritam alludes to village life during British rule in the early 20th century where villagers lacked basic resources and infrastructures including: roads, buses, canals, tube wells, toilets, sewage, electricity, running water, brick houses, etc. Pritam believed that this lack of resources was deliberate so that Indian economic dependence on British rule would ensure their position as rulers. Victorian beliefs and sentiments reigned supreme during British rule and most Indians except the very few elite were treated no better than human slaves and held in disdain by their British counterparts.

When the two World Wars erupted in 1914 and then in 1939 respectively, any and all Indian soldiers were required to risk their lives and face battle in the field as part of the British Empire. Even then, all Indian soldiers' roles were kept to the lower ranks until the British had no option but to allow Indians into the higher ranks. Pritam's father Ram Singh was one of those Indian soldiers thrown into the battlefield at a lower rank and he received very little in return from the British for his bravery. As Pritam mentioned, Ram Singh's retirement allowance only gave him enough to provide for some simple home renovations. Some thirty one years later, Pritam would be following in his father's footsteps, but education allowed him to achieve a much higher success in Army rankings.

In WWII the provinces of British India sent over 2.5 million of their Indian soldiers abroad to fight against the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan) from 1939-1945 as part of the British Allied forces. Though key figures for the Indian Independence movement such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi opposed Nazism and Fascism, they refused to support the British cause because of the irony that the British were at war to save democracy when Britain itself denied Indians their basic rights of freedom and sovereignty. It was this slow realization and India's continuous nationalist freedom movement that contributed to the withdrawal of the British and finally giving Independence to India in 1947.

The 4th, 5th and 10th divisions of the Indian Army were all deployed in North Africa as part of the 8 British Army. Pritam

played a key role in providing communication signals for the army. The majority of these Indian (mostly Sikh) soldiers had never seen any land beyond their regions, let alone crossing the oceans. Despite this, they fought bravely on the battlefield thousands of miles away from their loved ones for the freedom of others, even as they were shackled under foreign rule at home. The divisions deployed in North Africa faced the treacherous German Afrika Corps Army which was under the command of Erwin Rommel. Pritam describes going into battle with General Rommel's German Army, which advanced with such a heavy position at one point in Libya that the allied forces were forced to withdraw, losing thousands of soldiers in the effort. Involvement in the war on foreign soil helped Pritam understand the value of sacrifice and he maintained a deep respect for his fallen comrades in arms. These ideals he kept close to his heart long after the war.

Pritam was awarded medals and distinction for exemplary service for the British Army, honoured with a well-earned title of Lieutenant Colonel. With the end of WWII and the dismantling and defeat of the Axis powers, India was already in the throes of an independence movement that came to fruition in the year 1947. What followed was the chaos and horrors of partition which saw the mass movement of 25 million Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. People moved across hand drawn boundaries between villages, from the Dominion of Pakistan to India and vice-versa, facing death and loss along the way. Pritam was truly blessed that his family did not see the effects of this first hand and they were spared untold suffering. In fact, the only real change that Pritam saw following Independence and partition was a sudden changing in his army rank when he was promoted to a Lieutenant.

In 1980 when Pritam and Harjit decided to move to Canada to join their children, they left the ancestral thread that bound them to India. They joined many other Sikhs who had built their lives abroad within the Diaspora, creating new strings of emotion and commitment in a new land.

Most historians would agree that the first true evidence of the Sikhs who arrived in British Columbia came on June 3, 1902. These fifteen or twenty three Sikh soldiers who came to Canada were a part of the procession honouring the coronation of King Edward VII. After they arrived in Victoria on the Empress of Japan, they

walked down the streets of Vancouver to a shower of applause by the local community. After this introduction to Canada, the earliest group of Sikh pioneers arrived on British Columbia shores in 1904 and by 1908 they totaled 5,179. At first the small number of Sikhs remained largely unnoticed in BC; however, as more South Asians began arriving on the shores of BC (e.g., on September 1, 1906 two hundred immigrants arrived by ship), so did racist sentiments. The growing numbers were noticed by the Provincial and Federal governments and racist legislation and policies commenced in order to hinder South Asian immigration. This included the continuous passage law requiring unbroken passage from the point of origin (impossible from India). Wives and children of the South Asian men living in BC also were not allowed to unite with them, leaving them with a temporariness of purpose and settlement. These laws also meant that the Sikh men who currently lived in BC faced blatant discrimination in many facets of their lives. Groups such as the Asiatic Exclusion League engaged in the Anti-Asian riots of 1907 and the community of Sikhs felt the sting of overt racism from European settlers of the time. Yet these men persevered and forged on to build successful lives in B.C. They came together and built *Gurdwaras* which became more than a religious sanctum; they provided a rallying site where the community could support each other politically, financially and emotionally. For the next eight decades, most South Asians who immigrated (or were allowed to migrate) faced immense discrimination which was sometimes violent. These difficult and humble beginnings carried the community into eight decades of Canadian life when Pritam entered the scene as a war veteran and father.

I was surprised when Pritam told me about his experience of arriving at the Vancouver airport in 1980 with Harjit. I was surprised because he told me how Balwinder's eyes welled up in pride when she saw the very visible, high and proud *pagh* of Pritam Singh's. Balwinder's emotion came with having seen so few *paghs* in Canada. I had thought in my naivety that by the 1980's (Pritam was denied entrance into the Legion in 1993) religious tolerance, acceptance and understanding had started to solidify in Canadian society. After reading and researching Pritam's immense collection of documents, I could say my answer would be that it was true for the most part. Yet, it is evident that fighting against the resistance towards the turban was very much a daily personal and community struggle for many and for some it continues to be so.

While Pritam was embroiled in his struggle to wear his turban in the Newton Legion branch, he had support from the media, community members and politicians. But as I read and reviewed Pritam's documents I realized that there was also an undertone of ignorance and some letters were clearly racist and violent in nature. I came to realize that many did not understand the meaning of the turban and its religious, cultural and social importance and as a result those people were making stereotypical and prejudicial assumptions. It is evident to Sikhs that the process of tying the *pagh* and placing it on one's head is so intrinsic to *Sikhi* that the two could not be separated. In the collection of documents Pritam had, the also kept articles and stories which touched on another story making headlines around the same time. This story was of a young man named Baltej Singh Dhillon who wanted to be an RCMP officer but refused to remove his turban and compromise his Sikh faith to adhere to strict Police uniform rules. In April, 1989 the RCMP commissioner recommended the prohibition against turbans be lifted. Then almost a year later, Solicitor General Pierre Cadieux gave his ruling to allow turbans to be a part of the RCMP uniform. In response to Pritam's Legion conflict it would seem that many Canadians were still reeling from the RCMP dress code change and they failed to understand that Sikhs had the same rights as any other Canadian in terms of religious and identity rights.

Sikhs like Pritam have fought the good fight to defend their right to wear the turban and accorded it a rightful place in Canadian society. Pritam's life has been marked by good fortune, many achievements and much acclaim but above all he has kept *seva* at the forefront of his values. His story testifies to this ideal.

Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra

Accomplishments & Achievements

ACHIEVEMENTS FOR SERVICE IN INDIA

1945-46-Appointed a Cadet Platoon Commander

While he underwent Commission training at the Indian Military Academy, Pritam was appointed as a Cadet Platoon Commander. His responsibilities included ensuring that all 45 British and Indian Cadets of his platoon were present on site to attend training as per their programs. Pritam had direct control over orders issued to them during this time.

1945-46-Awarded Colours in Soccer and Athletics

Pritam was awarded Academy Colours in soccer and athletics by the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun.

July 30, 1948-Western Command Gallantry Award

For his contributions during the Operations in Jammu and Kashmir, and for his gallantry and devotion to duty the following casualty was published in the HQ Western Command Orders:

IC 3656 Lieut. Pritam Singh Jauhal Signals is brought to the notice of the GOC-in-C Western Command for gallantry and devotion to duty, in action, in the Operations of Jammu and Kashmir.

Authority: Western Command Order No 386 of July 30, 1948

1952-Selected and Commanded Guard of Honour for the President of India

Pritam had the distinct honour to command the "Guard of Honour" for the very first President of India, Rajendra Prasad at Lucknow in 1952.

February 14, 1953-Plaque received from First President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad

Pritam received a signed parchment from the First President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad which granted him Commission as a Lieutenant in the Regular Indian Army from 20th January 1946.

1967-Honoured by Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Air Command

The Signal Regiment which Pritam commanded was honoured by the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Air Command for its high standard of work in providing land-lines for the Air Force in war and in Peace.

1969-Selected and Sent on Deputation to the Central Reserve Police Force

Pritam was selected for Deputation to the Police where he exercised judicial powers of a Metropolitan Magistrate Class 1. The Police Battalion he commanded made history by introducing radio tele-type working in India before all other police forces. The police wireless team Pritam trained set a new record and won a Gold Medal during the XIX All India Police Duty meeting held in 1976.

During his thirty eight years of service for the British and Indian armies, Pritam was blessed enough to have received a great many commendations.

Commendations and Medals:

International Commission for Supervision and Control for Services in Vietnam

Defence Medal

War Medal

Africa Star with 8th Army clasp

1939-45 Star

25th Anniversary Medal

Independence Medal 1947

Videsh Seva Medal (Foreign Service Medal)

Sainya Seva (Services) Medal with Clasp Jammu and Kashmir

Sangram Medal

Raksha (Defence) Medal 1965

Samar Seva Star (war against Pakistan)

General Service Medal 1947 with Clasp Jammu and Kashmir

ACHIEVEMENTS IN CANADA

October 2, 1992-Addressed Canadian Citizen Inaugurates During Swearing-in Ceremonies

On orders from the Surrey Citizenship Court Judge, Pritam prepared an address in English and delivered it to fellow candidates during the Swearing-In Ceremony, something that had never been done before.

1995-Organized 'Brotherhood' Week Event

In partnership with the late Mr. Arthur Helps, a senior executive with St. Helen's Church of Canada, Surrey, BC, Pritam organized 300 Sikhs to attend the Church to mark 'brotherhood' week. This was believed to be the first time in the history of the Church that the Sikhs had taken part in such a ceremony.

May 13, 1995-Founded and First President of the Indian Ex-Servicemen Society BC

This was the first society of its kind formed on a provincial basis and Pritam was elected as its first President. Pritam decided to form such a Society so that the Indian Ex-Servicemen and their families living in Canada would have a support group.

August 7, 1995- Invitation by BC Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism

On invitation from the B.C Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism, Pritam attended a reception announcing the BC Day and the famous Vimmy Battle fought by Canadians.

June 13, 1998-Requested to Review Annual Ceremonial Parade

On a personal request from Captain David Morier, the Commanding Officer of the 637 Arrow Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Cadets South Burnaby, Pritam acted as Reviewing Officer at the Annual Ceremonial Parade of his Unit. Pritam inspected the parade after which the parade march passed him with band in attendance. Pritam took the salute and addressed the parade. According to Pritam, this was the first occasion that an Indo-Canadian retired Commissioned Officer had ever been given this honor in the 41 year history of the Squadron.

1999-International Year of Older Persons Certificate of Recognition

The year 1999 was marked as the "International Year of Older Persons." The Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society and Surrey Delta Immigration Services Society held a special dinner in recognition of the elders in the community. Plaques and certificates were presented to those individuals over the age of 60 who have made significant contributions to the community. Pritam was one of eleven persons honoured.

May 13, 2002-Certificate of Appreciation from Indian Ex-Servicemen Society of BC

Pritam was presented with presented a Plaque in recognition and appreciation of his outstanding services as the Founding President of the Society.

January, 2004-Certificate of Appreciation

Pritam received a certificate of appreciation for his long and distinguished career in the Indian Army and for his many services during war and peace. The certificate was presented by Dave S. Hayer, MLA for Surrey-Tynehead. The certificate also highlighted and thanked Pritam for his active involvement within the Indo-Canadian community since immigrating to Canada in 1980.

May 4, 2004-BC Community Achievement Award

Pritam was honored with the British Columbia Community Achievement Awards. During the ceremony, Pritam was awarded a Medallion and a Certificate held in the presence of The Honorable Lona V. Campagnolo, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia on at Government House, Victoria. The Certificate and the Medallion were presented by the Lieut. Governor and the Premier respectively.

March 7, 2005-Interviewed for Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)

Pritam engaged in an extensive four hour long interview with a researcher for the Veterans Affairs Canada. The interview has now become a permanent feature of the VAC website. Two letters of appreciation and thanks were sent to Pritam for his contributions.

2005-Presented a 'Veterans Badge' by the Crescent Beach Legion

During the 'International Year of the Veteran,'" Pritam was awarded the 'Veterans Badge' on behalf of Her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth II, the Government of the United Kingdom, and the Ministry of Defence. The badges were issued to all World War II Veterans who fought in the war as a part of the Commonwealth Forces. In Canada, those badges were presented to eligible World War II Veterans through the Royal Canadian Legion, on receipt from London, England.

2006-Certificate of Appreciation

Pritam received a certificate of appreciation in recognition of his extraordinary services to Indian Military pensioners in Canada from Jagrup Brar, MLA of Surrey-Panorama Ridge.

1997, 1998, 2006, 2007, 2008-Nominee for the Order of British Columbia

Pritam had the full on support of local MLA's, Councilors, and many other community members when he was nominated for the Order of British Columbia in 1997, 1998, 2007 and 2008. Pritam was nominated by Retired Lieutenant Colonel Gurcharan Singh Sahota for his 1997-98 applications, and by Retired Lieutenant Colonel Inderjit Singh Gill for his 2006-08 applications.

Invitation by the British Columbia Regiment

Pritam was invited to attend the British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught's) celebration of its annual St. Jullien Mess Dinner at the hall in Vancouver. Over 100 serving and retired Commissioned Officers were also in attendance.

Order of Canada Nominee

Pritam was nominated for the Order of Canada by Lieutenant Colonel Gurcharan Singh Sahota.

February 1, 2013- Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal

To commemorate the 60th Anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the Throne as Queen of Canada-60,000 outstanding Canadians of all ages and from all walks of life were honoured for their contributions or distinguished service to their fellow citizens, to their community and to their country. Pritam was one of these Canadians honoured on February 1, 2013. He was presented with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal with the Queen's picture engraved on it; a plaque signed by the Governor General of Canada containing Pritam's name; and a letter addressed to Pritam as a Recipient of the Medal signed by the Governor General of Canada.

OTHER CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION

September 29, 1970: General SHFJ Manekshaw MC, Army Headquarters New Delhi, India

February 10, 1995: Rev Maggie Rose Muldoon-Burr The Wardens and The Parishioners of St Helen's Anglican Church of Canada

August 28, 1995: Sheila Finestone Member Parliament Secretary of

State (Multiculturalism) Government of Canada

May 14, 2003: High Commissioner of India, Ottawa, Canada

December 16, 2003: Gurmant Grewal Member Parliament House of Commons Ottawa, Canada

March 16, 2005: Nina Grewal Member Parliament House of Commons Ottawa, Canada

December 24, 2005: General J.J Singh PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC Chief of the Army Staff Army Headquarters New Delhi, India

December 8, 2006 and May 16, 2008: Avtar Singh, President Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Amritsar, India

Date Unknown: Jim Karpoff Member Parliament House of Commons Ottawa Canada

GLOSSARY

<i>Brahmin</i>	the priestly class, the highest caste among Hindus
<i>Chacha ji</i>	one's father's younger brother
<i>Dadi</i>	one's paternal grandmother
<i>Darshan</i>	a Sanskrit term meaning 'sight,' vision or apparition, most commonly used to refer to an encounter of a vision of the divine
<i>Ek pagh</i>	one turban
<i>Ghumaon</i>	measurement of land
<i>Granthi</i>	learned keeper and the reader of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the Sikh scriptures); any person of any gender who is a custodian of the Gurdwara
<i>Gurdwara</i>	"the door of the Guru," a Sikh temple or place where the Guru Granth Sahib Ji (Sikh scriptures) are kept
<i>Guru Ka Langar</i>	the communal kitchen located in every Gurdwara where a simple vegetarian meal is served for any member of the congregation or any persons irrespective of their caste, creed, religion or gender, a concept first derived from the Sikh Gurus
<i>Guru</i>	a spiritual teacher, enlightener
<i>Gutka</i>	a manual or handbook version of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji
<i>Jat</i>	an agrarian caste

<i>Kabaddi</i>	a game played between two teams of seven players, in which individuals take turns to chase and try to touch members of the opposing team without being stopped by them
<i>Kachera</i>	undershorts, one of the five K's worn by Khalsa Sikhs representing keeping ones fidelity
<i>Kakar</i>	the five articles of faith worn on the body by a baptized Sikh – kanga, kesh, kara, kachera and kirpan
<i>Kanga</i>	hair comb, one of the five K's worn by Khalsa Sikhs representing keeping ones cleanliness
<i>Kara</i>	steel bracelet worn on the right wrist, one of the five K's worn by Khalsa Sikhs representing a bondage to Truth and freedom from every entanglement
<i>Kesh</i>	hair, the uncut hair of the Sikhs, one of the five K's worn by Khalsa Sikhs as given by God, to sustain him or her in higher consciousness; and a turban, the crown of spirituality
<i>Kirpan</i>	the sword or dagger worn by Khalsa Sikhs as one of the five K's, representing the commitment to righteously defend the Truth and ones right to religious freedoms
<i>Khalsa Panth</i>	'Khalsa' referring to the baptized Sikh and 'Panth' meaning a spiritual roadway or pathway
<i>Kismet</i>	fate, destiny and/or luck
<i>Latrine</i>	a toilet, generally without a bowl

<i>Miri</i>	temporal authority
<i>Muklawā</i>	consummation of a marriage, when the bride shifts from her parents' home to live with her in-laws
<i>Nana ji</i>	one's maternal grandfather
<i>Nani ji</i>	one's maternal grandmother
<i>Pagh</i>	a long plain unstitched cloth used by Sikh men or women to cover their kesh (unshorn and uncut hair), one of the five K's; the length may vary according to the type
<i>Patasay</i>	Indian sweet made of sugar and dough
<i>Piri</i>	spiritual power
<i>Pundit ji</i>	a learned man or Brahmin
<i>Rupee</i>	the basic monetary unit of India, Mauritius, Nepal, and Pakistan
<i>Sangrand</i>	the first day of each month of the Indian lunar calendar
<i>Seesa jhandi</i>	helio and flag (refers to the means of relaying messages in the late 19 th Century and early 20 th Century)
<i>Seva</i>	dedicated communal service, particularly service in a Gurdwara
<i>Shabash</i>	bravo or kudos
<i>Shalok</i>	stanza in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (Sikh scriptures)
<i>Sikh</i>	a learner or disciple, one who follows the teachings of the Sikh Gurus

<i>Sikhi</i>	another form of the word 'Sikhism' referring to the monotheistic, monist, pantheist religion founded during the 15th century in the Punjab region, by Guru Nanak
<i>Tongas</i>	horse-driven carriage

