

Henderson Brooks Report: An Introduction

It seems likely now that the Henderson Brooks Report on the debacle in the border war with China, completed in 1963, will never be released. Furthermore, even if one day a stable, confident and relaxed government in New Delhi should, miraculously, appear and decide to publish it, the text would be largely incomprehensible, the context, well known to the authors and therefore not spelled out, being now forgotten. The report would need an introduction and gloss – a first draft of which this essay attempts to provide, drawing upon the author's research in India in the 1960s and material published later.

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When the Army's report into its debacle in the border war was completed in 1963 the Indian government had good reason to keep it Top Secret and give only the vaguest, and largely misleading, indications of its contents. At that time the government's effort, ultimately successful, to convince the political public that the Chinese, with a sudden 'unprovoked aggression', had caught India unawares in a sort of Himalayan Pearl Harbour was in its early stages, and the report's cool and detailed analysis, if made public, would have shown that to be self-exculpatory mendacity. But a series of studies, beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into the 1990s,¹ revealed to any serious enquirer the full story of how the Indian Army was ordered to challenge the Chinese military to a conflict it could only lose. So by now only bureaucratic inertia, combined with the natural fading of any public interest, can explain the continued non-publication – the report includes no surprises, and its publication would be of little significance but for the fact that so many in India still cling to the soothing fantasy of a 1962 Chinese 'aggression'.

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board and publish it, the text would be largely incomprehensible, the context, well known to the authors and therefore not spelled out, being now forgotten. The report would need an introduction and gloss – a first draft of which this paper attempts to provide, drawing upon the writer's research in India in the 1960s and material published later.

Two preambles are required, one briefly recalling the cause and course of the border war, the second to describe the fault-line, which the border dispute turned into a schism, within the Army's officer corps, which was a key factor in the disaster – and of which the Henderson Brooks Report can be seen as an expression.

Origins of Border Conflict

India at the time of independence can be said have faced no external threats. True, it was born into a relationship of permanent belligerency with its weaker Siamese twin Pakistan, left by the British inseparably conjoined to India by the member of Kashmir, vital to both new national organisms; but that may be seen as essentially an internal dispute, an untreatable complication left by the crude, cruel surgery of partition. In 1947 China, wracked by civil war, was in what appeared to be death throes, and no conceivable threat to anyone. That changed with astonishing speed, and by 1950, when the newborn People's Republic re-established in Tibet the central authority which had

lapsed in 1911, the Indian government will have made its initial assessment of the possibility and potential of a threat from China, and found those to be minimal, if not non-existent. First, there were geographic and topographical factors, the great mountain chains which lay between the two neighbours and appeared to make large-scale troop movements impractical. More important, the leadership of the Indian government – which is to say, Jawaharlal Nehru – had for years proclaimed that the unshakable friendship between India and China would be the key to both their futures, and therefore Asia's, even the world's. The new leaders in Beijing were more chary, viewing India through their Marxist prism as a potentially hostile bourgeois state. But in the Indian political perspective war with China was deemed unthinkable, and through the 1950s New Delhi's defence planning and expenditure expressed that confidence.

By the early 1950s, however, the Indian government, which is to say Nehru and his acolyte officials, had shaped and adopted a policy whose implementation would make armed conflict with China not only 'thinkable' but inevitable.

From the first days of India's independence it was appreciated that the Sino-Indian borders had been left undefined by the departing British, and that territorial disputes with China were part of India's inheritance. China's other neighbours faced similar problems, and over the succeeding decades of the century almost all of those were to settle their borders satisfactorily through the normal process of diplomatic negotiation with Beijing. The Nehru government decided upon the opposite approach. India would through its own research determine the appropriate alignments of the Sino-Indian borders, extend its administration to make those good on the ground, and then refuse to negotiate the result. Barring the inconceivable – that Beijing would allow India to impose China's borders unilaterally and annex territory at will – Nehru's policy thus willed conflict without foreseeing it.

Through the 1950s that policy generated friction along the borders and so bred and steadily increased distrust, growing into hostility, between the neighbours. By 1958 Beijing was urgently calling for a standstill agreement to prevent patrol clashes

and negotiations to agree boundary alignments. India refused any standstill agreement, since such would be an impediment to intended advances, and insisted that there was nothing to negotiate, the Sino-Indian borders being already settled on the alignments claimed by India, through blind historical process. Then it began accusing China of committing 'aggression' by refusing to surrender to Indian claims.

From 1961 the Indian attempt to establish an armed presence in all the territory it claimed and then extrude the Chinese was being exerted by the Army, and Beijing was warning that if India did not desist from its expansionist thrust Chinese forces would have to hit back. On October 12, 1962 Nehru proclaimed India's intention to drive the Chinese out of areas India claimed. That bravado had by then been forced upon him by the public expectations which his charges of 'Chinese aggression' had aroused, but Beijing took it as in effect a declaration of war. The unfortunate Indian troops on the front line, under orders to sweep superior Chinese forces out of their impregnable, dominating positions, instantly appreciated the implications: "If Nehru had declared his intention to attack, then the Chinese were not going to wait to be attacked".²

On October 20 the Chinese launched a pre-emptive offensive all along the borders, overwhelming the feeble – but in this first instance determined – resistance of the Indian troops and advancing some distance in the eastern sector. On October 24 Beijing offered a ceasefire and Chinese withdrawal on condition India agreed to open negotiations: Nehru refused the offer even before the text was officially received. Both sides built up over the next three weeks, and the Indians launched a local counter-attack on November 15, arousing in India fresh expectations of total victory.³ The Chinese then renewed their offensive. Now many units of the once crack Indian 4th Division dissolved into rout without giving battle, and by November 20 there was no organised Indian resistance anywhere in the disputed territories. On that day Beijing announced a unilateral ceasefire and intention to withdraw its forces: Nehru this time tacitly accepted.⁴

Naturally the Indian political public demanded to know what had brought about the shameful debacle suffered by their Army, and on December 14 a new Army Commander, Lt General J N Chaudhuri, instituted an Operations Review for that purpose, assigning the task of enquiry

to Lt General Henderson Brooks and Brigadier P S Bhagat.

Factionalisation of the Army

All colonial armies are liable to suffer from the tugs of contradictory allegiance, and in the case of India's that fissure was opened in the second world war by Japan's recruitment from prisoners of war of the 'Indian National Army' to fight against their former fellows. By the beginning of the 1950s two factions were emerging in the officer corps, one patriotic but above all professional and apolitical, and orthodox in adherence to the regimental traditions established in the century of the raj; the other nationalist, ready to respond unquestioningly to the political requirements of their civilian masters, and scorning their rivals as fuddy-duddies still aping the departed rulers, and suspected as being of doubtful loyalty to the new ones. The latter faction soon took on eponymous identification from its leader, B M Kaul.

At the time of independence Kaul appeared to be a failed officer, if not disgraced. Although Sandhurst-trained for infantry service he had eased through the war without serving on any front line, and ended it in a humble and obscure post in public relations. But his courtier wiles, irrelevant or damning until then, were to serve him brilliantly in the new order that independence brought, after he came to the notice of Nehru, a fellow Kashmiri brahmin and indeed distant kinsman. Boosted by the prime minister's steady favouritism, Kaul rocketed up through the army structure to emerge in 1961 at the very summit of Army HQ. Not only did he hold the key appointment of chief of the general staff (CGS) but the Army Commander, Thapar, was in effect his client. Kaul had of course by then acquired a significant following, disparaged by the other side as 'Kaul boys' ('call girls' had just entered usage), and his appointment as CGS opened a putsch in HQ, an eviction of the old guard, with his rivals, until then his superiors, being not only pushed out, but often hounded thereafter with charges of disloyalty.

The struggle between those factions both fed on and fed into the strains placed on the Army by the government's contradictory and hypocritical policies – on the one hand proclaiming China an eternal friend against whom it was unnecessary to arm, on the other using armed force to seize territory it knew China regarded as its own.

Through the early 1950s Nehru's covertly expansionist policy had been imple-

mented by armed border police under the intelligence bureau (IB), whose director, N B Mullik, was another favourite and confidant of the prime minister. The Army high command, knowing its forces to be too weak to risk conflict with China, would have nothing to do with it. Indeed when the potential for Sino-Indian conflict inherent in Mullik's aggressive forward patrolling was demonstrated in the serious clash at the Kongka Pass in October 1959, Army HQ and the ministry of external affairs united to denounce him as a provocateur insist that control over all activities on the border be assumed by the Army, which thus could insulate China from Mullik's jabs.⁵

The takeover by Kaul and his 'boys' at Army HQ in 1961 reversed that. Now regular infantry would takeover from Mullik's border police in implementing what was formally designated a 'forward policy', one conceived to extrude the Chinese presence from all territory claimed by India. Field commanders receiving orders to move troops forward into territory the Chinese both held and regarded as their own warned that they had no resources or reserves to meet the forceful reaction they knew must be the ultimate outcome: they were told to keep quiet and obey orders. That may suggest that those driving the forward policy saw it in kamikaze terms and were reconciled to its ending in gunfire and blood – but the opposite was true. They were totally and unshakably convinced that it would end not with a bang but a whimper – from Beijing. The psychological bedrock upon which the forward policy rested was the belief that in the last resort the Chinese military, snuffling from a bloody nose, would pack up and quit the territory India claimed.

The source of that faith was Mullik, who from beginning to end proclaimed as oracular truth that, whatever the Indians did, there need be no fear of a violent Chinese reaction. The record shows no one squarely challenging that mantra, at higher levels than the field commanders who throughout knew it to be dangerous nonsense: there were civilian 'Kaul boys' in external affairs and the defence ministry too, and they basked happily in Mullik's fantasy. Perhaps the explanation for the credulousness lay in Nehru's dependent relationship with his IB chief: since the prime minister placed such faith in Mullik, it would be at the least lese-majesty, and even heresy, to deny him a kind of papal infallibility.

If it be taken that Mullik was not just deluded, what other explanation could there be for the unwavering consistency with which he urged his country forward on a course which in rational perception could lead only to war with a greatly superior military power, and therefore defeat? Another question arises: who, in those years, would most have welcomed the great falling-out which saw India shift in a few years from strong international support for the People's Republic of China to enmity and armed conflict with it? From founding and leading the non-aligned movement to tacit enlistment in the hostile encirclement of China which was Washington's aim? Mullik maintained close links with the CIA station head in New Delhi, Harry Rossitsky. Answers may lie in the agency's archives.

China's stunning and humiliating victory brought about an immediate reversal of fortune between the Army factions. Out went Kaul, out went Thapar, out went many of their adherents – but by no means all. General Chaudhuri, appointed to replace Thapar as Army Chief, chose not to launch a counter-putsch. He and his colleagues of the restored old guard knew full well what had caused the debacle: political interference in promotions and appointments by the prime minister and Krishna Menon, defence minister, followed by clownish ineptitude in Army HQ as the 'Kaul boys' scurried to force the troops to carry out the mad tactics and strategy laid down by the government. It was clear that the trail back from the broken remnants of 4 Division limping onto the plains in the north-east, up through intermediate commands to Army HQ in New Delhi and then on to the source of political direction, would have ended at the prime minister's door – a destination which, understandably, Chaudhuri had no desire to reach. (Mullik was anyway to tarnish him with the charge that he was plotting to overthrow the discredited civil order but in fact Chaudhuri was a dedicated constitutionalist – ironically, Kaul was the only one of the generals who harboured Caesarist ambitions.⁶)

The Investigation

While the outraged humiliation of the political class left Chaudhuri with no choice but to order an enquiry into the Army's collapse, it was up to him to decide its range and focus, indeed its temper. The choice of Lt General Henderson Brooks to run an Operations Review (rather than

a broader and more searching board of enquiry) was indicative of a wish not to reheat the already bubbling stew of re-cremations. Henderson Brooks (until then in command of a corps facing Pakistan) was a steady, competent but not outstanding officer, whose appointments and personality had kept him entirely outside the broils stirred up by Kaul's rise and fall. That could be said too of the officer Chaudhuri appointed to assist Henderson Brooks, Brigadier P S Baghat (holder of a WWII Victoria Cross and commandant of the military academy). But the latter complemented his senior by being a no-nonsense, fighting soldier, widely respected in the Army, and the taut, unforgiving analysis in the report bespeaks the asperity of his approach.

There is further evidence that Chaudhuri did not wish the enquiry to dig too deep, range too widely, or excoriate those it faulted. These were the terms of reference he set: training; equipment; system of command; physical fitness of troops; capacity of commanders at all levels to influence the men under their command. The first four of those smacked of an enquiry into the sinking of the titanic looking into the management of the shipyard where it was built and the health of the deck crew; only the last term has any immediacy; and there the wording was distinctly odd – commanders do not usually 'influence' those they command, they issue orders and expect instant obedience.

But Henderson Brooks and Baghat (henceforth HB/B) in effect ignored the constraints of their terms of reference, and kicked against other limits Chaudhuri had laid upon their investigation, especially his ruling that the functioning of Army HQ during the crisis lay outside their purview. "It would have been convenient and logical", they note, "to trace the events [beginning with] Army HQ, and then move down to Commands for more details, ...ending up with field formations for the battle itself". Forbidden that approach, they would, nevertheless, try to discern what had happened at Army HQ from documents found at lower levels, although those could not throw any light on one crucial aspect of the story – the political directions given to the Army by the civil authorities.

As HB/B began their enquiry they immediately discovered that the short rein kept upon them by the Army Chief was by no means their least handicap. They

found themselves facing determined obstruction in Army HQ, where one of the leading lights of the Kaul faction had survived in the key post of Director of Military Operations (DMO) – Brigadier D K Palit. Kaul had exerted his powers to have Palit made DMO in 1961 although others senior to him were listed for the post, and Palit, as he was himself to admit, was "one of the least qualified among [his] contemporaries for this crucial General Staff appointment"⁷ Palit had thereafter acted as enforcer for Kaul and the civilian protagonists of the 'forward policy', Mullik foremost among the latter, issuing the orders and deflecting or overruling the protests of field commanders who reported up their strategic imbecility or operational impossibility. Why Chaudhuri left Palit in this post is puzzling: the Henderson Brooks Report was to make quite clear what a prominent and destructive role he had played throughout the Army high command's politicisation, and, through inappropriate meddling in command decisions, even in bringing about the debacle in the north-east. Palit, though, would immediately have recognised that the HB/B enquiry posed a grave threat to his career, and so did all that he could undermine and obstruct it.

After consultation with Mullik, Palit took it upon himself to rule that HB/B should not have access to any documents emanating from the civil side – in other words, he blindfolded the enquiry, as far as he could, as to the nexus between the civil and military. As Palit smugly recounts his story, in an autobiography published in 1991, he personally faced down both Henderson Brooks and Baghat, rode out their formal complaints about his obstructionism, and prevented them from prying into the "high level policies and decisions" which he maintained were none of their business.⁸ In fact, however, the last word lies with HB/B – or will do if their report is ever published. In spite of Palit's efforts, they discovered a great deal that the Kaul camp and the government would have preferred to keep hidden; and their report shows that Palit's self-admiring and mock-modest autobiography grossly misrepresents the role he played.

The Henderson Brooks Report is long (its main section, excluding recommendations and many annexures, covers nearly 200 foolscap pages), detailed and far-ranging. This introduction will touch only upon some salient points, to give the flavour of the whole (a full account of the subject

they covered is in the writer's 1970 study, *India's China War*).

The Forward Policy

This was born and named at a meeting chaired by Nehru on November 2, 1961, but had been alive and kicking in the womb for years before that – indeed its conception dated back to 1954, when Nehru issued an instruction for posts to be set up all along India's claim lines, "especially in such places as might be disputed". What happened at this 1961 meeting was that the freeze on provocative forward patrolling, instituted at the Army's insistence after Mullik had engineered the Kongka Pass clash, was ended – with the Army, now under the courtier leadership of Thapar and Kaul, eagerly assuming the task which Mullik's armed border police had carried out until the Army stopped them. HB/B note that no minutes of this meeting had been obtained, but were able to quote Mullik as saying that "the Chinese would not react to our establishing new posts and that they were *not likely to use force against any of our posts even if they were in a position to do so*" (HB/B's emphasis). That opinion contradicted the conclusion Army Intelligence had reached 12 months before: that the Chinese would resist by force any attempts to take back territory held by them.

HB/B then trace a contradictory duet between Army HQ and Western Army Command, with HQ ordering the establishment of 'penny-packet' forward posts in Ladakh, specifying their location and strength, and Western Command protesting that it lacked the forces to carry out the allotted task, still less to face the grimly foreseeable consequences. Kaul and Palit "time and again ordered in furtherance of the 'forward policy' the establishment of individual posts, overruling protests made by Western Command". By August 1962 about 60 posts had been set up, most manned with less than a dozen soldiers, all under close threat by overwhelmingly superior Chinese forces. Western Command submitted another request for heavy reinforcements, accompanying it with this admonition:

[I]t is imperative that political direction is based on military means. If the two are not co-related there is a danger of creating a situation where we may lose both in the material and moral sense much more than we already have. Thus, there is no short cut to military preparedness to enable us to pursue effectively our present policy...

That warning was ignored, reinforcements were denied, orders were affirmed and, although the Chinese were making every effort, diplomatic, political and military, to prove their determination to resist by force, again it was asserted that no forceful reaction by the Chinese was to be expected. HB/B quote Field Marshall Roberts: "The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy not coming, but in our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable". But in this instance troops were being put in dire jeopardy in pursuit of a strategy based upon an assumption – that the Chinese would not resist with force – which the strategy would itself inevitably prove wrong. HB/B note that from the beginning of 1961, when the Kaulist putsch reshaped Army HQ, crucial professional military practice was abandoned:

This lapse in Staff Duties on the part of the CGS [Kaul], his deputy, the DMO [Palit] and other Staff Directors is inexcusable. From this stemmed the unpreparedness and the unbalance of our forces. These appointments in General Staff are key appointments, and officers were hand-picked by General Kaul to fill them. There was therefore no question of clash of personalities. General Staff appointments are stepping stones to high command, and correspondingly carry heavy responsibility. When, however, these appointments are looked upon as adjuncts to a successful career and the responsibility is not taken seriously, the results, as is only too clear, are disastrous. This should never be allowed to be repeated and the Staff as of old must be made to bear the consequences of their lapses and mistakes. Comparatively, the mistakes and lapses of the Staff sitting in Delhi without the stress and strain of battle are more heinous than the errors made by commanders in the field of battle.

War and Debacle

While the main thrust of the Forward Policy was exerted in the western sector it was applied also in the east from December 1961. There the Army was ordered to set up new posts along the McMahon Line (which China treated – and treats – as the de facto boundary), and, in some sectors, beyond it. One of these trans-Line posts named Dhola Post, was invested by a superior Chinese force on September 8, 1962, the Chinese thus reacting there exactly as they had been doing for a year in the western sector. In this

instance, however, and although Dhola Post was known to be north of the McMahon Line, the Indian government reacted aggressively, deciding that the Chinese force threatening Dhola must be attacked forthwith, and thrown back.

Now again the duet of contradiction began, Army HQ and, in this case, Eastern Command (headed by Lt General L P Sen) united against the commands below: XXXIII Corps (Lt General Umrao Singh), 4 Division (Major General Niranjan Prasad) and 7 Brigade (Brigadier John Dalvi). The latter three stood together in reporting that the 'attack and evict' order was militarily impossible to execute. The point of confrontation, below Thagla Ridge at the western extremity of the McMahon Line, presented immense logistical difficulties to the Indian side and none to the Chinese, so whatever concentration of troops could painfully be mustered by the Indians could instantly be outnumbered and outweighed in weaponry. Tactically, again the irreversible advantage lay with the Chinese, who held well-supplied, fortified positions on a commanding ridge feature.

The demand for military action, and victory, was political, generated at top level meetings in Delhi. "The Defence Minister [Krishna Menon] categorically stated that in view of the top secret nature of conferences no minutes would be kept [and] this practice was followed at all the conferences that were held by the defence minister in connection with these operations". HB/B commented: "This is a surprising decision and one which could and did lead to grave consequences. It absolved in the ultimate analysis anyone of the responsibility for any major decision. Thus it could and did lead to decisions being taken without careful and considered thought on the consequences of those decisions".

Army HQ by no means restricted itself to the big picture. In mid-September it

issued an order to troops beneath Thagla Ridge to “(a) capture a Chinese post 1,000 yards north-east of Dhola Post; (b) contain the Chinese concentration south of Thagla.” HB/B comment: “The General Staff, sitting in Delhi, ordering an action against a position 1,000 yards north-east of Dhola Post is astounding. The country was not known, the enemy situation vague, and for all that there may have been a ravine in between [the troops and their objective], but yet the order was given. This order could go down in the annals of History as being as incredible as the order for ‘the Charge of the Light Brigade’”. Worse was to follow.

Underlying all the meetings in Delhi was still the conviction, or by now perhaps prayer, that even when frontally attacked the Chinese would put up no serious resistance, still less react aggressively elsewhere. Thus it came to be believed that the problem lay in weakness, even cowardice, at lower levels of command. General Umrao Singh (XXXIII Corps) was seen as the nub of the problem, since he was backing his divisional and brigade commanders in their insistence that the eviction operation was impossible. “It was obvious that Lt General Umrao Singh would not be hustled into an operation, without proper planning and logistical support. The defence ministry and, for that matter, the general staff and Eastern Command were prepared for a gamble on the basis of the Chinese not reacting to any great extent”. So the political leadership and Army HQ decided that if Umrao Singh could be replaced by a commander with fire in his belly all would come right, and victory be assured. Such a commander was available—General Kaul. A straight switch, Kaul relinquishing the CGS post to take-over from Umrao Singh would have raised too many questions, so it was decided instead that Umrao Singh would simply be moved aside, retaining his corps command but no longer having anything to do with the eviction operation. That would become the responsibility of a new formation, IV Corps, whose sole task would be to attack and drive the Chinese off Thagla Ridge. General Kaul would command the new corps.

HB/B noted how even the most secret of government’s decisions were swiftly reported in the press, and called for a thorough probe into the sources of the leaks. Many years later Palit, in his autobiography, described the transmission procedure. Palit had hurried to see Kaul

on learning of the latter’s appointment to command the notional new corps: “I found him in the little bedsitter den where he usually worked when at home. I was startled to see, sitting beside him on the divan, Prem Bhatia editor of *The Times of India*, looking like the proverbial cat who has just swallowed a large yellow songbird. He got up as I arrived, wished [Kaul] good luck and left, still with a greatly pleased smirk on his face”.⁹ Bhatia’s scoop led his paper next morning. The ‘spin’ therein was the suggestion that whereas in the western sector Indian troops faced extreme logistical problems, in the east that situation was reversed and therefore, with the dashing Kaul in command of a fresh ‘task force’, victory was imminent. The truth was exactly the contrary, those in the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) faced even worse difficulties than their fellows in the west, and victory was a chimera.

Those difficulties were compounded by persistent interference from Army HQ. On orders from Delhi, “troops of [the entire 7 Brigade] were dispersed to outposts that were militarily unsound and logistically unsupportable”. Once Kaul took over as corps commander the troops were driven forward to their fate in what HB/B called “wanton disregard of the elementary principles of war”.

Even in the dry, numbered paragraphs of their report, HB/B’s account of the moves that preceded the final Chinese assault is dramatic and riveting, with the scene of action shifting from the banks of the Namka Chu, beneath the menacing loom of Thagla Ridge, to Nehru’s house in Delhi – whither Kaul rushed back to report when a rash foray he had ordered was crushed by a fierce Chinese reaction on October 10. To follow those events, and on into the greater drama of the ensuing debacle is tempting, but would add only greater detail to the account already published.

Given the nature of the dramatic events they were investigating, it is not surprising that HB/B’s cast of characters consisted in the main of fools and/or knaves on the one hand, their victims on the other. But they singled out a few heroes too, especially the jawans, who fought whenever their senior commanders gave them the necessary leadership, and suffered miserably from the latter’s often gross incompetence. As for the debacle itself, “Efforts of a few officers, particularly those of Capt N N Rawat” to organise a fighting retreat, “could not replace a disintegrated command”, nor could the cool-headed

Brigadier Gurbax Singh do more than keep his 48 Brigade in action as a cohesive combat unit until it was liquidated by the joint efforts of higher command and the Chinese. HB/B place the immediate cause of the collapse of resistance in NEFA in the panicky, fumbling and contradictory orders issued from corps HQ in Tezpur by a ‘triumvirate’ of officers they judge to be grossly culpable: General Sen, General Kaul and Brigadier Palit. Those were, however, only the immediate agents of disaster: its responsible planners and architects were another triumvirate, comprised of Nehru, Mullik and, again, Kaul, together with all those who confronted and overcome through guile and puny force. **[PVI]**

Notes

- 1 The series began with *Himalayan Blunder*, Brigadier John Dalvi’s account of the sacrifice of his 7 Brigade on the Namka Chu, a classic of military literature, continuing with the relatively worthless *Untold Story* by General Kaul. In 1970 this writer’s *India’s China War* told the full military story in political and diplomatic context. In 1979 Colonel Saigal published a well-researched account of the collapse of 4 Division in the North-East Frontier Agency; two years later General Niranjan Prasad complemented Dalvi’s study with his own fine account of *The Fall of Towang 1962*; and in 1991 General Palit, who as a brigadier had been director of military operations in 1962, followed up with *War in High Himalaya* – like Kaul’s book self-exculpatory, but much more successfully so because by then very few were left with the knowledge that could challenge Palit’s version of events and his role in them.
- 2 Major General Niranjan Prasad, *The Fall of Towang*, Palit and Palit, New Delhi, 1981, p 69.
- 3 With near-criminal disregard for military considerations, this attack was launched, near Walong in the eastern sector, to obtain a ‘birthday’ victory for Nehru! It failed.
- 4 He might well have aspired to another act of Churchillian defiance but the American ambassador, J K Galbraith, up betimes, got to the prime minister in time to persuade him that discretion would serve India better than a hollow show of valour. Thirty years later the Chinese expressed their appreciation with a banquet in Galbraith’s honour in Beijing.
- 5 The government misrepresented the Army’s takeover as evidence of the seriousness of the ‘Chinese threat’. In fact it was a measure to try to insulate China from the steady pinprick provocations Mullik had been organising. The truth emerged only years later, in Mullik’s autobiography, *My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1971, pp 243-45.
- 6 Welles Hagen, *After Nehru, Who?*, Harte-Davis, London, 1963, p 272.
- 7 D K Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962*, Hurst and Co, London, 1991, p 71.
- 8 *Ibid*, pp 390-92.
- 9 *Ibid*, p 220.