

_ *AN ODE TO B2B Ex NDAs

(many of our times (38 NDA), will surely relate to;

But *so would the others* to a certain extent...)

The Beatles were rocking, the Rolling Stones a scream,

Elvis was passé and Woodstock was still a dream.

That was the time a bunch of daring young men,

Challenged the world and chose the sword against the pen.

'67 was the year when we all met first,

Each one with a vision to quench his thirst.

The friendships were real, the bonds became strong,

As side-by-side we front-rolled along.

So diverse were we, it was difficult to believe,

That we could merge as a group, a target to achieve.

There was no caste nor creed which could be a barrier

Because we were all so focused to become a true warrior.

The initial awe and inspiration at the sight of NDA,

Was very soon dispelled by a guy called the ACA.

A surdee with a goatee, can you believe it ?

“My name is Panag and you piddlers better watch it !”

Lifting your own boxes wasn't so much fun,

As we arrived at the Cadets' Mess in the bright morning sun.

With aching backs we were ensconced in the Sqns by eleven,

And by noon most of us were hanging from “Seventh Heaven”.

Notwithstanding the jokes, it may be worthwhile to be a surd,

Because after a haircut all of us felt like an absurd turd.

The dining hall was expansive and gave a great feel,
But it all faded as pangs of hunger followed a "Square Meal".
"Look at the centre of my forehead and I will give you three eggs",
But Capt Bhatia Sir, we will love you more if we could only stand on our legs.
Having fed ourselves well we thought we'd get some aaraam,
Little realising we had a tryst with destiny called Kanshi Ram.
"Cadet" he really didn't have to say more,
His sheer personality and bearing would level any score.
Kanshi Ram was an institution within the Academy,
But so was another stalwart, Mr Keswani, but in alchemy.
Listening to Mr Kuldip Singh and Mr Bhandari was really a feast,
But the cake goes to Mr Prem Singh for his immortal "Beauty and the Beast".
A sight to behold was Capt Bongirwar on his scooty, and none too soon,
He was captured brilliantly by GD Bakshi in the ultimate cartoon.
Lest we forget Daku Darshan Singh, God rest his soul,
The rope, the beam, the mat, the pool, he only spared the flagpole.
There were officers we loved and those we loved to hate,
But none more than the Dep Com who chased you down to Budhwar Peth.
Extra Drills and Restrictions became religion, as did the Singarh Hike,
And Mr Keswani kept screaming, "You can take my wife but not my mo'bike"
Some of the instructors charming daughters were really a God-send,
But (Brig) Basu (HOD Geography) slowly and surely went round the bend.
While the curriculum was hectic and some came up trumps,
You came down to earth when Nargis took you through the Lane Jumps.
While some struggled in academics, pass marks to strive,
With our Drill Boots we wore out ten feet of 2475.

As the terms flew by, some stumbled a bit,
But Brigadiers or Generals we all yearned to climb "Madhubala's Tit"
Kapoor & Co looted Officers / Cadets irrespective of grades,
Only to forfeit the Mangola & Besan Barfi in the systematically planned Cafe raids.
Camps Greenhorn / Rover / Torna took the juice out of you,
But the Gole Market Halwai's daughter lifted (?) the blue(s)
Bivouacs, Tent Pitching, Ganna Raids galore (sigh !)
Helping your buddy during "Josh" was the ultimate high.
Strong bonds were built, good friends created,
We knew for a fact that in future we will never feel cheated.
But finally it came to pass and we parted ways,
Fondly remembering our glory days.
The Academy changed and so did the uniform
As we went to our respective service, as was the norm.
The Pongos were Green, the Air Force was Khaki,
The Whites of the Navy could be seen from miles by every Paki.
While the training in each service took on its respective hue,
Somehow the bullshit and punishments continued on cue.
Oh what have we done to retain this curse?
Will it last us a life-time or will it somehow disperse?

But as the training continued and we felt its weight,
As professional soldiers we were proud of our state.
The first fatality pierces all faith like a knife,
An aeroplane crash took away Mandke's young life.

While we felt the fear, life must go on,
The Chief Instructor bellowed, "Strap up and get airborne".
As the training reached a crescendo, our confidence was brimming,
We were all looking forward to a brand new beginning.
There were stories to tell and anecdotes to recount,
Some tales were so tall that you needed stirrups to dismount.
From Pith Hats atop Sudan Block to Besan Barfis in the tank,
The list was never- ending and needed a bank.
While the Academies threw up extensive modules of training,
Panga taking and procrastinating became an Art of Living.
There is no doubt that life is all about survival of the fittest,
The bonhomie and camaraderie meant you helped the weak pass the test.
You carried his FSMO and his rifle too,
Provided he passed you the cog-sheets as you went to the loo.
"Thrust and Parry", normally a fencer's delight,
Was a matter of routine (for us) before we said Good-Night.
The final training for the Army & Navy took just a year
The Air Force was slow and needed another six months to bear.
Thus Nineteen Seventy One was the Year of the Lord,
When the course took the oath to bloody the sword.
It didn't take long because war clouds were gathering,
The Pakis were belligerent but seemed to have lost their bearing.
The war had begun amidst swords that did rattle,
As this fine bunch from '67 were BORN TO BATTLE !!
It was a cry from the motherland to defend its borders,
The military engaged the enemy amidst instructions and orders.

A valiant young officer put his life at the stake,
Proudly Commandeering his tank towards the enemy, make no mistake.
The heroics of Arun Khetarpal can be seen on every portal,
As we remember his last fight which made him immortal.
The great warship INS Khukri took a torpedo and sank,
Sunil Nandan Singh survived because of Daku's training slam-dunk.
There were many who bled and many shed a tear,
But the rigours of training had erased all forms of fear.
Battle-hardened and inoculated in the infancy of life,
Only sharpened the senses and the urge to find a wife!
As we grew in the service in our various hues,
The big transformation came when the Air Force adopted the blues.
Some did well and grew in stature and rank,
Making us proud as a group because we all came from the same bank.
But the sad part of life is something we must endure,
As course-mates fell by the wayside and missed the future.
It was the Hut of Remembrance which had made us circumspect,
A memorial to the valiant and dead, we grew to respect.
The Academies were vast, we never realised
Till we met course-mates we hardly recognised.
The ravages of time and success and failure
Saw the ever expanding gap widen even further.
Time has never been kind, it was horribly evident
As decades later we met each other, balding and rather bent
The travails of the service saw many course corrections

Good friends and buddies wandered into different directions
It was business for some, DGR for another
Just trying to keep afloat suddenly seemed quite a bother
The kids grew up, life's burden they did release,
Thank God for small mercies, they were all CTCs !!
The better halves lived up to their name
A delightful bunch, always batting for the game.
In times of trouble and through the crests and troughs,
They provided the rudder to evade the roughs
What would we do without them, we say
We salute them all, hip hip hurray !
Life was good for the course and what made it bright
Was the array of "Stars" that justified the might
There were some who were unfortunate, their life prematurely cut short
May their souls rest in peace and the families get support
Now the boots are hung and the anchor dropped,
Sixty years and life seems suddenly cropped
The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak
We plod along from 'creak' to 'creak'
But the bonhomie and brotherhood remain sound and strong
As "BORN TO BATTLE" remains our theme song !
---- The Inveterate Bong !

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38th NDA, Golf.*