

The view from outside



M. Moyeedul Islam

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Once outstanding as a football player, the cadet had sustained a severe injury in his second year. Because of his damaged knee, the question of recommending him for a commission hung in the balance when he graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Luckily, West Point had a commandant who did not consider arthritis of the knee a serious handicap for an officer of the U.S. army as long as he did not suffer from arthritis of the brain.

The cadet was Dwight D. Eisenhower. Commissioned in 1915, he was a major for 16 years when the war broke out. His rise to fame was meteoric: from a lieutenant colonel in 1941 he became Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in 1943 and was a 5-star general in 1945.

In England a commission was once bought and sold, and the officer, often a young son of the aristocracy, brought his own horse and uniform to his regiment. Members of the Royalty, including some future kings of Britain, usually served for a period with the navy, which has its Royal Navy College at Dartmouth which I chanced to visit in 1960.

West Point was founded in 1802, and the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 1812. Sandhurst has trained an impressive number of visitors from abroad. King Hussein of Jordan, Field Marshal Ayub Khan as well as, I think, President Iskander Mirza of Pakistan, India's first C-in-C Cariappa and several others of the Indian Army and General Gowon of Nigeria were all commissioned from Sandhurst.

The Air Force, a young service, came in much later. The heroic role of the RAF's small band of brave officers in the Battle of Britain has been immortalised in the famous words of Winston Churchill: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

India's military academy, founded during the British days, is situated at Dehra Dun, which produced most of the regular officers of the

Indian and Pakistan armies at partition of the subcontinent in 1947. The Pakistan Military Academy was established in 1949.

Candidates are selected for admission to an Armed Forces' Academy through a comprehensive selection process involving many elaborate tests designed to assess their physical fitness, mental abilities, educational adequacy and personality traits. Churchill failed three times to pass into Sandhurst though he eventually passed out 8th in a class of 150. In Bangladesh as in Pakistan, a candidate, rejected twice by the Selection Board, is not considered for admission. In India, the Federal Public Service Commission selects candidates for entry to the Indian Military Academy at Dehra Dun.

Regular Army cadets at Bhatiary near Chittagong, where the Bangladesh Military Academy is situated,

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stay for two years, roughly half of which is military training and half purely academic, based on the BA/BSC syllabus of the University of Chittagong. Those who graduate from the BMA are both commissioned as second lieutenants and awarded BA or BSC degrees depending on their subjects of study.

The system of awarding academic degrees was introduced at the Pakistan Military Academy in the mid-fifties in order to improve academic standards as also to enable those who may leave the army to seek suitable civilian employment. At this distance of time I do not remember the exact year as I am writing from memory which is not always a reliable guide.

For a commission in the

Bangladesh Navy, cadets and midshipmen of Executive and Supply branches attend a two and a half years' course at the Bangladesh Naval Academy (BNA) Chittagong on successful completion of which they are commissioned as Sub Lieutenants and awarded BSC degrees of Chittagong University.

The Navy is a highly technical service whose officers must have a good grounding in science subjects to keep pace with the rapid advance in technology. Cadets of the Mechanical, Electrical and Naval Architecture branches

of the Navy, after six months' basic service training at the BNA, join the BUET for 4 years to study for a degree in engineering. Successful candidates are commissioned as Sub Lieutenants and also receive a BSC BE degree.

Air Force cadets receive their professional and academic training at the BAF Academy, Matiur Rahman Base, Jessore for a period of 2½ years during which they

prepare for a Bachelor's

Degree in science of Rajshahi University and complete the basic training in flying.

For entry to the academies the minimum educational qualification prescribed is H.S.C. or Senior Cambridge. The academies have also direct entry graduates like engineers, who receive a few weeks' basic military and professional training at their respective academies before they are commissioned.

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the Royal Military Academy

Sandhurst had been to public school and one out of every eight had been to either Eton or Wellington. With democratisation of education and emphasis on an equality of opportunities, only about forty per cent of cadets are nowadays from public schools.

A large proportion of cadets in Pakistan are from public

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schools like Ghoraghali, Alchison College Lahore and Cadet College Hasan Abdul, but quite a few come from Somersatta and other ordinary schools as well, besides a sprinkling of army specials from Jhelum.

The bulk of the cadets of the three service academies in Bangladesh come from cadet colleges (now over a dozen and a half in number), which, with their restricted intake and smaller classes, extensive facilities for games and recreational activities, well-equipped laboratories, fixed hours of study and proper supervision by a better paid teaching staff provide a much better education, though somewhat regimented, than most of our schools can hope to do.

The first Bengali officer in uniform that I came across was a friend who was with me in the same class at Presidency College Calcutta. He got a first in English in his Honours, joined the army during the war and was killed in action while still a lieutenant. Saini. Sure certainly was a maverick, an exception those days for a Bengali.

But no so Liaqat, a student of mine at Faujdarhat, who was among the first five both in his SSC and HSC, was commissioned into the Air Force and was killed in an air crash while on a flying mission. Only a few hours earlier he had come to my hotel suite at Rawalpindi to see me.

Because of the cadet colleges our armed forces should experience no difficulty in getting a number of candidates who are disciplined, physically fit, mentally alert and well-adjusted in social relationships from whom they can choose. Some of the boys would no doubt be disqualified in the rigorous tests and some would disqualify themselves to pursue a career in civilian life. But some who eventually join the armed forces should be as good, even academically, as the best elsewhere.

This should apply equally to the cadets from other colleges who are chosen carefully and undergo intensive training for 2 to 2½ years during which more academic instruction is squeezed in than is normal in colleges.

Standards of education have steadily declined over the years. Many of our university graduates can hardly be called educated, so little do they gain from their prolonged stay at colleges and universities. But the boys who get into the civil service are not the best among them, though only a few in number, are perhaps better in many ways than those who got into it in our days.

They begin with a certain undoubted advantage because of their longer stay at the university and a more liberal and advanced education over Armed Forces officers whose

academic education is bound to be somewhat limited. The initial advantage is largely offset by the continuous process of training that armed forces officers receive later.

Modern warfare is both an art and a science that has to be learnt and mastered by painstaking effort. The service academy—the BMA, the BNA or the BAF Academy—represents only the opening process of a training machine that grinds away continuously throughout an officer's career.

No professional, administrative or business organisation takes so much care over the selection and preparation of its higher management as the army or the navy or the air force does.

No military organisation worth the name can afford to neglect the training of its officers. Training is very important in the civil service too; an untrained civil service leads to inefficiency and mismanagement that gradually

brings the administration to the verge of collapse. In the armed forces training may

make the difference between victory and defeat, survival

and death, for individuals

and nations and the military's primary function is

to fight and win wars.

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NEXT WEEK: SECOND PART