confirmed from the yardmaster that our wagon would be attached to the train that would be leaving in the evening via Varanasi. It then occurred to me why not to visit the Lord Vishwanath Temple at Varanasi and with the consent of my buddy I ventured out to take a holy dip and pay my obeisance at the world famous temple of Lord Shiva. After my visit to the temple I bought some sweets for my friend, Walter without whose consent my wish would not have been fulfilled.

During the next phase of our journey we got an eight hour break at Lucknow. I asked my buddy Walter to take a break and take a tour of the ‘city of Nawabs’ and see the Bara Imambara, the Chota Imambara, Bhul bhulaiya, the Art Gallery etc. He was very happy and thanked me profusely for enabling him to do so. Both of us were now re-energised to undertake the balance of the journey.

On the 18th day of our long journey, we reached Lahore, crossing Harbanspura at about 10 am. The station master assured us that he would provide an engine for shunting our wagon back to our destination station. It was a hot summer day, the heat was unbearable and our wagon was like an inferno. To avoid the extreme heat, Walter closed the door to prevent sunlight from directly entering the wagon, as a result the outside bolt fell locking us both inside the wagon, since other door was already locked from outside. All our shouting and banging on the door went unheard. There was no hope of finding relief from suffocation. Sometime later a police patrol passing by heard our shouts, but instead of helping us, they ran to the station master to report the presence of some thieves who had entered the goods

Mugal Sarai Marshaling Area
wagon to steal precious goods. After half an hour the station master with his staff came to the spot and realised what had happened. With the help of the staff he opened the door from outside and gave mouthful to the police patrol and shouted “Are you blind? Can’t you see that on either side of the Wagon it is written: MEN INSIDE, NOT TO BE LOOSE SHUNTED.

However, we were very relieved and thanked the station master for saving us from a near death situation. Thereafter we decided that one of us would always remain outside when the other partner was resting.

Next morning, we reached Harbanspura Station. Walter stayed with the consignment and I went to the Air Force Station and reported to the Senior Equipment Officer. He completed all the formalities required to take the items in his charge and provided us with the necessary receipts. We took rest for the day. During our return journey via the Punjab Mail we decided that we will proceed on casual leave and spend a few days with the families. We fixed the date when we would meet at Sealdah station for the onward journey to our unit location.

On that particular day at Sealdah Railway station, we met the British Railway Traffic officer (RTO) who gave us a letter from our Commanding Officer stating that our Agartala unit had been disbanded and we should return at the earliest. We immediately arranged our journey by Shurma Mail and we were quite excited to learn that Mohammad Ali Jinnah was also travelling by the same train.

On reaching Agartala, I handed over my report to the Commanding officer who was pleased to announce that I was entitled to wear the Burma Star and 1939-45 Star, having been in service in Agartala (forward Area) for the duration of the war.

Sgt Nandagopal Biswas is a Second World War Veteran (aged 94 years) and now living at B 24 Amarabati Defence Colony, Durgapur 713214 (West Bengal). He can be contacted on his phone: 9475320526. We salute this Air Warrior for his spirit and for sharing his memories in this article.
The HQ Purva UP & MP Sub Area is proud to be associated with the veterans on its AOR. The Sub Area veteran outreach programme focuses on strengthening partnerships and interacting with veterans, in order to improve the care and availability of services for veterans and their families. The aim is to identify the unique needs and challenges facing our veterans and guide them by making respectful inquiries, giving them a compassionate hearing and enabling them to lead a peaceful retired life.

It is these veterans who are left to tell their stories of courage and triumph in the face of adversaries. While some soldiers and important figures are well known to the people in general, most are unknown. Some didn’t survive, and many others simply never spoke about what they did. These heroes displayed courage, valour bravery and a selflessness we may not have heard about, but they nonetheless made an important contribution in various wars.

Gnr Ram Awadh Mishra, a 97 year old World War II veteran from the 11 Royal Artillery Regiment of the British Indian Army is one such veteran, a real life hero who helped the Allies win the war and make the world what it is today. His sacrifice for the sake of his fellow fighters and even strangers is truly heroic.

Gnr Ram Awadh Mishra enlisted in the 11 Royal Artillery Regiment on 10 Oct, 1941 at Deolali. With just one year of training he was moved to Rangoon to face the onslaught of Japan. The geographical characteristics of the region meant that weather, disease and terrain took a major toll on the human body. The lack of transport infrastructure placed an extra burden on military engineers and air transport for ensuring troop movement, supplies, and the evacuation of the wounded. This veteran has faint memories of being actively involved in the war, most of the time, under heavy enemy fire and never retreating despite all odds. Initial setbacks, did not deter the determined soldiers of the regiment. While the enemy was hammering at the defensive positions, Gnr Ram Awadh fought valiantly to check the savage and determined assault on Pagoda Hill. In a fierce frontal attack, as the Japanese were blasting his guns with grenades and mortar fire, the battery moved an extra gun into position and placed it in action, under continuous fire; they repaired another
and Gnr Ram Awadh personally manned it, gallantly holding his line, until replacements arrived. A little later, with ammunition critically low and the supply lines cut off, at great risk to his life and in the face of continued enemy attack, he battled his way through hostile lines with the urgently needed shells for his gunners, thereby contributing in large measure to the virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment. His great personal valour and courageous initiative were in keeping with the highest traditions of Izzat- o -Iqbal.

Gnr Ram Awadh Mishra was conferred with the Yudh Medal and Good Service Medal by the British Indian army for the feat accomplished at a young age. A proud soldier, highly motivated and full of energy, war veteran, Gnr Ram Awadh Mishra, is presently residing the in Pratapgarh district of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. He is indeed a source of inspiration for the Indian Army and the nation. We pray for his good health and would like this icon to inspire future generations of soldiers.
HUMAN INTEREST STORIES : LT COL BRIJ RAJ SINGHA

This is a story of a veteran who after having donned the olive green for 28 years, is now giving back to the society and the nation, through his philanthropic efforts.

Lt Col Brij Raj Singh was born on 2 February, 1936 in humble circumstances in a remote village of District Mirzapur on the banks of the river Ganga. The hardship of his formative years, like losing his father at the young age of two, walking for 10 kms to go to school and many other such adversities made him the very simple and compassionate man, that he is today.

He passed his BSc from Allahabad University. To contribute to the family income, he paid no heed to his education and joined the UP Govt in the non-gazette post of ADO, where he served till 1963.

Life was well settled, but the call of the nation was too tempting to deny in the aftermath of the debacle of 1962. He joined the Indian Army as an emergency commissioned officer. He was commissioned into 17 Madras and got first hand experience of the battle zone during the 1965 war and tackled the Naga insurgency in its full spectrum in Nagaland. Post 1971, during demobilisation, he was transferred to EME where he served at both peace and field locations. He finally hung up his uniform in 1992.

Post retirement the officer settled down in Allahabad. Life was moving at a very comfortable pace. But remembering his younger days when he used to walk 10 kms for a basic elementary education made him yearn to do something for the upliftment of his village. What better way of uplifting the people than by raising educational standards and providing good quality education to downtrodden. Finally mobilising all his resources he opened a primary school for poor children at his native village of Mugal patti, still one of the remotest village of eastern UP.

The list of his social service activities is endless. He also took up an honorary job with UP govt, as District Programme Manager, Mirzapur district, to run the National Blindness Eradication programme, sponsored by WHO from 1995 to 1998. He organised eye camps at far-flung villages to help the eye surgeons to carry out cataract operations. He was awarded the second prize in the entire state of UP, for organising more than 3000 successful free eye cataract operation in Mirzapur.

The officer could contribute so much to the society because of the unflinching support of his equally motivated and compassionate wife Dr Mrs Vidya Singh, who herself is an accomplished gynaecologist. She is also involved big time in social service. She has provided honorary medical service at the 508 Army Base Workshop, COD Chheoki and the Military Hospital Allahabad. She is also a regular contributor to various charitable funds for providing relief to the needy. The list goes on…

This couple is an excellent role model for all army men, and in the larger context for every citizen, for looking beyond ones self-centered materialistic cocoon and contribute to the betterment of the society. May god bless the couple who are 82 and 75 year sold respectively, with a healthy and long life, so that they continue to be a beacon of light for selfless social service in this materialistic world.
Maj FKK Sircar of the 2nd Assam Regiment, who was one of the longest living officers in the Allahabad area, left for his heavenly abode on the 21 January, 2018 at the age of 101. Born in 1917 he would have been 102 on the 6 March. An alumnae of the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun, he had the experience of fighting three wars- the Second World War, Indo-Pak war of 1947-48 and Indo-China War of 1962. He was part of the select group who were entrusted with the onerous task of building up the National Cadet Corps, and his involvement was right from deciding the colour of the uniform to the structure of the NCC in the country.

With his sharp memory right till the end, it was fascinating to hear him recount his varied experiences and adventures right down to the names of the people and the dates of the events. His daily routine consisted of yoga, an evening walk and sitting at his writing table, for an hour or two doing his accounts. He kept a meticulous record of all the staff working for him, their absences and the work they did, occasionally typing an official letter on his beloved typewriter. Evening time was for watching his favourite sports and the Animal Kingdom TV channel. He was an avid sports lover and regularly watched cricket, badminton and tennis matches. He had tremendous love for his garden. He kept a close watch over his garden, and with his Mali would plan the planting and pruning of various flowers and vegetables and the various kinds of fertiliser to be given to the different plants.

At the young age of 95, he wrote The Memoirs of a Soldier, which described his life and is replete with stories and interesting anecdotes from his army life. The book was released by Major General Arun Sahni, VSM, GOC 4 Inf Div on 28 December, 2009 at Allahabad.

When asked the secret of being so alert and active even at such a ripe old age, he used to smile and say: Hard work, discipline, simple and good food and most of all God’s blessings. An inspiration for one and all veterans, hew as the epitome of how to keep oneself active even at an advanced age.
Our veterans of today are the heroes of yesteryears and a source of inspiration and motivation of today’s leaders. They, with their zeal and commitment, have nurtured the Indian Army over the years, guarding the nation’s frontiers to hand over a vibrant nation to the present generation. Now, that they have hung up their uniforms and embarked on a new innings, the Indian Army stands by them at each step, with the resolve that ‘We Care’. Towards this aim, HQ Purva UP and MP Sub Area are revitalising their connect with the veterans and recognising the sacrifices and contribution of our unsung heroes.

This edition covers the life of Major General MN Rawat, PVSM (Retd) who at 90 years, is the senior most veteran of Allahabad Station and has fought three wars with both China and Pakistan in different sectors.

The General is a true scholar warrior. His ardent love for books and military history is still intact, and now occupies a major part of his time. His early childhood was spent in Agra. Being the youngest child, in a family of scholars he developed an interest in writing. For his higher studies he went to Allahabad where he took his BSc degree in Botany. He always topped his class throughout his academic career. In Allahabad, which was the hub of educational excellence in the mid-1940s, he further honed his scholastic talent. Here he had the privilege of closely interacting with eminent personalities like Dr DV Pant, Dr Hari Vansh Rai Bachchan and many more.

In spite of his scholastic achievements, his destiny and desire to serve the country, charted a different course for him as he joined the Indian Army in 1948, despite resistance from his teachers and against the wishes of his family members, especially his elder brother. During his SSB interview, when the psychologist asked him his reason for joining the army, he replied, ‘To become the most competent General of the Indian Army.’ This gives an insight into the tremendous confidence he had as a youngster. He joined the Indian Military Academy leaving the comfort and opportunities being offered by Allahabad University for pursuing higher studies, including an offer to go abroad to pursue his PhD degree on a princely scholarship of Rs 100 per month - a huge amount at that time.

In keeping with his track record of excellence, he
topped all academic tests during his training at IMA. Being a staunch vegetarian was considered a disadvantage by his superiors, but his resolve prevailed and he passed out of the academy with flying colours. He was commissioned on 4 June, 1950 into the 1/1 Gorkha Rifles. He excelled in all the basic army courses and topped most of them.

In the true tradition of a regimented officer, he toiled hard and learned the art of soldiering in his battalion. Here he learnt the importance of being methodical and sweating in training to prepare for the war. As a young officer, he had the privilege of closely interacting with two illustrious COAS, Field Marshall Cariappa and Gen Thimayya which left an everlasting impression on him. He narrates a very interesting incident when as a young company commander, he was camped outdoors at a cashew orchard with his company as part of the annual exercise. Field Marshall Cariappa was to visit the company and witness the training. The camp was very well laid out and the entire visit went off well. While returning to his helicopter, the Commander-in-Chief interacted with villagers and inquired whether they were facing any problem due to army camp. The villagers said that the cashew yield had increased since ‘Gorkhas’ camped at the orchard, as they would neatly collect the fallen cashews, and every piece was accounted for during morning parade; more over nothing was being stolen by the locals since the army was camped there. Even though this is a minor incident but it teaches the big lesson that the honesty of the commander rubs off onto the troops and it has to be practiced in day to day life.

He is a 1962, 1965 & 1971 war veteran. After completing his staff course, he was straight away launched into the battlefield in Bomdila where he was posted as Brigade Major of the 48 Infantry Brigade on 6 November, 1962. He was baptised in the war of 1962 by being in the thick of the action against the Chinese. This was the sector where most of the important battles of 1962 war were fought. His physical courage came to the fore when amidst tremendous enemy artillery shelling, he walked alone an entire day, bearing secret documents for his HQ. His vivid description of the war and his various encounters raises goose bumps in the listeners. The saga of the valour of the Indian Army against all odds in those testing times in November 1962 make one want to press the reset button to transport oneself to the battle field.

He attended the Unit Commander Career Course in USA for one year in 1964-65 and topped it, despite being a foreign student. On his return to India he immediately went into action in the 1965 Indo-Pak War. As Company Commander he fought Pakistanis in Akhnoor sector. In Dhere Ki Gali his company captured 122 rifles from intruders. His eye for detail, belief in physically mapping the area and absorbing the knowledge of the ground, held him good stead during his later years when he commanded the division in the same sector.

He commanded 1/1 GR, his own Battalion into which he was commissioned, at Samba from 1966 to 1968. After this Command he moved to DSSC, Wellington as instructor. In line with his previous sojourns, he want straight from the school of instruction into the 1971 War where he was posted as Col GS 54 Division. His eye twinkles while remembering 1971 war and he narrates vividly the
Battle of Basantar. It witnessed one of the fiercest tank battles in the history of Indian army. In the fog of war he could correctly assess that 47 enemy tanks had been destroyed in the battle. For the assessment he applied a very simple and practical method of counting the flames coming out of the damaged tanks strewn around in the battlefield. For the task he had asked three battalion commanders who were holding ground there, to send one L/Nk each from the Int Sec of the unit to do the counting and report back. Post war the figure was confirmed by subsequent enemy reports and by Pakistan Army. He was decorated with Mention-in-Dispatches in Year 1971.

He commanded the 301 Bde in Missamari. In his first address to officers as the Brigade Commander he emphasised that ‘character is more important than fame’ a dictum he himself followed for his entire life. He told them that ‘an officer, who cannot risk his career in peace for his conscience, will not risk his life in war and will hence be unfit for both peace and war’.

He commanded the prestigious 10 Division in Akhnoor in 1980. Thereafter, he served as Chief of staff, Central Command and for his final assignment he was deputed to the Cabinet Secretariat as Chief Military Intelligence Advisor (CMIA). In 1984 he was awarded PVSM and he finally hung up his uniform on 30 November 1984.

Post retirement he has been very active. He is a very articulate speaker and delivers talks on various national and international issues at various forums. He is also involved in various philanthropic and social activities. His love for books and gardening is still strong at the young age of 90 years. His upright nature and courage of conviction to speak out his mind is very motivating. He is an ideal role model for an aspiring new generation of Army Officers. We wish him good health and a long life so that he can continue to inspire us for many years to come!
LNK Bachan Singh was a loving husband, a responsible son, a good soldier and an extremely humble human being. I, as his better half, got the opportunity to get to know a pious and good soul, and experience the love of a man in olive green. He was a hero in every aspect of life.

He was born on 5 July 1969, to Shri Mahabir Singh, a farmer, and Mrs Roshni Devi a home maker. Little did they know that their little son would one day make the whole nation proud. He was very fond of movies, reading Hindi novels, playing volleyball and always preferred sports over studies. Being the eldest son, he had the responsibility of three sisters and one younger brother. A cheerful and outgoing extrovert by nature, he changed altogether after joining the army and became a serious and responsible family man. The realisation that he was the sole earner in his family, made him mature before his age. He was enrolled on 22 February 1989, in the 2 RAJPUTANA RIFLES as a rifleman. He was a true hero—not only because he was adventurous, but because he had a never-say-die attitude. It was his zeal to do something extraordinary that made him attain martyrdom at the age of 30. He, in every aspect of life, was a hero be it towards family obligations or during war.

After two years of service, on 10 February 1991, we tied the knot and we promised to be there for each other, come what may. Three years later we were blessed with twin sons. In fact, I still remember, during the delivery since there was a medical complication, the doctors asked him to choose between me or the kids, and he chose me. It was then, that I knew he was going to cherish our bond forever.

By God’s grace, the delivery went fine and I and the twins came out of this crisis victorious, in our own way. Seeing him so happy was perhaps the most cherished moment of my life. His love for the children and me was unconditional. While we were living in our village, he was serving in places like J&K and the Northeast, I meanwhile, was happy and...
busy raising my sons. Their father loved them a lot and named them HITESH and HEMANT. At the age of three, they joined the village school, but they often came back even before the first period was over. I realised that my sons were not paying attention to the studies and preferred playing games the whole day. Their father was very concerned about their studies and hence, shifted us to the city for better educational opportunities. In 1999, he completed 10 years of service but he could manage to spend only six months with me, when he was posted at a peace station in Rajasthan. Whenever he would come on leave, he would make sure to spend time with his family. He used to take the kids to school and sit outside so that they wouldn’t run away. Every evening he used to take the kids out for a walk and get them something to eat. He was planning to shift them to a public school, but life had something different planned for him. When the Kargil War happened, he promised me that he would come back and this time he would take us along with him.

A phone call on 13 June 1999, changed my life for ever. I was at my parent’s home when my son told me “Maa, phone aya hai”, I quickly picked up the phone and asked “Sab theek hai na?” But the silence gave away the truth and I realised that Bachan was no more. My husband, the father of my children, the sole earner of our family had made the supreme sacrifice in the service of the nation. On the night of 12-13 June 1999, during OPERATION VIJAY, 2 RAJ RIF were given the task of capturing the Tololing Top in the Drass Sector. As they proceeded towards enemy positions, heavy fire fighting took place and they came under intense artillery and small arms fire. The leading section of his platoon suffered three casualties and the attack was stalled temporarily. At this juncture, his section continued to move ahead. Fifty metres short of the enemy position, he came under a burst of Light Machine Gun fire. Unmindful of his injuries he moved ahead with his platoon and continued to do so till he succumbed to his injuries next to the enemy bunker. He proved that he was destined for the greatest sacrifice, one that is made for the country. After 5-6 days, his body came to the village and was cremated in the village with full military honours. The whole country, relatives, friends, everyone grieved at his martyrdom, but five of us - his parents, our children and I were emotionally destroyed. I was completely broken and I lost complete sense of direction. How would I bring up the two small children, how would I look after the old grieving parents, was a big challenge for me. Nothing in this world could compensate for a life, but I am very thankful to the
government of India, the state government and the Indian Army for providing financial, social and moral support to my family in terms of grants, benefits and self-employment. I regained my confidence and realised that the entire responsibility of bringing up the family now rest on me. Making them good human beings and successful was the only thing I could do for the martyred soul. They were already studying in the best school, but our sons always had the fire for joining the army. Bachan Singh was such an inspiration, our sons would often tell me they wanted to become “SIPAHIS” just like their dad. So, I sent them to the Rashtriya Military School. Just after completing his graduation Hitesh got a call from three SSBs for the armed forces - one for the airforce and two for the army. He joined the Indian Military Academy and was commissioned into the same battalion where Bachan had made the supreme sacrifice. Our other son is also preparing for the Armed Forces and I am sure he will make me proud soon. I am very sure Bachan Singh would’ve been truly proud of our sons, who understood the ‘sangharsh’ of a mother and the ‘balidan’ of a father and deemed it their moral responsibility to make him proud.

He will remain in our hearts and live in our memories till eternity. Sometimes I feel sad that he left for the other world a little too soon, without seeing his family grow up and fulfil his dreams. But at the same time, I am proud of him because when the names of others will perish with time, his name will remain immortal. Along with his fellow soldiers, Lance Naik Bachan Singh too will be remembered as a brave soldier who made the supreme sacrifice for his country. I thank everyone, my relatives, the government, the organisation for always supporting me and respecting the sacrifice of my husband and providing financial, moral and social support to my family. After a struggle of 19 years, at last I can feel content that I have fulfilled my responsibility the way Bachan would have desired. Finally, I’d like to end this tribute with a little poem that Hitesh wrote about what he has learnt from his father:

**KARM SANGHARSH HAI**
**DHARM BALIDAN**
**KARTAVYA SAMARPAN JEEVAN HAI**
**AUR PARINAM SAMMAN, KEVAL SAMMAN**
Dialectics form a major part of any major constructive argumentative discourse. This Hegelian and later, Marxian notion prescribes a middle path approach to resolving differences. An idea, an argument or a viewpoint can be termed as a thesis, which will give rise to its counterpoint, antithesis. An ideal solution would include the best of both arguments to come up with a synthesis. This synthesis could again become a new thesis giving rise to the corresponding antithesis and finally a synthesis and so on. The idea is to refine and polish arguments which could form the cores of practical syncretic solutions to issues. The virtual or digital equivalent of a meeting place, a community hall are the social media platforms, affording maximum connectivity and an opportunity for a confluence of different cultural, political, linguistic, sexual leanings, apart from enabling instantaneous responses and ensuring anonymity. They also acts as a virtual advertising space for different corporate and state services to ‘hawk their wares’ that is, showcase their respective exclusiveness and inclusivity. The aim of state sponsored campaigns, especially in a democracy, is to maintain the prevailing societal status quo at the least, and as a best case scenario for promoting a positive image of the state institutions. However, since social media is a tool, it can be used both for positive and negative dialectics. After all, as Zadie Smith puts in her review of the 2010 feature film The Social Network, “Connection is the goal. The quality of that connection, the quality of the information that passes through it, the quality of the relationship that connection permits—none of this is important.”

India has suffered because of the fallout of the negative and fake news circulating on social media platforms. The spread of hateful vitriol and photo shopped images can be either intentional or unintentional. Sometimes, an ordinary joke or a localised vindictive rhetoric may just get out of the hands of those who sent it so that on reception, without the crutch of context, it resembles a monstrosity, that inspires venomous physical or verbal retorts or is capable of exploding into serious riot-inducing hysteria. Fake news can also be generated as part of deliberate content creation drives by corporatised groups, such as Postcard news. These disruptive campaigns seek to manipulate the existing social, economic and political fault lines in the country and incite violence. The unique characteristic of social media delivered fake news, or the creation of a ‘post-truth’ narrative hinges on the usability, vulnerability and culpability of the weakest link, that is, the ordinary man. Social media uses the consumer as a medium, receptor and finally as the arbiter of information. Since most of this news, in the form of Whatsapp forwards, Tweets and Status Updates, among many others, it aims to grab eyeballs and incite primeval instincts within a span of seconds, where the process of ingestion, digestion and opinion forming is short circuited to a span of a few breaths. Any detailed dissection of the information being peddled is generally put off for an immeasurable time period. When some of this information is incorrectly or unintentionally relayed by a few news channels, then the perceived objectivity of media houses in the form of a free press, is used as a facade to propagate
subjectivities, to further stoke hostilities.

The Indian army created the Additional Directorate General of Public Information (ADGPI) to promote the positive image of the armed forces and showcase the various nation building initiatives being undertaken by the Army. Also, the ADGPI posted information and photographs relating to a plethora of activities carried out by the Indian army such as: Ex Servicemen (ESM) rallies; interaction with Veer Naris; the afforestation drives being undertaken by various fighting formations in their Areas of Responsibility (AOR); activities of the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV); the ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) that addresses various problems faced by the army’s huge veteran community; exercises with Friendly Foreign Countries (FFCs); reminders and snippets of the various wars fought by the army in the past; and the Chief of Army Staff’s (COAS) interactions with various dignitaries on issues of mutual cooperation and foreign policy matters. The ADGPI has thus played a critical role in endearing the armed forces to the population of the country. Social media is ‘social’ because any individual can take part in any conversation regardless of his/her stature in society. Any post put up by the ADGPI, an official arm of the Indian army and therefore the Indian government, can be seen and commented upon by any member and section of the society. In addition to the adulation and positive feedback, there is a section of the population that feels very strongly about some specific policies and actions of the army and this includes a sizeable chunk of the ESM community. The attitudes of such veterans may be divided into three categories:

• Statements by retired prominent officers, Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and Other Ranks (OR) on political issues that might not be in sync with the prevailing opinion or policy which may turn acerbic due to the trolling and counter points made by strangers. While many of these statements in the form of well thought out and structured papers reflect a nuanced response or critique of certain actions and ventures of the armed forces and are welcome, some may just be irreverent to the point of being offensive. This is true especially on platforms which depend on brevity to be popular. A 140 word tweet needs to grab eyeballs to gain retweets and followers, which is a measure of stature and popularity in the virtual-actual world today.

• ‘Forwarded as received’ is a common ploy for posting unverified and sometimes outright discriminatory messages on Whatsapp groups. This three word pretext accomplishes two things: it conveys that the message is important enough to be forwarded to groups of retired and serving officers and men, while absolving the sender of any responsibility. These messages, if they contain even a whiff of information, are generally accepted as true in the absence of a verification platform, while morphing into a self-propelling momentum. This creates and deepens existing service-specific
chasms. A successful psy-ops strategy will always have an element of truth in order to deceive the recipient into believing, that what he/she is reading/seeing/hearing/ assimilating is true

- A relatively recent phenomenon is the use inflammatory slogans and language by some ESMs while responding to official posts of the government and the army. Due to the ease of access to the unverifiable material and the lack of an official fact-checking platform, some veterans are resorting to trolling and blaming the service for their ills. This is the equivalent of washing one’s dirty linen in the public. This, despite the fact that there are now departments such as the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV) and central organisation the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) dedicated solely towards the benefit and welfare of the veterans. Another tendency is for veterans to post videos of themselves expounding on the injustices done to them by the service and propagating stereotypes related to rations, financial irregularities and officer-men relationships. This tendency to publicly denounce the service, especially on social media, which is rife with anti-national elements, looking to recruit disgruntled individuals or to use these videos and comments as leverage to start a smear campaign against the forces, needs to be nipped in the bud. The media, including print and television and now the burgeoning internet also play a major role in this.

The Indian army’s veteran community can play a major role as unifiers of the country. As ex-servicemen they have had the experience of traversing almost the entire length and breadth of the country. The veteran community can be the positive resounding board of the army’s positive efforts and nation-building image. The veteran community can assist the army in the following manner:

- By acting as ‘foot soldiers’ for the Indian army’s development initiatives in the embattled states of Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast. Veterans from these communities are equally effective in managing perceptions as the ‘home and hearth’ battalions.
- By becoming the positive ‘echo chambers’ of the Indian army’s social media campaigns. Veterans can use their extensive experience to provide polite responses to the many queries that are fielded by the huge diversity of the country. Since the response would be from an individual and not a state agency, the message will carry more weight and credibility, and has a much higher chance of assimilation and acceptance.
- The army also needs to design a fact checking and dissemination platform, preferably Whatsapp based, on the lines of Alt News (a fact checking and fake news dispelling platform), in the public domain which collates non-sensitive and non-confidential information from the many directorates of the Army HQ and disseminates them in response to the various fake Whatsapp messages, masquerading as truth. This will require the creation of a dedicated team of tech savvy officers and men who would be responsible for monitoring messages and forwards on various groups and then creating credible responses and posting them.

The Indian army’s strength lie in its ethos and principles which, unlike many other armies around the world, have not eroded over time. The Indian army’s vast veteran community can play a huge role in uniting the nation through social media and on the ground in addition to promoting an inclusive and united image of the army amongst the local population, by using positive dialectics. Post the establishment of DIAV, a single window redressal mechanism, it would be much more constructive and beneficial for the veteran community, if they were to direct their problems to this Directorate.
Soldiering is different from other professions. Men are often reminded of the heritage and the history of their unit and regiment to best in them in order to deliver during peace and war. Soldiers give their lives in war for the honour and dignity of their Unit and Regimental Flag first, and the nation later. It is ingrained in every soldier that he belongs to an army that produced great warriors such as Major Shaitan Singh, Major Vikram Batra or CQMH Abdul Hamid. By preserving this history for future generations, we lay down the foundations for making lions out of men. Alexander the Great had said, “I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep; I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion”. The tradition of producing lions must continue and what better way then by reminding current and future generations of the audacity of great soldiers like Major Ralengnao (Bob) Khathing, who singlehandedly killed more than 100 Japanese soldiers, as part of the ‘V Force’ during the advance of Japanese forces towards Jessami and Kohima. Not many know that Major Bob in the course of three years on the battlefield, from May 1942 to May 1945, was awarded the most coveted decorations like the: MBE (Member of the order of the British Empire); Commander-in-Chief Gallantry Certificate, twice; Mentioned-in-Dispatches and; the M.C (Military-Cross) which speak volumes about the military acumen ingrained in him. How can we allow such a great heritage to be forgotten?

“When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today”. This verse composed by Major John Etty-Leal, is engraved on the War Memorial at Kohima to commemorate the men of the 2nd Division who attained martyrdom in the Battle of Kohima in 1944. It is a tribute to the fallen comrades in arms. Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch in his tribute to the heroes of Battle of Saragarhi, in Salute wrote:

When informed of this feat, Britain’s Parliament interrupted proceedings and rose to give a standing ovation to these 21 valorous soldiers — all of them Indians, all of them Sikhs — for what was undoubtedly a tremendous act of collective bravery, and one of the greatest ‘last-stands’ in military history. The collective courage of the 21 Sikh soldiers moved Queen Victoria so much that her majesty decreed that due to conspicuous gallantry beyond and above the call of duty displayed by the 21 soldiers, all of them shall be awarded the Indian Order Merit (IOM) posthumously. IOM is the highest award for bravery given to colonial troops and it was equivalent to the British Victoria Cross.
soldiers, all of them shall be awarded the Indian Order Merit (IOM) posthumously. IOM is the highest award for bravery given to colonial troops and it was equivalent to the British Victoria Cross. This was the only time in history of warfare where each soldier who took part in the same battle was given the highest award.

This is a shining example of grit and valour beyond human endeavour. These tales not only inspire soldiers but also tell their fellow countrymen, what it takes to preserve the freedom and sovereignty of a nation.

The profession of arms is different and it is all about setting examples and benchmarks to bring out the best in the future generations. By recalling the fortitude of the generations before us, we come to a greater appreciation of what it means to serve the nation under the sword. If those who led before us succeeded, there is no reason why the current generation cannot succeed in future. The nation will remain strong if there are men who are willing and ready to die, to preserve its sovereignty and freedom. I, as a veteran, have seen men laying down their lives, without even questioning the wisdom of a decision that will throw men to the wolves. Future generations need to know that it is this unlimited liability and moral contract that bind each soldier to his comrades during peace and war.

The Armed Forces have contributed in almost every sphere of nation building. It was Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw who restored the pride of every Indian after the 1962 humiliation and propelled India towards becoming a regional power by cutting Pakistan into two and creating a nation by sheer military brilliance. How can we forget that the 1974 and 1998 nuclear blasts were executed with the help of the Army Engineers working day and night? They not only prepared the sites but ensured the secrecy that was so important to execute such a complex operation. Can there be better example of nation building than the Indian Armed Forces?

The soldiers and officers of current and future generations’ need to be reminded of what Gen PS Bhagat, had said to the cadets on their passing out parade at IMA: “Do nothing petty, selfish or mean. Be magnanimous, be loyal, be courageous, and be a gentleman. You will then be an officer in the true sense”. This creed can only be internalised when history is preserved and soldiers and military commanders are reminded that profession of arms is not a race to achieve higher rank. It is a career to secure the nation through an ethos of sheer grit, professionalism and moral uprightness. Do not demand loyalty from your men if you can’t stand for their welfare and the preservation of moral virtues. Let no one tamper with this elitism and tradition. These ideals of soldiering can only be passed on when veterans’ stories are preserved so as to
strengthen the foundations of this great organisation.

The question is: Why am I reminding the veterans who have been legends in their own right about need to preserve the stories of valour. Every veteran has a tale that is so different from that of the other. Every veteran, from soldier to general, has contributed to nation building in his own capacity. I am reinforcing the fact that the responsibility for remembering and preserving the stories of this rich and great heritage rests with us. It is veterans who act as path finders by showing the mirror and reminding future generations what is expected of them. Indeed it is our sacred duty to be true path finders not only by our words but also by our creed. Once a soldier always a soldier.

The second important factor is that the nation looks to us to educate youth about the future challenges to the nation and for which they should be prepared. Today the nation is facing unlimited security challenges from traditional and non-traditional threats. It may be difficult for the youth to comprehend the differences between campaigns, battles, strategy, tactics, traditional and non-traditional threats. These are confusing and least interesting topics, but when these aspects are explained by personal experiences and anecdotes, they get registered and students not only get enriched by the knowledge but also become sensitive and aware of the threats to the nation and their responsibility towards the nation. Future wars will not be fought on the frontiers but they will be fought in the streets, and of course, on the borders. They will be fought in the physical and also in psychological domains. Thus it is our responsibility to prepare the youth for this daunting challenge. Oral history is a powerful communication tool that leaves a lasting impression on the minds of youth which cannot be forgotten. Thus who can do it better than the veterans! Taking young students or adventure seekers on guided tours of battle fields will be another way of reminding citizens and future nation builders of what had happened on those innocent looking landscapes when guns were blazing and men were refusing to take a single step back, even if it meant laying down their lives. Just one visit to Longewala, Siachen, Chushul or Jessami could give people a perspective of what it costs to defend the territorial boundaries of our nation.

We have a lot to give to the nation and this can only be done if we preserve the stories of valour of past and the legends who came before us and those who are with us. The military ethos should be protected and preserved so as to act as a trail blazer and for upholding the tradition of “Service unto Death”. Even as veterans we have two important tasks in the society, first: “To reclaim and defend the rights of the people in our own way by raising our voice at various forums, including those of our own fraternity, who need our support”. Second: “To protect and maintain the strategic interests of the nation”. The fulfilment of both these responsibilities could have a profound impact on nation building and would be in keeping with the ethos of ‘once a soldier, always a soldier’.

The sentiments of the people of this country were very profoundly expressed by the Late Former President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, Bharat Ratna, during his visit to Kargil:

Oh! Defenders of borders, You are great sons and daughters of my land,
Defending the deserts or guarding the marshes, Surveillance in seas and by securing the air,
Prime of your youth given to the nation, We pray for you brave men.
The nation depends on you now, more than ever, to drive away the divisive forces that keep man away from man, and prevent hearty co-operation and mutual help.

Jai Hind