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**‘Waging War against the King’: Recruitment and
Motivation of the Indian National Army, 1942-1945**

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Background and abstract

The Indian National Army has been neglected in accounts of the Second World War in South-east Asia. It grew out of the defeat of British Empire forces in Malaya and Singapore in 1942, with captured Indian officers and men of the British Indian army volunteering to fight alongside the Japanese in order to further the cause of Indian nationalism. It was formed with an initial strength of sixteen thousand in late 1942 but before it could be deployed on operations differences emerged between its military leadership and the Japanese over how it would be employed. Although as a result it was partially disbanded the arrival in mid-1943 of credible political leadership, in the form of Indian revolutionary Subhas Chandra Bose, led to its reinvigoration. It was expanded to a size of forty thousand, in part through the incorporation of civilian volunteers, and saw action in India and Burma in 1944 and 1945 although its combat performance was variable. Its character is better thought of as an armed revolutionary force rather than as a conventional army. Its methods of recruitment varied over time with there being evidence of coercion during 1942 although others joined willingly. Recruitment from mid-1943 relied largely on the charismatic qualities of Subhas Chandra Bose to attract volunteers. The motivation of the force drew heavily on the appeal of Indian nationalism and its struggle against British imperialism.

About the author

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Glossary

CSDIC(I) Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (India)

ICO Indian Commissioned Officer

IIL Indian Independence League

INA Indian National Army

jawan Indian soldier

Jif 'Japanese Influenced Forces'

POW Prisoner of War

VCO Viceroy Commissioned Officer

Introduction

One of the most dramatic but least known episodes of the Second World War occurred in South-east Asia where captured Indian officers and men of the British Indian army volunteered to serve and fight alongside the Japanese in order to further the cause of Indian independence. At the end of the war a number of the officers involved were charged with a variety of offences including ‘waging war against the King’, a charge of treason of which they were all convicted.¹ The force they served in was called the Indian National Army (INA) and its recruitment and motivation is the subject of this paper. The INA was active from 1942 to 1945 and was one of a number of auxiliary forces raised at the instigation of Japan to support its war effort against British and Allied forces, another example being the Burma Defence Army. The INA was initially formed from ethnic Indian prisoners of war (POW) captured by the Japanese in late 1941 and early 1942 during the Malayan campaign and the surrender of Singapore. The *rationale* given by its Indian leadership was that the INA was being formed to help liberate India from British rule. Although the majority of the approximately sixty thousand Indian POWs volunteered to serve in the INA, the size of the force was deliberately limited by the Japanese to the size of a single division of sixteen thousand strong.² Before it could be deployed, however, relations between the military leadership of the INA and the Japanese authorities broke down at the end of 1942 over the question of the Japanese government’s true intentions towards India and the INA. It was not until the middle of 1943, with the arrival from Europe of credible political leadership in the form of Subhas Chandra Bose, that the INA was reinvigorated. Now allowed by the Japanese to expand beyond a single division, it tripled in size largely through the incorporation of civilian volunteers. Its

¹ See charge sheet in Khan, S.N. (1946) *The first trial of I.N.A. officers and its aftermath*. Lahore, p.x.

² Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45.

First Division, largely composed of Indian Army veterans, was deployed to Burma and took part in the ill-fated Japanese Imphal offensive in 1944. Although INA forces stood on Indian soil for a short period, the offensive was a failure and INA actions over the remaining year of conflict were defensive as they fought alongside Japanese forces to stem the advance of Allied forces across Burma. The subsequent defeat and surrender of Japan led to the dissolution of the INA and the capture of most of its personnel. However, the post-war trial and conviction of senior INA field commanders by British authorities at the Red Fort in Delhi proved to be a pyrrhic victory and helped to accelerate the end of British rule in India.

The INA *per se* has been relatively neglected in the historiography of the period with much of the attention focussed on the remarkable career of the Indian revolutionary Subhas Chandra Bose. Notable exceptions have been the works of the American authors Lebra and Fay. One of Lebra's books, *The Indian National Army and Japan*,³ is a valuable account of the often fraught relationship between the INA and its sponsors but contains little information on the force itself. Fay's book *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*⁴ is by far the most useful narrative available but has only limited coverage of the first year of the INA's existence. A recent book, Bayly and Harper's *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945*,⁵ has relatively little discussion on the INA compared to other forces, but is clearly dubious of its military capability. Earlier general accounts,

³ Lebra, J.C. (2008) *The Indian National Army and Japan*. Singapore

⁴ Fay, P.W. (1993) *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*. Ann Arbor

⁵ Bayly, C. A. & Harper, T. (2004) *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945*. London

such as Slim's *Defeat into Victory*,⁶ were even more dismissive, while a very recent work by Keane on the battle of Kohima, *Road of Bones*,⁷ completely ignored the INA in an action where it had a notable impact. Articles on the INA are also relatively rare, with a widely cited article by Sundaram, 'A Paper Tiger: The Indian National Army in Battle, 1944-1945',⁸ being a notable exception. The INA therefore tends to be either ignored or denigrated, its soldiers given at best a walk-on part on a stage dominated by the actions of others. And yet its soldiers fought in campaigns which are regarded as having been some of the toughest of the Second World War, against an enemy which possessed greatly superior resources and firepower. A more balanced assessment is perhaps overdue.

As Fay has pointed out, however, the primary sources available related to the INA are meagre. This is in large part due to the systematic destruction of its documentation at the end of the war by the INA itself. A notable exception is a set of 'Platoon Lectures' held at the British Library and described later in this paper.⁹ In addition, a number of INA officers wrote memoirs, with Khan's *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji* (1946)¹⁰ being particularly useful. Other memoirs, written much later, include those by Singh¹¹ and Dhillon¹². Fay mentions another source of material, although he only made limited use of it himself: British military files related to the INA, the majority of which are held at the British Library. Most of

⁶ Slim, W. (1956) *Defeat into Victory*. London

⁷ Keane, F. (2010) *Road of Bones: The Siege of Kohima 1944*, London

⁸ Sundaram, C.S. (1995) 'A Paper Tiger: The Indian National Army in Battle, 1944-1945'. *War & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1, May, pp. 35-59.

⁹ *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹⁰ Khan, S. (1946) *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji*. Delhi

¹¹ Singh, M. (1974) *Soldiers' Contribution to Indian Independence*. New Delhi

¹² Dhillon, G.S. (1998) *From My Bones: Memoirs of Col. Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon of the Indian National Army (Including 1945 Red Fort Trial)*. New Delhi

these were created by the ‘Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (India)’ (CSDIC(I)) for a restricted military readership, and include a variety of summary reports and a large number of interrogations of captured INA personnel. Conducted to establish the true loyalties of the INA prisoners, the interrogations contain a variety of voices. They can be an officer seeking to excuse his joining of the INA, a defiant volunteer still dedicated to the cause, or the judgemental conclusions of the interrogator himself. Through these voices, individual stories emerge, framed by the inquisitive agenda of the interrogation itself. Historians have made little use of this archive, although recent work by Singh on similar material is suggestive of its potential.¹³

This paper uses the material at the British Library, along with other primary and secondary sources, to examine the recruitment and motivation of members of the INA and how those factors varied over time. Given the large number of interrogations in the ‘Mss Eur F275’¹⁴ manuscript series, a selection was taken covering the work of interrogation centres at Delhi, Bangkok, Singapore and elsewhere, with material relating to Indian troops who served with German forces being deliberately excluded. The sample reviewed represents approximately one third of the available material. Based on this sampling and the other material at the British Library (see the bibliography) the chapters are constituted as follows. In Chapter 2 the INA is placed in the context of Japanese military strategy and the nature of the British Indian army from which its initial recruits came. In Chapter 3

¹³ See Chapter 6 of Singh, G. (2014) *The testimonies of Indian soldiers and the two world wars: between self and sepoy*. London

¹⁴ Selected papers of the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (India). British Library, Mss Eur F275 manuscript series, packs 1-26.

the formation of the INA is discussed, and the nature and scale of recruitment is examined. In Chapter 4, original INA propaganda material in the form of ‘Platoon Lectures’ is used to examine how the INA perceived itself and its mission. Chapter 5 examines the impact on the INA of the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose and uses CSDIC(I) material to investigate the impact of the INA on the battlefield. The conclusions in Chapter 6 emphasise that the marginalisation and denigration of the INA is unjustified. The material held at the British Library can both help to correct some of the misconceptions surrounding the INA, while also providing the possibility of recovering some of the experiences of those involved.

The Indian National Army in context

The INA did not spontaneously appear but emerged as a consequence of Japanese policy during the Second World War which aimed to further Japan’s strategic objectives of expansion by undermining the existing colonial powers in South-east Asia. It did this through the encouragement and active support of nascent nationalist movements across the region. But while the policy was strategic in scope it was implemented in practice by relatively junior Japanese Military Intelligence officers, who were allowed extraordinary licence and achieved spectacular success during the early stages of Japanese military operations in Burma, Malaya, Sumatra and elsewhere. Preparations for this work began before the war, for example with the Burmese group known as the ‘Thirty Comrades’ which was trained by Colonel Suzuki Keiji.¹⁵ During the Japanese invasion of Burma a huge two hundred thousand strong militia nucleated around the ‘Thirty Comrades’ to support the expulsion of the

¹⁵ Allen, L. (1984) *Burma: The Longest War 1941-45*. London, p.17.

British.¹⁶ Colonel Keiji developed a strong empathy with the Burmese nationalist movement he fostered and this tendency was to be repeated in another officer with regards to Indian nationalism: Major Fujiwara Iwaichi. Tasked with supporting the Japanese invasion of Malaya he established links in Bangkok with the Sikh dominated Indian Independence League (IIL), which laid the foundations for the formation of the INA. The Japanese military also sponsored a variety of other nationalist forces in South-east Asia, such as the Peta self-defence force in Indonesia, and others in Malaya, Sumatra and beyond.¹⁷ In a much broader context the pattern of a nationalistic military force being fostered by a relatively idealistic junior Military Intelligence officer can be seen in the example of the contemporary Russian Liberation Movement of Lieutenant-General Vlasov and its German liaison officer Captain Strik-Strikfeldt.¹⁸ The often dramatic success enjoyed by Japanese Military Intelligence with nationalist movements during the early stages of the war was in a significant way due to the personalities of the Japanese officers concerned and the strong working relationships they developed with local nationalists. As these officers were replaced and the true nature of Japanese policy became evident, the relationships with these movements would become strained and in some cases, such as the INA, break down.

The INA had an advantage compared to the other Japanese-sponsored forces in that it could draw its recruits from members of the British Indian army who were now POWs. However while some sixty thousand Indian troops had been captured by the

¹⁶ Lebra, J.C. (1977) *Japanese-Trained Armies in Southeast Asia: Independence and Volunteer Forces in World War II*. Hong Kong, p.65.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.75.

¹⁸ Andreyev, C. (1987) *Vlasov and the Russian liberation movement: Soviet reality and émigré theories*. Cambridge, p.8.

Japanese there were few Indian officers among them due to the slow pace of the 'Indianisation' of the officer class.¹⁹ The British Indian forces deployed to Malaya and Singapore in 1941 were still overwhelmingly commanded by British officers.²⁰ It was also common for Indian officers of this period to experience discrimination in various forms both within the army and from wider British colonial society, although the experience of individual officers could vary significantly. Officers such as Acting Captain Prem Sahgal of the 2/10th Baluch, whose prowess at polo facilitated acceptance within the regiments he served in,²¹ had a very different experience to that of Captain Mohan Singh of the 1/14th Punjab, who found his relationships with British colleagues strained, and found an outlet for his frustrations in campaigning for the introduction of Indian food into the officers mess of his own regiment and others.²² Nonetheless both would go onto play leading roles in the INA. The deployment of Indian troops to Malaya in 1941 seems to have brought the general issues of discrimination into particular focus. Experiences ranged from extreme cases, such as the example of Lieutenant Colonel Fletcher of the 1st Bahawalpurs who was ultimately relieved of his command before hostilities began in part for having kicked Indian officers who displeased him,²³ through to more general discrimination such as that enforced on the Malayan railways where Indian officers could not travel in the same compartment as a European.²⁴

¹⁹ Deshpande, A. (2010) 'Contested Identities and Military Indianization in Colonial India (1900-39)', in Roy, K. (ed.) *War and society in colonial India, 1807-1945*. Oxford, p.214.

²⁰ Barkawi, T. (2006) 'Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41, No. 2, p.331.

²¹ Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*. p.29.

²² Durrani, M.K. (1955) *The Sixth Column*. London. p.3.

²³ Elphick, P. (1995) *Singapore, The Pregnable Fortress: a study in deception, discord and desertion*. London. p.70.

²⁴ Khan, *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji*. p.5.

Despite the variation in experiences of Indian officers, the similar context of their experiences means they can be seen as a 'generation' of officers who were, in Mannheim's phrase, 'similarly located', and this is supported by a report written by an Indian intelligence officer.²⁵ It gives an enlightening overview of the state of feeling among Indian officers in Malaya. Although written in 1943 the officer concerned had served in Malaya until January 1942 and had 'met and talked to hundreds of Indian officers and men'. Specific causes of discontent included the refusal of the European social clubs in Malaya to accept Indian officers as members and the disparity in pay between themselves and British officers. His opinion was that sixty percent of the officers he met were 'nationalists' and wanted 'an early and complete independence for India', while the other forty percent were 'in a general way dissatisfied with British rule'. As he summarised it 'Indian officers in Malaya were discontented' although in his view political awareness among other ranks was generally low.²⁶ It is interesting to note that many of the officers he met would have been captured by the Japanese in February 1942.

The British Indian army from which the initial set of INA recruits would be drawn was therefore in some ways a troubled force. The discontent manifested itself in a number of incidents prior to the outbreak of hostilities. One example from Singapore in 1940 was triggered by a seditious letter written by a Muslim Indian officer of the 4/19th Hyderabad in which he hoped a long war for the British would bring India freedom. Support for the officer across ranks meant that the incident escalated to the

²⁵ Mannheim, K. 'from *The Sociological Problem of Generations*', in Olick, J.K. & Vinitzky-Seroussi, V. & Levy, D. (eds.) (2011) *The Collective Memory Reader*, Oxford, p.95.

²⁶ *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1*. British Library, L/WS/1/1576.

point where the battalion was disarmed and put under guard by British troops.²⁷ As one Indian officer who would later become Chief of Staff of the Indian Army put it, ‘Our anti-British feelings were intense’.²⁸ Although the situation was resolved peacefully it pointed to deep discontent within the battalion and it would go on to join the INA virtually *en masse* after its capture in 1942.²⁹ Another incident that occurred in Hong Kong at the end of 1940 suggests a similar picture of disaffection. Involving eight hundred Sikh troops refusing to wear steel helmets, the key concern of the authorities was the uncovering of links to civilian Sikh nationalists.³⁰ Although the way these incidents escalated can be explained in part by poor quality British officers, they also provide evidence of a nascent political awareness among Indian troops that involved *jawans* as well as officers. It suggests that it was no longer the straightforward mercenary force which had defended the interests of the British Raj for so long.

Prisoners and volunteers

Of all the INA related CSDIC(I) interrogation reports by far the most comprehensive is that of Mohan Singh.³¹ A captain in the 1st Battalion The 14th Punjab Regiment, he was captured a few days after the start of the invasion of Malaya, rapidly agreed to work with the Japanese, and went on to command what would become the INA throughout 1942. His central role in the INA ensured that his interrogator Major

²⁷ Sundaram, C.S. (2010) ‘Seditious Letters and Steel Helmets: Disaffection among Indian Troops in Singapore and Hong Kong, 1940-1, and the Formation of the Indian National Army’, in Roy, K. (ed.) *War and society in colonial India, 1807-1945*. Oxford, p.136.

²⁸ Evans, H. (1960) *Thimayya of India: A Soldier's Life*. New York, p.169.

²⁹ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45.

³⁰ Sundaram, C.S. (2010) ‘Seditious Letters and Steel Helmets: Disaffection among Indian Troops in Singapore and Hong Kong, 1940-1, and the Formation of the Indian National Army’, in Roy, K. (ed.) *War and society in colonial India, 1807-1945*. Oxford, p.144.

³¹ *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*. British Library, MSS Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945.

Toye³² devoted considerable effort to the report written in 1945. Its value lies in the way it can shed new light on episodes in the history of the INA. Early in the report the physical description of Mohan Singh hints at a strong personality; despite years in Japanese detention, his 'erect and proud' bearing and his 'striking eyes' were notable.³³ One factor it speculates on is his mental state following his capture with the 'shock of defeat' accentuating his 'mental depression'.³⁴ Mohan Singh on the other hand portrays this period in his memoirs in a much more heroic light. While having chosen to devote himself to Indian independence even before meeting the Japanese intelligence officer Major Fujiwara, he denigrates the role of his commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Fitzpatrick.³⁵ The portrayal of his commanding officer hints at deeper issues,³⁶ which places him into a broader context of discontent that many of his 'generation' of Indian officers shared with respect to their status.³⁷

There is however a big difference between being discontented and being willing to switch sides and work with the enemy. One of the most remarkable aspects of the Malayan campaign is the way that Mohan Singh and others were willing to actively support the Japanese long before the final outcome of the campaign was certain. When asked during his interrogation to explain why this occurred he cited, among various factors, the unexpectedly good treatment of Indians by the Japanese, dormant Indian nationalism, and the shocking defeat of British forces. He also added another

³² Who later wrote, Toye, H. (1959) *Subhash Chandra Bose (the springing tiger): a study of a revolution*. Bombay

³³ Front page of *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*. British Library, MSS Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, paragraph 31.

³⁵ Singh, *Soldiers' Contribution to Indian Independence*. p.71.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.50.

³⁷ Khan, *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji*. p.4.

factor that applied to others: the effect of his own oratory in Hindustani - a claim that Major Toye believed was credible.³⁸ By the beginning of January 1942 he was making nationalist speeches to captured Indian troops and allegedly getting a ‘rapturous reception’,³⁹ and his oratorical ability and willingness to cooperate marked him for a prominent role in the INA. But there was also one other necessary ingredient: the personality of Major Fujiwara. An officer far removed from the brutality of so many officers of the Imperial Army, he had a genuine heartfelt commitment to the nationalist aspirations of the Indian troops he encountered, and an ambiguity towards the intentions of the imperial power he served reminiscent of his role-model, Lawrence of Arabia.⁴⁰ The confidence he inspired in Mohan Singh and others was the catalyst for what came next.

There is a photograph in Major Fujiwara’s memoirs which shows him sitting at a table having tea with Indian soldiers. One of them is pouring for him while another, cigarette in mouth, looks at the camera with others sitting at tables in the background.⁴¹ The striking feature of the scene is how relaxed those present look, particularly as it was taken in January 1942 before the fall of Singapore and only shortly after the Indians present had been captured. The Indian officer sitting next to Major Fujiwara is Captain Akram, a Muslim colleague of Mohan Singh’s and the man selected to lead what he described as the ‘pukka volunteers’.⁴² It was in January that around two hundred Indians were selected to form a unit to undermine the morale of Indian troops fighting for the British. A CSDIC(I) report gives details of

³⁸ *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*. British Library, MSS Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, paragraph 68.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 47.

⁴⁰ Fujiwara, I. (1983) *F. Kikan: Japanese Army Intelligence Operations in Southeast Asia during World War II*, translated by Akashi Yoji. Hong Kong, p.227.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Plate 5.

⁴² *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*. British Library, MSS Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, paragraph 51.

those who took part, which included Sikhs, Dogras, Jats, Pathans and Gurkhas.⁴³ Most were deployed onto Singapore Island in the week before the surrender where they exploited the confused situation to mingle with Indian forces still fighting. Their success was rated by the report as 'considerable' although by the nature of their role an objective assessment of their impact is problematic.⁴⁴ However, suspicious instances of desertion did occur, the largest known being the disappearance of most of the 2/10th Baluch battalion, and there were also sightings of Indian troops fraternising with Japanese forces.⁴⁵ Captain Sanghal, who was with the 2/10th Baluch, believed afterwards that he had been tricked into surrendering, but while he was well treated, the British officer with him was immediately beheaded by the Japanese.⁴⁶ Nonetheless the conduct of Indian troops in the battle for Singapore needs to be set within a broader context where desertions were occurring among Australian and British troops during the same period.⁴⁷ The surrender of Singapore occurred on 15 February 1942 and it set the scene for a remarkable staged event. All Indian military personnel were ordered to congregate at Farrer Park on the 17 February for what came to be seen as a watershed event by those present. An aspect of this order was that the British officers of the Indian units were to proceed separately to the Changi area on Singapore Island, where all British personnel had been ordered to gather. The poignancy of the separation is captured in the parting words of one British major to an Indian officer as he shook his hand, 'I suppose this is the parting of our ways'.⁴⁸ Separated from most of their officers, the Indian troops streamed towards Farrer Park until by midday some forty five thousand were

⁴³ Sareen, T.R. (ed.) (2004) *Indian National Army: A Documentary Study, Vol. 1*. New Delhi, p.54.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Elphick, *Singapore, The Pregnable Fortress: a study in deception, discord and desertion*. p.343.

⁴⁶ Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*. p.70.

⁴⁷ Elphick, *Singapore, The Pregnable Fortress: a study in deception, discord and desertion*. p.338.

⁴⁸ Khan, *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji*. p.18.

gathered at the former racecourse.⁴⁹ A carefully staged ceremony then took place involving a group of officers including Major Fujiwara and Mohan Singh along with a lone British officer, who in a deliberate humiliation of British authority, was required to make a speech acknowledging the handover of the troops to the Japanese. As one witness put it the ‘white man’s prestige was at its lowest ebb in Asia’.⁵⁰ Major Fujiwara then spoke beginning, ‘My dear fellow Indian soldiers!’, before outlining how they could liberate India from British rule.⁵¹ That Major Fujiwara made an impact is clear, and one of those present was emphatic that General Tojo, the Prime Minister of Japan, had been the speaker.⁵² Mohan Singh then made an impassioned speech in Hindustani in which he asserted that it was now time to fight for a ‘nobler cause’.⁵³ According to his account the speech was greeted with ‘a frenzied fit of ecstasy’ among the Indian soldiers although some of the officers were ‘downcast and indifferent’.⁵⁴ Some interpreted the soldiers’ reaction as being driven largely by the promise of good treatment.⁵⁵ The mixed reaction was driven by many factors including the fact that some came from military families with long records of service in the British Indian army. There was also suspicion of the pre-eminence given by the Japanese to Mohan Singh, a mere captain.⁵⁶ In the view of one officer present who subsequently escaped, while many liked the idea of Indian independence they also felt an obligation to remain true to their oaths and were

⁴⁹ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45, monograph 3.

⁵⁰ Dhillon, *From My Bones*, p.93.

⁵¹ Fujiwara, *F. Kikan: Japanese Army Intelligence Operations in Southeast Asia during World War II*, p.186.

⁵² Interrogation of Abdul Hayat Khan, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/2.

⁵³ *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*. British Library, MSS Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, paragraph 66.

⁵⁴ Singh, *Soldiers’ Contribution to Indian Independence*. p.109.

⁵⁵ Khan, *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji*. p.20.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.21.

therefore caught in a dilemma.⁵⁷ However sincere Major Fujiwara may have been though, there can have been few Indians present who were unaware of the true nature of the Japanese regime and this almost certainly affected their reaction. The day after the Farrer Park meeting, in an act of terror directed against Chinese citizens in Singapore, the Japanese began a ‘purification by elimination’ in which perhaps twenty five thousand were massacred.⁵⁸

There were some though who embraced the overturning of the old order. One of them was Captain Singh Dhillon who, when the Japanese demanded a detachment of Indian soldiers to act as guards for the Allied prisoners at Changi, seems to have had none of the qualms of many of his fellow officers regarding the assignment, agreeing to command it.⁵⁹ His memoirs make clear that the Japanese were keen to use the two hundred Indian volunteers under his command to humiliate the Allied prisoners, with beatings handed out to ‘hundreds’ in a day when they failed to salute the Indian soldiers.⁶⁰ Soon enough it was the Indians doing the beating with an early victim being a British colonel, the former commanding officer of the *jawan* concerned.⁶¹ Dhillon’s stated motivation for encouraging such activity was to overcome his soldiers ‘inferiority complex’ towards the British.⁶²

⁵⁷ Report of escape of Captain Balbir Singh from Singapore in *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1*. British Library, L/WS/1/1576.

⁵⁸ Farrell, B. (2005) *The Defence and Fall of Singapore 1940-1942*. Stroud, p.385.

⁵⁹ Dhillon, *From My Bones*, p.103.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.122.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.123.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.122.

In practice there was a whole spectrum of reactions to the call for volunteers for the INA from genuine early commitment through to outright resistance. As the process of gathering volunteer names began in the camps, a split became evident in the early months with, in broad terms, Sikhs, Dogras and Jats tending to volunteer and Punjabi Muslims, Pathans and Gurkhas tending not to, although there were numerous exceptions.⁶³ The dominance of Sikhs in the leadership of the INA in this period certainly played a part in discouraging Muslims with domestic Indian tensions in the Punjab a key issue. There was also a deep suspicion of Japanese motives, shared in part by Mohan Singh and the INA leadership.⁶⁴ Later in August 1942, the 'Quit India' resolution of the Indian National Congress had a major impact on sentiment, leading, according to one report, to a large rise in the numbers genuinely pro-INA.⁶⁵ Certainly for some officers it was the event which triggered their wholehearted commitment to it.⁶⁶

There are however many allegations in CSDIC(I) reports of the use of threats to persuade men to volunteer for the INA ranging from the threat of transportation to Japanese labour camps, to spells in a 'concentration camp' in which beatings were common and whose guards the Japanese encouraged with 'wine, women and money'.⁶⁷ Being outspoken against the INA carried risks and as early as March 1942 when the Japanese demanded labour parties for work in Borneo and Thailand, it was groups of non-volunteers who were sent under officers who had been vocal in their

⁶³ Khan, *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji*. p.26.

⁶⁴ *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*. British Library, MSS Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, paragraph 6.

⁶⁵ *Indian National Army*, British Library, L/WS/1/1711, p.32.

⁶⁶ Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*. p.134.

⁶⁷ *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*. British Library, MSS Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, paragraph 192.

opposition.⁶⁸ There were certainly some who joined the INA to avoid the rigours of Japanese labour camps. However, stories of intimidation would later be used by some under interrogation to explain their volunteering. One example is Major Parkash Chand who explained his early membership of the INA as being due to the threat of transportation. His interrogator was unconvinced and thought his explanation ‘unlikely’ and that his ‘word is entirely unreliable’. He had in fact been a close associate of Mohan Singh.⁶⁹ A recurring theme though is the ever present threat of the ‘concentration camp’ for those who proved resistant to INA propaganda with reports of mistreatment and deaths.⁷⁰ One *jawan* claimed to have volunteered for the INA after a day in the camp and stated that he knew of two deaths having occurred there.⁷¹ However the CSDIC(I) assessment of these stories introduced a sceptical note after investigating the sites in Singapore associated with the allegations. The conclusion was that while ‘it is certain that harsh ill treatment and tortures took place’, when the camps were examined it became clear that ‘these stories have far outstripped the truth’. In particular there were none of the ‘dark cells’ so often referred to.⁷² It seems likely that on occasion such allegations were used as a convenient cover story for men who were struggling to explain to their interrogators why they had volunteered for the INA.

There were in fact many willing volunteers. One of them was a senior medical officer, Lieutenant Colonel Allagappan, who volunteered in August 1942 to, as he

⁶⁸ Khan, *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji*. p.26.

⁶⁹ Interrogation of Major Parkash Chand, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/15.

⁷⁰ Crasta, J.B. (2012) *Eaten by the Japanese. The Memoir of an Unknown Indian Prisoner of War*. New York, p.23.

⁷¹ Interrogation of Sepoy Allah Bakhsh, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/15.

⁷² *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*. British Library, MSS Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, paragraph 192.

put it during his interrogation, 'best help everyone'. In practice he was an enthusiastic propagandist, commanding the team which produced the Platoon Lectures described in Chapter 4, and he was involved in making radio broadcasts.⁷³ Another example was a Captain Stracy who as an Anglo-Indian found himself held at first as a prisoner with British officers. His interrogator considered that he joined in August 1942 'from motives of greed, ambition and pleasure-seeking' although he conceded his 'thorough ideological conversion'. The comments reveal more about the attitude of the interrogator attempting to comprehend the actions of an Anglo-Indian than they do about Captain Stracy himself, who seems to have been genuinely enthused by Indian nationalism and became a senior staff officer in the INA.⁷⁴ Another committed volunteer was Captain Gulzara Singh, who was one of Mohan Singh's 'pukka volunteers' and later served in Burma. Described by his interrogator as 'a shrewd enemy of our forces in battle' he was said to have been 'most unpleasant' to interrogate.⁷⁵ In a separate CSDIC(I) report he was implicated in the interrogation and death of an American airman.⁷⁶ It's clear that a wide variety of officers were attracted to the INA cause.

There were also those who joined without any commitment to the aims of the INA. One example is Lieutenant Percival Lewis, an Indian Christian who became a staff officer. Cut-off in the early stages of the Malayan campaign, and with the British officer he was accompanying choosing suicide rather than capture, he resisted INA

⁷³ Interrogation of Lieutenant Colonel Allagappan, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/15.

⁷⁴ Interrogation of Captain C.J. Stracey, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/15.

⁷⁵ Interrogation of Captain Gulzara Singh, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/15.

⁷⁶ 'A note on two cases of murder of B.O.R.'s by INA personnel' in Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/9.

‘propaganda’ for many months but was persuaded to ‘follow a policy of expediency’ and joined in September 1942. He then fulfilled a variety of staff roles until the very last stages of the war when he was given a field command but was removed within days after being accused of planning to desert. Seen by his interrogator as unenthusiastic about the INA he commented that he had been struck by the ‘*elan* and *esprit de corps* of the early volunteers’ although at times this had led to a ‘perverted fanaticism’ among some when it came to inducing others to volunteer.⁷⁷ A more explicitly mercenary attitude is evident in another interrogation where the man concerned, Syed Hussain, after capture had ended up working on propaganda for the IIL. Described by his interrogator as a ‘strangely educated and somewhat cranky individual, a poet and an egoist’ he sought to make the best of his new situation by stating: ‘I am a sincere man. I worked sincerely for the IIL which paid me and I am now ready to work sincerely for you, Sir’. Among his achievements was composing the lyrics of the INA song.⁷⁸

Resistance to volunteering for the INA was not necessarily coincident with loyalty to the British. A significant factor was suspicion of Japanese intentions and for some in this period the lack of credible political leadership was the critical missing ingredient.⁷⁹ Even someone such as Captain Durrani, who would ultimately be awarded the George Cross for his actions later in the war, seems to have been motivated primarily by his belief in an anti-Muslim conspiracy by a ‘Sikh-Hindu alliance’ operating through the medium of the INA with, according to him, Mohan

⁷⁷ Interrogation of Lieutenant Percival Lewis, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/21.

⁷⁸ Interrogation of Syed Mumtaz Hussain, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/15.

⁷⁹ Khan, *My Memories of INA & Its Netaji*. p.39.

Singh having been promised a 'Sikh kingdom' in the Punjab by the Japanese.⁸⁰ At the same time there were individuals and units who consistently refused to enlist, with Gurkha units being highlighted in one report as having remained largely loyal, despite the 'bad defection' of a number of their VCOs.⁸¹

A CSDIC(I) report from May 1946 provides an assessment of the true level of volunteering during 1942 and it makes sobering reading for anyone attached to the idea of the loyalty of Indian troops to the British Raj. Its view was that by June 1942 Mohan Singh, despite the use of some intimidation, had 'gained the genuine and general esteem and admiration' of the Indian prisoners to the point where forty thousand of the forty-five thousand prisoners in Singapore had volunteered for the INA with only five thousand remaining 'staunch non-volunteers'.⁸² There were in fact far more volunteers than the Japanese were willing to accept. They had no wish to arm large numbers of Indian troops of dubious loyalty while simultaneously losing their potential for forced labour. In August 1942 they told Mohan Singh that he could raise a single division of sixteen thousand men with the remaining volunteers being regarded as 'surplus' and therefore available for use as forced labour.⁸³ The division was established in September⁸⁴ and paraded in Singapore on the 2 October to mark Mahatma Gandhi's birthday.⁸⁵ This would prove to be the high point of the first INA. By this stage, with Major Fujiwara replaced, the relationship between the INA military leadership and the Japanese was deteriorating.

⁸⁰ Durrani, *The Sixth Column*. p.59.

⁸¹ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45.

⁸² *Ibid.*, monograph 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Singh, *Soldiers' Contribution to Indian Independence*. p.136.

⁸⁵ *Interrogation of Mohan Singh*. British Library, MSS Eur Photo Eur 382: 1945, paragraph 121.

Mohan Singh lost faith when he realised the Japanese aim was simply to exploit the INA for propaganda purposes. His last act in December 1942 was to try and dissolve the force that his ‘magnetic and compelling personality’ had helped create.⁸⁶ He was imprisoned shortly afterwards by the Japanese. However the INA was to survive in a depleted form, run by a council of senior officers, until news came of the impending arrival of the one person capable of reinvigorating it: Subhas Chandra Bose.

Political soldiers

Held at the British Library are a set of ‘Platoon Lectures’ written in English and produced in booklet form for the use of the INA for the political education of its soldiers.⁸⁷ Written in 1943 under the auspices of the ‘Department of Enlightenment and Culture’ of the Azad Hind Military Bureau,⁸⁸ there are a total of twenty three lectures varying in length between two and six pages, each of which is contained in an individual booklet approximately eight by six inches in size with a string binding. The lectures cover a range of subjects including the aims of the INA, the history of India, and even the martial qualities to be admired in the Japanese. Given the systematic destruction of INA documentation at the end of the war,⁸⁹ these represent a rare survival of original material. The set of lectures appears to be complete and can therefore provide an insight into the type of political education considered

⁸⁶ Ibid., paragraph 200.

⁸⁷ *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

⁸⁸ Sareen, T.R. (ed.) (2004) *Indian National Army: A Documentary Study, Vol. 2*. New Delhi, p.327.

⁸⁹ Appendix to Interrogation of Captain C.J. Stracey, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/15.

necessary for members of the INA.⁹⁰ A full description of the lectures does not appear to have been previously published.

The lectures can be dated to the middle of 1943. Although the first two are undated the third is dated 14 May and from then on most lectures have a date typically a few days after the last, culminating in the final date of 6 August for Lecture 23 with Lecture 8 the only other undated lecture. The lecture series was therefore produced over a period of three months, although most were produced in the first two months, with Lecture 18 being dated the 2 July. Whether these dates represent a writing and printing schedule or just the time required for printing is unknown, although the gaps of at least a few days between each would have allowed time for the material to be written on an ongoing basis. There is a change in the year format from Lecture 5 onwards with the year 1943 thereafter being represented as 2603 to align it with the Japanese imperial date system.⁹¹ All the lectures were published at ‘Indo Sinbun Sha, 161 & 163 Cecil Street, Syonan’, with ‘Sinbun Sha’ meaning publishing house in Japanese and Syonan being the substitute name given to Singapore by the Japanese during their wartime occupation. Although the first two lectures are undated the typical production schedule of the others would suggest a start date in the second week of May 1943, which is significant as it was on 6 May that Subhas Chandra Bose disembarked from a Japanese submarine in Sumatra at the end of his transfer from Hitler’s Germany.⁹² The decision to produce the lectures would therefore appear to be related to his arrival in Asia although the authorship of the lectures is

⁹⁰ Sareen, *Indian National Army: A Documentary Study*, Vol. 2. p.327.

⁹¹ Thanks go to Mr Rory O’Brien for an explanation of the Japanese Imperial date system.

⁹² Bose, S. (2006) *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the age of Global Empire*. London, p.172.

uncertain. In general, the written English of the lectures is competent but it can vary in quality with some clumsy composition and poor spelling at times, for example ‘tankes and armoured cards’.⁹³ The variation in quality occurs between rather than within lectures which suggests at least two authors. While Subhas Chandra Bose is likely to have influenced the content of the lectures none of them display the eloquent style evident in his works.⁹⁴ The lectures are therefore likeliest to have been produced by at least two authors with a more competent English language writer doing most of the work, and there are glimpses of this primary writer in phrases such as ‘I have already stated in my previous lectures’.⁹⁵ The most likely candidates are among the four lecturers listed by CSDIC(I), among them Surja Singh who was later killed in Burma.⁹⁶

Although the lectures vary in length they are composed in a standard style, all beginning with the salutation ‘Dear Brothers’, and in many cases concluding with an *aide memoir* of key points. The subjects addressed are organised in a systematic way beginning in the first two lectures with the assertion of Indian unity and a review of the nature of British imperialism. There is then an overview of Indian history across the next six lectures followed by the ‘Requisite Characteristics’⁹⁷ necessary for members of the INA in the following six. The fifteenth lecture entitled ‘Our Mission in Life, as Indians, First and Last’ acts as the culmination of the lectures thus far. The next seven lectures seem more like supporting material and cover subjects such

⁹³ Lecture 6 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

⁹⁴ Bose, S.C. (1997) *The Indian struggle, 1920-1942*. Oxford.

⁹⁵ Lecture 23 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

⁹⁶ Interrogation of Lieutenant Colonel Allagappan, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/15.

⁹⁷ Lecture 10 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

as ‘Health and Hygiene’⁹⁸ and ‘Revenue and Expenditure in India’.⁹⁹ The final lecture addresses the nature of the British Indian army in only two pages and is easily the shortest.¹⁰⁰

There are a number of themes which run through the lectures but the key one is political and religious unity. This is introduced in ‘Unity of India, Past and Present’ with its emphasis on the ‘common blood brotherhood’ of all Indians.¹⁰¹ The difference between the British and previous rulers is emphasised with the British remaining aloof and separate while the previous Moghul rulers had made India their home. Much civil conflict in India, which the British characterised as ‘religious disturbances’, was really rooted in ‘the extreme poverty of India’ and was fundamentally economic. Indeed the British deliberately ‘promoted fights among ourselves’ for their own benefit while in reality ‘The Muslims do not differ from the Hindus in their blood’ and ultimately ‘There is no such thing as the Hindu-Muslim problem in India’.¹⁰² This is a strong assertion at odds with the increasing polarisation in domestic Indian politics.¹⁰³ The concept of unity is reinforced in other lectures with, for example, the importance of overcoming caste based differences being emphasised.¹⁰⁴ Such declarations were aligned with the political position of Subhas Chandra Bose, whose last political demonstration in India before his final arrest involved both Hindu and Muslim students,¹⁰⁵ as well as the INA itself which had among its officers Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The INA reinforced

⁹⁸ Lecture 17 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

⁹⁹ Lecture 21 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹⁰⁰ Lecture 23 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹⁰¹ Lecture 1 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Sarkar, Sumit. (1989) *Modern India: 1885-1947*. Basingstoke, p.377.

¹⁰⁴ Lecture 13 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹⁰⁵ Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*. p.382.

this message in other ways with one example being an INA officer's cap badge held by the Imperial War Museum in London.¹⁰⁶ The oval bronze badge has an outline of an undivided India at its centre with the letters INA at the top and an Urdu motto below it meaning 'Unity, Faith, Sacrifice', a motto highlighted in Lecture 10.¹⁰⁷ The cap badge acted as the physical embodiment of a central theme of the lectures: the unity of all Indians against British imperialism.

Another significant theme present in the lectures is the alignment with the domestic political struggles of the Indian National Congress, and in particular with its leader Mahatma Gandhi. In Lecture 5 the critical development is seen as being the 'Quit India' resolution of August 1942 where the 'All-India Congress Committee declared India completely independent'.¹⁰⁸ The oppressive nature of the British reaction is emphasised in Lecture 6 and includes 'Air-bombing [and] machine-gunning'.¹⁰⁹ In practice there were a huge number of arrests in India as a result of 'Quit India' with perhaps ninety thousand having been arrested by 1943 including Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders,¹¹⁰ while aircraft were indeed used against crowds on occasion.¹¹¹ However quite how the formation of an army to fight the British could be squared with the principle of *ahimsa* or non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi was a potentially difficult issue, and it was resolved in Lecture 9 by stretching his "To do or die" declaration at the time of 'Quit India' resolution, to its absolute limit. As it put it 'In India ours must be "To do or die", according to the dictates of our leader, Mahatma

¹⁰⁶ Indian National Army officer's headdress badge

<<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30070820>> Accessed: 14th May 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Lecture 10 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹⁰⁸ Lecture 5 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹⁰⁹ Lecture 6 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹¹⁰ Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*. p.385.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.396.

Gandhi'.¹¹² In private Mahatma Gandhi had serious concerns about the activities of Subhas Chandra Bose, and stated in a letter 'In fact, I believe that Subhas Bose will have to be resisted by us'.¹¹³ But these concerns remained private and the image portrayed in the lectures is of the INA as the military wing of the Indian National Congress, an image reinforced by the naming of the three guerrilla regiments of the First INA division after its key leaders, namely Gandhi, Nehru and Azad.

The theme of revolution is addressed in Lecture 15. The lecture acts as the culmination of the main part of the lecture series and within it the INA is portrayed as an agent of revolution, or as it puts it 'We are real revolutionaries'.¹¹⁴ The vision outlined is of socialist revolution, the 'struggle of the masses' against the 'possessing classes' of capitalism. And for India it must lead to *Purna Swaraj*: total freedom for the nation and every individual to bring about the 'welfare of humanity at large'. Although the Japanese 'co-prosperity sphere' is mentioned, the subject of actual Japanese intentions or behaviour is left unexplored. The lecture culminates in a long emotional passage in which 'Love is the gate to all secrets of the Universe' and if 'all ranks in the INA' are steadfast 'in their life's mission' then the whole world will 'pulsate' in their favour.¹¹⁵ It comes across as a passage designed to be read aloud.

A full understanding of the themes of social unity, political alignment with the Indian National Congress, and the need for revolutionary fervour are therefore seen as essential for the motivation of INA personnel. Built on a foundation of a narrative

¹¹² Lecture 9 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹¹³ Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*. p.390.

¹¹⁴ Lecture 15 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

of the history of India shaped by the pernicious effects of British imperialism, the lectures set out a political vision for an army portrayed as very different in motivation from the British Indian army from which so many of its recruits were drawn. It is interesting therefore to compare the INA approach with that taken in the British Indian army, where by 1944 the importance of motivational sessions was recognised. Designated as ‘Josh’ sessions the approach to be taken is outlined in a document from May of that year.¹¹⁶ Emphasising the need for ‘enthusiasm’ when delivering the material and the importance of introducing an entertainment element through the use of radio, drama and so on, the intent is to persuade each Indian soldier that the Japanese are ‘his own individual personal enemies’ and to counter the potential effects of ‘Jif’ or ‘Japanese inspired fifth column’ activity. The approach is therefore very different from the broad sweep of history and ideology evident in the INA lectures and instead focuses on the immediate circumstances that the *jawan* will face on the battlefield, with ‘stories of the bravery of Indian soldiers’ and victories achieved.¹¹⁷ Discussion of politics is notable by its absence and the intent is to appeal to the traditions of the British Indian army: the loyalty to regiment and colleagues. This does not mean that martial qualities are ignored in the INA lectures, with Lecture 14, ‘Bushido in Nippon’, exploring the martial qualities to be admired in the Japanese and how ‘We, Indians, have to learn many a lesson’ from them.¹¹⁸ But the differences between the INA’s conception of itself and how it sees the British Indian army is crystallised in Lecture 23, ‘The British Army of Occupation in India’, where it is characterised as a ‘separate caste by itself, never mixing with the civilian masses’ with religion used as a means to divide one soldier

¹¹⁶ See note on Josh work in units in *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 1*. British Library, L/WS/1/1576.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Lecture 14 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

from another.¹¹⁹ The contrast with how the INA portrays itself in its lectures, undivided and aligned to the political consciousness of India, an agent of revolutionary change, is striking. This does not mean that each individual in the INA saw it that way, and indeed the fact that the lectures needed to be written suggests that many did not possess the level of political awareness considered necessary. Nonetheless the lectures provide an invaluable insight into how the INA perceived itself and the challenge it faced.

The road to Delhi

The arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose in South-east Asia in May 1943 marked a new chapter in the history of the INA. Since Mohan Singh's attempt to dissolve it at the end of the previous year it had survived in a depleted form, some twelve thousand strong, but 'in a semi-moribund state'.¹²⁰ The appearance of the 'Netaji' or leader¹²¹ had a transformative impact not only on the INA but on the IIL and the politics of the Indian diaspora in South-east Asia. Here was a leader of the foremost political rank, a former President of the Indian National Congress, a man who had spent many years in British jails for his commitment to Indian nationalism, but above all a committed revolutionary who, unlike Mahatma Gandhi, believed in the use of violence to oppose British rule. Nor was he short on ambition: as T. E. Lawrence put it, 'All men dream: but not equally',¹²² and his vision included a government, the *Azad Hind*, as well as a reconstituted INA, while his oratorical skills could captivate

¹¹⁹ Lecture 23 in *Platoon Lectures, Nos. 1-23, 1943*. British Library, Mss Eur A73: 1943.

¹²⁰ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45.

¹²¹ Gordon, L.A. (1990) *Brothers against the Raj: a biography of Sarat & Subhas Chandra Bose*. New Delhi, p.460.

¹²² Lawrence, T.E. (1940) *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, London, p.23.

an audience as he showed in speeches soon after his arrival in Singapore (or as he called it ‘the graveyard of the British Empire’).¹²³ His personal charisma could also work on the Japanese, even Prime Minister Tojo being impressed, a critical factor in ensuring enhanced Japanese support.¹²⁴ He condensed the spirit of his ambitions in slogans that all Indians could understand: “Jai Hind” (Hail to India) and “Chalo Delhi” (On to Delhi).¹²⁵ His political vision was a secular one and an early priority was the full incorporation of Muslims into the INA both symbolically and in practice. The adoption of the ‘Springing Tiger’ as a motif for the force, a symbol associated with the eighteenth century Muslim leader Tipu Sultan who resisted the British,¹²⁶ was a deliberately inclusive act designed to appeal to Muslims. His assumption of the leadership of the INA had a profoundly positive impact on the motivation of the force, but particularly on its officers, whom he got to know whenever possible on a personal basis. One Muslim officer, Shah Nawaz Khan, who had reluctantly joined the INA and was deeply sceptical of the Japanese, was completely won over by him and became a committed officer in the INA.¹²⁷ Not every Muslim officer was convinced though and one, Captain Durrani, while accepting lunch and the gift of a book on Lawrence of Arabia from Subhas Chandra Bose, came away suspecting a Hindu plot behind what he said.¹²⁸ He was unusual though, and for most the effect was as described by one officer in a barbed comment from a post-war CSDIC(I) interrogation: he ‘was greatly moved by the new Fuhrer and inspired by his personality’.¹²⁹ There was in fact no shortage of recruits for the

¹²³ Lebra, J.C. (2008) *Women Against The Raj: The Rani of Jhansi Regiment*. Singapore, p.48.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.41.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.71.

¹²⁶ Bose, S. (2011) *His majesty’s opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India’s struggle against empire*. London, p.257.

¹²⁷ Lebra, J.C. (2008) *Women Against The Raj: The Rani of Jhansi Regiment*. Singapore, p.50.

¹²⁸ Durrani, *The Sixth Column*. p.176.

¹²⁹ Interrogation of Captain C.J. Stracey, Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/15.

INA, with around ten thousand additional POWs volunteering with another eighteen thousand civilian volunteers to give a total of around forty thousand men.¹³⁰ The report also notes that the four thousand men who had withdrawn from the first INA in December 1942 at Mohan Singh's instigation, and had subsequently been transported as POWs to islands in the Southwest Pacific, were denied their request to re-enlist by the Japanese.¹³¹ Many would die in the camps, their fate lamented by Mohan Singh after the war.¹³² These were some of the most committed INA troops, their fate divorced from any loyalty to the British.

The deployment of the main fighting units of the INA to Burma and their subsequent participation in combat during 1944 and 1945 has been described extensively by authors such as Toye and Fay.¹³³ The performance of the INA units in battle has been a controversial subject, however, and it is one that relates directly to the question of motivation. That the morale of the INA forces was high as they arrived in Burma is clear from accounts such as those of a young Indian, Ramesh Benegal, who would later become an air commodore in the Indian Air Force. He describes the INA troops and the 'sense of purpose' and 'intense patriotism' they engendered in those who met them.¹³⁴ However emblematic of accounts of the INA in battle is a widely cited article by Sundaram, 'A Paper Tiger: The Indian National Army in Battle,

¹³⁰ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Singh, M. (1946) *Leaves from my diary*. Lahore, p.18.

¹³³ For example see Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*. and Toye, *Subhash Chandra Bose (the springing tiger): a study of a revolution*.

¹³⁴ Benegal, R. S. (2009) *Burma to Japan with Azad Hind: a war memoir 1941-1945*. Olympia Fields, IL, p.33.

1944-1945'.¹³⁵ This is in many ways a valuable and detailed account of the INA's military engagements but its judgement of the INA as a 'paper tiger' lacks perspective. While the theory of combat motivation is overwhelmingly European-centric it can provide insights relevant to the INA. Strachan has outlined a number of models of combat motivation including the primacy of the 'small group', the role of ideology, the threat of punishment, and the importance of training.¹³⁶ For the INA, the role of ideology was dominant and with Subhas Chandra Bose as its head few armies can have been better prepared from an ideological perspective, although one CSDIC(I) report speculated that there was too much emphasis on 'spiritual' rather than military training.¹³⁷ It is interesting to note that General Slim, when describing the rebuilding of morale in his own force, considered this aspect of motivation as important in getting a soldier to the front but of less importance on the field of battle.¹³⁸ Another key factor that he emphasised was the importance of the 'weapons and equipment' necessary for the task.¹³⁹ It is here that the difference between the INA and its opponent, the British imperial 14th Army, is stark. The INA typically fought its actions and campaigns lightly armed, with inadequate ammunition, having not eaten properly in weeks or months, and without access to necessary medicine. A CSDIC(I) report, remarking on the lack of rations the INA experienced during the 1944 Imphal campaign, noted that 'no army has ever been trained to fight successfully under such conditions'.¹⁴⁰ Describing the INA as a 'paper tiger' is

¹³⁵ Sundaram, C.S. (1995) 'A Paper Tiger: The Indian National Army in Battle, 1944-1945'. *War & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1, May, pp. 35-59.

¹³⁶ Strachan, H. (2006) 'Training, Morale and Modern War'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41, No. 2, April, pp. 211-227.

¹³⁷ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45.

¹³⁸ Slim, *Defeat into Victory*. p.182.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45.

misleading because it ignores the conditions under which it operated and the comparative strength of its foe.

A key role of the INA was the front-line subversion and recruitment of British Indian troops and this was attempted on all the active fronts in Burma using methods such as pamphlets, loud-speaker broadcasts and direct contact. In general these attempts met with little success although there were exceptions. In the Arakan in 1944, for example, a platoon of the 3rd Gwalior Lancers was persuaded to switch allegiance to the INA.¹⁴¹ How successful these attempts actually were though is difficult to assess as a standard *modus operandi* was to return troops quickly to British lines to act subversively in their units, or as the report put it they were ‘propagandised and allowed to escape’.¹⁴² Greater success was achieved when the INA was able to access groups of Indian troops captured by the Japanese with one of the most dramatic examples occurring during the early stages of the battle around Kohima in 1944. After a fierce engagement at Sangshak with the Japanese, hundreds of Indian troops of the 152nd and 153rd Paratroop battalions were taken prisoner. The events have been described by various authors with only General Slim mentioning the presence of the INA who, according to him, made ‘unavailing attempts to confuse and suborn our Indian troops’.¹⁴³ More detailed accounts of the action at Sangshak by Allen¹⁴⁴ and a recent work by Keane,¹⁴⁵ make no mention of the INA. A CSDIC(I) report makes clear though that an INA unit commanded by Captain Maghar Singh had some success with the prisoners. As it put it, ‘some of the

¹⁴¹ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45. p.19.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.20.

¹⁴³ Slim, *Defeat into Victory*. p.300.

¹⁴⁴ Allen, *Burma: The Longest War 1941-45*. p.212.

¹⁴⁵ Keane, *Road of Bones: The Siege of Kohima 1944*, p.196.

captives volunteered at once and operated with the Japanese against British forces at Kohima' while 'a large number' having been used as 'coolies' escaped back to British lines. It also noted that a 'fair number' chose to stay with the INA and tried to withdraw with them into Burma at the end of the campaign.¹⁴⁶ A number of points are raised by the episode. This was one of the few occasions when a significant number of Indian prisoners were taken during the campaign, and it is clear that some were willing recruits for the INA and chose to stay with them even when the campaign was obviously lost. It is also worth noting that these men were members of an elite fighting unit who would have been considered some of the best troops in the British Indian army. The pattern of a few being willing to immediately participate in action against British forces is reminiscent of Mohan Singh's 'pukka volunteers'. The CSDIC(I) assessment is also a contradiction of General Slim's opinion of the INA's impact. It's difficult to believe that he was unaware of what occurred with the Indian prisoners at Sangshak and this suggests his other comments on the INA need to be treated with caution. On the other hand authors such as Allen and Keane do not even mention the INA in their descriptions of this action, which raises the question of what other episodes they may have been omitted from. Finally, while caution is necessary when drawing general conclusions from such a small number of Indian POWs, the episode does suggest a susceptibility to nationalist propaganda. What is speculative is whether the INA awoke them from what Trotsky called the 'opium of the barracks' or whether they were already primed for revolt by the force of Indian nationalism.¹⁴⁷ An interesting point to note is that according to CSDIC(I), of the few Indian officers captured during the campaigns in Burma in 1944 'most of them

¹⁴⁶ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45. p.19.

¹⁴⁷ Trotsky, L. (1934) *The History of the Russian Revolution*, translated by Max Eastman, London, p.136.

volunteered to join the INA'. One of them, Lieutenant Khurray of the 5th Mahrattas, was captured at Sangshak.¹⁴⁸

The campaigns in India and Burma in 1944 ended in defeat for the Japanese and the INA, with the campaign taking a heavy toll on the men of both armies. The subsequent retreat was called the 'road of bones' by the Japanese.¹⁴⁹ By 1945 the ultimate outcome of the conflict was obvious and the INA found itself fighting a series of defensive actions in which its combat performance was very variable.¹⁵⁰ However one action stands out where according to CSDIC(I) 'INA troops stand their ground well against Gurkhas and British tanks'.¹⁵¹ The unit involved was a ninety-six strong company of the INA Nehru Regiment, led by Lieutenant Gian Singh, and the action is described in detail in Dhillons' memoirs.¹⁵² Another CSDIC(I) note details the forty five survivors taken prisoner of whom twenty six were 'civilian' volunteers, and the origins of these are interesting as all but one are listed as being from regions such as the Punjab, Madras and Orissa in India and must therefore have somehow made their way to Japanese occupied territory in order to enlist in the INA.¹⁵³ There is at least one description of a land crossing from India to Burma in 1942 from a memoir, but it was clearly an enterprise fraught with danger and suggests a high level of motivation among those involved.¹⁵⁴ Most accounts suggest that civilian volunteers for the INA were largely drawn from the Indian diaspora in

¹⁴⁸ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45. p.21.

¹⁴⁹ Keane, *Road of Bones: The Siege of Kohima 1944*, p.xviii.

¹⁵⁰ See accounts in Sundaram, C.S. (1995) 'A Paper Tiger: The Indian National Army in Battle, 1944-1945'. *War & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1, May, pp. 35-59.

¹⁵¹ *Indian National Army* British Library, L/WS/2/46

¹⁵² Dhillon, *From My Bones*, p.314.

¹⁵³ Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/9.

¹⁵⁴ Palta, K.R. (1946) *My adventures with the I.N.A.* Lahore, p.6.

South-east Asia rather than from India itself, an assumption which may need to be revised.

As the end of the war approached there were large scale surrenders of INA personnel in locations such as Rangoon and the final capitulation of Japanese forces found INA units scattered across South-east Asia. The remains of the INA's 'X' Regiment surrendered in Bangkok but proved difficult to manage as prisoners. According to CSDIC(I) as the 'hard core of Jiffery' they showed 'no repentance for their past sins'.¹⁵⁵ In a later report from November 1945 concern is evident as moving the prisoners to the tougher conditions of a criminal jail has had a galvanising effect, with the prisoners taking pride in their harsher treatment, one prisoner commenting 'For a tiger, a cage is necessary'.¹⁵⁶ For some INA members then, while the war had ended, the struggle continued in other forms. Other manifestations of this were post-war attempts to subvert British Indian army forces in Burma. According to CSDIC(I), 'serious efforts were made by ex-INA and ex-IIL civilians to contact' them.¹⁵⁷ Despite the military defeat there were still many individuals motivated to continue the struggle; as CSDIC(I) put it 'S.C.Bose may be dead but much that he did lives still'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Selected papers of CSDIC(I), British Library, Mss Eur F275/10. p.184.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.192.

¹⁵⁷ Anderson, G.D., CSDIC (I). *A Brief Chronological and Factual Account of the INA*. British Library, L/WS/2/45. p.21.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.27.

The subsequent trials of INA officers at the Red Fort in Delhi have been described in detail by many authors.¹⁵⁹ The strong support given to the INA defendants by the Indian National Congress was criticised by some, particularly returning Indian POWs who had resisted joining it. One of those was a Captain Badhwar who made representations to Congress about the 'brutal treatment of loyal Indian P.W.' and wanted them to withdraw support, but the reply made it clear that this was politically impossible.¹⁶⁰ While convictions for 'Waging War against the King' were secured against the first three officers put on trial, the sentences had to be commuted in order to avoid what General Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief India, feared would be 'violent internal conflict'.¹⁶¹ He stated that 'any Indian officer worth his salt is a nationalist' and the decision had had to be taken in order to 'maintain the stability, reliability and efficiency of the Indian Army'.¹⁶² Despite all the INA's efforts on the battlefield this political victory in 1946 was its greatest achievement because it exposed the limits of British power in India.

Conclusion

The INA has been neglected and largely ignored in accounts of the Second World War in South-east Asia. It grew out of the catastrophic defeat of British Empire forces in Malaya and Singapore in 1942, its foundation being the Indian nationalist sympathies of Indian officers captured by Japanese forces. They were a generation of officers with a shared experience of racially-based discrimination and prejudice, but

¹⁵⁹ See for example Khan, S.N. (1946) *The first trial of I.N.A. officers and its aftermath*. Lahore; Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*. p.465.

¹⁶⁰ *Indian National Army and Free Burma Army, Vol. 2*. British Library, L/WS/1/1577. p.112.

¹⁶¹ *Typewritten Minute Market "Strictly Personal and Secret" from General Auchinleck, Concerning the Effect on the Indian Army as a Whole of the First Trial of Members of the Indian National Army*. Major-General Thomas Wynford Rees Papers. British Library, MSS Eur F274/95.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

with often strong loyalties to the regiments they served in. That regimental fabric was deliberately ripped apart at Farrer Park and both officers and men were presented with unexpected choices. Their reasons for volunteering for the INA, or not doing so, were varied and could change over time. While many volunteered to secure better treatment there were also those who were genuinely inspired by the cause of Indian nationalism. Nor did refusal to volunteer necessarily imply loyalty to the British with, particularly for Muslims, domestic Indian political concerns often being a factor. Volunteering rates in 1942 were much higher than often supposed with the numbers allowed to join the INA being artificially limited by the Japanese.

The arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose in 1943 transformed both the recruitment of volunteers and the motivation of the INA. As well as absorbing more POWs, the INA recruited large numbers of civilian volunteers to create a force some forty thousand strong. The INA developed a strongly secular political identity inclusive of all religious groups and based on a vision of an undivided independent India. Its subsequent combat performance on the battlefields of India and Burma was highly variable but needs to be set in a context of facing a much better equipped and supplied opponent. It has at times been unfairly denigrated. The mind-set of its troops was much closer to that of the British Indian army than the brutal fanaticism typically displayed by the Japanese forces it fought beside. The contribution of the INA to the battles it fought in is likely to have been underestimated although it never had more than a marginal effect on the outcome of the campaigns in which it participated. It therefore failed to deliver the full revolutionary vision of Subhas Chandra Bose but had a political impact on post-war India when some of its officers

were put on trial by British authorities. An interesting aspect of the INA is the insight it provides into the changing loyalties of the British Indian army itself.

The archival material relating to the INA held at the British Library represents one of the few primary sources available for researching this little known or understood force. Although largely created by British Military Intelligence for its own purposes it can yield useful insights and has considerable potential for future research.

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