

Jawaharlal do you want Kashmir?

Sam Manekshaw, the first Field Marshal in the Indian Army, was at the ringside of events when Independent India was being formed. Then a Colonel, he was chosen to accompany VP Menon on his historic mission to Kashmir. This is his version of that journey and its aftermath, as recorded in an interview with Prem Shankar Jha (Kashmir 1947, Rival Versions of History).

At about 2:30 in the afternoon, General Sir Roy Bucher walked into my room and said, "Eh, you, go and pick up your toothbrush. You are going to Srinagar with VP Menon. The flight will take off at about 4 o'clock." I said, "Why me, Sir?" General Bucher replied, "Because we are worried about the military situation. VP Menon is going there to get the accession from the Maharaja and Mahajan." I flew in with VP Menon in a Dakota. Wing Commander Dewan, who was then Squadron Leader Dewan, was also there. But his job did not have anything to do with assessing the military situation. He was sent by the Air Force because it was the Air Force which was flying us in. Since I was in the Directorate of Military Operations, and was responsible for current operations all over India, West Frontier, the Punjab, and elsewhere, I knew what the situation in Kashmir was. I knew that the tribesmen had come in - initially only the tribesmen - supported by the Pakistanis.

Fortunately for us, and for Kashmir, they were busy raiding, raping all along. In Baramulla they killed Colonel DOT Dykes. Colonel Dykes and I were of the same seniority. We did our first year's attachment with the Royal Scots in Lahore, way back in 1934-35. Tom went to the Sikh regiment. I went to the Frontier Force regiment. We'd lost contact with each other. He'd become a Lieutenant Colonel. I'd become a full Colonel. Tom and his wife were holidaying in Baramulla when the tribesmen killed them. The Maharaja's forces were 50% Muslim and 50% Dogra. The Muslim elements had revolted and joined the Pakistani forces. This was the broad military situation. The tribesmen were believed to be about 7 to 9 km from Srinagar. I was sent into get the precise military situation. The army knew that if we had to send soldiers, we would have to fly them in. Therefore, a few days before, we had made arrangements for aircraft and for soldiers to be ready.

But we couldn't fly them in until the state of Kashmir had acceded to India. From the political side, Sardar Patel and VP Menon had been dealing with Mahajan and the Maharaja, and the idea was that VP Menon would get the Accession, I would bring back the military appreciation and report to the Government. The troops were already at the airport, ready to be flown in. Air Chief Marshall Elmhurst was the Air Chief and he had made arrangements for the aircraft from civil and military sources. Anyway, we were flown in. We went to Srinagar. We went to the palace. I have never seen such disorganisation in my life. The Maharaja was running about from one room to the other. I have never seen so much jewellery in my life - pearl necklaces, ruby things, lying in one room; packing here, there, everywhere. There was a convoy of vehicles.

The Maharaja was coming out of one room, and going into another saying, "Alright, if India doesn't help, I will go and join my troops and fight (it) out." I couldn't restrain myself, and said, "That will raise their morale Sir." Eventually, I also got the military situation from everybody around us, asking what the hell was happening, and discovered that the tribesmen were about 7 or 9 km from what was then that horrible little airfield. VP Menon was in the meantime discussing with Mahajan and the Maharaja. Eventually the Maharaja signed the accession papers and we flew back in the Dakota late at night. There were no night facilities, and the people who were helping us to fly back, to light the airfield, were Sheikh Abdullah, Kasimsahib, Sadiqsahib, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, DP Dhar with pine torches, and we flew back to Delhi. I can't remember the exact time. It must have been 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the morning.

On arriving at Delhi, the first thing I did was to go and report to General Sir Roy Bucher. He said, "Eh, you, go and shave and clean up. There is a cabinet meeting at 9 o'clock. I will pick you up and take you there." So I went home, shaved, dressed, etc. and General Bucher picked me up, and we went to the cabinet meeting. The cabinet meeting was presided by Mountbatten. There was Jawaharlal Nehru, there was Sardar Patel, there was Sardar Baldev Singh. There were other Ministers whom I did not know and did not want to know, because I had nothing to do with them. Sardar Baldev Singh I knew because he was the Minister for Defence, and I knew Sardar Patel, because Patel would insist that VP Menon take me with him to the various states.

Almost every morning the Sardar would sent for VP Menon, HM Patel and myself. While Maniben (Patel's daughter and de facto secretary) would sit cross-legged with a Parker fountain pen taking notes, Patel would say, "VP, I want Baroda. Take him with you." I was the bogeyman. So I got to know the Sardar very well. At the morning meeting he handed over the (Accession) thing. Mountbatten turned around and said, "Come on Manekji (He called me Manekji instead of Manekshaw), what is the military situation?" I gave him the military situation, and told him that unless we flew in troops immediately, we would have lost Srinagar, because going by road would take days, and once the tribesmen got to the airport and Srinagar, we couldn't fly troops in. Everything was ready at the airport.

As usual Nehru talked about the United Nations, Russia, Africa, God Almighty, everybody, until Sardar Patel lost his temper. He said, "Jawaharlal, do you want Kashmir, or do you want to give it away? He (Nehru) said, Of course, I want Kashmir (emphasis in original). Then he (Patel) said, Please give your orders." And before he could say anything Sardar Patel turned to me and said, "You have got your orders." I walked out, and we started flying in troops at about 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock. I think it was the Sikh Regiment under Ranjit Rai that was the first lot to be flown in. And then we continued flying troops in. That is all I know about what happened. Then all the fighting took place. I became a Brigadier, and became Director of Military Operations and also if you will see the first signal to be signed ordering the cease-fire on 01 January (1949) had been signed by Colonel Manekshaw on behalf of C-in-C India, General Sir Roy Bucher. That must be lying in the Military Operations Directorate.