



A brave lady, freedom fighter, armed with a gun and with three children joined us. She carried a pot of cooked rice for us.



Padma Shree Lt Col Sajjad Zahir (Retd)
(Swadhinata Padak, Bir Protik, Project Director, Bangladesh Army History Project)

Col Sajjad was a young artillery officer serving with the Pakistani Parachute Brigade in the Sialkot Sector when the armed struggle for freedom started in Bangladesh. On learning of the atrocities committed by the Pakistan Army on his fellow Bengalis, he defected and crossed over to India, bringing with the Operational Plans of the Pakistan Army, which proved most useful to us when war was declared. He later joined the Mukti Bahini and served under Gen Sagat Singh. For his gallantry and services during the war, he was decorated with a, Swadhinata Padak, Bir Protik, equivalent to our Vir Chakra. After the war, amongst other things including writing over fifty books, he has worked tirelessly to promote good relations between our two countries, for which, he was awarded the Padma Shree by our Government. He is a dear friend and he and Chandrakanti are in almost daily touch with each other.

Col Sajjad

"1971 was a turning point in the history of the sub-continent. One of the key players in the history of 1971 War was the Mukti Bahini. They were the main strength of the resistance and their inexorable motivation was a key factor for the Mitra Bahini for winning the War of 1971. According to KF Rustamji, the first Director General of Border Security Force (BSF) of India, "Mukti Bahini lacked everything for carrying on



The author with Maj Dhillon Arty during our Mukti Bahini days.

The War That Legends Are Made Of

The Mukti Bahini was formed on the night of 25 March when Pakistan Army launched 'Operation Search Light,' the operational order to conduct genocide. The initial resistance was put up by the five battalions of the East Bengal Regiment, the East Pakistan Rifles, Police, Ansars, students and people from all walks of life. With meager arms and ammunition, they started resisting the Pakistan Army. Due to the genocide being committed by Pakistan Army, large number of people started crossing over the border and going to India to save their lives.

#1971 LIBERATION WAR



Sitting on my right is Col Sajjad, Princess Diya Kumari in a pink saree and Meera Kumari in a red Saree.



The rickshaw seen in the above picture is decorated and displayed in the Raddison Hotel in Dacca. Self with my wife, Lakshmi.



Author with young Bengali supporters, 1971.

later, two more infantry divisions were raised which put the Pakistan Army in a secure position for conducting their operations. The BSF had limited capabilities and resources available to them for taking care of the security situation along the border and for the training of the Mukti Bahini. As such, a decision was taken by the Government of India that the Indian Army would step in the border areas and take over the border security of West Bengal area by 30 April and Assam (including Meghalaya) and Tripura by 1 May. The BSF came under the operational control of the Army and the 'Operation Jackpot' was launched. The Mukti Bahini training also became the responsibility of the Army and training camps were established along the border areas.

The Mukti Bahini, after initial training and equipping itself, started conducting numerous

operations deep inside Bangladesh, causing heavy casualties on the Pakistan Army. The Bangladesh Army was initially organised with three infantry brigades and two artillery batteries. After rigorous training, a small Air Force and Navy were formed with the help of Indian Air Force and Navy. In addition, Bangladesh was divided into 11 Mukti Bahini sectors, where mainly the newly trained Mukti Bahini members were posted under the leadership of trained army/air force officers and they continued their operations. A force of nearly 500 naval commandos were trained and put under Sector No 10. The naval commandos were successful in destroying the Pakistan forces' river and seagoing vessels, thus disrupting their logistic route. The Indian Army also started conducting operations along the border belt areas with support

and cooperation of Mukti Bahini and local people. Guerrilla activities by Mukti Bahini members were conducted in Dhaka and other parts of the country that was posing a challenge to the Pakistan Army. On 3 December 1971, after Pakistan Air Force attacked ten Indian airfields, the war between Indian and Pakistan started. During this war, there were many incidents which crowd the pages of history and many are not yet documented. Some of the incidents on contribution of common people which come to my mind are as follows:

- On 7 December 1971, the 4/5 GR under 59 Mountain Brigade of 8 Mountain Division, crossed the Surma River and landed in Mirapara, near Sylhet town, in a classic heliborne operation. During a fierce fight with 31 Punjab Regiment of Pakistan Army



Even young children helped us by carrying ammunition and other stores.

- Brigadier Sant Singh, Commander FJ Sector, marched to Mymensingh with 6 Bihar Regiment, 93 BSF Battalion and 15,000 members of Mukti Bahini. After the capture of Mymensingh on 14 December 1971, he marched to Dhaka without any vehicles. The common people of the villages provided them rickshaws, vans, trucks, buses and ensured that the troops reach Dhaka by early morning hours of 16 December 1971.
- In the early hours of 16 December, the Pakistan Army and Mitra Bahini were facing each other in Dhaka, the balance of forces were heavily tilted towards Pakistan Army in Dhaka. They had a total 26,500 soldiers and Indian Army had barely 2,000 soldiers. Incidentally, on the 11 April evening, the Chief of Staff of Eastern Command, in a meeting of senior officers of Pakistan Army in the command post of Nazim, suggested that they should prepare and launch street to street fight in Dhaka city with their 26,500 soldiers. Major General

Mohammad Jamshed Khan, Commander of 36 Infantry Division, who was a senior and experienced commander, said that he was of the opinion that street to street fight in Dhaka city will bring a disaster to the Pakistan Army as every home in Dhaka has more than 2-3 armed Muktis. They will attack the Pakistan Army from three sides and Indian Army will attack them from the front. As such, the plan of street to street fight was abandoned. This was the level of frustration and lack of determination of Pakistan Army.

Indian Army made very heavy sacrifices for the success in the war. They were not an invading Army but a liberator Army. It was a war conducted for freedom of people from genocide and atrocities. It is known that Pakistan Army commanders believe that defence of the east lay in the west. Pakistan Army had mobilised more forces on the western sector as they felt that they would be able to defeat the Indian Army in the western sector which would affect the war in the east. The Pakistan Army had four corps in western front (Frontier Corps, I Corp, IV Corps and I Corps), whereas, Indian Army had three corps (XV Corps, I Corp and XI Corps). Yet, they could not bring success in the battlefronts in western front also. It is important for us to study and document the history of 1971. The sharpest memories of our experience of working together have already started to fade, but yet we have to recollect the memories and document them. It is the people who had witnessed the bloody struggle and can give the best evidence. It is the brave who make history, and it is the brave who can also write real history as it takes courage to write the truth, the whole truth."

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A Bengali women raped and shot by the Pakistani soldiers.

#PLATED VIETNAM@CHAO

You'll not forget this 'bread'

Slowcooked to extract the maximum flavours, enough to revel in!



Sadhana Garg
Journalist & Social Entrepreneur

Eaten bread is soon forgotten, so goes a Vietnamese proverb. Not if you have savoured the traditional street-food at the Vietnamese Food Festival currently on at Chao, the Chinese Bistro at Holiday Inn City Centre. Vietnam, of late, has been in the news for all the right reasons, not only has it become a most favoured destination for holidaying but its cuisine has literally captured the gastronomic buds of a whole new generation.

At Chao, the culinary journey begins with Bun Thang, a typical North Vietnamese dish. It is a mixed bag of herbs, chicken base and topping of pork and eggs. A very basic preparation. It uses round rice noodles with fresh Vietnamese coriander, the sheer aroma is what makes it uniquely Vietnamese.

For vegetarians, it uses a generous use of vegetables, herbs and noodles that makes a great beginning for the experience ahead. For those who like their food spicy, there is Hanoi Canh Chua ca, a fish soup, it was actually rich with balanced flavours, sour, sweet and spicy. A popular Vietnamese dish served with pineapple, basil and fresh lime.

Starters were a perfect blend of flavours and freshness. The Vietnamese fresh vegetable rolls are far healthier than the Chinese spring rolls. These near translucent parcels were first packed with salad greens,



carrots, mint, peanuts and glass noodles. For the non-vegetarian, the stuffing is of minced meat or seafood, adding to this the rice paper, making it an enticing snack.

The Goi Cuon, fresh herbs and prawn paper rolls were included. Lean proteins like chicken and tofu boosted both its taste and food value. The main course is literally akin to having Vietnam on a plate. Bun'h Thit Nuong is a very popular noodle dish from South Vietnam. It was all of salty, sweet, soft and the crushed peanuts and pickled carrots gave it a crunchy kick.

And now about the national dish of Vietnam, Pho, the fresh noodles soup with sticky rice noodles and accompaniments that turned it into a burst of flavour. Slowcooked to extract the maximum flavours, enough to revel in the bowl of taste-



ful concoction, and Pho get all your worries! The stir fried Tofu, popularly known as soya paneer in India, was not only silky but the fresh red chillies, fresh lime, bamboo shoots, scallions and shiitake mushrooms added to its taste.

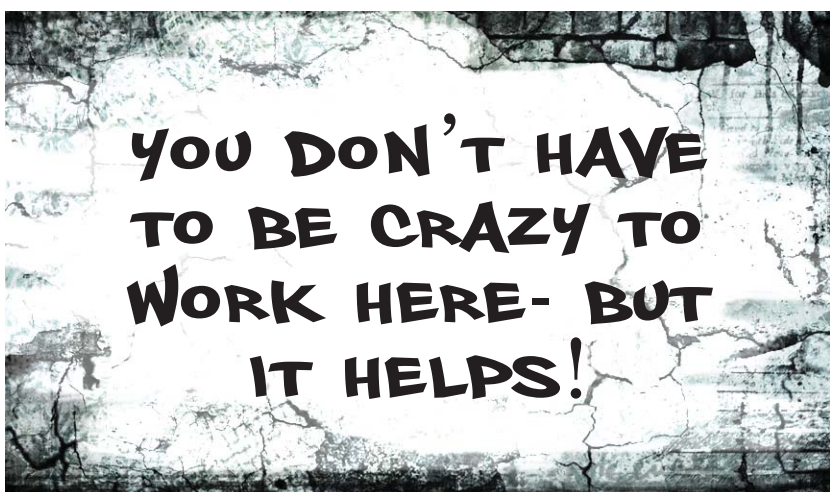
Another popular dish from South Vietnam, or specifically the Mekong Delta, is Ga Khao Sa Ot. Made from minced chicken with beans, broccoli bamboo shoots and braised with fresh lemon grass and lime make it simple but delicious with all the ingredients giving it a texture and taste that is very special. For those who swear that seafood is for the soul or those for whom it is a constant reminder of the ocean's bounty, there is Ca Hap Xi Dau, a homely Vietnamese steamed fish with bamboo shoots, scallions fresh chillies, lime and shiitake served with ginger sauce and it is a reminder of how rich the Vietnamese cuisine is without being complex. Sans the use of dairy and oil well, almost the food festival at Chao should be every foodie but fit person's go-to-destination.

Also, for those who think curry is just a yellow sauce, check out the Vietnamese golden curry made from coconut milk, fish sauce, cilantro, chicken and served with Jasmine rice!

For dessert, there was Che Chuoi Hap. Simply put, caramelised bananas, sago pearls, simmered in fresh sweetened coconut milk, no dairy, no fat, but comfort and sumptuousness in a bowl. Actually, that literally sums up this very popular and painstakingly curated Vietnamese Food Festival at Chao!



THE WALL



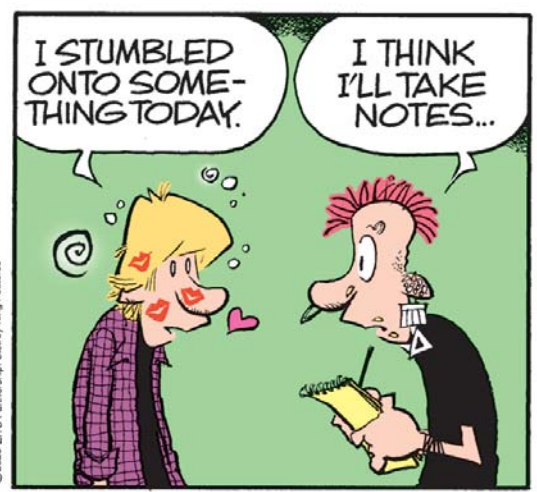
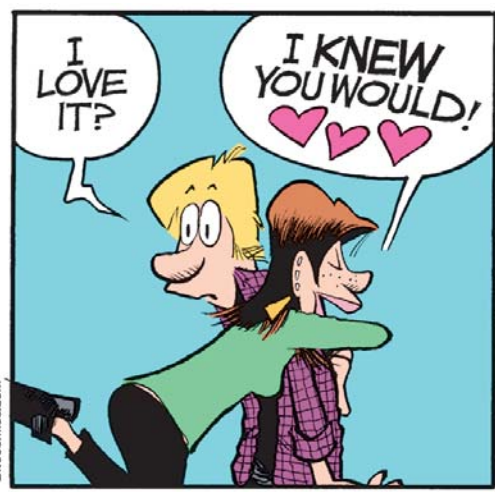
Col Sajjad with Gen VK Singh and Author.

BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman