



THE SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY  
AND  
THE BOMBAY SAPPERS

# BROTHERS IN ARMS





**BOMBAY PIONEERS - 1788**



**32 SIKH PIONEERS - 1857**



**12 BOMBAY PIONEERS - 1891**



**34 SIKH PIONEERS 1887**



**ROYAL BOMBAY GROUP - 1941**



**32 SIKH PIONEERS - 1929**

*The direct connection between the Sikh Pioneers and the Bombay Sappers is through the common heritage of the Sikh Pioneers and the caste of the Sikh troops. The Ramdasia and Mazahbi troops of the Sikh Pioneers were amalgamated into the Bombay Sappers on the disbandment of the Pioneers in 1933. During the Second World War the Sikh Pioneers were re-raised as the Mazabhi Ramdasia Sikh Regiment later renamed as the SIKH LI.*





## **Brothers in Arms**

*The SIKH LI comprising the Mazhabi and Ramdasia Sikh soldiers known for their dauntless daring, courage, loyalty and tenacity, is one of the oldest Regiments of the Army. It traces its origin to the middle of the nineteenth century when the first Mazhabi soldiers were recruited into the British Indian Army. The first Corps of Mazhabi Sikh Pioneers, the fore bearer of the SIKH LI, was formed in 1850. The British had recognised the great fighting qualities and prowess of these soldiers in the Anglo-Sikh Wars. The stubborn and sustained resistance offered by them and their ability to maintain themselves frugally amazed them. The British had admiration for the Mazhabi as they made capital soldiers. Maharaja Ranjit Singh also had a great admiration for their bravery and enlisted the Mazhabis freely into the khalsa army; which he nurtured into an excellent instrument of war.*



*The Bombay Sappers draw their origin from the erstwhile Bombay Presidency army of the British Raj when the British had become a new force in the politics of India which consisted of a large number of kingdoms and fiefdoms; the principal ones being the Maratha confederacy, Mysore, Hyderabad and Berar, with British presidencies at Bombay, Madras and Bengal in addition to their factories at Surat.*

*The British engaged in conflict with Tipu Sultan and later the Marathas, which along with diplomatic measures resulted in British over-lordship over large parts of India. The earliest instance of recruitment of native sappers was the formation of a company of Pioneer Lascars, comprising 100 men, in 1777 by Major Lawrence Nilson, the first Chief Engineer of the Bombay Presidency. Over the next few years, these newly born Lascars saw action mostly in skirmishes with the Marathas. Soon after being recognised as a Pioneer Corps in 1781 they participated in the 1782-84 expedition to the Malabar coast against Tipu Sultan's forces in the Second Mysore War and also saw action in the Third Mysore War, when they served at Calicut and at the first siege of Seringapatam.*

*In the 1903 reorganisation of the Indian Army, the Corps was renamed in the newly unified Indian Army as the 3rd Sappers & Miners. A mistaken interpretation of the historic records led to the Bombay Sappers being considered as junior to the Madras and Bengal Sappers whereas they could trace an unbroken descent from before the Madras or Bengal Sappers were formed; the case for reversion being taken up a number of times unsuccessfully, presumably due to inadequate records of the services of the Corps in the late 18th century.*

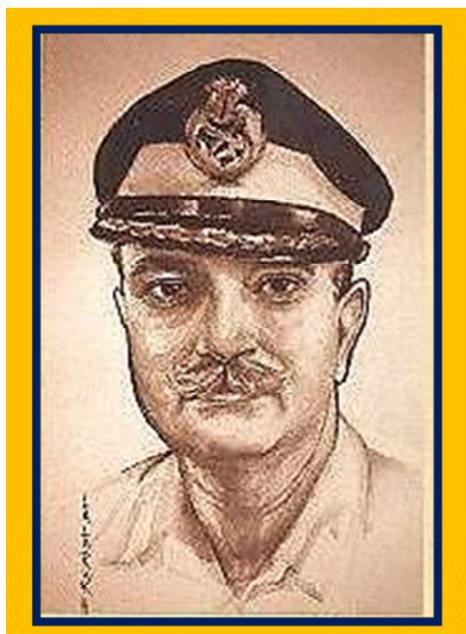


*The Bombay Sappers expanded greatly during the 'Great War' to meet the large number of Indian engr tps reqd by the Empire. The Bombay Sappers fought against the Germans and the Turks in Europe, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Aden, Persia, East Africa and also in Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province, winning as many as 29 battle and theatre honours. The very large losses of 20 and 21 Field Companies in Europe in 1914-15 led to the Malerkotla Sappers & Miners joining the Corps where they remained affiliated till 1945. In recognition of the prodigious contribution of the Bombay Sappers in World War I, the title 'Royal' was bestowed on the Corps in 1921 and they became the 3rd Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners. The Second World War once again saw a great wartime expansion and the Bombay Sappers fought the Germans, Italians and the Japanese in Malaya, Singapore, Burma, Abyssinia, Eritrea, North Africa, Syria, Italy and Greece.*

*The Bombay Sappers have gone on to win many accolades in battle throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, both before and after indep, incl the British Victoria Cross and the French Legion of Honour before indep, as well as the Param Vir Chakra and Ashok Chakra as part of indep India.*

*The Gp has also made its mark in peacetime activities such as sports winning five medals in the Commonwealth Games 2010, (three Gold, one Silver and one Bronze), adventure, aid to civ auth and prestigious constr projects. The tps of the Bombay Sappers are renowned for their endurance, courage and valour on the battlefield akin to their Brothers in Arms, The SIKH LI.*





Lt Gen Premindra Singh Bhagat, PVSM , VC  
14 October 1918 – 23 May 1975

*Physical and moral courage are seldom found in abundant measure, in the same person. Yet Lt Gen Prem Bhagat, PVSM, VC was an example of this. For the former, he won the Victoria Cross during the Second World War. For the second, there are innumerable instances to recount.*

*Lt Gen Prem Bhagat, PVSM, VC was born in 1918, and joined the 10th course at IMA in 1937. Although he was not able to attain the highest rank – that of the Army Chief, and retired as Army Commander, there is little doubt in Army circles even today, that if there was an officer deserving of this position, it was Prem Bhagat. Apart from a truly courageous soldier and officer, both mentally and physically, Prem Bhagat was known to be a true soldier's general.*

*He assumed the appt of the Third Col of the Regt of SIKH LI on 11 June 1966 from Brig Gurkirpal Singh and held the position till his end. He became in later years the only Engr Offr to be the Col of an Inf Regt, the SIKH LI. He raised the honour dignity and status of the Regiment to its present eminence as one of the best Inf Regts of the Indian Army. There were three affiliations in his life to which he laid proud claim - to have been a Rimcollian, a Bombay Sapper and to have been associated closely with the SIKH LI.*





LT GEN PREM BHAGAT, PVSM, VC  
ADDRESS AS COL OF THE REGT SIKH LI



Lieutenant Colonel Amarjit Anand of 3rd Battalion, Sikh Light Infantry, had proposed the name of Major General P S Bhagat, VC as the Colonel of the Regiment at the Biennial Battalion Commanders Conference in 1966. This was unanimously approved by the then Colonel of the Regiment, Brigadier Gurkirpal Singh, the Centre Commandant and all Commanding Officers. Thereafter a formal request was made, accepted and a notification published in the Gazette of India. Prem became the third Colonel of the Regiment on 11 June 1966 and held that position until he died. Prem's acceptance of this honour extended to him was equivalent to the acceptance of a challenge, the challenge to raise the standing of the Regiment which had the reputation, in those days, of being difficult. Brigadier K Tewari, commissioned into the Sikh LI in December 1958, remarked that from his term at the IMA no one opted to join the Sikh LI. The popular Regiments at that time were the Rajputana Rifles, Gorkhas, Grenadiers and Dogras. He himself had opted for the last and was stunned to learn that he was to be commissioned into the Sikh LI. When Prem visited the Regimental Centre at Meerut in February 1967, he made his presence felt immediately. "I accepted the appointment of the Colonel of the Sikh LI Regiment," he told the recruits, "as I had commanded M & R troops for almost 19 years and they had given me their full loyalty. I want to repay them by improving their lot. I assure you that I will do my best to look after your welfare and uplift." Tewari says that he gave the Regiment dignity, honour and self-respect within a short space of time. Anand outlines how he did so:

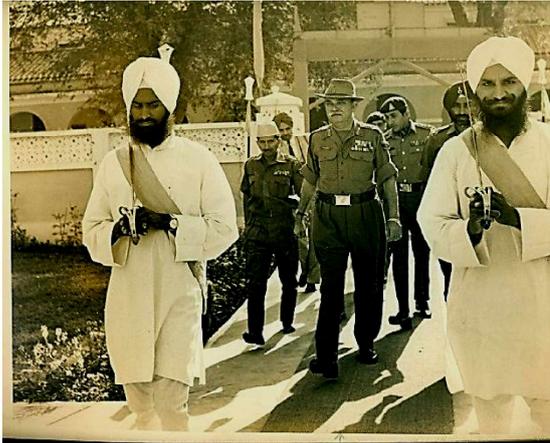
After Lieutenant General Sir Reginald A Savory, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., the first Colonel of the Regiment, Brigadier Gurkirpal Singh took over but unfortunately his voice did not carry far and the Regiment went through a long lean period of subtle discrimination though His Highness Colonel Sir Harinder Singh Brar, Bans Bahadur, K.C.S.I., Raja of Faridkot, was an Honorary Colonel of the Regiment. At times, officers, specially Jat Sikh officers, tried to run down our crowd and the regiment was bullied unnecessarily. Prem put an end to all this. He selected officers from the Regiment and placed them in important appointments where they could help the Regiment in many ways. He insisted that a proportion of the best officer trainees from the IMA and OTS be posted to the Regiment. He introduced new dresses and ceremonial trimmings for the officers, the men and the Regimental Brass and Pipe bands. He wanted to move the Regimental Centre away from Meerut where the Sikh Regimental Centre was also located. We are now at Faizabad but this was accomplished after 1975. He gave the Regiment an *elan* and ethos hitherto unheard of and made it a point to have an officer from the Regiment on his personal staff when he was Corps Commander and when he became Army Commander. Very often he would wear the Sikh LI colours and trimmings, the orange and gold, on formal occasions. He was particularly keen to see that Battalion Commanders were given status and their due. He helped rehabilitate many ex-servicemen on their retirement. He was particularly kind and helpful to widows and their children. In all such welfare measures Mohini was a constant source of inspiration and assistance.





AN INTRICATE COMMITMENT TOWARDS REGIMENTAL ISSUES





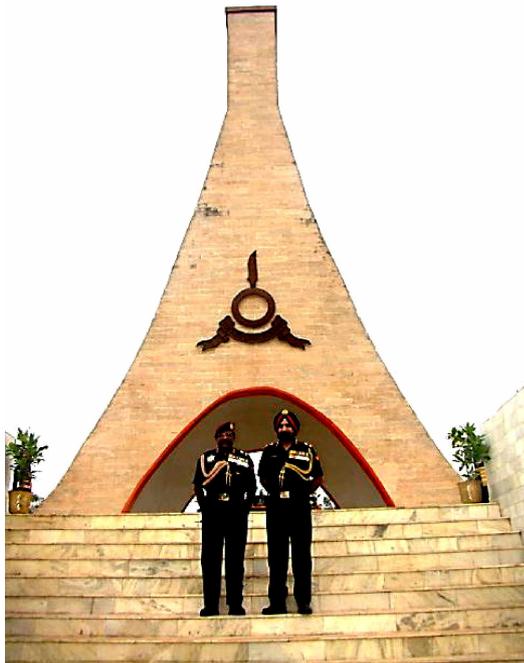
LT GEN PREM BHAGAT COMMITTED HIMSELF TOWARDS THE CAUSE ENTRUSTED TO HIM WITH THE CHARISMATIC INVOLVEMENT TOWARDS EACH FACET OF THE GROWTH OF HIS COLONELCY. MRS MOHINI BHAGAT WAS A REFLECTION IN HER OWN WAYS.





LT GEN NOBLE THAMBURAJ, PVSM, SM COL COMDT THE BOMBAY SAPPERS AND VCOAS VIS THE SIKH LI REGT CENTRE IN AUG 2009. A REJUENATION OF THE INTRINSIC BONDING WITNESSED A SERIES OF EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE TWO TRG CENTRES







SIKH LI MARCHING CONTINGENT GRACED THE BOMBAY SAPPERS RE-UNION PARADE IN JAN 2010 AND WAS FELICITATED BY MAJ GEN VK BHATT, SM, VSM COL COMDT THE BOMBAY SAPPERS AND CE WESTERN COMD DURING THE SPECIAL SAINIK SAMMEELAN



## ... Recent Milestones

- ✚ *Jt SIKH LI and Bombay Sappers Cycling Expedition org by 268 Engr Br Regt in Dec 2005. Expedition covered interiors of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal and was flagged in by Lt Gen S Pattabhiraman, PVSM, AVSM, SM, VSM, VCOAS and Col Comdt, The Bombay Sappers.*
  
- ✚ *Inter Centre interaction between the SIKH LI Centre and Bombay Engr Gp and Centre Dec 2006 by vis of the Supdt of Trg to SIKH LI Centre.*
  
- ✚ *Lt Gen Noble Thamburaj, PVSM, SM, VCOAS and Col Comdt, The Bombay Sappers vis SIKH LI Regt Centre, accompanied by Brig Sanjiv Talwar, Comdt Bombay Engr Gp and Centre on 10 Aug 2009.*
  
- ✚ *Exclusive ACC Cadre for SIKH LI Centre conducted by HRDC Bombay Engr Gp and Centre in Sep 2009.*
  
- ✚ *Vacancies for admission to Bombay Sappers GURNAM ACADEMY extended to wards of SIKH LI tps.*
  
- ✚ *A unique reflection of the bonding is the presence of the Brothers of Sep Gursevak Singh, 14 SIKH LI and Sepoy Gurpreet Singh, 12 SIKH LI and Spr Harbhajan Singh, 103 Engr Regt in respective Centre Basketball Teams.*



## **The Way Ahead ...**

- ✚ *Jt SIKH LI and Bombay Sappers, Sikkim to Lhasa trekking expedition on the Lhasa expeditionary route taken by Mr Francis Young is at the conceptualisation stage.*
  
- ✚ *Jt JOR Mela for SIKH LI and Bombay Sappers proposed to be held in Punjab in 2012.*
  
- ✚ *Inter-Centre Games competitions.*





## That Day by Rudyard Kipling

The Battle of Maiwand - 27th July 1880



*It got beyond all orders an' it got beyond all 'ope;  
It got to shammin' wounded an' retirin' from the 'alt.  
'Ole companies was lookin' for the nearest road to slope;  
It were just a bloomin' knock-out -- an' our fault!*

*Now there ain't no chorus 'ere to give,  
Nor there ain't no band to play;  
An' I wish I was dead 'fore I done what I did,  
Or seen what I seed that day!*

*We was sick o' bein' punished, an' we let 'em know it, too;  
An' a company-commander up an' 'it us with a sword,  
An' some one shouted "'Ook it!" an' it come to sove-ki-poo,  
An' we chucked our rifles from us -- O my Gawd!*

*There was thirty dead an' wounded on the ground we wouldn't keep --  
No, there wasn't more than twenty when the front begun to go;  
But, Christ! along the line o' flight they cut us up like sheep,  
An' that was all we gained by doin' so.*

*I 'eard the knives be'ind me, but I dursn't face my man,  
Nor I don't know where I went to, 'cause I didn't 'alt to see,  
Till I 'eard a beggar squealin' out for quarter as 'e ran,  
An' I thought I knew the voice an' -- it was me!*

*We was 'idin' under bedsteads more than 'arf a march away;  
We was lyin' up like rabbits all about the countryside;  
An' the major cursed 'is Maker 'cause 'e lived to see that day,  
An' the colonel broke 'is sword acrost, an' cried.*

*We was rotten 'fore we started -- we was never disciplined;  
We made it out a favour if an order was obeyed;  
Yes, every little drummer 'ad 'is rights an' wrongs to mind,  
So we had to pay for teachin' -- an' we paid!*

*The papers 'id it 'andsome, but you know the Army knows;  
We was put to groomin' camels till the regiments withdrew,  
An' they gave us each a medal for subduin' England's foes,  
An' I 'ope you like my song -- because it's true!*

*An' there ain't no chorus 'ere to give,  
Nor there ain't no band to play;  
But I wish I was dead 'fore I done what I did,  
Or seen what I seed that day!*

