

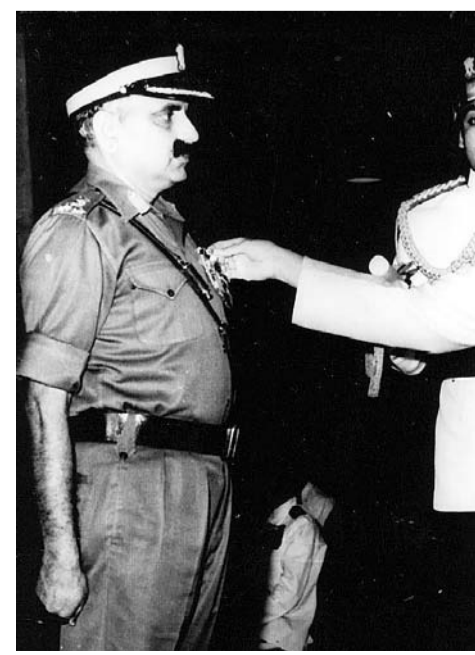
It is easy to write about a success in battle but very difficult to talk about, and draw lessons from a failure but it is even harder to talk about the time spent as a POW. Just the recall of those events can trigger off memories which are a worse than any nightmare.

Major General Vijay Singh a fourth generation officer who is presently serving has written one of the most remarkable books on the trials and tribulations that his father, Major (later Brigadier) Hamir Singh underwent during the famous battle of Daruchhian. He was tasked with leading Company of 14 GRENADIERS in an almost suicidal attack to capture a Pakistani Post on the night of 13 December 1971 in the Poonch Sector of Jammu & Kashmir. The book gives a rare insight into the emotions of a soldier, the intrinsic strength of the Indian Army, the commitment of the officers and men, the honour of the Regiment and the family and the manner in which they coped against insurmountable odds.

No doubt, these are the reasons why this account took so long to write. But as is brought out in the book, failure doesn't take away the valour of the eight officers, seven JCO's and 149 men of 14 GRENADIERS who laid down their lives for the nation, were injured or missing in this battle.

The book is written in four parts namely the battle of Daruchhian Top, the period spent in hospital at Rawalpindi, the time in POW Camp in Lyaalpur and finally the emotions on returning back home. Each chapter is wonderfully narrated and is inter connected with various memories from the past. Incidentally, Vijay was permitted to write this book by his father with the condition that the proceeds of this book if any, are to be utilized towards looking after the kin of the martyrs of this battle.

The battle itself is covered in the most graphic detail. Looking back most people will wonder how the battalion would have carried out this most difficult attack on the Ceasfire Line. It is undoubtedly a gripping account of a bloody engagement to capture an impregnable dominating feature. That they nearly succeeded is testimony to the spirit, motivation, courage and commitment of the troops and not the attack plan which as per the then GOC 25 Infantry Division; Major General Kundan Singh was 'too complicated and providing artillery support for which would be a challenge'. He went on to state that



Brig. Hari Singh Ji was awarded A.V.S.M by Former President of India V.V.Giri.

Part two deals with the time Hamir spent in a Pakistani Military Hospital recovering from his injuries. He was initially kept isolated and blindfolded as they feared he was a commando. There were however a large number of inquisitive people peering through the only window to catch a glimpse of the 'Hindu' soldier. A poignant moment reflecting comradeship within the profession of arms took place when a sentry guarding him told him that he would not volunteer for this duty again as "his heart aches in sadness". It was while in Military Hospital Rawalpindi that a Pakistani Junior Commissioned Officer told him that one of their senior knew him.

## #BOOKWORM



Maj Gen. Vijay Singh, author of POW 1971.



The words of his father, "son I can bear your loss but not your disgrace", were the cross he bore as he stood up under intense enemy fire, adjusting his heavily bandaged hand, which could no longer be used to fire his weapon, his clothes soaked in blood and he continued extolling his men forward with the battle cry 'Sarvada Shaktishali'.

'plans must be simple and practical'. Even though, the Brigade Commander Brigadier Hari Singh advised him to keep in mind the points raised by the GOC, Lieutenant Colonel Inderjeet Singh, CO 14 GRENADIERS did not change his unconventional plan which turned into a catastrophic failure.

### To Serve With Honour

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Earlier, a representative from 7 MAHAR had lead his Company through their minefield a delicate task, where even one misplaced step could result in casualties and alert the enemy. The Company then infiltrated through thick forests and heavy undergrowth in complete silence shrouded in darkness. The move had to be coordinated with the other two Companies advancing from different directions.

The first Company to go in for an attack led by Major Harbans Chahal

attacked the feature frontally and faced devastating fire. Unfortunately, Major Chahal a close friend and college class mate of Hamir's mangled his foot badly by stepping on a mine leaving him seriously wounded. While on another axis Major Dogra lay critically injured due to enemy machine gun fire and the Company was now under intense fire including artillery which killed him. In a matter of minutes all his key personnel had been killed or grievously injured. Major Khan's Company having traversed a steep slope were within meters of their objective when they too came under direct enemy fire resulting in his death. Hamir had therefore remained the last hope to capture the objective.

### A Prisoner of War

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That there are similar emotions on both sides clearly came out during his interaction with the widow of a Pakistani officer who came to meet him in hospital regarding the fate of her husband. Coincidentally, he was aware of his death and even of the last cheque he wrote, which



Battle of Daruchhian.

# A Heroic Tale of Trials & Tribulations: POW 1971



Pakistani POWs.

she showed him with tears streaming down her cheeks. All she wanted to know was weather his last rights had been conducted as per Islamic traditions, which he confirmed.

His time in Lyaalpur Jail has been covered in great detail. The segregation of Prisoners as per religion with an aim of indoctrination, failed to break the strong secular traditions that bind the Indian Army. Incidentally, Hamir had been commanding the Khaim Khani Muslim Company and was soon joining his men during Friday prayer as per the customs of the Indian Army much to the surprise of the Pakistanis. His leadership qualities stood out as the senior most Indian officer in the Camp and he helped the men get out of their psychological state by demanding that they be allowed to play games and organizing recreational activities.

### Homeward Bound

The poignancy of their return home was not lost on Hamir. He had witnessed the heroism of his men and fellow officers even when things did not go their way on the slopes of the objective. Hamir had to clear the air along with the others on what actually transpired on the slopes of Daruchhian and be prepared to face the widows and parents of those who had not returned and wanted to know their

fate, some of the were still unwilling to believe the death of their loved ones. There were others like Mrs Gossain, the young widow of the artillery officer of 196 Mountain Regiment who had also been awarded a Vir Chakra, wanting to know how her husband died.

Major Hamir Singh was the son of Major General Kalyan Singh who had himself been a prisoner of war during the Second World War in May 1942 while serving as a Captain with 2 Field Regiment during the fighting at Bir Hachiem. Incidentally, the others who had been taken prisoners during that battle included Major (later) General PP Kumaramanglam and Captain (later General) Tikka Khan both from 2 Field Regiment and also included Captain (later Lieutenant General) Shahbazada Yakub Khan who was with 18 Cavalry.

Hamir was on deputation to the Nigerian Defence Academy and had come to India on leave to attend a wedding just before the outbreak of hostilities. As war was imminent he decided to join his battalion as his battalion required him. His father assured him that it was the right thing to do in spite of the complications being on the strength of the Nigerian Academy. He need not have been there but he answered his calling and lived up to the values of a brave warrior inculcated in him



and passed down over generations. The mystery of the senior Pakistani officer remains in the realm of speculation; it could be General Tikka Khan who had served alongside his father and even visited the POW Camp or was Brigadier Adeb whom he had interacted with in Nigeria? There is no doubt that the camaraderie within the forces and particularly within a unit creates everlasting ties.

### The Imprint Endures

The war had a lasting impact on his wife; she was in her twenties staying with her parents a Police officer posted in Alwar along with her two young boys when on 16 December 1971 she received a telephone call informing her that her husband was missing and presumed dead. It was only in early February that she learnt that he was alive. This uncertainty naturally left its mark but what is remarkable is the manner in which she shielded her boys from the trauma the family was undergoing. The fact that both of them are serving Major Generals today is testimony to her qualities.

There is undoubtedly a great legacy that the family of Brig Hamir Singh carries, looking back he seems fortunate to have survived but his courage, leadership qualities and the gallantry of the men he commanded stood out. As the citation for his Vir Chakra states he "displayed gallantry and determination of a high order." Leadership and character qualities such as commitment, competence, courage, resilience, concern for his troops

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## Rockefeller Centre Christmas Tree Lighting

ighting up your Christmas tree during the winter holidays is an American pastime. One special part of the Christmas season is the lighting of the Rockefeller Centre Christmas tree. It brings people together and creates beautiful moments for the people and tourists of New York City. As part of the Christmas tradition, the Rockefeller Centre has a long history of joy, prosperity, and success throughout.

## Pebble in Your Shoe

The speed of thought that Lionel Messi showed while taking his goal was incredible, but the hard-fought victory over Mexico also gave us a glimpse of Argentine football's future, in the shape of the brilliant Enzo Fernandez.



Atreyo Mukhopadhyay from Qatar

Much of the talk before this tournament was of Argentina's 36-match unbeaten run, which spanned over three years. But by the end of their shock defeat to Saudi Arabia, it was another number that had their fans breaking out in cold sweats. Since losing the 2014 World Cup final to Germany, Argentina had won just one of their five World Cup matches, a sequence that included a 3-0 thrashing at the hands of Croatia and a 4-3 loss to France, the eventual champions, in the round of 16. It wasn't being mischievous to ask whether another team built around the matchless talent of Lionel Messi could cope with the pressure of being on the biggest stage.

When fighting to stay alive in a tournament, Mexico are one of the last teams you'd want to play. After being banned for the 1990 edition, El Tri have reached the last 16 in each of the next seven World Cups, accumulating some notable scalps along the way.



Lionel Messi's strike against Mexico.

None of those victories was more eye-catching than the one over Germany, World Cup holders, in 2018. Mexico has one of the strongest leagues in the Americas, and their players are known for their tenacity. They will scrap for every inch, and notably raise their game when up against illustrious South American opponents. On Saturday night, with Argentina clearly nervous, it was they that had the better opportunities in the first half.

But what this Mexican team lacks is a cutting edge. There is no penalty-box poacher like Javier 'Chicharito' Hernandez, or an attacking presence to compare with The Last Emperor, Mauro Arambaro Blanco. Raul Gimenez had that quality in his prime, but he hasn't been remotely the same player since suffering that horrendous skull fracture a couple of years ago.

As for Argentina, how can you ever count out a team that has Messi in its ranks? It was the great Muhammad Ali that once said: "It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out; it's the pebble in your shoe." The Saudi Arabia loss was that pebble, but throughout the qualifying campaign, it was apparent that Messi, now 35, isn't about to lose sight of the mountaintop and the World Cup title he craves above all else.

Against Mexico, chances were at a premium. A trademark run early in the second half ended with being scythed down. But the resulting free kick was floated harmlessly over the bar. As the

## Unique Goal: Messi's Grounder



Atreyo Mukhopadhyay from Qatar

There are two things about something called a 'grounder' when it comes to the game of football. It means when you hit ball along the ground.

First, it is difficult to hit with perfection when taken from a distance. Positioning of the body has to be perfect, head has to be lowered and placed above the ball, and the shooter's body has to be bent from the waist. Otherwise, the ball will travel in air. Somewhat like cricket, where batters are advised to keep the head above the ball rather than away while executing the drive shot. Second, it is the most difficult kind of challenge for a goalkeeper to deal with. Usually they are tall. For them to get that low and slide along the ground to save that ball is not a mean act.

That is why Lionel Messi's strike against Mexico in Argentina's do or die match was so special. He took the shot from a fair bit of distance, about 22-25



Argentina world cup squad 2022.



Argentina's Coach Lionel Scaloni.

minutes ticked down, you could sense the tension in the stands and even among the players.

But it's at moments like those that sporting genius makes itself felt. When Angel Di Maria passed the ball to him from the right wing, Messi was in a central position and about 22 yards from goal. Those Mexicans moving to close him down could have been forgiven for expecting that he would shift the ball to a teammate on the left flank and move further forward.

Instead, he took one touch and with the ball still bobbling, sent a daisy-cutter past Guillermo Ochoa and into the corner of the net. If the Mexicans and the millions watching were stunned, who could blame them? The speed of thought and execution were incredible. Two Mexicans had sensed the danger and were rushing to close him down, but the ball had left his boot long before they could get close.

This win wasn't only about

## Unique Goal: Messi's Grounder

yards. The crucial part was how he adjusted his body position, by checking just about half a step before making connection with the ball. He knew what he was doing. Others realised that after he had completed his act. Then comes the question of imparting the curl. It kept going away from the goalkeeper, teasing him all the way. To have that kind of control and presence of mind in a pressure situation!



Mexico's Guillermo Ochoa.

That was the most remarkable part about the goal which kept Argentina in the World Cup after the opening defeat against Saudi Arabia. Mexico's Guillermo Ochoa is a vastly experienced and extremely skilled goalkeeper. He might have thought that he had the angle covered. But the level and amount of spin Messi packed

Messi though. Lionel Scaloni, the coach, deserves enormous credit for recognising that the starting XI against Saudi Arabia hadn't clicked. The five changes made for this match said as much. Lisandro Martinez, the centre-back that Manchester United signed from Ajax in the summer, may be small in stature, but he's a warrior with great positional sense and speed. And the introduction of Enzo Fernandez with more than half an hour remaining gave the team much-needed attacking momentum.

Fernandez, just 21, is a versatile, deep-lying playmaker who can also move up the pitch and influence play. The manner in which he took his goal - Messi, who else, provided the assist - showed just why he's so highly rated, and why Benfica of Lisbon will struggle to hold on to him for very long.

Given the intensity of the rivalry between the two countries, it's unusual for an Argentine to be named after a Uruguayan. But

during his spells with River Plate of Buenos Aires in the 1980s and 1990s, Enzo Francescoli was such an iconic figure that Raul Fernandez decided to name his son after the Uruguayan. The modern-day Enzo is a very different player from his father's hero, but there is every sign that he, along with Julian Alvarez of Manchester City, is the next great Argentine talent.

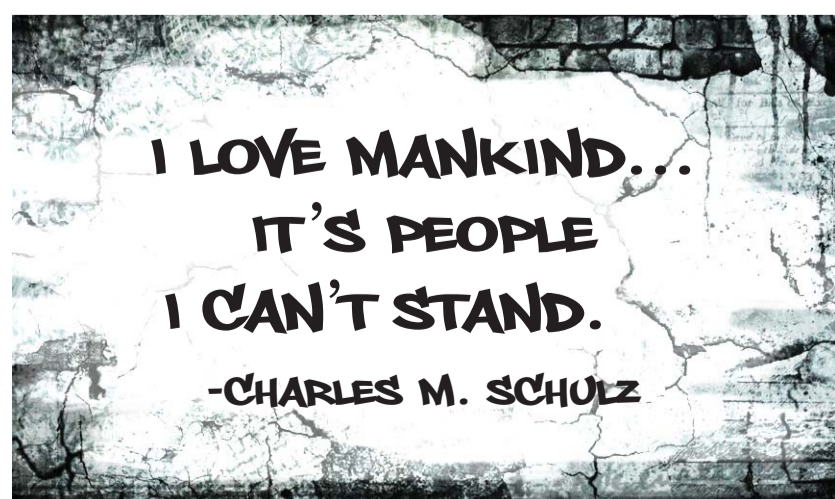
Despite that amazing unbeaten run, this is far from being a perfect team. Saudi Arabia showed that. But as the likes of Fernandez grow in stature and the team enjoys such frenetic support from the stands, Messi will feel that his dream is very much alive. Poland and the imposing Robert Lewandowski showed just why he's so highly rated, and why Benfica of Lisbon will struggle to hold on to him for very long.

power. In case of the second one struck by Enzo Fernandez, it was mostly about force. Messi did not need that. He met the ball almost with love and caressed it in. That something he has been doing for so long. Remember the last-minute winner he netted against Iran in 2014? That was an aerial effort, technique wise different from the one we saw. Messi's genius will always garner the most headlines, but this is no one-man show.

It's for moments like this that people watch football. It does not quite assure Argentina's passage into the pre-quarters. They have many gaps to plug in the defensive midfield region and in defence. Poland will be a formidable opponent in the last match. But for neutral viewers, if we are, that was something worth remembering. Nonviolent, yet so telling. Messi has kept his team in it. What happens here on? Let's see.

Atreyo Mukhopadhyay is a sports journalist. Worked for the Telegraph, Hindustan Times and The New Indian Express. He covered four 50-over cricket World Cups. Wrote on football World Cup and other sports. Does bird photography when he is not working.

## THE WALL



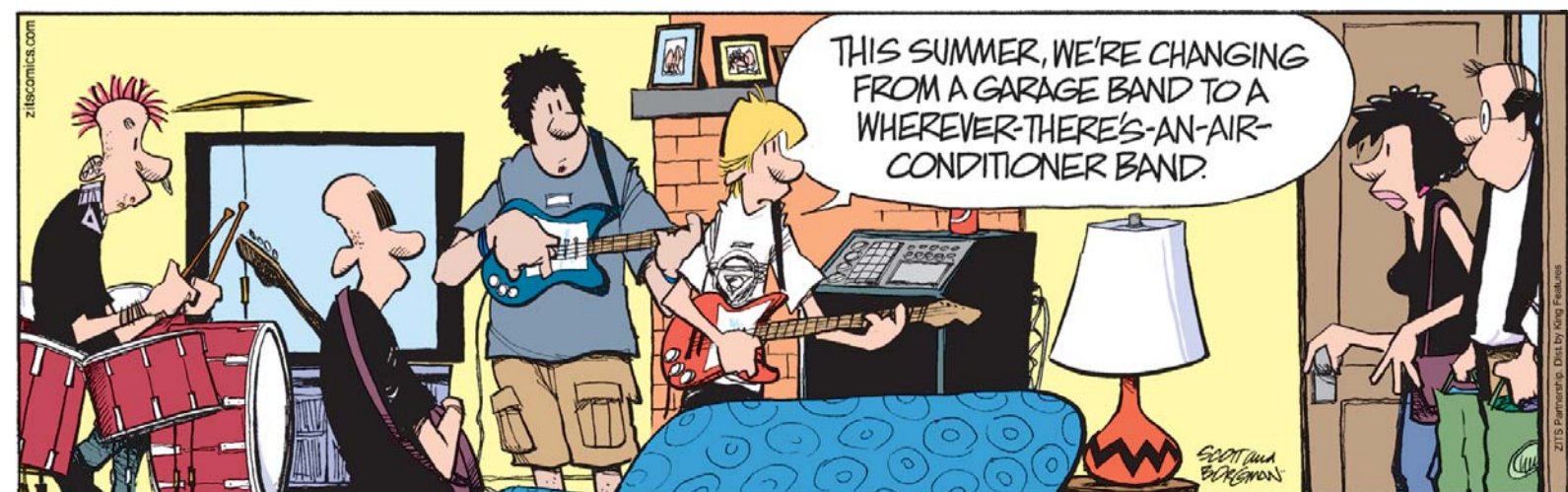
-CHARLES M. SCHULZ

## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman